ABSTRACT

Title: “THE IMAGERY OF THE EAR:” LISTENING AND SOUND IN AMERICAN ART, 1847 - 1897

Asma Naeem, Ph.D., 2010

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America’s soundscape underwent tremendous changes from the mid-nineteenth century on: not only in terms of the telegraph, telephone, and phonograph, but also with the noises heard in the city streets, factories, and countryside nearby. During this period, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Thomas Wilmer Dewing explored the intersection of auditory experience and artistic production, creating complex works that gave visual form to the changing nature of sound and listening. All three painters pursued the representation of aurality as career-long endeavors, and developed distinct approaches and pictorial syntaxes.

Homer, whose life and artistic outlook were marked by his experience as a traveling Civil War illustrator, painted the everyday sounds of laborers in the American countryside and out at sea in terms of issues related to distance and signaling over space. At a time when a growing number of people were communicating with one another with the aid of such machines as the telegraph and telephone, Homer’s long-distance aural exchanges probe the human desire for connectivity, and its converse, separation. Eakins piques our aural imagination with the physiognomic and sartorial acuities of his musicians and singers, not to mention the mimeticism of their actions, and attempts to

pack the parallel visual and aural experiences of realism tightly into his paintings, despite the limits of the medium. Transferring his photographic experiments of stopping the human body in mid-motion to the painterly stopping of musical sound in mid-song, Eakins's works evince his personal form of transcription. Whereas Eakins sought to unify the eye, ear, and hand in one split second of representation, Dewing sought to fragment aural moments to pictorialize the psychic effects of listening, and promote the vaults of the imagination. Most notably through attenuated sonic transmissions and the idea of pause, Dewing's representations of women in airless domestic interiors and atmospheric landscapes frequently evince a "pulling apart" of sight and sound that render his depictions of music and speech strangely quiet and unsettling. At the same time, these suspended aural scenarios help to cabin the women he so often portrayed.

“THE IMAGERY OF THE EAR:” LISTENING AND SOUND IN AMERICAN ART, 1847-1897

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Introduction

For several months in 2006, visitors walking through Tate Modern's Turbine Hall were enthralled by a dull, haunting clangor that filled the five-hundred-feet-long, five-story-tall structure. Many thought the former industrial building, once used to house electric generators, was making strange noises: it sounded as if a giant coil's tinny spirals were being endlessly stretched and contracted and the long chimes of a massive bell had somehow been turned inside out.[1] In truth, the din was a "sound sculpture," a commission called *Harmonic Bridge* by American artist Bill Fontana. Amplifying the real-time, natural sounds of Millennium Bridge, a pedestrian steel-suspension bridge spanning the Thames River, Fontana placed transducers or vibration sensors along the bridge's cabling and distributed the signals throughout Turbine Hall using diffusion programming, sampling, and loudspeakers. Speaking about the project, Fontana explained that he wanted to explore the "magical senses" by extracting everyday sounds from their normal context as a Duchampian kind of disruption.[2]

Indeed, *Harmonic Bridge* unfixes the defining coordinates of what traditionally has constituted art: the work is spatially unhinged, nothing is to be hung or moved, and the medium is invisible, nothing is to be seen. Our attention is at once decentered (visually) and acute (aurally). In turn, our job as art historians seems similarly stressed. To some, sound art, by which I mean works that actually emit sound (and best explained

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[1] Those interested in how *Harmonic Bridge* sounded can listen to an excerpt of the commission at http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/fontana/mp3/harmonicBridge01.mp3.

[2] Interview with Bill Fontana, "Hear and Now," on *Speeds of Time* (BBC Radio 3, 27 September 2008). http://echosounddesign.com/media/BBC_Hear_and_Now_on_Speeds_of_Time.mp3 (accessed on March 18, 2010).

in Douglas Kahn's book on the subject), represents an odd tangent of art history, better left to scholars accustomed to thinking about music, film, performance, or any other kind of art made with synchronized sound components.[3] And particularly because such kinds of artistic expression were made in the United States by John Cage and others after that still bright, arbitrary line of 1945, these nebulous forms and their attendant issues seem more the terrain for the contemporary art historian. Yet there is a second, even broader, range of artistic objects that was made throughout America's history and these works either portray or implicate sonic matter but are *soundless*. Of course within this latter classification – populated by such heterogeneous objects as military art, antebellum genre scenes, Hudson River landscapes, Neoclassical sculpture, and Stieglitz circle photographs – there are different syntaxes, historicisms, and methodologies to consider. Nonetheless the taxonomic divide I offer is significant because there was a point when everyday, non-musical sounds freed themselves from the mute materials of canvas, plaster, and paper to become their own medium, as evidenced by *Harmonic Bridge*.

This dissertation, " 'The Imagery of the Ear:' Listening and Sound in American Art, 1847-1897," examines works of art made in the United States before this rupture – before the twentieth-century turn to sound art.[4] It is a study of sounds heard or imagined in the second half of the nineteenth century – of, among other things, a military brass band playing "Home, Sweet Home" to lift the spirits of Union soldiers at an encampment, a young woman blowing a tin dinner horn to farmers working the field, a fisherman hollering "all's well" to his shipmates, a parlor trio of a pianist, cellist, and singer

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3 Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

4 In his book, *Radio: An Art of Sound*, Rudolph Arnheim titles one of his chapters, "The Imagery of the Ear." Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound*, transl. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read (New York: Arno Press, 1971).

performing a sorrowful song, and two women slowly contemplating the words of an oral reading. More specifically, this is the study of the complicated and difficult ways that these sonic events are represented in paint, and, in turn, how they are imagined in our minds as we stand in front of the completed work of art – in other words, an investigation of the relationship between visual representation and aural experience from the artist's studio to the viewer in the museum and elsewhere. Through a series of representative case studies, I focus on the art of three different painters, Winslow Homer (1836-1910), Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), and Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1939). All three men were born less than a decade apart from one another and pursued the sonic subject throughout their careers, but they could not be more different in terms of the pictorial strategies they used and the problems that preoccupied them. Though Homer and Eakins both manipulated the style of realism to reveal cultural aspects of the world and people around them, Homer was more interested in the psychological complexities embedded in social encounters and experiences with nature, while Eakins focused on the empirical, almost Cartesian, specificities of individuals – their bodies, their minds, and their selfhood. In contrast to Homer and Eakins, Dewing shaped the atmospheric style of Aestheticism, and its promotion of ideas of poetry, mood, and spiritual meanings, to repeatedly cabin women in dense landscapes and airless interiors. As I will demonstrate, the uniqueness of each artist's background and style inflected his visualizations of sound and listening.

Before considering these artists' works in the chapters that follow, this introduction will briefly chart several different conceptual tracts: historical developments in sound and listening, art historical contextualizations of sonic depictions, and the

methodologies I utilize for this study. Subsequently, the remainder of the introduction discusses several significant representations of aurality in the ten or so years preceding the artistic activity of Homer, Eakins, and Dewing. A summary of the succeeding chapters then follows.

Sound's Moment

Surprisingly, it was mainly in the nineteenth century that sound and listening expanded as fields of study and new realms of cultural practices. Physiologist Johannes Müller (1801-1858) was one of the first to understand frequency and sound waves as a series of vibrations that traveled through air (or any other pressure-sensitive medium) until they reached the eardrum and were perceived by the auditory nerve in the inner ear.[5] Prompted by these scientific discoveries related to frequency and the workings of the inner ear, the study of sound in such fields as physics, otology, and acoustics flourished. Researchers in medicine were at the forefront of this epistemological breakthrough and began to utilize the faculty of hearing to obtain information from the patient and make diagnoses – most notably with the monaural stethoscope in 1816.[6] And in psychoanalysis, the therapist's assessment of the patient shifted in emphasis from visual observations to linguistic/aural fields in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) and with the catharsis model (or "talking cure") of his student, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).[7] In 1847,

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[5] Johannes Müller, *Elements of Physiology,* trans. William Baly, arranged from the 2d London ed. by John Bell (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1843), 714.

[6] For discussion of the stethoscope in this context, see Jonathan Sterne, "Medicine's Acoustic Culture: Mediate Auscultation, the Stethoscope and the 'Autopsy of the Living'," in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (New York: Berg, 2003), 191-217.

[7] Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 50-53.

the term "aural" entered public discourse and, a decade or so later, began to circulate in print with the meaning, "received or perceived by the ear."[8]

As these new models and proliferation of interest suggest, sound became a highly focused mode of knowledge. One strand of this scholarly research consisted of attempts to visualize sound, with scientists and inventors creating sound tracings or "phonautograms" that inscribed sound vibrations through a transducer or diaphragm and attached stylus onto surfaces, most famously demonstrated with glass plates of sand by the eighteenth-century German physicist Ernst F. Chladni.[9] Nearly a full century later, in 1874, Alexander Graham Bell and Clarence Blake's ear phonautograph transformed human speech into tracings by speaking into a mouthpiece that transduced the sound vibrations through an actual excised human ear. These kinds of efforts to visually inscribe sound led to the first model of the telegraph and form part of the earliest developments for sound technologies such as the phonograph – devices that, as I will discuss more fully in the following chapters, helped to transform the relationship between looking and listening.

Despite these advancements, the layperson's understanding of sound as a physiological concept remained inchoate in certain ways. In a lengthy 1856 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* describing the "mysterious," "magical" faculty of hearing, the lack of knowledge about the sense was linked with the inability to actually see the organs of hearing and the sound waves that such organs perceived:

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[8] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Aural."

[9] For further discussion of the historical and cultural conditions from which sound technologies emerged, see Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University, 2000).

> The mechanism of the eye lies as clear and open before the man of science as the beautiful organ itself appears in the face of man. It is not so with the ear. Its wondrous parts are deeply hidden in the secrecy of our head, inapproachable during lifetime, and dark and unknown are therefore also, as yet, their peculiar functions. The fleeting, intangible nature of sound escapes all observation …[10]

As this suggests, the faculty of hearing was cloaked in "secrecy," partially because vision controlled much of the discourse surrounding the senses and processes of perception. In fact, until the mid-nineteenth century, the senses of sight and hearing were unified, indeed virtually twinned, in matters of social and commercial intercourse. At concerts, for example, the audience simultaneously watched and listened to the musicians; and conversations, whether personal or business, took shape as face-to-face exchanges where both parties would see and hear each other. Beginning in the 1840s however, with the series of monumental events transforming the act of listening, preexisting models of communications, and the meaning of sound, and culminating with such technologies as the telephone and phonograph in the 1870s, listening no longer required looking, voices became disembodied, and sound gained materiality and status as a commodity. For a host of experiences and activities, vision did not correspond to listening: instead of a confidante or concert musician, people saw the telephone or phonograph they used to access those voices or sounds. Along with these shifts in everyday looking, listening gained a newfound significance: social codes mandated concertgoers to listen in silence, for example, and many individuals began to represent sonic events in visual and literary forms, exploring the act of listening and its relationship to vision in profound ways.

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[10] "The Senses - Hearing," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 12, issue 71 (April 1856): 635.

Silent and Sonic Art Histories

During this transformative era, Thomas Edison introduced the phonograph in 1878 as a machine that could "gather[] up and retain[] sounds hitherto fugitive… [for] their reproduction at will."[11] Not fully realizing the lucrative possibility of recording music, Edison imagined phonographic books for the blind and the preservation of the last words of dying loved ones. Thirty years later, Virginia Woolf used similar language to describe her desire to "re-form the novel;" specifically, she wanted to "capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes."[12] While Woolf was far from Edison and the epicenter of sound reproduction discourse, I find her words an apt description for this dissertation's study of sound and listening. Just as she found value in capturing the "fugitive" for literary representation, this dissertation's exploration of art historical issues related to sound and its temporal, formless nature can begin to "enclose the whole." To consider issues of sound in works of art that portray or suggest aurality both allows these works their full range of meanings in a historical and cultural sense, and encourages a more complete range of perceptual responses. Yet to many, the notion of exploring ideas of sound in a mute object such as painting may seem counterintuitive or even counterproductive. Arguing in this vein, theorist Rudolph Arnheim wrote in 1936 that, "Painting certainly does not make us think that we are missing the aural … The eye alone gives a very complete picture of the world, but the ear alone gives an incomplete one."[13] For Arnheim, there was an implicit binary

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[11] Thomas Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," *North American Review* 126 (May/June 1878): 527.

[12] Virginia Woolf, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf,* ed. Susan Dick (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1989), 1.

[13] Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound*, 135.

between looking and listening, in which the former was valuable, especially in understanding a work of art, and the latter was not.

Arnheim also classifies vision and hearing as two distinct spheres of perception; in fact, the faculty of hearing is a multi-step perceptual process that, at different points, both involves and avoids vision. As encapsulated in the old adage about the tree falling in the forest, something or someone must make a sound that then must be heard. Implicit in this bimodality of sound is a transmutation from something that is readily seen (the tree falling) to something that is invisible (sound waves). It is probably this indeterminacy of sound – and in a sense, its audacity – that makes it seem ill suited for art historical study. In other words, representing aurality in a silent, seemingly disinterested, medium such as painting or sculpture is risky on so many levels: the very nature of sound is elided, the limits of the medium are tested, and our task as viewers seems doomed for failure. Perhaps for these reasons, when scholars talk of aurality in art works involving sound, it usually materializes as the appeasing sentence here, the responsible paragraph there – brief acknowledgments that mostly fall on deaf ears anyway.

But this hasn't always been the case. Depictions of musical sound have proven to be the richest field for art historians to mine, with prominent examples being Donna Cassidy's work on the relationship between jazz and American modernists, an exhibition and catalogue by Leo Mazow and others devoted to the banjo, and Rachael Delue's upcoming study of paintings by Arthur Dove made while the artist listened to phonographic recordings. Also forthcoming is Mazow's monograph on Thomas Hart Benton, which will consider the range of the artist's involvement with sonic materials, including radio. Turning away from music, Alexander Nemerov considers the sounds out

at sea in Edward Hopper's *Ground Swell* (1939) and Michael Gaudio, the aural encounters with nature in Thomas Cole's *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826). Dissertations considering sound in addition to the present study are also beginning to appear. Melissa Warak's dissertation-in-progress examines the interrelationship between music and spirituality in the long 1960s, for example.[14] As this brief paragraph limns, there is much more to be done.

But then again, the relationship between sound and art has always been one of disavowal. This is due in no small part, I suspect, to the entrenched binary of seeing and hearing. I need not recount the litany of formidable thinkers who have pitted looking against listening here (though Arnheim surely would be included). To my mind, this opposition is missing the point: our senses work in tandem, sight with touch, smell with taste, etc. In 1896, philosopher John Dewey forthrightly rejected mono-sensory perception: "It is absolutely impossible to think of the eye center as monopolizing consciousness and the ear apparatus as wholly quiescent. What happens is a certain relative prominence and subsidence as between the various organs which maintain the organic equilibrium."[15] More recently, art historian Jonathan Crary echoes Dewey's conclusion, noting that perception is comprised of "more than a single-sense modality of sight, in terms also of hearing and touch, and most importantly of irreducibly *mixed*

[14] Donna Cassidy, *Painting the Musical City: Jazz and Cultural Identity in American Art, 1910--1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Leo Mazow, *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2005); Rachael Z. Delue, *Arthur Dove and the Art of Translation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, forthcoming); Mazow, *Thomas Hart Benton and the American Sound* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, forthcoming); Alexander Nemerov, "*Ground Swell*: Edward Hopper in 1939," *American Art* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 50-71; and Michael Gaudio, "At the Mouth of the Cave: Listening to Thomas Cole's *Kaaterskill Falls*," *Art History* 33, no. 3 (June 2010): 448-65. Melissa Warak, "Sound Exchange: Interactions of Music and Art, 1955--1969" (Ph.D. diss. in progress, Univ. of Texas, Austin).

[15] John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept," *Psychological Review* 3, no. 4 (July 1896), 362.

modalities which, inevitably, get little or no analysis within 'visual studies'."[16] Heeding Dewey's (and Crary's) words, this dissertation considers the ways that perception is comprised of multiple modalities, and explores the phenomenological topography of sensorial swellings, merges, and interruptions in our experience of art objects.

Aural Methods

In particular, artistic production that piques our auditory sense calls for something in addition to the conventional art history and methodological recipe with which we as Americanists are all too familiar: add painting (or sculpture or illustration), fold in socio-historical context, and mix. Instead, these works demand that that we listen to them by using our aural imagination. In this dissertation, I attempt to imagine the sounds visualized or suggested by the art object in question, and extrapolate how the formal and narratival elements presented advance, minimize, or push and pull with these imaginary aural operations. As an attunement that activates and enlarges the exchange between human subject and art object, the process of imagining sound in a mute art object requires a seeing with the ear and beyond, a hyper-awareness of our subjectivity as sensate beings.

In addition to these imaginative aural operations, each chapter centers on a close reading of the work of art: the formal ways the listener is depicted, and how the artist manipulates the relationship between what the listener hears and sees. Throughout my analysis, I consider primary documents that elucidate the artist's attitudes towards sound. In addition to these methodologies, I interpret the painting as a cultural construction of listening – an artifact of the ways listening looked and was represented in a specific

[16] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 3.

historical moment – and examine a vast range of period sources, from short stories and scientific treatises on sound to graphic material such as advertisements and cartoons. Although there are works before 1855 (and after 1897) that are germane to my topic, my dissertation focuses on this period because of the tumultuous changes in hearing and sound during this time.

Of particular interest is the relationship between looking and listening, for both faculties dominate the processes of perception and cognition, and the relationship between these two senses plays an important role in the discursive forces that chart Western modernity. Of course, other senses are at play in these developments, too; and I am not advocating a simplified, dualistic sensory model. Adopting John Dewey's model, I consider the relationship between looking and listening as indistinct, shifting, and diachronic – one is partially suppressed while the other is engaged, or both work together in one moment and disassociate in degrees in the next.[17] Indeed, as I will argue, emerging modes of listening in the nineteenth century actually *affected* certain ways of seeing.

Contemporaneous developments in sound technologies – specifically, the telegraph, typewriter, telephone, and phonograph – comprise another significant aspect of my exploration of listening as part of a historical, multi-sensorial experience and set of social behaviors.[18] In this light, the technological materials I examine (trade catalogues, brochures, posters, etc.) offer a period-specific visual language of some of the ways the senses functioned. To some, my consideration of these technologies may be drifting too far from the works themselves, particularly because nearly all of the works I examine do

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[17] See page 9 and note 15 of this introduction.

[18] Throughout my dissertation, I am careful not to endorse a technological determinism, the view that technology instigated change or progress, rather I attempt to show how technological innovations emerged from transformations in American culture and social needs, such as how the senses could be used more efficiently.

not actually depict any of these technological devices. Indeed, during the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a vast disjunction between how those in the sphere of fine art imaged America and how most of the country, if not broad swaths of the upper, middle and working classes, was beset by the virtual explosion of technologies. Consciously, overtly, or otherwise, most artists, at least those who have been substantively documented, did not attempt to pictorialize these mechanisms – it simply was not done.[19]

While the larger set of issues surrounding this *en masse* avoidance, such as the disparities and contiguities between American fine arts and machine culture, are outside the scope of this introduction, to argue that artistic representations of listening made during this time circulated within some kind of cultural vacuum – wholly separate from the unprecedented transformations involving listening and sound technologies – seems untenable. At the same time, to create relationships between works of art and period inventions without substantiation and careful arguments seems equally unreasonable. Rather than summarily dismiss the possibility of technological narratives within works of art portraying or implicating aurality, this dissertation attempts to find meaning in their omissions and silences. Specifically, I will attempt to establish plausible connections to these technologies by looking at recurrent motifs, iconographical characteristics, and sensorial experiences in the paintings, as well as biographical data of the artists, that track or intersect with these various inventions and their discourses. The aim here is not to demonstrate a direct correspondence between the artist's work and the technological devices, but, in some instances, to uncover the artist's latent attitudes (positive, negative,

[19] One exception to this avoidance of depictions of technologies is the handful of landscape paintings showing telegraph poles, such as Asher B. Durand's *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)* (1853), which I discuss in the following chapter.

or otherwise) towards these cultural forms and, more importantly, to reveal how their sonic depictions (and artistic production overall) can be better understood through the interpretive lens of the technological discourses of the time. What I also hope to gain from this widening of scope is a deeper awareness of the ways these paintings addressed, even contributed to, period cultural forces, dialogues, and debates surrounding the rapidly changing nature of sensorial functions and social intercourse.

In addition to sound technologies, this dissertation also explores representations of non-musical sound. While music and painting have been characterized as "sister arts" in their shared facility for exceeding the limitations of words, relations of sound and listening in the plastic fine arts cannot be contained by attention to music alone.[20] To put it differently, the inexorable bond between music and painting shows that painting has an undeniable, fundamental aural capacity or dimension – one that has been not been fully explored by solely considering music. This dissertation attends to an array of sound-makings, musical or otherwise, and various forms of listening, considering the ways that artists visually convey all kinds of sonic events and tropes to stir the human imagination.[21] America's soundscape underwent tremendous changes from the mid-

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[20] As suggested by the nineteenth-century critic Walter Pater's remark that art should "aspire to the condition of music," there exists a centuries-old philosophical discussion of the competition or *paragone* between the two art forms. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 106. And in the twentieth century, early forms of abstraction were in fact efforts to correlate music with painting by such artists as Wassily Kandinsky, Frantisek Kupka, Arthur Wesley Dow, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and the Synchromist artists, Stanton Macdonald Wright and Morgan Russell. For further discussion of these artists in this context, see Judith Zilczer, "'Color Music:' Synaesthesia and Nineteenth-Century Sources for Abstract Art," *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987), 101-126.

[21] While my work focuses on period sounds and listening practices, this does not mean that I am attempting to reconstruct the sounds of Homer, Eakins, Dewing or of their time – that would not only be impossible but also of little value for art-historical inquiry. Nor will I focus on the ahistorical, linguistic possibilities of painting, a concern raised in the debate between André Malraux and Maurice Merleau-Ponty concerning painting's capacity to signify and speak throughout the ages. "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, intro. and transl. Richard McCleary (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 39-83. Andre Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, transl. Stuart Gilbert

nineteenth century on: not only in terms of the typewriter, telephone, and phonograph, but also with the noises heard in the city streets, factories, and countryside nearby. Taking these kinds of sounds into account, my concerns are grounded in sound and listening as a set of historical conditions and intellectual problems, and the artistic representation of these conditions and problems.

Visualizing Sound and Listening in the Long 1850s

Against this historical and methodological backdrop, I now turn to several works of art portraying sound made in the years leading up to the Civil War. Specifically, in the late 1840s and mid 1850s, painters William Sidney Mount and Richard Caton Woodville, and sculptor Randolph Rogers created forceful depictions of audition that trace some of the more significant issues found in the work of Homer, Eakins, and Dewing.

In the earliest work, William Sidney Mount's *The Power of Music* (1847; fig. 1), we find an African-American laborer outside a barn listening to a young man playing the violin to several friends inside. A significant work in many narratives of American art – mainly because of its skilled, earnest portrayal of rural life and prodding of race issues in antebellum America – many art historians have explored and documented the various aspects of the painting and its maker.[22] Many have recounted, for instance, that Mount,

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 13-130. For further discussion of the debate between Malraux and Merleau-Ponty, see Alex Potts, "Art Works, Utterances, and Things," in *Art and Thought*, ed. Dana Arnold and Margaret Iverson, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 91-110.

[22] See *American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915*, ed. H. Barbara Weinberg and Carrie Rebora Barratt, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009); Jennifer A. Greenhill, "The View from Outside: Rockwell and Race in 1950," *American Art* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 70-95; David Bjelajac, "William Sidney Mount and the Hermetic Tradition in American Art," in *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, ed. David Morgan and Sally Promey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Frederick C. Moffatt, "Barnburning and Hunkerism: William Sidney Mount's "Power of Music," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29, no. 1

himself an accomplished violinist, was a sign painter turned New York city academician of painting who returned to his native Sewtauket, New York, and devoted his career to genre scenes, some of which reflect his farm upbringing on Long Island. Scholars have also noted Mount's daily interactions with African Americans, freed or enslaved, as he was growing up in the waterside community, pointing to these relationships to temper his problematic depiction of a black man in *Farmers Nooning* (1836), and to illuminate the more ambiguous representation of race in *The Power of Music*. Indeed, though Mount depicts the African American with a certain amount of sympathy in the latter work, the bifurcated, geometric nature of the composition reinforces the sense of marginalization and exclusion that blacks experienced at the time, most controversially with the institution of slavery. But what art historical discussions have paid little heed to is how *The Power of Music* devotes itself to the act of listening, and how certain qualities of the aural activity depicted also contribute to the painting's thematics of division and its converse, intersection. [23]

(Spring 1994): 19-42; Bruce Robertson, " 'The Power of Music:' A Painting by William Sidney Mount," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 79, no. 2 (February 1992): 38-62; William T. Oedel and Todd S. Gernes, " 'The Painter's Triumph:' William Sidney Mount and the Formation of a Middle-Class Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1988): 111-127; and Karen M. Adams, "The Black Image in the Paintings of William Sidney Mount," *American Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (November 1975): 42-59.

[23] One observer described the listening laborer in the painting as follows:

> A brown jug and ax standing near inform us that he has been to dinner after chopping all the morning, filled his jug with blackstrap or a mixture of vinegar, water, molasses, and ginger … and was about to resume his labor for the afternoon when he was arrested by the notes of the violin. He has got his 'stent' for the day, but thinks he can listen a little longer, work all the harder, and get through before sunset.

Quoted in Flexner, James Thomas *That Wilder Image: The Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer*. (Boston: Little Brown, 1962), 32. An interesting counterpart to this work is Mount's *The Banjo Player* (1852-6), which features the same barn setting populated only by a lone African-American banjo player seated on a chair, as well as one of the artist's last works, *Catching the Tune* (1866-67), which shows a whistling man eagerly looking to a violinist who looks down in concentration so as to "catch the tune" and play it on the violin that he holds.

The idea of division is most readily seen, of course, in the way that the laborer remains outside the barn, unseen by the men inside.[24] And whereas the individuals in the group have a certain sartorial sophistication, with their jaunty shirts, vests, trousers, coats, and hats, Mount presents our listening protagonist as a persona who is more simple and less stable, with clothing that in some spots has already ripped and been mended and in other areas seems to be fraying and unraveling. Mount extends this motif of instability with the main auditor's dislocation from the central scene, he is literally placed at the intersection of several disparate planes, in contrast to the grouping of men who sit within one neat rectangular area and are linked together in their viewing of and listening to the violin, a knot of seeing and hearing, so to speak. The listener is disconnected from this sensorial intersection; instead, his immobility and inability to speak are linked to the jug that sits on the ground near him. Echoing the position of his arm and the color of his skin, the jug is topped with a cork stopper that carries connotation of suppressed speech for the laborer: in other words, if the laborer is heard talking, he will have to "put a cork in it."

At the same time, even though he is excluded from the pleasant gathering and unable to speak, the laborer is allowed to enjoy the music through the faculty of hearing. Since sound has a porousness that vision does not, the laborer is aurally joined with the men inside.[25] The invisible member of society is thus linked to the invisible phenomenon of sound waves. Overall, then, this strained relation between looking and listening continues the trope of division and intersection in the work. Further, Mount pins this

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[24] The motif of divisions also can be seen in the view of the barn's underpinning; we can see how the stratum of earth, rock, and lumber (with Mount's signature and date on the large rock on the left) form the foundation of the barn.

[25] The laborer has somewhat of a foil in the man leaning against the barn door. Though the gentleman is placed higher than the laborer, both are standing, placed in close proximity to one another, and with similar arm positions. In light of these similarities and the figure placements within the composition, Mount seems to suggest that this man is ambivalent about his role as an insider.

strained relationship to the more looming issue of race that the work at once attempts to expose and assuage.

Made only one year after Mount's picture, Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico* (1848; fig. 2) also explores the status of race. Woodville, a Baltimore native and former medical school student, studied in Düsseldorf and lived in various parts of Europe for nearly ten years, one third of his short life. From his European studios, he created several works that focus on the act of listening as an integral aspect of the American social experience, of which *War News* is the most well known.[26] In *War News*, we find a group of citizens on the front porch of a hotel with most of the action centering on the reading of a newspaper out loud. The work is literally a cast of listening characters. Several auditors read along with the main figure from behind, one particularly animated man waves his hat in the air and shouts with his mouth wide open. In front of him is a seated pair of men, the younger one repeats the news to his older, hard of hearing companion, cupping his mouth to ensure he will be heard. To the right of the newspaper reader is another pair of men, both of whom are shown in intense listening postures.[27] Outside of the porch are several other figures, most notably a seated African American who holds a silver cup and looks up to listen, and by him, an African American youth who stands with tattered rags and also pays close attention.

[26] For example, Woodville also painted *Politics in an Oyster House* (1848), which features two men seated at a private curtained booth in a restaurant, one discoursing as he holds a newspaper and the other across from him holding a hand to one ear. For further discussion of Woodville's *oeuvre*, see Justin Wolff, *Richard Caton Woodville: American Painter, Artful Dodger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). For a landmark discussion of *War News*, see Bryan Wolf, "All the World's a Code: Art and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American Painting," *Art Journal* 44 (Winter 1984), 328-337.

[27] In addition, the architecture of the porch echoes the newspaper, featured at the painting's center, in its format of columns and rows.

Like Mount's painting, the clearly demarcated social spaces in *War News* do not prevent the disenfranchised from participating in the act of audition.[28] But whereas *The Power of Music* draws its particular sense of aurality from the exclusionary qualities of the laborer, the sense of sound in *War News* is based on the painting's inclusionary, chain-like effect of the spreading of news. Though it was a relatively short war and won swiftly, the Mexican War (1846-48) provided one of the first national uses for the telegraph, a device invented by Samuel F. B. Morse and others in 1844. Instead of the usual long intervals between an event and its filed report, news of the war arrived quickly with telegraphic updates and the American public eagerly awaited the next influx of information about the front. Woodville limns the telegraphic source for the news in this painting with the columns of the porch suggesting telegraph poles and the overall linear, wire-like formation of figures, beginning with the right arm of the seated figure on the left hand side of the picture and ending with the woman poking her head out of the window on the right.

In addition to this adumbration of telegraphy in the picture, Woodville relies on several motifs of orality to convey the work's sonic narrative. First, there is the direct correlation between the centrifugal arrangement of individuals and the imagined sound waves emanating from the newspaper reader's mouth to all the listeners around him. Woodville reinforces this sense of radiating sound waves with the concentric pattern on the straw hat directly below the central speaking figure and, to a lesser extent, with the numerous circular shapes throughout the work that echo the shape of the newspaper

[28] In contrast to the open mouths of several of the figures under the covered porch, the African Americans' mouths are closed; like the corked jug by the seated figure's foot, they literally have no voice. In this sense, the relationship between the figures and the jug is very similar to that shown in Mount's *The Power of Music*, discussed above.

reader's mouth, for example, the bucket in the bottom right corner, the silver cup held by the African-American man, the opening of the drain pipe on the left side of the building, and the even wider opening of the barrel nearby. Related to this sense of directionality, the various vectors of bodies, arms, and gesticulations also convey the notions of mobility and duration that are essential aspects of sound. Lastly, the abundance of text in the painting amplifies the linguistic nature of this aural event, as well as the ostensible germination of words throughout the figures. Specifically, we can note the "post office" sign on the left column and the notice requesting "volunteers for Mexico" below it (not seen in this reproduction), the large sign stating "American hotel" on the pediment and the smaller sign for "bar room" directly below that (also not visible), the prominence of the word "extra" on the newspaper itself, and the various (illegible) postings on the wall behind the main group. Indeed one could say that all of these elements – the crammed bodies, dramatic gestures, textual references, and the motif of circuitry – imbue Woodville's picture with a particularly charged, rushed kind of aurality, not unlike the speedy delivery of the telegraphic news itself.

The final work I offer as a significant precedent for the works of art and issues I examine in the subsequent chapters is not a painting but a sculpture – in fact, one of the most popular sculptures made in the nineteenth century.[29] Based on Edward Bulwer Lytton's best-selling novel, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), Randolph Rogers's *Nydia, the Blind Girl of Pompeii* (1855-59; fig. 3) depicts the moment when the blind former slave uses her acute sense of hearing to rescue her benefactor and unrequited love Glaucus during the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius. Listening for her beloved's voice, the

[29] Another work to be explored in this regard is John Quidor's *Antony van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvesant* (1839), which manipulates the motif of a blowing trumpet to visualize varying degrees of social order or disorder in terms of race, ethnicity, and class.

young girl cups her ear with one hand while holding a staff in the other as she forges through heavy winds, pandemonium, and destruction. In the novel, Nydia becomes an unlikely hero in these devastating circumstances: with the volcanic ash all but shrouding the city of Pompeii in a black cloud, she was able to find her way through the dark, winding city paths because of her life-long blindness.[30] Yet after navigating Glaucus and his lover Ione to safety to an awaiting ship, Nydia realizes the futility of her feelings and throws herself overboard. The sculpture, one of Rogers's earlier works, was an instant success, making the work of the American expatriate in high demand.

Born in Waterloo, New York, and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Rogers moved to Italy to study at the Academy of Florence in 1848 and, but for a few trips to the United States, lived in Rome for the rest of his life. Because of the popularity of *Nydia*, Rogers received somewhere between fifty to seventy-five commissions for the work, creating a factory-like system of reproductions that led fellow sculptor Lorado Taft to comment somewhat wryly: "Randolph Rogers was perhaps engaged at the moment upon the one hundredth replica of his 'Blind Nydia.'"[31] Indeed the number of *Nydia* statues was disarming. One studio visitor recalled:

> He had lately made a statue of Nydia , the blind girl of Pompeii, which had a great popular success, particularly among Americans, who ordered many replicas for their houses. … I once went to his studio and saw seven Nydias, all in row, all listening, all groping, and seven marble cutters at work, cutting them out. It was a gruesome sight.[32]

[30] Rogers made a companion piece to *Nydia*, *Somnambula* (1861), which features a sleepwalking girl probably based on the figure of Amina from Vincenzo Bellini's nineteenth-century opera *La Sonnambula*.

[31] Lorado Taft, "American Sculptures and Sculptors," *The Chautauquan* XXII (Jan. 1896), 387; cited in Millard F. Rogers, Jr., *Randolph Rogers: American Sculptor in Rome* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1971), 26.

[32] D. M. Armstrong, *Day before Yesterday: Reminiscences of a Varied Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 194; cited in Rogers, *Randolph Rogers*, 27. For these replicas, the "plaster model was the sculpture copied by the marble cutters employed in his studio," Ibid., 4.

As the commentator suggests, some of the most notable qualities of *Nydia* were the emphatic sensorial gestures of the protagonist, the "listening" and "groping." Indeed, with her hunched posture, tilted head, closed eyes, and right hand by her left ear, *Nydia* leaves no doubt as to the protagonist's subjectivity, her psychic posture of both desperation and determination. The sculpture emblematizes hearing not only with the overt cupping of her ear but also in the way the girl's form, not unlike the spiral shape of the inner ear, radiates out into the viewer's space in multiple directions like rippling sound waves. In addition to Nydia's posture and gestures, Rogers suggests sound with the objects he includes in the sculpture – the walking stick that would tap as Nydia hurried along, and the broken column at her feet a reminder of the many crashes taking place around her. The blowing forms of Nydia's clothing also contribute to the unfolding narrative, and Rogers sculpts the wind whipping through her dress with remarkable skill. Thus, even though no transmission of sound is depicted, the tableau Rogers creates – particularly with Nydia's body and her overt listening posture – functions as a marker of sound, some that have occurred, and others that are occurring still, and all of which are imagined in our minds.

In *Nydia*, a sympathetic depiction of a former slave, Americans may have found some solace as the country veered toward civil war over the issue of slavery. In fact, all three works of art I discuss focus on the act of listening and implicate slavery in some way, either through the invocation of race or, in the case of *Nydia*, a term of indentured servitude. Of the three, *Nydia*, with its narrative of death and destruction, telegraphs an

apocalyptic message for antebellum America; nonetheless, it also offers listening as a way out.[33]

As this brief discussion suggests, the faculty of hearing became a significant subject for artists to depict in the mid-nineteenth century. The artists I examine demonstrate the ways that listening functioned as an integral aspect of American life, a valuable tool in a variety of social situations, and a visible manifestation of interiority and subjectivity. Shown most intensely in *Nydia*, we see how the embodied responses of one person implicate an entire aural narrative that does not require representation but is imagined in the viewer's mind instead. For all three works, vision delimits sound, either through tight relationships between the listener and transmitter of sound or by the willful elimination of vision making the faculty of hearing more acute. Lastly, the artists also wield the thematics of audition as a motif of power and exclusion, with the genre scenes

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[33] In the late 1850s, the divisiveness between the Northern and Southern states was reaching a feverish pitch. Abraham Lincoln acknowledged as much in his 1858 speech upon acceptance of the Republican party nomination for Illinois state senator, "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other." Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 2: 461-68. As president, Lincoln was well known for his listening skills. For example, New York Republican Chauncey M. Depew recalled: "The patient president, wearied as he was with cares of state, with the situation on several hostile fronts, with the exigencies in Congress and jealousies in his Cabinet, patiently and sympathetically listened to these tales of want and woe." May D. Russell Young, ed., *Men and Memories: Personal Reminiscences by John Russell Young* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1901), I: 68.

During the same time he was fulfilling the numerous requests for replicas of *Nydia*, Rogers was also working on several commissions related to the founding and politics of the United States, including several representations of Lincoln, and a set of bronze doors for the United States Capitol (1855). Centered on the life of Christopher Columbus, the doors limn Rogers' view of the country and his attitudes towards some of the most important issues of the day, including slavery – a subject he somewhat tenuously explores in *Nydia*. For example, one of the Capitol bronze door panels, *Columbus's First Encounter with the Indians (1492)*, shows Columbus rebuking one of the sailors for taking a Native-American girl as a slave. For further discussion of the doors, as well as the spirited exchange of letters between Rogers and the commissioners, see Rogers, *Randolph Rogers*, 48-68.

The intersection of slavery, listening, *Nydia*, and the depictions of Abraham Lincoln in Rogers' works merits further consideration.

in particular (despite their fairly lighthearted subject matter) confronting the sober cultural implications and hierarchies of sonic experiences.

Like these antebellum representations of listening, the works of art by Homer, Eakins, and Dewing that I examine in the following chapters shape the contours of sound to mean many different things, and for disparate pictorial effects. In the first chapter I trace how Homer emphasizes the use of the human voice, horns, and bells to cover vast distances at a time when a growing number of people were communicating with one another with the aid of such machines as the telegraph and telephone. Homer's life and artistic outlook were marked by his experience as a traveling Civil War illustrator, and many of his works focus on the theme of distance and signaling over space. The second chapter considers Thomas Eakins's efforts to "record" both the visual and aural moment that he painted in *Singing a Pathetic Song* (1881) and, with a model in his studio, photographed with his own camera. Examining the artist's avid interest in photography as a technology of transcription, I also explore in this chapter connections and tensions between the quest for realism in the reproduction of vision in photography and the parallel impulses that inflected the phonographic reproduction of sound. The final chapter moves from the intersection of realism and sound to probe Aestheticism, silence, and listening in Thomas Dewing's *A Reading* (1897). In addition to his many music-themed works, Dewing created canvas after canvas of quiet women in refined domestic settings, an artistic enterprise that illuminates pervasive Victorian attitudes towards women having a literal – and metaphoric – voice. With each successive chapter, there will be a

narrowing of focus – the first considering many different works by Homer, the second chapter looking to other works by Eakins in order to explore his *Singing a Pathetic Song*, and the final chapter investigating Dewing's *A Reading* within an even tighter framework.

What ties all three individuals is their depth of engagement with tropes of sound, not only in their sustained, career-long exploration of aural subjects, but also in the density of issues each explored. As I will argue, Homer, Eakins, and Dewing do more than approach sound as a readily paintable quotidian moment, subject matter, or genre scene, they use the invisible phenomenon as a unit of pictorial language, to expand space, to push notions of mimeticism, and to express inexpressible notions of interiority. Ultimately, I hope to show through this study how considerations of aurality will amplify our understandings of these artists, the objects that they made, and the historical conditions in which they lived.

Chapter One

Spatial Conceptualizations of Sound in Winslow Homer

Winslow Homer's prolific career spanned nearly five decades, shifted from Massachusetts and New York to England and Maine, and moved seamlessly among the mediums of illustration, oil painting, and watercolor. Throughout these peregrinations, Homer created a body of work that has occupied art historians in the century since his death. Though scholarly explorations of Homer's *oeuvre* continue to this day, the artist actively discouraged such interest – a sentiment crystallized in his remark, "don't let the public poke its nose into my picture."[1] Indeed, as Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. and Franklin Kelly note in the introduction to the catalogue accompanying their landmark 1995 exhibition, "scholars have attempted to disinter precisely the kind of personal and cultural meanings that Homer himself always refused to discuss."[2] Yet though Homer was silent about his artistic production, many of his works were in fact clamorous, voluble, inherently sonic. As I will demonstrate, from the artist's very first tentative moves as illustrator, Homer pictured aural events and moments of listening. Beginning early in his career, when he was assigned to cover the Civil War for *Harper's Weekly*, and continuing through his mid-career genre scenes and more mature period of marine paintings, the artist visualized music playing, bells ringing, horns blowing, people yelling and gesturing across spans of countryside and ocean. As was the case for most of his artistic production, Homer's approach to sonic tropes and events was deliberative, complex, and

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1 Harrison S. Morris, *Confessions in Art* (New York: Sears Publishing Co., 1930), 63; quoted in Franklin Kelly, "Time and Narrative Erased," in *Winslow Homer*, Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. and Franklin Kelly, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 312.

2 Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 13.

equivocal, but if a single continuous thread can be found running throughout, it is Homer's probing of the idea of transfer or connection, the human desire to physically and/or psychically connect with one another.

This leitmotif of connectivity can be found not just in the aural-themed pictures, but also throughout the rest of Homer's body of work. For example, some of the most interesting manifestations of this theme involve linear arrangements, human chains, ropes, and, in a more attenuated fashion, wives who weave at shore while their fishermen husbands work at sea. In such paintings as *Snap the Whip* (1872) and *Undertow* (1886) (figs. 4a and 4b, respectively), Homer literally strings his protagonists in a line – be they school children or sea bathers and their rescuers – building the pictorial composition and narrative around the joined bodies. In other paintings, such as *Croquet Scene* (1866) and *The Life Line* (1884) (figs. 5a and 5b, respectively), the human connection is accompanied by different kinds of linking mechanisms, croquet wickets, for example, or the technology of the breeches buoy. And in the paintings of fishermen and women from the 1880s (figs. 6a and 6b), Homer uses the net that the women mend and the men cast to symbolize how their lives and feelings are connected despite the long absences and distances.[3] Like these works, the pictures that I examine in this chapter manipulate these tropes of connectivity and attenuation but, in addition, they rely on sonic devices and motifs to effect the transfer or engage in a specific kind of signaling. As this suggests, more often than not, Homer *chose* to strain these aural efforts to connect with the pressure of distance, and it is precisely this problematic condition – one shaped by the

[3] A more substantial discussion of these human chains and linear arrangements is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the chapter as it presently stands. I hope to, in the near future, expand my analysis of these pictures and Homer's attachment to such tropes.

coordinates of signaling, spatial configurations, communication, and sound – that I will address in my inquiry.[4]

Specifically, this chapter will argue that Homer was deeply invested in the language of signaling over space, and, in searching for different ways to visualize connectivity and the transfer of expression, turned to tropes of aurality to articulate notions of distance. In these attempts to fix ideas of space through sonic paradigms, Homer was creating his own sort of distal communication or signaling system, one that was manifestly circumscribed around artist, painting, and viewer, and that, in its own complicated and avowedly obtuse and insular way, reveals much about the artist's ventures. This chapter will proceed thematically and chronologically according to the kinds of sounds that the artist portrayed, beginning with his depictions of the Civil War, continuing through his pictures of horns and bells, and concluding with his representations of shouting. Throughout this inquiry, I will consider a number of Homer's illustrations and paintings from various stages of his life, not to develop some precise linear trajectory of how the artist dealt with sound over the course of his long career, but to unpack at various discursive moments how Homer used sound as a pictorial strategy, what sound meant in historical and cultural terms, and the significance of aural thematics to Homer's artistic production overall. Ultimately, I hope to shed light on our understanding of Homer's *oeuvre* – the kinds of problems that he was working through, what preoccupied him – as well as broaden our purview of the times in which he lived.

In this vein, I also hope to illuminate the latent connections between the two seemingly disparate spheres of art and technology. During the second half of the

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[4] That is to say, while Homer made many other works that depict a sonic event or implicate sonic tropes, such as the marines in the final decades of his life, this chapter will focus on those pictures related to signaling, distance, and sound.

nineteenth century, scientists and inventors attempted to achieve instant electric communication and speech and to solve other pressing problems related to sound and distance, problems that period inventions of the telegraph and telephone helped to address – and create. As an artist who lived during the emergence of telegraphic and telephonic cultures, Homer experimented with ways to visualize these very same issues. Thus, the connection that I am arguing exists between Homer and period sound technologies is more than one of contemporaneity; it is instead one of shared agendas, albeit with vastly different methodologies. As I consider the confluence of period developments in telecommunications and Homer's artistic investigations, I will attempt to avoid placing Homer's clearly nostalgic, pre-industrial, agrarian images of American life within a neat narrative suggesting the artist's disavowal of technological advances. Rather, I seek to complicate such notions by arguing that the fact that the artist made painting after painting of humans attempting to communicate over vast distances at the same time that scientists and inventors were pondering the very same issues suggests that his works not only implicate period telecommunications discourse in terms of both representational and compositional strategies, but also they were part of the same cultural dialogue and polemics – one centering on American middle-class hopes and fears – about sound, distance, and technology.

I should note here that Homer also seemed to be interested in problems of *seeing* across distance, a concern I will address more fully as my argument unfolds. In many works, Homer stresses not only sound but also the power of vision, particularly from a high viewpoint, to enact a sense of space and bolster the illusion of distance. Thus, I am by no means suggesting that sound functions as the only variable to create distance, a

three dimensionality, or a sense of spatiality; like Homer's *oeuvre*, the techniques the artist uses are diverse. But I do insist that sound claims significant status for Homer, and provides important clues to his artistic motivations and enterprise.

I. Family, Isolation, and Communication

The middle of three sons, Homer was born in 1836 in Boston, Massachusetts. Though his father was a hardware businessman, Homer was fortunate to have his parents nurture his early artistic proclivities, most likely because his mother was herself a skilled watercolorist. In fact, most of Homer's artistic development seemed to have occurred at home or on his own, making him more an autodidact than anything else; he neither attended art school in the States nor learned the academic method in Europe like many of his colleagues. Rather, during his youth, Homer apprenticed with commercial lithographer John H. Bufford in Boston. With two years at Bufford's under his belt, Homer began to contribute as a freelance artist to illustrated magazines such as *Ballou's Pictorial* and *Harper's Weekly* in 1857. Two years later, he left his Boston studio for New York, moving into the artist-filled University building in Washington Square in 1861. For over fifteen years, Homer drew countless illustrations for *Harper's* and other periodicals. In essence then, Homer was a commercial artist and, as I will demonstrate, his reliance on established and emerging systems of news and communication not only controlled the logistics of how his image-making materialized in print, but also informed and shaped his artistic production – a point that will gain relevance as my argument unfolds.

Perhaps the experience that most defined Homer was his assignment to the Civil War for *Harper's*. As Cikovsky puts it, "The war called upon Homer's powers of innovation and interpretation in more ways and to a greater degree than more ordinary events and pedagogical procedures would have done."[5] While Homer quickly absorbed the modern, gruesome nature of the war into his pictorial strategies, he moved on to lighter subject matter after the war ended. Throughout the 1860s and 70s, Homer went on to paint various genre scenes of leisure, children, and the countryside. After a significant trip to England in 1881, however, Homer came back a changed man, no longer interested in light-hearted subjects. Two years later, he began to live in virtual isolation in Prout's Neck, Maine (leaving only to vacation in the Caribbean), and remained there for the last twenty-seven years of his life, from 1884 to 1910.

While it is not incorrect to say that Homer's ties to society were tenuous during his time in Prout's Neck, he was in relatively constant communication with dealers, colleagues, and family, by postal mail and telegraph. Several miles from his house the little town of Scarboro, a stop on the train route between Portland and Boston, had a post office, telegraph depot, and railway station. In a December 1893 letter, Homer seems to both savor and reject his reputation as a secluded man while referencing the post office: "I deny that I am a recluse as is generally understood by that term. … No other man or woman within half a mile & four miles from railroad & P.O. This is the only life in which I am permitted to mind my own business."[6] Whether he was reticent or reclusive, Homer did not use his ascendancy in the art world as a platform or opportunity for self-

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5 Cikovsky, "The School of War," in *Winslow Homer*, 19.

6 Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945), 113. The post office was, according to Goodrich, "his only link with the outside world." Ibid., 84. As a neighbor recalled, "The two (Homer and his fox terrier Sam) always walked over to the post office at sunset for the mail." Ibid., 112.

promotion. Not surprisingly, he left little behind in terms of describing his personal life, or for that matter, his artistic ambitions and motivations. Nonetheless, Homer was an avid letter and telegram writer, and, in fact, the mail was such an integral aspect of Homer's life that he developed an unusual friendship with his postman. In the artist's final years, afraid that he would die with no one knowing, Homer requested that the mailman smash his door if no one answered.[7] Indeed, his relationship with the local mail carriers was so strong that the Scarboro postmaster wrote a kind obituary about Homer: "He was a good man and a good citizen. If any man had a setback he was the first to help him. He was good to the poor. We shall miss him for a long time to come."[8]

In addition to his epistolary activities, Homer used the telegraph to communicate with others throughout his life. His friend John W. Beatty recalls how Homer would telegraph him to let him know of his travel plans and arrangements.[9] More interesting, however, is how Homer relied on the telegram for business transactions with dealers, galleries, and collectors such as Thomas B. Clarke, William T. Evans, and George A. Hearn. Homer's telegraphic correspondence only seemed to cease when inclement weather hit, as suggested by his reply to a telegram from the M. Knoedler & Co. gallery in New York: "I received your telegram but too late … when a storm sets in I am shut out until I am dug out …"[10] Constantly negotiating the prices and sale of his work in telegrams, Homer's use of the telegraph was a commercial and professional necessity. For example, when Thomas Clarke saw *The Lookout* and *The Maine Coast* before the

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[7] Ibid., 190.

[8] Ibid., 201.

[9] John W. Beatty, "Recollections of Intimate Friendship by John W. Beatty," in Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 219.

[10] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 166. Responding to another telegram from Knoedler's: "I do not keep a horse & my nearest neighbor is half a mile away – I am four miles from telegram & P.O. & under a snow bank most of the time, so I cannot answer telegrams." Ibid., 108-109.

opening of the Society of American Artists exhibitions, he telegraphed the artist for their prices. Homer responded that each would be $800 each, Clarke agreed, and the sale was completed quickly thereafter.[11]

Though Homer frequently used the telegraph to relay messages to friends and business associates, he seemed to have little awareness or familiarity with the newer invention of the telephone. When John Beatty visited Homer at his New York hotel and made a telephone call to another artist, the following exchange occurred, "Homer, with a quizzical expression, said, 'would you mind telling me how you did that?' When I had explained the method of calling a number, he said he was sorry he had not known this before, as he had desired to reach Roland Knoedler in haste, but not understanding 'that thing' he had written in a letter."[12] Though Homer was unaware of the telephone, he nonetheless was intrigued by it and seemed to appreciate the usefulness of the device as a faster means of communication than the telegraph.

II. The Sounds of the Civil War

Homer's first sustained exposure to telegraphy was probably during his turn as a special artist for the Civil War from 1861 to 1864, as the device became a vital means to disseminate information for military leaders, reporters, and newspapers. Though periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly* capitalized on this technology, there was still a need for artists such as Homer to illustrate contemporary events. For his assignment, the artist traveled between his home base of New York and the front lines in Virginia, where he would observe the Union soldiers around the clock, from their daily routines and

[11] Ibid., 143-44.
[12] Beatty, "Recollections," in Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 216.

preparations to military operations that used the latest technological advancements in machinery and telecommunications. What Homer saw and heard during the Civil War can be distilled from his illustrations and paintings. In his sketches of regiment bands and bugle boys, we detect an early interest on the part of the artist to depict the sounds of the militia. But Homer was depicting more than what he heard while the country was at war. He was also interested in how sound shaped certain ways of listening and remembering, how it could serve as a bittersweet counterpoint to the bloodshed going on all around him, and, as I will argue, the ways it could expand and contract notions of distance and narrative in pictorial form.

Telegraphing Signals

As with other technological innovations, the telegraph was not invented by one person, and was the effect, not the determinate cause, of a whole host of social and cultural changes.[13] In essence, the electromagnetic telegraph advanced the basic signaling functions of semaphore telegraphy, and emerged from a set of conditions and desires tied to this older system as well even older ones such as smoke and drum signaling. Semaphore (from the Greek meaning "conveying a signal," also called the "line of sight" or "optical telegraph") telegraphy was actually a network of tower-like structures outfitted with wooden arms and flaps.[14] Using the telescope, which had achieved a workable accuracy in 1757 and made seeing at far distance possible, a signalman in each tower would pivot the wooden appendages to convey certain codes to the next tower in

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[13] For further discussion of the device, see Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1990).

[14] Ken Beauchamp, *History of Telegraphy* (London: The Institution of Electrical Engineers, 2001), 3-19; Andrew Robinson, *The Story of Measurement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 162. Maritime signaling developed independently around this time, with a sailor waving small flags to a sailor using a telescope on another ship.

the network (figs. 7a, 7b). The system was first put in use between Paris and Lille during the 1790s by Frenchman Claude Chappe and expanded by Napoleon's army, primarily for national and military communications. Very quickly, the semaphore system spread to Spain, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, as well as such American sites as the network erected between Martha's Vineyard and Boston in 1801. With the invention of the electromagnetic telegraph in 1844, however, semaphore communication on land quickly faded and what we know today as the telegraph became one of the century's dominant forms of communication.

The electro-magnetic telegraph was the result of a series of discursive events across the Atlantic that spanned many years. Painter Samuel F.B. Morse invented a device, in consultation with Leonard Gale, Joseph Henry and Alfred Vail, that greatly simplified the prototype of Englishmen W.F. Cooke and Charles Wheatstone that Morse had seen in the late 1830s. Instead of the semaphore's visual system of signals, Morse's model (fig. 8) relied on electricity, Henry's recent discovery of electromagnets, and a combination of dots and dashes that represented letters and numbers, what later became known as Morse code. Unlike the British model, Morse's version was able to record the signals coming in using an electromagnet-controlled stylus that would make small impressions on a motor-operated paper tape. With a $30,000 grant from Congress and the construction of telegraph lines between Washington and Baltimore in May 1844, Morse transmitted his first message between the two cities, the famous line, "What hath God wrought."[15] Demand for the device was instant, with approximately 12,000 miles of

[15] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815 – 1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 690-700.

telegraph wires installed up and down the East coast by 1850, and by 1866, a completed transatlantic telegraph cable.

In order to send a message, the operator tapped long and short bars with a battery-attached pointer, sending out the dots and dashes for the encoded message. But first and foremost, telegraphy was an embodied transaction, meaning that a message exchange could not occur without telegraph operators and the human sensory apparatuses of sight, hearing, and touch. As can be seen in this illustration (fig. 9), telegraph operators initially *read* the dashes and dots in order to convert them into words, but quickly realized that it would be more efficient to translate the Morse code as they *heard* the signals coming in through the sounder. So, despite Morse's original intentions, the telegraph soon became a sonic device instead of a visual one, further differentiating it from the optical system of semaphore telegraphy. But more than this, the telegraph became know for its ability to collapse geography. At a banquet honoring Morse in December 1868, one speaker toasted Morse's invention for "annihilat[ing] both space and time in the transmission of intelligence. The breadth of the Atlantic, with all its waves, is as nothing."[16] "Annihilating time and space" became a catch phrase of sorts in telegraphic rhetoric and, perhaps because the telegraph became an acoustic signaling apparatus, its frequent touting in period discourse was thick with aural meanings. For example, an 1846 article from New York states, "Washington is as near to us now as our up-town wards. We can almost hear through the telegraph, members of Congress as they

[16] Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers* (New York: Berkley Books, 1998), 90.

speak. … Man will immediately respond to man."[17] And this 1859 article in *The New York Times* states, "The telegraph gives the speaker in the furthest East or West an audience as wide as the Union. He is talking to all Americans… immediately, and literally with the emphasis of lightning."[18] The telegraphic annihilation of distance, then, offered an ability to speak – and hear voices from – far and wide. More to the point, the telegraph became equated with the proximate, aural functions of speaking and hearing.

With the Civil War's vast geography and need for prompt information, military and political leaders realized that the telegraph could serve a crucial function. As can be seen in these images from 1864 by Homer's friend and illustrator colleague Alfred Waud (figs. 10a, 10b), telegraph poles were an integral component of the theater of war, with soldiers installing an additional 15,000 miles of telegraph wire during their advancements.[19] Showing army personnel continuing the burgeoning telegraph network, these 1863 *Harper's Weekly* illustrations titled *Army Telegraph Setting Up* (fig. 11), with the image at top by Waud, reveal how the expansion was a somewhat crude operation, involving only the bare essentials of poles, wires, and telegraphic device. The accompanying text elucidates and bears quoting in full:

[17] Menahem Blondheim, *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844 -1897* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 191, citing "quoted in the *Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper*, 17 June 1846."

[18] Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 194, citing *New York Times*, 9 September 1859.

[19] Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, 159.

> The army signal-telegraph has been so far perfected that in a few hours quite a large force can be in constant connection with head-quarters. This, while a battle is progressing, is a great convenience. The wire used is a copper one insulated, raised on light poles, made expressly for the purpose, on convenient trees, or trailed along fences. The wire and the instrument can be easily carried in a cart, which as it proceeds unwinds the wire, and, when a connection is made, becomes the telegraph office. Where the cart cannot go, the men carry the drum of wire by hand. In the picture the cart has come to a halt, and the signal-men are hastening along – some with the drum, while others with crow-bars make the holes for the poles, upon which it is rapidly raised.[20]

As much propaganda as reportage, the illustrations and passage reassured *Harper's Weekly* readers that the Union army was always strategizing and moving, using the latest technology to outsmart the Confederates. On the bottom of the same *Harper's Weekly* page as this image were several other telegraphic illustrations (fig. 11) continuing the same message, both by Theodore R. Davis. One shows an army telegraph operator and the other, an army signal station waving a lit torch at night with the explanation that, "All day and all night these signalmen are kept busy telegraphing news of movements and orders from one end of the army to the other, by the aid of their inscrutable signals."[21] In these images, old signaling mechanisms stand side by side with the new.

Drawings such as Waud's and Davis's would be sketched in pencil on woodblock, which would then be converted into an engraving and printed from steel-faced electrotypes on an industrial power press. It was only because of the electrotype technology that the weekly pictorials were able to quickly reproduce the images and flourish.[22] The newly formed illustrated weeklies were a mass-produced form of visual

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[20] "The Army Telegraph – Setting up the Wire during an Action," *Harper's Weekly* (24 January 1863), 53-54.

[21] Ibid., 54. The device depicted seems to be a dial telegraph, a related technology to Morse's invention.

[22] David Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Pictorial Press* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 14-15. The images Homer drew on woodblock, along with the initial sketch, did not survive the

and textual communication sprouting up in cities all over the world, with the first appearing in London in 1842, and other major cities on virtually every continent quickly following suit. The standard format consisted of sixteen pages and small folio size (which allowed for a cheaper postal rate), with half of each page devoted to illustrations, most of them large-scale. Inexpensive, lightweight, and filled with information and illustrations of far-off places, the weeklies, in the words of David Tatham, "helped to collapse their reader's sense of distance and remoteness."[23] As this suggests, the telegraph was but one of many conditions and experiences that annihilated time and space and made the world seem a little smaller in the mid nineteenth century.

Telegraphing Soldiers

Just a page before the telegraphic illustrations by Waud and Davis in the January 24, 1863, edition of *Harper's Weekly* is a work by Homer (fig. 12) that depicts how the soldiers spent their time when not on the battlefield. The illustration, titled "Camp-Life in Winter," shows soldiers in various forms of leisure, from reading the newspaper and warming by the fire to playing cards and conversing. Most strikingly with the arrangement in the top right, Homer manipulates the chiaroscuro in the work to shift the eye among the various groupings and areas of interests. The text accompanying the image links the dramatic shading to the experience of storytelling in such situations (though it is unclear whether the group in the upper right-hand corner of Homer's image is listening to a story or witnessing a card game scuffle):

process of duplication. The drawing on the woodblock would be cut into and the woodblock would be planed down for the next electrotype.

[23] Ibid., 20. Tatham also discusses how illustrators would sketch subjects they had only seen in photographs and not in person. By 1880s, the halftone screen reproduction process (using photography to make a tonal printing matrix) started to replace woodblock and engraving process, and as a result, the intermediaries of woodblock engravers. Ibid., 25, 28-9.

> Almost in every company there is one sharp-witted fellow who can tell a good story. The soldiers' great delight is to get this man into a tent or hut, and start him on a good long old-fashioned yarn, which lasts from dark until far on in the night. The scene – while the narrator is harrowing the imaginations of his rapt hearers, and the red glare of the fire lights up odd spots in the darkness – is very striking.[24]

However unwittingly, the writer strikes at the heart of the artistic process of representing aurality for Homer. The writer's commentary offers a surprisingly apt parallel between storyteller and artist: Homer's gifts at narration were just coming into their own during this time, and just as the writer talks of the storyteller's "harrowing the imaginations of his rapt hearers," Homer was beginning to use tropes of aurality to develop his ability to conjure specific imaginaries.[25] And just as the "odd spots in the darkness" become illuminated, so, too, as I shall argue below, do ideas of sound and listening amplify the spatial effects and absences contained within Homer's pictorial narratives.

These ideas begin to come into focus when considering one of the earliest wartime illustrations by the artist. In this 1862 work for *Harper's* titled *News from the War* (fig. 13), Homer visualized the modern facet of wartime communications and dispersal of information. The various vignettes show how people were kept apprised of wartime events, including bags of mail for the fleet, the delivery of a letter via horse and rider, a housewife grieving upon reading news of her wounded, and the special artist who illustrates such events.[26] Of particular interest is how Homer ties together all the scenes with the mast or headline of telegraph wires, which frame the issues of connection and distance that Homer expounds in this work. The telegraph is but one mode of delivery

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[24] "The Army Telegraph – Setting up the Wire, " *Harper's Weekly*, 53.

[25] One of the initial challenges for Homer in terms of his narration strategies involved recalibrating the pictorial content according to the artistic medium: in his paintings, he would frequently distill the illustration's composition to few simple forms for a more streamlined, abstract effect.

[26] Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Pictorial Press*, 118.

here, and the language to be decoded is visual as well as textual. Homer accords equal emphasis to the transmitters of information – the bugle boy, the soldiers outside the Richmond prison (in the top right image), the telegraph – and the recipients of the news, the crewmembers on the ship, the forlorn wife, the soldiers jockeying for their copy of *Harper's Weekly* from the newspaper train. Around this same time, David Gilmour Blythe also pictured the excitement generated by mail delivery in his painting, *Post Office* (1859-63; fig. 14), which shows an onslaught of people anxious to get their letters from afar, so much so that they fail to see the pickpocketers in their presence. Like Blythe's work, Homer's *News from the War* underscores just how significant news and information were becoming, and how their consumption was becoming a frenzied experience. In fact, Homer emphasizes the range of emotional effects that wartime news incurred – from shuddering grief to frantic excitement. Shown at the bottom left, the special artist, sketching the soldiers who stand as tall as telegraph poles, is a stolid node in this dense circuit of informatics, himself an agent of telecommunication. Though the artist is probably not Homer – it may be Alfred Waud – it is remarkable as one of the few instances over his entire career that the self-effacing Homer treaded near self-depiction.[27] For Homer, the artistic process itself is the act of transfer, a recording of perception and imagination that will be sent to places far and wide. Moreover, the responsibilities accorded to Homer during the Civil War, of documenting wartime events and depicting soldiers in their daily activities, ultimately involved a kind of communication similar to

[27] According to Tatham, Homer included a portrait of himself in the August 21, 1858 illustration, *Camp Meeting Sketches: The Tent* in *Ballou's Pictorial*, the last of a series of four illustrations depicting a week-long religious revival held at Millennial Grove near Cape Cod. In his commentary on the text, Homer notes, "under the lead of a distinguished preacher … men and women become powerfully agitated and convulsed…" Ibid., 65-67. The image shows a preacher wildly gesticulating and speaking in the tent while men and women around him faint and engage in other dramatic behaviors. At the far left of the image, near a curtain and several boys is Homer, wearing a straw hat, and sketching the scene in front of him.

the news delivered via letters and newspapers, a relaying of what he observed in a cohesive, consumable language.

During his trips to Arlington, and Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1861 and the spring of 1862, respectively, Homer was a "camp-follower" as he called himself, trailing Lieutenant Colonel Francis Barlow of the Army of the Potomac and observing the field routines of the Union soldiers. For artists and reporters, their constant to and fro between the battlefield and the publishing weeklies office necessarily entailed the carrying of information. The illustrations for the weeklies could not be sent instantly like the short snippets of news over the telegraph; rather, Homer would frequently make field sketches while with a regiment and then either mail the drawings or take the train back to New York and compose the painting at home.[28] We thus find a contrast between the telegraphic movement of words and physical movement of images. As seen in this drawing (fig. 15) by Alfred Waud of General Grant advising of his crossing of the Rapidan River in May 1864 to be sent by telegram, news was traveling independently of humans through the telegraph. Regarding this new mode of textual delivery, communications theorist James W. Carey explains,

> Before the telegraph, 'communication' was used to describe transportation as well as message transmittal for the simple reason that the movement of messages was dependent on their being carried on foot or horseback or by rail. The telegraph, by ending the identity [of communication and transportation] allowed symbols to move independently of and faster than transportation.[29]

While transportation required the constant interaction with the physical coordinates of land and the topographical features of elevation and waterways, the telegraph was able to

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[28] Ibid., 110, 115, 116.

[29] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 157.

elide these geographical factors, and, as long as the telegraphic network of wires and poles was in place (and the telegrapher decoded the message for the recipient), collapsed physical configurations of time and space.[30]

In this same vein, though Homer's *News from the War* is fairly straightforward in depicting the growing web of information systems, it also begins to explore the changing meanings of distance and proximity. As can be seen in the depiction of the bugle boy, Homer elides notions of space, playing with the idea of borders by swathing the horse and bugler in a cloud of dust. More important is the abstracted background behind the bugler and the range of arcing bands that suggest both the movement of sun over the horizon and concentric sound waves. Mirroring the circular shape of the trumpet's horn and suggesting the ambient, radiating nature of sound, the arcs become broader and broader as they move away from the bugle boy, which simultaneously compacts and extends the sense of space behind him. The abutting vignette of the newspaper train similarly experiments with traditional notions of pictorial space. In this case, the protracted foreground allows Homer to heighten the sense of anticipation and hysteria exuded by the soldiers as they run and tumble for their *Harper's Weeklies*. In this work overall then, Homer creates different distal positions between figure and ground, and experiments with how the articulation of space impacts the viewer. And in this sense, *News from the War* seems to be a key to Homer's paintings of distance, visualizing not only telegraphy, but also attendant issues of connectivity and spatial effects.

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[30] Though this is rarely mentioned in discussions of the telegraphic annihilation of time and space, telegraphic messages incur a bottleneck of sorts in the instant flow of information, not only because the messages have to be decoded, but also because they then have to be retrieved by their intended recipients. In this sense, the telephone, more than the telegraph, collapsed distance and time.

The Shot: Death, Distance, and the Bang

This experimentation with spatial effects would show itself most dramatically in Homer's first painting, *The Sharpshooter on Picket Duty* (1863; fig. 16). As Cikovsky notes, the work marked a sea change in Homer's artistic vision in many ways.[31] Homer's initial approach to war subjects, as exemplified by *The War for the Union, 1862 – A Cavalry Charge*, adhered to the conventions of military art where battle scenes were shown as jumbles of bodies, weapons and horses from the ground.[32] Homer broke from this standard with the spare scene of *The Sharpshooter*, related to his November 15, 1862, *Harper's Weekly* illustration, *The Army of the Potomac- A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty, From a Painting by W. Homer Esq*. Tellingly, the reference to the painting in the illustration's title reveals Homer's artistic aspirations and priorities to all. Homer's colleague, Roswell Shurtleff, explained that the painting was "[h]is very first picture in oils," and that Homer worked on it for "many days" in the University Building.[33] In the painting, Homer features a soldier from the elite sharpshooters unit of the Union army, sitting astride in a tree, eyes squinting through the telescopic sight of the rifle that he holds with one hand as his other hand grasps a branch for balance. The red insignia of his cap is immediately noticeable, foreshadowing the blood that his rifle will reckon; and his ear is highlighted with a bit of lighter paint, suggesting the piercing shot that the sharpshooter will soon hear. The sharpshooter's vision and bullet share the same trajectory, and immediately create a sense of space beyond the picture frame. This is further heightened by the viewer's position of floating with the sharpshooter on the

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[31] Cikovsky, "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 21.

[32] For a reproduction of the work, see fig. 6 in Cikovsky, "The School of War," in *Winslow Homer*, Cikovsky and Kelly, 20.

[33] "Correspondence. Shurtleff Recalls Homer," *American Art News* 9 (29 October 1910), 4; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 39.

branches. Further, there is an anticipation of sound, one that that will be loud, fast, and destructive, and in a sense, the highly compressed pictorial space adumbrates this.

Homer had depicted sharpshooters before, but never to such dramatic effect. In the May 3, 1862, *Harper's Weekly* illustration, *Our Army before Yorktown, Virginia – from sketches by Mr. A. R. Waud and Mr. W. Homer*, one scene titled "Berdan's Sharpshooters Picking off the Enemy's Gunners" features sharpshooters lying prone on a bunker stalking Confederate soldiers. Though the periodical did not designate which vignettes were drawn by Waud and which by Homer – an issue that caused Homer great consternation – David Tatham posits that Homer drew the sharpshooter scene based on the drawing style and Homer's own personal experience.[34] In fact, Homer saw the sharpshooters in the siege of Yorktown in 1862, and the incident was seared into his memory. Writing a friend years later about the practice, he stated, "I looked through one of their rifles once when they were in a peach orchard in front of Yorktown … the above impression struck me as being near murder as anything I could think of in connection with the army & I always had a horror of that branch of the service."[35]

Many Union soldiers had been lost to Confederate sharpshooters, leading the Union army, under the leadership of Colonel Hiram Berdan, to create two regiments of sharpshooters in the summer of 1861. Discussing his experience of witnessing a sharpshooter in action, a Confederate lieutenant recalled:

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[34] Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Pictorial Press*, 115-116.

[35] Letter to George G. Briggs, 19 February 1896 (Archives of American Art); quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 40.

> Some of those Yankee sharpshooters … had little telescopes on their rifles that would fetch a man up close until he seemed to be only about a 100 yards away from the muzzle. … I've seen them pick a man off who was a mile away. They could hit so far you couldn't hear the report of the gun. *You wouldn't have any idea anybody was in sight of you, and all of a sudden, with everything as silent as the grave and not the sound of the gun,* here would come … one of those 'forced' [rifled] balls and cut a hole clear through you.[36]

What the lieutenant notes about the perceptual responses to such an event, the lack of sound and visible presence, is of particular interest: it was an experience of standing next to a soldier and then, all of sudden, seeing the soldier fall to the ground. The sensorial absences of a face-to-face gunfight, of seeing the gun being shot and hearing the explosive noise of the gunpowder and bullet leaving the gun shaft, were more the reason for the shock of a sharpshooter's hit. Whereas a proximate gunfight has these visual and aural stimuli, sharpshooting evacuated both of these. At the same time, the sharpshooter himself has the stimuli magnified and amplified – he sees his victim close up through the telescopic sight and hears the bullet exit the rifle right next to his ear, most likely in an otherwise completely silent environment. As we shall see, this strand of sensory (visual/aural) evacuation for the recipient, in tandem with the seemingly contrastive issue of sensory acuity for the transmitter, thrives not just in *The Sharpshooter*, but in many of Homer's other works of distance. Moreover, while Homer does not show the victim of the sharpshooter's prowess, in our imagination, he will have been shot, and the two – shooter and victim – will have effected a lethal kind of transfer or connection. But because the viewer is not shown what happens – we cannot see whom the sharpshooter is going to kill – the open-endedness of these kinds of narratives and distal exchanges enacts a deflating,

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[36] Christopher Kent Wilson, "Marks of Honor and Death," in Marc Simpson et al., *Winslow Homer's Painting of the Civil War*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1988), 36, n. 51 (emphasis added); quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 40.

negating experience. Thus, even though Homer seemed to view sharpshooters with disdain, there seems to be some sense of pleasure or fetishizing of distance in *The Sharpshooter*, a fetishizing that puts a strain on the actors' and the viewers' sensory and cognitive functions, and that in turn seems to make our aesthetic experience of the picture an ambiguous, somewhat discomfiting one.

Homer achieves these complex sensorial effects in a surprisingly sparse pictorial language, a characteristic that becomes an essential component of the artist's signature style. Homer's friends and critics continuously commented on this. As Homer biographer Lloyd Goodrich noted, "Where other naturalistic painters cluttered their pictures with a thousand and one petty details, he saw things in their largest, simplest terms, eliminating everything unessential. This simplification, instinctive in early years, became increasingly conscious as he matured."[37] Friend John Beatty recalled that this economy of language was apparent even in letters: "He always used the simplest means of expression. Sometimes, referring in his letters to a particular picture, instead of writing a description, he would make a small sketch. These sketches, incorporated as a part of the writing, served his purpose more perfectly than written language."[38] This sparse pictorial vocabulary was not unlike the terse language utilized when sending telegrams, an experience no doubt familiar to Homer from his telegraphic correspondence with dealers, gallery owners, and friends. Writing a telegram required shorter words to save money and was a skill to be honed, as described in the 1928 pamphlet by Nelson E. Ross titled, "How to Write Telegrams Properly." The primer was filled with such sections as "how to

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[37] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 180.
[38] Beatty, "Recollections," in Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 217.

save words," and "how unnecessary words creep in."[39] In this sense, Homer's spare paintings (of which we shall see more later on) are telegram-like, expressive objects that subsist on few units of language and are left open-ended for the viewer to fill in the details. Even in paintings where the composition is not necessarily streamlined or simplified, Homer's innate sense of restraint creates enough ambiguity that the narrative is never abundantly clear, leaving the viewer with many unanswered questions.

One such example of this is *Defiance: Inviting a Shot before Petersburg* (1864; fig. 17), which can be seen as the counterpart to *The Sharpshooter* in many ways. Once again, the painting turns on the idea of distance, and specifically, long distance vision. In a barren landscape filled only with mutilated tree stumps, one soldier boldly welcomes the deadly gunshots of the nearly invisible opposing army, standing above the trenches that protect his compatriots. The verticality of the men is echoed by the tree stumps dotting the land and the rifles in the foreground as well as what appear to be telegraph poles in the right background. While we can only speculate as to the motivations of this defiant soldier, it is unambiguous that the gunfire – as evidenced by the flash of golden light and puff of smoke seen below the horizon line in the left of the picture – overcomes the distance separating the two forces.[40] As a Confederate lieutenant recalled,

> One of the Union marksmen saw by means of his telescopic rifle a man upon the ramparts of Yorktown, who amused his companions by making significant gestures towards the lines, and performed queer flourishes with his fingers, thumbs, and nose. The distance between them was so great, that the buffoon supposed he was safe; but the unerring ball pierced his heart, and he fell inside the works."[41]

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[39] Nelson E. Ross, *How to Write a Telegram Properly* (1928). James Carey explains that because of the sparse use of words, "the story had to be reconstituted at the end of the telegraphic line … the story divorced from the story teller." Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 163.

[40] The puff of smoke also can be seen in *Skirmish in the Wilderness* (1864).

[41] Wilson, "Marks of Honor and Death," in Simpson et al. 1988; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 47.

Like the transaction in *The Sharpshooter*, the scene in *Defiance* is a long-distance event that will most likely end in death. In fact, one could say that the soldier's daring gesture constitutes a long-distance communication with the enemy, albeit a deadly one. A foil to the soldier is the African-American man playing the banjo at his feet, protected by the bunker and unseen by the opposition. Just a few years earlier, Eastman Johnson depicted a banjo-player in his work, *Old Kentucky Home/ Life in the South* (1859; fig. 18).[42] Whereas Johnson uses the figure to stir the viewer's sympathies and contribute to a cohesive narrative in a unified stage-like setting, Homer uses sound to create a bipolar narrative structure, with the sound of a strumming banjo in the foreground as a bittersweet counterpoint to the sound of the gunfire from the far-off ramparts in the recesses of the picture. As we shall see, this co-mixture of musical sound and vision to create stages of a landscape is something that Homer does with another painting made during this time, *Home, Sweet Home*.

Music to Our Ears

As a prelude to *Home, Sweet Home* and its subject of wartime music, Homer created a two-page *Harper's Weekly* illustration in 1861 titled, *The Songs of War* (fig. 19). Organized into various vignettes, the work shows how song and music marched lockstep in certain aspects of the war. Homer matches songs to specific scenes in the work, for example, an entire regiment singing "Glory Hallelujah," "The Bold Soldier Boy" showing soldiers in action, soldiers standing at attention to General McClellan atop a horse with the song "Hail to the Chief," the "Rogue's March" with drummers, and the song "Dixie" for an African-American on a barrel marked "contraband." Threaded

[42] For further discussion of the iconographical and historical significance of the banjo in American art, see Leo Mazow et al. *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park, Pennsylvania State Press, 2005).

throughout the work are bugles, musical staff and notes, tying together the various scenes. The popular songs Homer references in the image gave voice to the range of emotions felt by soldiers and civilians alike, and their cultural meanings would not have been lost on the *Harper's Weekly* readers.

Like *The Songs of War,* Homer drew on the well of sentimental response to popular music to create the ambitious painting, *Home, Sweet Home* (c. 1863; fig. 20). The picture shows two Union infantrymen (indicated by the insignia on their caps) listening to the regimental band playing the song that gives the painting its title. Like *The Sharpshooter*, also one of Homer's earliest forays into oils, the significance of this painting cannot be underestimated: it was Homer's first professional entry at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design. Critics were in uniform praise over the debut; one, for example, wrote: "[the painting] shows a strength and boldness in execution truly admirable. … There is no claptrap about it. Whatever of force is in the picture … is not merely surface work, not admitting of examination, but painstaking labor directed by thought."[43] Also writing about the sincerity of the painting, another critic wrote: "It is a little work of real feeling … there is no strained effect in it, no sentimentality, but a hearty, homely actuality, broadly, freely, and simply worked out."[44] The force of emotion and intellect, "the real feeling," so many found in the painting could be related to the feelings of nostalgia that the well-known song, "Home, Sweet Home" painted with words.

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[43] "Atticus," "Art Feuilleton," *The New York Leader* (9 May 1863); quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 40.

[44] "The Lounger. The National Academy of Design," *Harper's Weekly* 7 (2 May 1863): 274; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 40.

The band's tune seems to deeply move the soldiers in the painting's foreground, who with their prominent position in the painting underscore how the work is essentially a depiction of listening. The soldiers are both shown in virtual profile, their eyes obscured by their hats, but their ears are given a certain prominence. In the standing soldier, the ear is particularly highlighted, rendered with more detail than the other facial features. In fact the brass button directly above his ear visually echoes the brass band in the background that captures his attention. Indeed, with the disparate touches of gold on the infantrymen, on their caps and their brass buttons, and on the carefully painted horns of the band, Homer subtly connects the two areas of the composition. As can be seen in this detail (fig. 21), the band is grouped together in a circle in the middle plane of the landscape, and while a drummer is visible, the horns are the most noticeable aspect of the unit. The openings of the horns face skyward and suggest that as the notes are blown, their sound is carried forward towards the listeners and out to the viewer. The two planes are therefore tied together, creating a coupling motif in terms of color and, of course, meaning. As the title so crucially informs us, the soldiers are listening to a song about the meanings of home – and viewers at the time would no doubt have thought of the popular wartime song when viewing the picture. Thus, the title has another function. As Cikovsky notes, "The painting's title both names the song to which the soldiers are listening and sympathetically evokes the 'bitter moment of home-sickness and love-longing' that it inspires in them (with special poignancy in the seated soldier who, it seems, pauses to listen while writing a letter home)."[45] To be sure, songs were an important aspect of field

[45] Cikovsky, "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 23.

culture during the Civil War.[46] Nelson Miles, a Union general, recalled an incident where the opposing armies were facing each other in the Rappahannock valley:

> Late in the afternoon our bands were accustomed to play the most spirited martial and national airs … "The Star-spangled Banner," etc. to be answered along the Confederate lines by bands playing, with equal enthusiasm, [such as] "Dixie." These demonstrations frequently aroused the hostile sentiments of the two armies, yet the animosity disappeared when at the close some band would strike up that melody which comes nearest the hearts of all true men, "Home, Sweet Home," and every band within hearing would join in that sacred anthem with unbroken accord and enthusiasm.[47]

We might find such brotherly sentiments in a time of raging war surprising but the reach of music, even in such desperate times, appealed to universal human emotions in the face of a long, brutal war.[48] In fact, music was played on the battlefield for a variety of reasons, for inspiration, solidarity, sentimentality. The title in the case of *Home, Sweet Home*, then, serves a double function, providing the aural theme of the picture, but also laying bare the overarching cultural and emotional resonances of the picture's visual terms.

In a different sense, the doubling effect of the title also occurs between foreground and background, between the band, the source of the music, and the listening infantrymen, the receivers of the sound. Homer depicts the playing of this sacred anthem within an elaborate system of spatial illusion, where the transmitters and receivers of sound are located on a diagonal axis punctuated by the canvas sheet hung on the branches

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[46] According to Cikovsky, "This happened frequently in the early years of the war as the two armies drilled, feinted, and battled as much with music as anything else." Ibid.

[47] *New York Evening Post* (12 June 1863); quoted in Cikovsky, "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 23.

[48] The song "Home, Sweet Home" unified opposing forces, as this 1886 poem titled "Music in Camp" set on the Rappahannock suggests: "All silent now the Yankees stood,/All silent stood the Rebels/ … So deeply 'Home, Sweet Home' had stirred/ The hidden founts of feeling." John R. Thompson, "Music in Camp," in *Bugle Echoes: A Collection of Poetry of the Civil War, Northern and Southern*, ed. Francis Fisher Browne (New York, 1886); quoted in Cikovsky, "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 35, n. 31.

and offset by the pitched tents and the placement of bodies (Fig. 20). Past the lounging figures by the band and the makeshift canopy of trees is another set of tents. Even further in the distance can be seen another encampment, and beyond that, a range of mountains. Increasing the sense of spatial contrasts, the curtain at once frames the standing listener and separates him from the band playing behind it. The structure is an important part of the picture in other words, for it facilitates the transition between near and far, and without it, the foreshortening would be less credible, perhaps even awkward. Moreover, the curtain offers the eye a resting place as we scan the recessionary space of the painting, which is quite acute and originates with the branches in the right foreground pointing the way. What is intriguing about the overall schematic is the way the curtain could block the band if Homer so desired. Instead, the canvas is pulled short on both sides; on one side, this permits us to see a few more blurred members of the band, and on the other, a branch has been arranged to fall across the sheet, opening it just so and creating a teasing idea of a stage curtain. What is beyond this branch is unclear and not legible, perhaps another camp or a wagon wheel. Regardless, this curtain device creates a kind of narratival screen, one that Homer has purposefully chosen to draw only partially open so as to not fully reveal what the infantrymen are doing, and to not fully complete the story.

In addition to the curtain device, Homer relies on other techniques to suggest depth and distance, such as foreshortening and *repoussoir*. Expertly utilized by seventeenth-century artists Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, *repoussoir* (literally meaning to push back or to set off) occurs when an object or figure is placed in the foreground, usually on the side, to lead the eye into the main scene and develop a sense

of recessionary space. Homer's two infantrymen serve as a *repoussoir* of sorts, as they are compositional elements that help establish a planar arrangement of the landscape, and thereby help the viewer read the entire painting. But perhaps the most unifying force is the aural narrative itself. The aural loop between the band and listener – the melody that stirs in the soldiers thoughts and memories of families and homes long unseen – helps to explain why the standing figure may be lost in reverie and why the seated figure may be writing a letter. In addition to color and compositional and narratival devices, then, Homer relies on the aural connection between the listeners and the band to bolster the sense of three-dimensional space and bind the pictorial composition overall.

To a certain degree, with his sitting position and sheaf of paper on his lap, the seated figure resembles the artist sketching in Homer's *News from the War*, or even the figure of General Grant composing the telegraphic message of crossing the Rapidan river in Waud's illustration (figs. 13 and 15, respectively). The seated soldier, in effect, processes the song "Home, Sweet Home" telegraphically, translating the musical codes into a missive about his own homesickness. Part of a network of communication, the sounds of the song travel through the air to impart their own message to the infantrymen. If we continue to read *Home, Sweet Home* as a metaphoric telegraphic scene, the curtain device becomes a station or switch in facilitating and/or closing the aural loop, the branches become the telegraph poles. Through the migration of sounds and coded meanings, the band delivers its message to the soldiers, who become a node in the network of recipients. And the seated figure, like the sketch artist or General Grant, transliterates his thoughts and feelings into a form of expression that will be dispatched to a place far away.

We should note, though, that the men are not facing the source of sound, the band is almost too far way, and the men are more interested in being alone with their thoughts, thinking about the sentiments and mental images that the song evokes, than in looking at the band. Indeed, Homer seems to de-emphasize external vision in this work, from the brims of the infantrymen's hats covering their eyes and the large screen behind them, to the darkness of the tents that they must reckon with day and night. This encumbrance of vision suggests how the soldiers literally cannot see their loved ones for long stretches of time, and by extension, how time and distance apart begins to impact their ability to recall their loved ones, the contours of their faces and the sounds of their voices. Cikovsky notes that a more abstract notion of distance is achieved in this work, that of ironic distance, calling it "perhaps the most important trait of Homer's creative posture."[49] This can be seen in the lack of sentimentality and cloyingness, in the display of the infantrymen's daily effects, the restraint in the anecdotal details, and the aversion of a blatant pandering to the viewer about the soldiers' difficult circumstances.

Nonetheless, the painting seems to offer some signs of hope and reunion, mainly because of the musical narrative, but also because the source of sound and the receiver are both located within the picture. The aural loop, though attenuated, appears to be complete in *Home, Sweet Home*, and the tenor of spatiality is narratival, resolved, and in a word, neat. As we shall see, Homer soon begins to deviate from this formula of a fully resolved aural connection. But the fact that the source and receiver of sound are spread

[49] Cikovsky, "The School of War," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 23.

far apart over a vast field is significant, for it will remain one of the most consistent qualities in Homer's aural works.[50]

Homer's interest in music extended beyond the Civil War. In his 1867 work, *The Studio* (fig. 22), Homer sets up an analogy between painting and playing music, between creating a visual work and an aural one. No evidence remains regarding Homer's musical talents or interests, but regardless, the subject matter is a bit unusual.[51] Two well-dressed men are seen in a humble room, one playing the cello, the other the violin, both are concentrating on reading the music in front of them. To direct the viewers' imagination to what is being played, Homer places on the floor in the foreground a book of sheet music with the words "W. A. Mozart" emblazoned on the cover. Close to the name of this prodigious musician and composer is Winslow Homer's own name, his signature scrawled on the floor, suggesting the artist's desire to be equated with the musical genius. Classical figure studies tacked on the wall behind the men adorn the room. This, along, with the overt reference to Mozart, suggests that Homer wished to equate his work with the masters of art and classical music. Surprisingly, Homer goes so far as to substitute sheet music for canvas on the artist's easels, suggesting correspondences between music-playing and picture-making, between sound and paint. Also worth noting is how the musicians wield bows in their hands, comparable to the fact that artists wield paintbrushes, which, along with the use of the easel to display sheet music, suggests the conflation of these sister arts. Even the title of the painting, "The Studio," bends in either direction, toward music or painting. In other words, Homer offers a pictorial *double*

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[50] Unlike other period depictions of listening, for example, Elihu Vedder's *The Questioner of the Sphinx* (1863), where the auditor is placed in close relation to the source of sound, Homer attenuates the space between the two parties. The juxtaposition of Vedder and Homer needs to be considered further.

[51] Another unusual subject matter by Homer involving listening, from this period is *Jurors Listening to Counsel, Supreme Court, New York City Hall, New York*, *Harper's Weekly* (20 February1869).

entendre, gesturing towards the visual and metaphysical affinities between music-making and picture-making. The work holds significant meaning, then, as this analogy also shows us that early on in his artistic career, Homer was interested in sonic tropes, how ideas of sound and the expressive aspect of music could be rendered and found in painting.

In terms of spatial design, the work largely turns on what Margaret Conrads describes as a "diagonal view into compressed pictorial space."[52] In tension with the orthogonals that lead us into the studio space is the lateral emphasis created by the directed attention of the men and the sheet music they face. Even though the faces of the men are profiled and we are only permitted an oblique view of the sheet music (if at all), the structuring allows us a clear view of the musician's ears, and bolsters our imagining of the classical arrangement they are playing (and hearing). Behind the men are two canvases, lined up in such a way so as to further suggest that the processes of their musical efforts echo the work done on the paintings behind them – a correlation between the sheets of music and painted canvases.

If anything, the sheet music on the easels shows us how sounds materialize from symbols and paper. The emphasis on the paper's materiality, the support that both music and art share, permits the viewer to consider the similarities between reading music and art. Of course, for Homer, paper carried several deep personal significances. It was bound up with his mother's artistic endeavors as an avid watercolorist, a skill that Homer himself would soon explore to create some of his most compelling works. Also, as an illustrator, this medium literally papered the path for Homer's entrée into the art world.

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[52] Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s*, exh. cat. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, in conjunction with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2001), 15.

The paper on the easel, then, not only bears musical notation for his musicians to follow but also the personal associations of the artist.

III. Horns (and a Few Larks)

A few years after *The Studio*, Homer turned to another instrument that made a different kind of sound, the horn. Over the course of several years, Homer used this motif in a series centering on a woman blowing a dinner horn to farmers working out in the field, and then a few years later, he reprised the same narrative from a different perspective by focusing on the farmers responding to the horn. Indeed, the farmer out in the field became a trope of sorts for Homer, and this section will look at these other depictions as well. Moving from these pastoral representations, I will also examine a later painting of a woman by the sea holding a horn, which I will contextualize in relation to contemporary Homer depictions of women at the shore. As I will show, Homer's interest in these transmissions of the horn reveal both an ambivalence in geographies and times gone by and continue his investigations of how to visualize signaling over vast distances.

Horns over Space and Time

In the 1870 painting, *The Dinner Horn* (fig. 23), we find a young woman with her back to us. With one hand on her hip, she blows a silver horn along a diagonal axis that extends into a meadow and hayfield. She wears a black ribbon and a net in her hair, and a white long dress which turns up in the breeze like the ties around her waist. The wind creates a subtle tension, a countervailing natural force to the sound the woman makes. We can see little of her face, but for her ear and the outline of her cheek. The vast stretch of pasture in front of her is populated with cows, hens, and farther, in the distance, tiny

farmers (some of whom also wear white) using their hands or a horse and plow to work the land. In the left foreground, Homer has placed several containers, some holding plants and one in particular holding a climbing vine that goes up the wall of the house and seems to join the trees that are deeper in the pictorial space.[53] The profusion of leaves everywhere, scattered in the foreground, climbing up the house, and on the trees in the middle ground, track the dispersive pattern of the sound waves of the horn and how they would fill the air and the pictorial space. Also paralleling the idea of sound emanating from the horn that the young woman blows is another vessel, a jug that is overturned in the left foreground.

Horns such as the one featured in *The Dinner Horn* were usually made of tin, a material that was both durable and inexpensive. With their piercing sound, horns were a common way to signal the beginning, middle, and end of a farmer's workday. The call of the tin horn was shrill and only with practice would farmers' daughters and wives learn how to modulate the high-pitched tones. To the farmers working the land far from home, however, the loudness of the dinner horn was pitch perfect, a welcome call to end the long day's work. This sentiment is described in this popular song from 1884: "Don't you remember the days long ago, when out in the fields broad and gay…Oh the old dinner horn, telling t'was noon, sweet music it seemed to me …"[54] Like the song, Homer's painting traffics in nostalgia. While farms were still a major part of the American landscape, the horns and whistles of the steam locomotive were beginning to overshadow the dinner horn. As can be seen in Fanny Palmer's famous lithograph, *Across the*

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[53] There were more leaves in an earlier version of this painting. Pentimenti shows that Homer had painted out a tree in the right foreground, which would have obscured the view of the farmers, the intended receivers of the girl's call to dinner.

[54] *The Hit of the Season. The Old Dinner Horn at Home. A Country Song, Words by Beardsley Van De Water* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1884). Johns Hopkins University, Levy Sheet Music Collection, Box 138, Item 030. http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/20611 (accessed on May 17, 2010).

Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" (1868; fig. 24), more and more open stretches of land – particularly in the name of Manifest Destiny – were being developed for trains, buildings, and schools. Whereas Palmer's print presents a sweeping view of the ways that machines and the human desire for progress transformed stretches of American soil, *The Dinner Horn* hones in on the life of one person who engages in a way of living that was losing its foothold in many parts of the country and giving way to more mechanized kinds of sound. Yet despite these differences, the works are similar in showing how sound, in all its manifestly different forms, was tied to the American countryside, specifically in the more abstract terms of expansion (and contraction): the train's whistle signaling the great convenience of modern-day travel, and the dinner horn, the daily routine of farming acres of land and returning home.

The Dinner Horn equivocates within this binary of expansion and contraction, with a significant portion of the canvas devoted to the distance between the horn blower and the farmers. Like *Home, Sweet Home*, both the transmitter and receiver of sound are pictured in *The Dinner Horn*, and once again, with the protracted distance between auditors and sound-maker, Homer creates a unique relationship between foreground and background. But unlike the earlier painting, the spatial recession becomes increasingly vague in *The Dinner Horn* – we have no real sense of the exact nature of the space in the distance and whether trees or water bound it, for example. Even though the horn-blower and farmers are yards apart, the horn in the foreground actually extends into the same pictorial zone as the farmers (fig. 25). To create the impression of an expansive distance in spite of this, Homer uses dramatic foreshortening between the transmitter and auditors and the minimization of detail in the background, and ultimately, relies on our visual

apperception. In other words, we know that the farmers are far away because they are much smaller in size than the horn-blower and the land and objects around them are rendered out of focus. This is all done with a surprisingly low number of visual cues, the cow, the haystack and set of trees in the background, and of course, the tiny dabs of paint that suggest the farmers and horse. This space between the two nodes of the aural circuit is also quantified with the implied knowledge that the human voice would not be able to reach the farmers, only the horn will. Yet, at the same time, this seemingly vast distance is contracted with our knowledge that they can hear the horn. The horn also is a connecting device, like the vines on the house and the strings around the horn blower's waist, between foreground and recessionary space, between the young woman and the farmers.

Over the next few years, Homer created at least three other works related to this painting in drawing and oil, experimenting with the horn's transmission in other spatial configurations. Closely tracking the 1870 painting is an engraving (fig. 26) that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on June 11, 1870, also called *The Dinner Horn*, with the main difference between the two works being the treatment of the surroundings. The horn-blower is seen closer to the house, by the entryway, which permits us a glimpse of the interior, the table set for dinner, and the pot on the fire. Along the exterior of the house, there are several large pans or containers, with the one closest to the viewer bearing the artist's initials. There is a vine on the top of the doorway that leads our eye from the top left foreground to the woman's head. In this picture, the air has movement, the grass, like the woman's dress, is blowing in the wind, though it is blowing in the opposite direction

that the woman blows her horn. Unlike the painting, however, Homer shows several men waving past the well in the distant field, probably in response to the blowing horn.

These tiny waving figures have a pictorial precedent in *Bridle Path, White Mountains* (1868; fig. 27). In the work, a bonneted woman is riding a horse sidesaddle over a rocky mountain, ahead of her on the trail are several gentlemen on horseback, and behind her, in the left background of the picture, is another horse and rider. This last figure is seen in virtual silhouette and waves a white flag, apparently to no avail, to the woman in the center of the painting. The same white in the flag is seen in the lady's dress, her gloves, the horse she rides, and the pants and derby hat of the gentleman ahead of her, so in this very small sense, there is the feeling of a chain or some kind of linking between these bodies as they move over this rugged terrain of what is called, by perhaps no accident, the White Mountains. But this is not as convincing as the fact that all these bodies are actually traversing a circuit, albeit one that is vast, and therefore making it extremely difficult to communicate with one another.[55] The white kerchief, or flag, devoid of speech or text, is more of a signaling of a desire to communicate than a communication of substance, though it is this, of course, as well. This difficulty in communicating is readily shown in the center figure's downcast gaze – the woman does not acknowledge the tiny waving rider.

This lack of attention relates to the kind of haze that our eyes encounter in viewing the painting. The sense of incompleteness, the lack of finish and modeling, along with the dense atmospheric effects, frustrated critics of the day. "[The painting] conveys

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[55] A significant number of Homer's paintings implicate the idea of movement over vast distances. In such works as *Crossing the Pasture* (1872) and *Snap the Whip* (1876), Homer treats pictorial space similarly, with a compressed picture plane set tightly against a recessionary space. Cf. Eastman Johnson's *The Old Stagecoach* (1871) where children are depicted in a chain-like fashion atop a stagecoach that is wheel-less and immobilized.

the impression of objects seen through a hazy medium of some kind, … [making] the figure and the horse look like phantoms."[56] In particular, the lack of finish and fact that the lady and horse were close up to the picture plane gave the painting a surprising lack of depth, with one critic noting that the painting looked like an "omnibus panel[ ] and signboard[ ]."[57] The signboard effect again highlights Homer's compression of foreground and background, and how tropes of communication and sound are interwoven with these compositional strategies. In this case, it is not so much Homer's use of *repoussoir* as seen in *Home, Sweet Home*, but instead with the central figure and waving rider, a play between surface and depth that becomes a push-pull kind of dialectic.[58]

Like *Bridle Path, The Dinner Horn* subsists on the alternating tension between different planes of space. In a third variation of the work (fig. 28), an oil sketch from 1870-73, Homer continues to experiment with the distal arrangement by expanding the view of the pasture and workers, who again appear as mere dabs of white paint, while retaining the same compositional elements of the woman, house with ascending vines, leaning pan and well. In the 1873 *The Dinner Horn* (fig. 29), however, Homer changes much of the composition, placing the woman on a covered porch and depicting her in

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56 "National Academy of Design. First Notice," *New York Evening Post*, 27 April 1870. Another critic noted that the painting "conveys the impression of objects seen through a hazy medium of some kind." "Art Items," *New York World*, 21 November 1868; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 76.

57 "The Annual Exhibition of the Academy," *Putnam's Magazine* 5 (June 1870): 699, 702-3; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 76.

58 One symptom, or perhaps even cause, of this push-pull is the detail Homer accords the saddle on the center horse and the clothing of its rider. The rider's face, and to a lesser extent, the horse's body, are not rendered as vividly. According to Cikovsky and Kelly, "the horse and landscape are secondary, and the rider seemingly an afterthought, added in the process of developing [a] drawing into the painting." Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 76. Also worth considering is the high vantage point Homer bestows upon the protagonists of so many of his works, including *The Sharpshooter*, *Mountain Climber Resting* (1869), and *Long Branch, New Jersey* (1869); all of these works evince a tension between near and far, foreground and background.

The central horse and rider from *Bridle Path* are seen in several other Homer works, including the painting *Mount Washington* (1869) (which also features a silhouetted waving figure) and a wood engraving titled "The Summit of Mount Washington" in *Harper's Weekly* (10 July 1869).

darker dress. A critic described the figure in this painting as a "farmer's daughter and maid of all work, just from the kitchen, … blowing the dinner horn."[59] To her right is a dense grouping of vegetation that, along with the tall potted plant behind her and the wall in front of her, seems to contain her. More than that, the house itself, as well as the trees and leaves abutting the structure, block her field of vision. At once connoting the interior, domestic space of women and the interiority of the farmer's daughter, the covered porch also hems in the viewer's imagination of the sound of her horn travelling over space. We cannot see to whom the daughter beckons, our imagination is not permitted to even imagine where they are, like the orthogonals of the porch floor and ceiling, we stop halfway into the image – our only reprieve being the open door that shows a few animals grazing in a field. And unlike the three predecessors, this image does not show the workers in the distant landscape. No figure is waving to signal that they've heard the horn, and unlike the previous two oils, there are no dots of white shirts in the background to represent the farmers the daughter beckons. In this last version of the dinner horn theme, then, the aural transfer becomes more dependent, perhaps self-destructively so, on the viewer's imagination.

Cikovsky argues that Homer's constant reuse of certain figures from illustrations and paintings could be related to the mechanization movement popularized by Eli Whitney's Interchangeable System, "known to Europeans as the American system [which] replaced the skilled artisan who made the entire product (gun, clock, lock, or shoe) with less experienced and less highly trained workers, or machines, that made only

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[59] "The Realm of Art. Gossip Among the Brushes, Mahlsticks and Easels," *New York Evening Telegram*, 8 June 1872; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 109.

a particular part."[60] Like the American system, Cikovsky suggests, Homer engaged in a "mechanical compositing," which beyond the conventional artistic process allowed the artist to "assemble parts, often interchangeably, into larger pictorial wholes."[61] I would continue this thread of technological analogy and posit another comparison for Homer's serial depictions of the dinner horn. In 1878, several years after Homer's last canvas, Thomas Edison conducted his own series of experiments into sonic amplification overlooking the cow pastures at his Menlo Park, New Jersey, laboratory. Improving a centuries-old device known as the speaking trumpet, Edison's efforts resulted in the invention of the megaphone, which allowed the human voice to carry longer distances than ever before, approximately two miles.[62] While Homer worked independently of Edison and his sound technologies research, both he and the inventor visualize the transmitting of sound similarly (fig. 30a), with the device set at an angle away from the viewer, suggesting the successful dispersal of sound within the picture and the imaginative, aural connection with others. Another period sketch (fig. 30b), this by an unknown illustrator, also shows the transmitter of sound mostly from behind, with the device pointing into the pictorial space. As these examples limn, Homer was experimenting visually – perhaps subconsciously – with how far sound could go, its ability to connect with others, and in a pictorial sense, its "audibility." In each of these horn works, Homer emphasizes the primacy of the horn's transmission, but he also attempts to pictorialize that the tiny farmers in the distance have heard the horn (except for the 1872 oil). As a result, the relationship between foreground and background,

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[60] Cikovsky, "Modern and National," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 67.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Frank Lewis Dyer and Thomas Commerford Martin, *Edison: His Life and Inventions* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001, reprinted from 1910), I: 224-225.

surface and depth, figure and ground, collapses with the aural transmission of the young woman.

Homer continues this thematic of aural transfer in *Answering the Horn (The Home Signal)* (1876; fig. 31). Yet even though the sonic exchange continues to control the spatial design, there is a massive shift in the artist's representational strategies. Instead of picturing both nodes of the aural loop as he did in *The Dinner Horn*, Homer only focuses on the receiver of sound in this work. Instead of the extreme foreshortening that we saw in *The Dinner Horn*, Homer sets the listeners close to the picture plane. Out in a field, a young farmer raises his hand to signal his hearing of the horn – his right ear clearly shown to bolster this – while a woman behind him mysteriously covers her mouth.[63] Both individuals hold wares from their travails out in the field: he, a scythe, she, a water jug and his hat. To the woman's left are a haystack and some roughly sketched figures and objects around it. The landscape is mostly negated, literally and metaphorically, by Homer's broad swathes of white paint. The crude treatment of the topography suggests that Homer was unhappy with a previous rendering and painted over it. This appears to have been done quickly, as the middle section of the farmer's scythe also seems to have been painted over in the process. Not surprisingly, Homer's rendering of the figures perplexed the reviewers of the time: "Why he answers the horn by motion of his arm, and why his face wears such a cross, almost sinister expression, and why the maiden seems desirous of getting behind him, and why she holds her fingers over her mouth – these things we don't profess to understand."[64]

[63] Though the woman's mouth is hidden from our view, the jug that she holds has the opening tilted out to the viewer, which suggests a mouth-like opening.

[64] "Fine Arts. The Academy Exhibition. II," *New York Evening Mail*, 23 April 1877; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 146.

There was another curious aspect of the picture: the farmer was originally holding a horn but instead of holding it to his mouth, he was waving it (fig. 32). While it is unknown whether Homer selected the current title after he deleted the horn in the farmer's hand, what is certain is that the instrument was stripped of its aural capacities and used as a visual signal instead.[65] The waving of the instrument, along with the farmer's resistance to sound and the young girl's seeming refusal to speak, creates the feeling that sound is deliberately avoided or suppressed. If this wave was indeed the home signal that Homer references in his alternate title to *Answering the Horn*, then the signal is a decidedly non-sonic one, an almost semaphoric response. In place of the human voice or the sound of the horn, sight and the human body offer instant legibility, instant confirmation that the horn has been heard, much like the tiny farmer's wave in the print of *The Dinner Horn*. In both versions of *Answering the Horn* then, the earlier version and the current state, sound is used to communicate one way, but the faculty of vision is invoked to respond. And unlike the previous works examined, particularly *Home, Sweet Home* and *The Dinner Horn*, Homer uses the aural exchange to activate the surface (as opposed to the depth) of *Answering the Horn*. In other words, the aural circuit in *Answering the Horn* occurs between the foreground and outside the painting.

This brings us to an interesting point. Both nodes of the aural circuit are not pictured in *Answering the Horn*. Around this time, more and more visual artists were faced with the dilemma of depicting communications occurring over vast distances. Whereas older systems of telecommunication, such as postal mail, were replete with

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[65] My thanks to Jane Connell, Senior Curator at the Muskegon Museum of Art, for sharing the museum's files and radiographs with me.
The position of the fingers of the farmer's hand is almost like sign language, and as we shall see, Homer returns to this gesture repeatedly throughout his career.

delays and a long gap of time between transmission and receipt, the telegraph – and beginning in 1876, the telephone – presented the new visual problem of depicting two parties far apart from one another in *instantaneous* communication. To avoid showing both parties as miniscule dots in a vast geographical space, the illustrator would either only show one party at a time, as can be seen in this image (fig. 33a) of Samuel F. B. Morse telegraphing in July of 1871, or both in some contrived way, as seen in Constantin Brumidi's 1862 painting, *Telegraph* (fig. 33b) for the United States Congress. In his broad interpretation of the laying of the transatlantic cable, Brumidi presents America bedecked with a Phrygian cap and caduceus shaking hands with Europe, who is pictured as Europa on the back of Zeus (in the form of a bull) and offered the telegraph wire by a cherub. Aside from this allegorical approach, however, was another prominent technique of picturing the sender and receiver in disjointed close-ups of floating circles or rectangles, Victorian split screens, if you will. As can be seen in this illustration (fig. 34a) for the 1879 book, *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* by Ella Cheever Thayer, distance was only nominally pictured as the string of telegraph poles in the upper left. Instead, more emphasis was given to each party of the telegraphic transaction, with both the man and woman pictured by their telegraphs and ensconced in their own private world. Similarly, an 1881 advertisement card (fig. 34b) for the telephone focuses on the panoramic view of the distance elided by the two parties, each in their own telephonic bubble. These split screens became one of the most accessible ways to picture bimodality as telecommunications technology collapsed geographical space between parties.

Though fully aware of these stylistic shortcuts as a long-practicing illustrator, Homer mostly eschews these techniques in *Answering the Horn*, moving the horn blower

to the non-visual, textual space of the title.[66] Yet, at the same time, with the farmer's hand gesture and directed gaze, he assures the horn blower's imaginative presence and even her approximate location outside the picture frame. Homer has to include the farmer's gesture to show that the transmitter of sound has been heard. Thus, the farmer's embodied response, like the tiny waving figure in the print version of *The Dinner Horn*, affirms the aural event as well as its distal nature and spatial boundaries. And we have, in a sense, a different kind of split screen, where one half of the aural loop is pictured within the painting, while the other half is imagined within our minds.

The rolling farmlands across which the signaling in *Answering the Horn* occurs were also the site of newfound commodities markets and financial networks, as can be seen in this 1876 Currier and Ives print titled, "The Progress of the Century" (fig. 35a). By the mid 1850s, both the Associated Press and Western Union Telegraph Company were on their way to becoming the country's first monopolies in their exploitation of the railroad and telegraph. As this image (fig. 35b) of Western Union attests, the companies quickly grew into large, tightly run operations. In his study of news services in the second half of the nineteenth century, Menahem Blondheim explains that with the establishment of a telegraphic network of wires from Boston and Buffalo to New York and Washington in 1846, a passel of small, region-specific, telegraph companies cropped up to satisfy the demand for instant news and information (initially begun by the penny press in the 1830s). These fledgling telegraph companies were quickly swallowed up by and merged into a few conglomerates, with the Associated Press emerging as the dominant news

[66] Homer does seem to rely on the illustration technique for the large patch of white around the figures in *Answering the Horn*, which assists the viewer's imagination in trying to visualize the compression of space, just as it does in the telegraph and telephone images where the area around the figures is abstracted.

supplier service, and later, Western Union controlling the national monopoly for telegraphic news services.[67] With this telecommunication dyad and the newspaper train service, channels of news reportage and delivery were put in place that remained largely undisturbed for over a century.

The American countryside, as a result, underwent dramatic changes during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. This can be clearly seen in the modern landscape by Asher B. Durand, *Progress, The Advance of Civilization* (1853), and, more subtly, in a pair of George Inness paintings, made approximately two decades apart. In Inness' magisterial *Lackawanna Valley* (ca. 1856; fig. 36a), the artist emphasizes the ways that the landscape was being transformed, particularly how trees were used throughout the country to create railroad ties and fuel for the steam engines. In his later canvas, *Pompton Junction, New Jersey* (1877; fig. 36b), Inness highlights how telegraph poles took their place along the railroad tracks at a nearby train station. Instead of trees, the skyline would be populated with puffs of steam and telegraph poles. The irony of these developments is that the workers had to travel through the geography – work to clear the land, encounter it on a daily and material level – to overcome it with telegraphy and to speed through it with the railroad. Whether the farmer in *Answering the Horn* is involved in such activities or not, Homer's denial of space behind the two figures, along with his refusal to integrate figure and ground, contributes to an overall assertion of how communication flattens geography and becomes extirpated from its physical coordinates.

Even in areas where the environmental effects of the entrepreneurialism related to the telegraph and railroad could not readily be seen, they could be heard. Upon hearing the whistle of the train in Walden woods, Henry David Thoreau wrote, "we have

[67] Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 11-67, 143-168.

constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside."[68] Homer's paintings, refusing to show the inevitable, pervasive railroads and telegraph wires, mine these same spaces for the same purposes, to attempt connectivity over long distances, and to conquer both nature and solitude. If as communications theorist James Carey argues, telecommunications like the telegraph cleaved value from labor, commodity from its connection to individuals, then Homer clings to the individual in this restructuring of the economic landscape. Instead of telegraph poles and telephone wires to show the long-distance transmission of signals, Homer pictures human substitutes, laborers who use their bodies and sound to signal to each other out in the field.

In a work closely related to *Answering the Horn*, and painted in the same year, Homer continues to explore ideas of extra-pictorial sound using the motif of a farmer out in a field.[69] The painting, *Song of the Lark (In the Field)* (1876; fig. 37), was described by Earl Shinn as follows, "the young farmer, striding through the dew of dawn and

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[68] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1904), 107. Thoreau called the telegraph wire the Aeolian harp, and references it some thirty times in his journal, particularly in spiritual terms. "[To Thoreau, the telegraph-wire] had concentrated into a single strain the meaning of the universe, had furnished him at no expense (at no cost of 'life') the entire spiritual stock which it is possible for man to accumulate. If Thoreau lost faith in the telegraph-wire, he never ceased to believe what Emerson had spent his life preaching: that 'spirit' is a single fact, that the soul has a single voice, that all spiritual values are indistinguishably blended in one experience …" Mark Van Doren, *Henry David Thoreau: A Critical Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 113.

[69] Conrads says that the painting relates to *Answering the Horn*, but is simplified with a lone figure in the composition. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, 136. Homer showed the work at the Century and Union League Club in February 1877 as *Song of the Lark*, and then as *In the Field* at the 1878 Academy exhibition.

Another related, albeit earlier, work is *Man with a Scythe* (1869), a pencil and white gouache drawing that again features the protagonist close up to the picture plane and in stark contrast to the vast receding countryside behind him. The figure looks downward, his eyes and facial features a blur, holding a scythe up to his cap, and with the other hand behind him holding some kind of pole or whip. The horizon line is fairly high and in the distance not too far behind the farmer is a grouping of people, what appears to be two men and a child. See also the engraving by John Filmer after Winslow Homer, *The Last Load,* in *Appleton's Journal*, August 7, 1869. The work features the same figure from *Man with a Scythe*, with two young women by his side, one looking out into distance, beyond the picture plane, and the other holds a pitchfork over her shoulder and looks in the other direction.

impulsively taking off his hat to the Te Deum of the birds."[70] The painting features a full-length view of a farmer close up to the picture plane, holding a hat in one hand and a scythe in the other. He is seen mostly from the side and we can clearly see his ear and profile as he looks up to the sky to hear the bird's call that the title references. The scythe points in the direction that the man faces, the same direction from which the bird presumably makes its sounds, the tip of the scythe curving up to the sky. Behind the man is a gently sloping hill graced by a small grove of mature full trees, and the clouds in the sky gently echo these low curves. In front of the man, the tips of long grass or goldenrod fleck the foreground and, like the clouds, give the painting an otherworldly, spiritual feel.

Once again, Homer does little to suggest spatiality and depth, though he does employ several pictorial devices to set up a stark foreground and backdrop, such as the relatively low horizon line and the foreshortening of the trees in the distance. Just as he did in *Answering the Horn* (fig. 31), Homer places the source of sound outside the picture's boundaries, which helps to counteract the flatness that the placement of the protagonist in the foreground creates. The sound of the lark is indicated by title only, but as we imagine the bird and its song – just as we imagine the farmer hearing the bird out in the otherwise still country field – the painting gains a sense of atmosphere and space, a sense that is bolstered by the vast sky and cumulus clouds.

We can trace this protagonist to an earlier painting, *Waiting for an Answer* (1872; fig. 38). In a sun-dappled field, the farmer with a scythe, this time wearing a hat with a feather and with shirtsleeves rolled up, looks toward a young woman clad in a pink dress and white apron. Even though he uses a brighter palette and experiments with the *plein*

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[70] Earl Shinn, *Nation*, 30 May 1878, 363; quoted in Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, 233, n.142.

air effects of light, Homer creates a narrative that is anything but optimistic, and one that is suspended in time both visually and aurally. With both of his hands on the scythe, the farmer appears to have paused momentarily while he waits, as the title suggests, for an answer from the young woman. Though we do not know the exact question that has been asked – or whether, in fact, it is the young man who has asked the question – from the posture of the woman, the outcome does not seem to be promising. She stands with one hand on her hip, the other holding a hat whose opening faces towards us, and her eyes are downcast, her expression quite serious. She is closer to the picture plane than he is, but she is not as accessible. The position of the farmer farther back in the composition is emphasized by the two other figures that zigzag behind him, one with his back to us and engrossed in clearing the field with his scythe. Homer has employed only a few compositional elements to suggest a receding landscape: the figures, sloping hills and several roughly drawn trees. Further, he uses little to no color modulation in the background, which is more a simple composition of broad colors and forms. Critics, including novelist Henry James, noticed Homer's avoidance of the exacting structure of linear perspective during this period. In 1875, James commented astutely, "He sees not in lines, but in masses, in gross, broad masses. Things come already modeled to his eye."[71] If there is any sense of depth, it is presented most clearly in the space between the young man and woman, a space that also symbolizes the emotional distance between the two.

As the tension moves between the two figures in foreground, the rest of the picture remains a flat screen. In *Waiting for an Answer*, then, we have both nodes of the aural loop within the confines of the picture, but the aural narrative is not complete and

[71] Quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (New York: Universal Printing Co., 1973), 18.

the title offers us little explanation of what we see.[72] The significance of this work for our purposes is that Homer has presented both caller and responder within one frame, a virtual enclosure of transmitter and receiver that the artist has played with in several later works featuring the farmer with scythe. Unlike those later works, *Answering the Horn (The Home Signal)* and *Song of the Lark (In the Field)* where the figure responds to an outside sound, and acknowledges it in some way, the farmer in *Waiting for an Answer* tries to engage in a communication that seems to go unanswered. In the process of sound being deferred, body language gains importance. In certain ways, the body, along with the scythe, both in this work and in *Answering the Horn*, is the medium of communication.[73]

Another ambiguous aspect of the painting is its open-ended reference to time. Nonetheless, for the period viewer, the title, "Waiting for an Answer," may have struck most Americans as antiquated in light of the prevalence of the telegrams. Blondheim explains that because of the transportation revolution, the time required for the dispersal of information had been dramatically reduced prior to the telegraph's invention in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, with the telegraph further minimizing the lag between an occurrence and its report:

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72 Margaret Conrads finds that Homer's use of light helps to describe the scene, "The young man, in light, appears modest but hopeful; the young woman, in shadow, seems lost in thought and doubtful." Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, 50.

73 The lack of responsiveness of the female in *Waiting for an Answer* can be contrasted to the smitten lady in Homer's earlier painting, *The Initials* (1864). Unlike the seeming unrequited romantic situation of *Waiting*, *The Initials* involves a physicalization of the emotions between a young man and woman, specifically, the carving of a lover's initials into a tree. See Lucretia H. Giese, "Winslow Homer's Civil War Painting, *The Initials*," *The American Art Journal*, XVIII, 3 (1986), 4-19. For other works involving the inscribing of initials, particularly those of the artist, see Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 90.

> [T]he average time lag between an event in Washington and an account of it being published in Boston was reduced by 11.8 days between 1790 and 1817 (from 18 to 6.2 days). Between 1817 and 1841 the lag was reduced by another 3.4 days to 2.8 days. In 1846, the telegraph virtually nullified, overnight, the time in communication of signals between Boston and Washington.[74]

Samuel F. B. Morse argued for the significance of celerity in communication to Congress thirty years earlier, "The greater the speed with which intelligence can be transmitted from point to point, the greater is the benefit derived to the whole community."[75] Whereas the nation was becoming more and more dependent on speed in distal communication, Homer's *Waiting for an Answer* shows that even when human beings are standing next to one another, communication may not occur fast enough, and that body language may offer more telling responses than words or sound alone.

Waiting to Hear by the Water

Shifting away from this pastoral setting to a nautical one, Homer continues to explore the horn as a mode of communication in *Daughter of the Coast Guard* (1881; fig. 39). This sheet was probably painted after Homer had settled in Cullercoats, England, a fishing village facing the North Sea not far from the city of Newcastle. Homer lived in Cullercoats for over a year, and made a remarkable series of watercolors and oils that reveal a distinctly different, and more mature, pictorial vocabulary and artistic viewpoint. Gone are the bright patches of color, sunny views, and earnest farmers, and in their stead are heavy washes of grays, crashing waves, sturdy fisherwomen and men. Homer once commented that he moved to England in search of "atmosphere and color," and it seems that he found, in the fisherwomen of the village, the appropriate means to explore these

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74 Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 11 -12.

75 United States Congress, House, *Telegraphs for the United States*, H. Doc. 15, 25th Cong., 2d sess., 1837, 30; quoted in Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 11.

concerns.[76] *Daughter of the Coast Guard* is one such example, with a young woman standing atop an unformed mass of rocks, holding a red painted horn, with what seems to be a rocky shore behind her. Surrounded by misty air and the roiling sea, the girl seems to be suspended. Other than the title, Homer provides no clues as to the woman's motivations, she appears to be waiting to signal and guide the fishermen, perhaps even her father, home through the foggy weather – whatever her story may be, we are not sure.[77] During these dangerous circumstances, communication had to be brief and one-sided – no words were needed, only the short, loud blows of a horn.

Another, earlier, work also focuses on the anticipation of a sailor out at sea. The painting *Dad's Coming!* (1872; fig. 40), depicts a little boy, perched atop a boat that is tied down on the shore, waiting to spot his father's boat returning home from a sea voyage.[78] In front of him is another boat that floats in the shallow waters and an expanse of blue water where more than several boats can be spotted in the distance. Standing behind him and holding a younger child is presumably his mother, whose face is gripped with grim thoughts. Closer to the foreground and viewer, she is separated from the hopeful boy also by the pole-like form that helps to keep the boat from washing away,

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[76] A. B. Adamson, "The Homer that I Knew" in Knipe, Tony, and John Boon et. al., *All the Cullercoats Pictures*, exh. cat. (Sunderland, England: Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, 1988), 15-21; quoted in Franklin Kelly, "A Process of Change," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 173. For a detailed discussion of Homer's interest in the Cullercoats fisherwomen, see Kelly, "A Process of Change," 173-183.

[77] During this time, there were advancements on the other side of the Atlantic to use horns to guide ships. *Daughter of the Coast Guard*, unconsciously or not, seems to track this development. As Thomas Edison wrote in a letter dated July 8, 1878, "In regard to the megaphone, at present it is only adopted for vessels at sea, lighthouses, coast wrecking companies &c, but I am in hopes of bringing the size into a form to render it portable." Image 1 of 1, Folder X121EA; TAEM 0:0, Yale University Library, Joseph Bradley Murray Papers, accessed from the Thomas Edison papers, http://edison.rutgers.edu (accessed on May 31, 2010).

[78] The painting was completed in 1873, the year that Homer was in Gloucester and when thirty-one vessels failed to return. That year, one hundred and seventy-four fishermen were declared dead, an unusually high figure. Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 136. As noted by Cikovsky and Kelly, "waiting and watching were central to the lives of the families and relations of Gloucester fishermen, as they were to the families and relations of fisheries everywhere. For that reason alone it is a central and recurrent theme in Homer's Gloucester watercolors." Ibid.

and behind her is a structure on which nets, buoys, and other fishing equipment hang. Spatially, the painting is quite complex. While the horizon line is neither high nor low, the sense of distance seems convincing, perhaps by the blocking of overlapping shapes and figures in the foreground, along with the smaller ships and boats in the background. The painting sets up a tripartite of diagonal sections that also correspond with the range of emotions presented, with a sense of foreboding in the closest part of the picture, the anxious boy in the second, and the emptiness of the sea in the farthest plane. The title, "Dad's Coming!," particularly the punctuation of the exclamation mark, only heightens the seeming inevitability of bad news. Like the net hung up to dry, the ties that bind this fishing family are of no use. Though the boy scans the sea for the sight of his father's vessel, it seems that this family is waiting for a signal that will never come. And just like the girl in *Daughter of the Coast Guard* who wants to blow her horn but can find no reason to, the possibility of connection seems unlikely.

Franklin Kelly writes that in some of the most important works from the Cullercoats period, Homer continually juxtaposes images of women on the shore while men are out at sea.[79] One example of this is *Hark! The Lark!* (1882; fig. 41) (related to the watercolor *A Voice from the Cliffs* (1883)), which features a full-length view of three women holding baskets and fishing nets and looking upwards.[80] According to the title, the women have stopped to listen to the call of the bird not pictured, an aural construct closely related to *In the Field* and *Answering the Horn*. Sound in this work seems to offer the women a brief moment of pleasure, diverting them from the fact that they are alone. But at the same time, by not picturing the lark, the transmitter of sound, Homer

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[79] Franklin Kelly, "A Process of Change," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 181.

[80] Homer's use of exclamation marks also suggests an implicitly aural experience and requires further consideration.

emphasizes a sense of absence, in this case, the tension of the fishermen who are away. Our reception of the work does little to diminish this tension, for the title only leads us to imagine a lark in flight. Kelly calls this sense of absence the "separateness" between the two sexes and explains that in *Hark! The Lark!*,

> [T]he nets and baskets remind us that these women, who have paused to listen to the song of a bird, are separated from their fishermen kin. And it is this same duality of men and women who are at once united through their shared inextricable links to, and dependence on, the sea, but separated by their inevitably different relationships to it…[81]

Only in the charcoal *Figures on a Rock* (1882; fig. 42) does Homer show the two sexes together, bound by the heavy, voluminous net that joins them. Despite this linking mechanism, the figures still seemed disconnected – as Kelly notes – for the two neither interact with one another nor acknowledge each other's presence. Thus, even though the net takes the place of the horn in this depiction of women whose lives revolve around the sea, Homer continues to reject the possibility of union and face-to-face communication.[82]

IV. Bells

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[81] Kelly, "A Process of Change," in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 182.

[82] As a fishing tool that offers families income, food, and literally ties them together, the net is a material reminder of connectivity. In several works, Homer shows the fisherwomen in the village mending the nets, (see *Mending the Nets* (1882) or engaged with other string materials, such as knitting (*Fisher Girls on Shore, Tynemouth* (1884) (charcoal on paper). When juxtaposed with his depictions of the fishermen out at sea (see *The Herring Net* (1885), the nets and ropes come to symbolize how their lives are tied together to the women back at the shore. Indeed, when men and women are depicted together, it is usually with ropes or nets, as can be seen in, for example, *Figures on a Rock* (1882), *The Life Line* (1884), and *Undertow* (1886).

Another, more abstract, theme of connection for these men and women is the wind. As can be seen in the November 23, 1861, *Harper's Weekly* print, "The First Telegraphic Message from California," telegraphic transmissions were likened to winged angels who moved like the wind to carry the message swiftly to its recipient. In this light, Homer's watercolors of windblown women at shore looking towards men, such as *Fisherwives* (1883), *Inside the Bar* (1883) (w/c), or the charcoal drawings of windblown women holding strings, such as *Three Girls* (1881-2) and *A Little More Yarn* (1884), can be seen as similar units of connectivity. The relationship between these kinds of depictions, telegraphic imagery, and Homer's own subconscious desires to connect need to be explored further.

In addition to horns, Homer began to depict genre scenes that included bells, in both painting and illustration. While not numerous, these works hew closely to the themes explored in his pastoral phase in the late 60s and early 70s as well as his heroic sea pictures from the 1880s and 90s. Like his interest in the horn, the emphasis on the bell in these markedly different stages of his body of work suggests that it was more than a passing fancy for the artist. Indeed, we can see in the bell pictures that Homer was continuing to explore sound's ability to signal, organize space, and create different distal positions between auditor and sound-making object in different kinds of environs. At the same time, Homer capitalized on the bell's symbolic value as a marker of nostalgia. In this section, I will explore how in *The Morning Bell*, Homer seemingly offers the bell as a signifier of rural life, a place populated with wooden bridges and women moving slowly. In fact, what is shown in *The Morning Bell* is a factory, similar to the one that Homer pictured in the earlier illustration, *New England Factory Life –"Bell Time"* (1868). I will also briefly consider *Eight Bells*, which, while not depicting a bell *per se*, refers to it in the title to establish a sense of time and create a pictorial narrative around hardy men out at sea. In all of these works, the bell at once signals a specific time of day and offers an experience or way of life with symbolic meanings.

Factory Bells

Published in the July 25, 1868 *Harper's Weekly*, Homer's illustration, *New England Factory Life –"Bell Time,"* (fig. 43) shows the Washington Mills factory by the Merrimac River in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Homer became familiar with the area because his brother Charles had worked as a chemist at the nearby Pacific Mills during this period. The subject matter was a departure for Homer, because, as David Tatham

notes, of its focus on industrialization in America.[83] The illustration is divided into diagonal zones of space, beginning with the looming factory and tower in the background, the river in the middle ground, and the teeming mass of laborers in the foreground, with each worker carrying a lunch pail or basket and streaming out of the picture to head home. This cavalcade of people calls to mind Herman Melville's 1855 short story, "The Tartarus of Maids," where factory girls working at a New England paper mill appear mechanical and pallid: "At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper."[84] Particularly with the grouping in the right foreground, the description of two factory girls in "The Tartarus of Maids" comes to mind: "I looked upon the first girl's brow, and saw it was young and fair; I looked upon the second girl's brow, and saw it was ruled and wrinkled."[85] In addition to this ready allusion to paper, the passage by Melville illustrates the far-reaching hands of the factory, how it called women of all ages to work, and how the long hours aged the girls significantly. Like Melville, Homer seizes on this undiscriminating aspect of factory life, showing workers who are male, female, young, and old alike. Yet even though the title references bell-time, there is no bell to be found in the picture, the tower in particular seems conspicuously empty.[86] Of course, as an illustration, Homer knew that the title of the work would abut the image so perhaps he omitted the bell for this reason. Regardless, the sense of the bell ringing and notifying the laborers to head home, while not manifest, is present, even if latently so, for the tin pails

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[83] Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Pictorial Press*, 152.

[84] Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" *Harper's New Monthly* (April 1855), 675.

[85] Ibid.

[86] The lack of sound also recalls this passage from "The Tartarus of Maids": "Not a syllable was breathed. Nothing was heard but the low, steady, overruling hum of the iron animals. The human voice was banished from the spot." Ibid.

carried by the laborers, swaying back and forth as they walk, serve as its visual homonym. Indeed, there is a parity between the rows of bodies in the foreground and the rows of windows in the structure in the background, and this visual rhyming between building and bodies can be extended to the bell that would ostensibly be housed in the building and the tin pails that dangle from the laborers' hands.

The bell was not just used for laborers and factory settings, but was also an integral part of civic life, particularly in western countries such as France and the United States, where it would summon all denizens within earshot for religious services, community events, deaths, celebrations such as births and weddings, and municipal announcements. In particular, the bell was closely linked to the countryside, as suggested by the etymological similarities between the words "campanarian," which describes bells or their manufacture, and "campagne," which means rural area or countryside in French. Usually in a pastoral setting, the bell had no real other competing sounds; as historian Alain Corbin explains in his groundbreaking study of the meanings of bells in the nineteenth-century French countryside,

> The countryside knew nothing then of the 'profane din' in which so many elements could be heard at once, and that constituted the background noise familiar to city dwellers. The auditory landscape, intercut with broad swathes of silence, here consisted of tollings … that could be easily located. The hearing of sounds of metal against metal, wood on wood, or of human voices served to demarcate family or vicinity.[87]

The bell was an integral part of the "auditory landscape," then, creating a different way of experiencing time and space that was marked by territorial identities of a village or town center, walking with neighbors and family to learn of new events, and a distinctly

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[87] Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 292.

communal range of emotions aroused by the shared environment. Part of a network of sounds, the bell demarcated a territory of sorts, one with a culturally specific set of functions and meanings. With an array of different kinds of peals, the bell also added structure to the day, imbuing the quotidian with a specific aural chronology that Corbin characterizes as the "aestheticization of everyday life."[88]

In the New England mill towns of the 1830s and 40s, the bell was seamlessly added alongside the latest advancements in machinery and industrialization. The seemingly contradictory fusing of old and new technology was purely a functional one, the factory bell signaled and regulated the start and end of day, instead of a factory supervisor having to inform each and every worker of the workday hours. As this recollection from a factory girl attests, the bell was a mechanical supervisor of sorts: "The factory bell begins to ring,/And we must all obey,/And to our old employment go,/Or else be turned away."[89] These sentiments are echoed in the 1833 poem, "Picture of a Factory Village," by Thomas Mann, whose family owned a cotton mill in Pawtucket, "Hark! Don't you hear the fact'ry bell?/Of wit and learning 'tis the knell./It rings them out, it rings them in,/Where girls they weave, and men they spin."[90] The bell, in no uncertain terms, ordered the workday and, from its lofty position, controlled the factory workers.

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[88] Ibid., 5.

[89] Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls: A Collection of Writings on Life and Struggles in the New England Factories of the 1840s by the Factory Girls Themselves, and the Story, in Their Own Words, of the First Trade Unions of Women Workers in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 5-6, 7; quoted in Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 137.

[90] Thomas Mann, *Picture of a Factory Village* (1833) in Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Z. Penn, eds., *The New England Mill Village, 1790-1860* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982), 339-341; quoted in Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 138.

Indeed, even in rural village settings, the bell, as Corbin puts it, "reinforced divisions between an inside and an outside."[91] Rung at the discretion of civic leaders or factory owners, the bell constructed a hierarchy between center and periphery, a structuring of power relations between employer and laborer, authority and citizen. Homer's factory depictions stay on the outside, focusing on how children, women, and the elderly become reluctant laborers and how the bell controls the movement of these bodies through space. Within this paradigm of control, the workers likened themselves to slaves or bondmen, "Any quarry slave, any galley slave, any bondman, whether 'hereditary,' or otherwise, was a king on a throne compared to the unfortunate victim bound to miserable toil ..."[92] Surely, in creating these images of weary factory workers, Homer must have returned to his own feelings about being a lithographer apprentice, an experience that he described as a "treadmill experience," "bondage," and "slavery."[93] But there was another, more malevolent and especially inhumane, association between bells and indentured servitude: in the antebellum South, belligerent slaves were occasionally shackled with a bell harness (fig. 44) to alert the master of the subject's whereabouts, as well as to discourage escaping.

In another short story by Melville, "The Bell Tower" (1855), the writer explores precisely such relations when the "mechanician" Bannadonna creates the "iron slave"

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[91] Corbin, *Village Bells*, 95.

[92] David N. Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn; or, The Changes of Fifty Years* (Lynn, Massachusetts: Thos. P. Nichols, 1880), 100-101; quoted in Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 136.

[93] George William Sheldon, "American Painters – Winslow Homer and F.A. Bridgman," *Art Journal* (New York) 4 (August 1878), 226; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 17. Homer also said, "From the time I took my nose off that lithographic stone, I have had no master, and never shall have any." Ibid.

Talus to ring the bell he has made.[94] Bannadonna arrives at the idea of creating a robot as he watches a bell-man's duties from below:

> Perched on a great mast or spire, the human figure, viewed from below, undergoes such a reduction in its apparent size as to obliterate its intelligent features. … Instead of bespeaking volition, its gestures rather resemble the automatic ones of the arms of a telegraph. … [I]t had indirectly occurred to Bannadonna to devise some metallic agent … And, moreover, as the vital watchman on the roof … walked to the bell with uplifted mace to smite it, Bannadonna had resolved that his invention should likewise possess the power of locomotion…[95]

Melville exploits the vantage point of looking from below to suggest how vision and perception are fooled, describing the bell-ringer's arms as the "arms of a telegraph," which links the bell's signaling function to the old model of the semaphore telegraph. Instead of ringing the bell himself, Bannadonna creates a mechanical Talus, who moves on grooves and oil and works like clockwork. Yet, as the denizens of the village gather below to hear the very first peals of their new bell, Talus kills Bannadonna, who accidently gets wedged between the bell and bell-ringer. During Bannadonna's funeral, the bell also fails to ring properly and, eventually, the bell-tower collapses. As the narrator concludes, "So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord, but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So the bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it."[96] The opposition between man and mechanical object that Melville enacts in this passage reveals a disdain for technological advances, alluding to the governmental interests (the "lord") behind them. Even further, Melville pressures ideas of progress: the peals of the cutting-edge bell are replaced with acts of murder and destruction.

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[94] Herman Melville, "The Bell Tower," in *Billy Budd, Sailor, and Other Stories*, selected, ed., and with intro. by Harold Beaver (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970).
[95] Ibid., 235.
[96] Ibid.

Like Melville, Homer, too, manipulates the bell's meanings of rural nostalgia to expose the tensions between humanity and nineteenth-century modernity. *The Morning Bell (Old Mill)* (1871; fig. 45) is replete with reminiscences of rural America, with women dressed in old-fashioned hats and clothing preparing for a day's work amidst decidedly quaint surroundings.[97] A critic at the National Academy of Design exhibition thought the painting depicted "an old school house, with a group of country girls, dinner buckets in hand going over the lonely wooden path leading to the upper story."[98] Cikovsky says the mistake of whether it was a schoolhouse or a mill was related to the bell on the top of the building, and that both the mill and schoolhouse began to be staffed with women after the Civil War.[99] The bell, more than an architectural feature, also becomes a metonym for the kind of building that it rests on, and equally important, the social function of the building. In addition, the bell helps to identify the main figure, carrying a lunch pail and walking with her head down, as a factory worker on her way to the mill. The depiction of the tolling bell, along with its reference in the title, immediately initiates the viewer's sense of another place and time. As noted by Corbin, "the ringing of bells could evoke temporal depths more effectively than any description of towns built in stone or wood, and could re-create in a reader's or listener's mind the dynamic of times gone by."[100]

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[97] The painting was originally shown as *Old Mill* at the Century Association in 1871 and as *The Mill* at the National Academy of Design in 1872. It later became known as *The Morning Bell* because of Lloyd Goodrich's research. See Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 92, n.1.

Two years after the painting *The Morning Bell*, Homer created an illustration with the same title. In the work, Homer has infused the narrative with more characters, a young boy, a man, several additional women, including an elderly one, all of whom seems to be moving across the space toward the factory.

[98] "The Realm of Art. Some Notes on the Academy Spring Exhibition," *New York Evening Telegram*, 20 April 1872; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 92.

[99] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 92.

[100] Corbin, *Village Bells*, x.

Yet the bell also adds enough anecdotal detail, a sonic impetus, if you will, to explain the sole girl's actions. As a marker of the various activities of the day, the bell not only instantly suggests sound, but also the ability of sound to travel over space. In Homer's depictions, this sense of mobility is a crucial quality. The bell compels the girl to walk over the bridge, and thereby functions as a marker of both time and displacement within the pictorial composition. Just as the bell sways in the air above the building, so, too, does the hat and dress of the girl on the bridge. There are other aspects of the picture that convey the idea of movement, of course, the way the bridge cuts across the picture plane transversely, for example, and the poles of walking bodies on either end (dog on one, human on other). Nonetheless, Homer's ideas of movement, space, and distance within the painting, I would argue, are uniquely related to, perhaps even augmented by, the sonic trope of the bell as spatiotemporal sign.

Homer's spatial design in this work is effective for a number of other reasons, including the path of planks leading from the center foreground of the painting and connecting to the bridge, and the peaks of roofs and hats that create their own kind of ascending line that parallels the bridge. The sense of three-dimensional space, rather than a tightly controlled system of Albertian perspective, is an amalgam of forms arranged around the spatiotemporal marker of the bell, strategically placed and sized in relation to each other to suggest proximity and depth. Similar to the quote noted above by Henry James, Goodrich describes Homer's handling of space as follows:

> Out of familiar actualities he has created a satisfying design in depth. … Homer's forms do not have the great substance of Eakins', and his three-dimensional space was not as completely comprehended. His gifts were wider, if not as deep.[101]

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[101] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1973), 19.

For Goodrich, then, Homer's "satisfying design in depth" was convincing in the arrangement of forms but had its limitations, its lack of scientific study, its avoidance of perspective. I would add that Homer's inclusion of certain kinds of aural signals simultaneously expands the pictorial space and imbues the painting with an overall diachronic narrative.

Bells out at Sea

Continuing with this coordination of bodies in campanarian space and time is *Eight Bells* (1886; fig. 46), the last of Homer's epic marine works from his trip to Cullercoats, England. The painting shows two men against a ship's rail and holding nautical instruments as they face the cloudy sky. A specific maritime procedure, eight bells were rung everyday on a ship at four, eight, and twelve o'clock as a signal for crewmembers to determine the ship's position in relation to the sun. Because Homer had traveled by sea so frequently, he was no doubt familiar with the sounding of eight bells and the daily operations conducted on board. The work is related to a watercolor that Homer made on his way to England in 1881, *Observations on a Shipboard* (1881), showing a steward performing the very same task. However, it was Homer's second depiction of the subject, with his brother Arthur posing as the ship's officer no less, when the inspiration for *Eight Bells* occurred.[102] This work, an oil titled *Taking an Observation* (1886; fig. 47), features a single figure at the ship's rail holding a sextant towards the patchy sky. The figure is seen close up to the picture plane, mostly with his back to the viewer. Both the sky and sea are choppy, formless masses, and the horizon line is at the

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[102] According to Downes, "[H]e began to make a black-and-white oil study of a ship's officer in uniform taking a noon observation, his back turned towards the observer. … When it was almost done, Winslow Homer suddenly stopped work on it, and, saying, 'I am not going to do anything more on this panel. You can have it if you want it,'…" William Howe Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer* (Boston and New York: 1911), 146; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 236.

steward's sightline, emphasizing how his vision, along with the sextant, fixes the ship's geographical coordinates. *Eight Bells* follows this format, but shows more of the ship's architecture, albeit with broad crude strokes, and adds another figure. Furthermore, both figures are in their rain gear, angled sharply in the ship and to the sea, with Homer lowering the horizon line to emphasize the men and emphasize their actions. The result conveys a heroism and monumentality that critics noticed immediately.[103]

Perhaps the most significant change between the two pictures for our purposes was Homer's decision to change the title from the visual paradigm of observation to the aural event of eight bells. The title, "eight bells," is the sole sonic element in the work of art, we cannot see the bell that has been rung nor any other indicator of aurality for that matter, even the crewmembers' ears are covered.[104] Perhaps Homer decided that the inclusion of the bell was unnecessary, as it only served to signal the time of day and the duties required of those on board, which was of more interest to the artist. Regardless, a relationship, however tenuous, exists between sound and space in this practice of "shooting" the sun with the sextant, because it is the aural construct that triggers the procedure of locating the ship's geographical position; thus, Homer's encounter with this subject matter continues his exploration of sound's interrelationship with displacement. As we shall soon see in Homer's next marine featuring a bell, the artist would reconfigure the pictorial tropes in this work to create a work that was as emphatically aural as *Eight Bells* is equivocal.

[103] One reviewer wrote: "He has caught the color and motion of the greenish waves, white-capped and rolling, the strength of the dark clouds broken with a rift of sunlight, and the sturdy, manly character of the sailors at the rail. In short, he has seen and told in a strong painter's manner what there was of beauty and interest in the scene." "Spring Exhibitions of the 'Academy' and 'Society,'" *The Art Review* 3 (July-August 1888), 32; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 238.

[104] Perhaps inspired by Homer's painting, N.C. Wyeth's *Eight Bells* (1937) also does not feature any bells. *A Century of Wyeths*, exh. cat. (Farnsworth, Maine: Farnsworth Art Museum, 1999), 12.

V. Shouting

Thus far, this chapter has examined Homer's interest in aural signaling mechanisms (horns and bells) as well as his depictions of music and gunfire during the Civil War. This final section turns away from these external sonic devices and considers Homer's visualizations of the human voice. In two significant works, one made in the mid-70s, the other, the late 90s, the artist experiments with the spatiality of vocal exchange, dramatically changing his pictorial strategies from one picture to the other. In *Answering the Pilot* (1876), Homer uses the transmission of the human voice over a body of water to activate the recessionary space. In *The Lookout, All's Well* (1896), Homer rotates the protagonist to shout out towards the viewer, a bold maneuver that exemplified the artist's modernist turn in the final years of his artistic production. Homer was not alone in exploring configurations of the human voice over distance. During this same period, the inventor Alexander Graham Bell patented his model of the telephone and by the end of the century, instant transmissions of the human voice could be heard from coast to coast. Though Homer was not of course visualizing the telephone, his pictorial strategies overlap with significant visual aspects of telephonic discourse.

Electric Voices

Having left his birthplace of Scotland in 1871 for Boston, Alexander Graham Bell was attempting to improve the telegraph when he became interested in the idea of varying currents over a single electric wire to transmit the human voice. Other inventors were working on the same idea around this time, including Elisha Gray of Illinois and Antonio Meucci in Italy. Bell's prototype, however, was the first patented successful model of what came to be known as the telephone, consisting of a double electromagnet, stretched

membrane over a ring (the diaphragm), and electric wire. From 1873 to 1876, Bell would repeatedly speak – actually, shout – into his device, with his main assistant Thomas Watson on the other end of the wire documenting the audibility of his attempts. Bell described his first successful transmission on March 10, 1876 as follows, "I then shouted into M [the mouthpiece] the following sentence: 'Mr. Watson--come here--I want to see you.' To my delight he came and declared that he had heard and understood what I said." W. A. Rogers memorialized the historic moment in this circa 1877 painting (fig. 48).[105]

The telephone and telegraph were used interchangeably in telephone's early years, and thus some confusion existed between Elisha Gray's musical telegraph, which was called the telephone, and Bell's speaking telephone. Indeed, as the telegraph and telephone were both wire-based electric systems, there were considerable lexical, epistemological, and practical overlaps between the two devices; most significantly, both used the same circuit wires and networks for several years. Thus, many of the first telephonic conversations were completed on telegraphic connections. One of Bell's assistant recounted one such exchange between Bell and Watson as they tried to communicate between Boston and New York on April 2, 1877:

> [Watson] waited for the signal by telegraph which notified him that Bell was ready in New York. Then he connected the telephone, 'crawled into the blankets, and shouted and listened for an hour or two.' He could hear Bell's voice, but not very clearly… It was the first attempt to talk between New York and Boston, but years of research and experiment intervened before improved circuits replaced the existing telegraph lines with their high resistance and rusty joints over which this first conversation was essayed.[106]

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105 Alexander Graham Bell, Lab Notebook, vol. I, (1875-6), Alexander Graham Bell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 40-41.

106 Catherine Dunlap Mackenzie, *Alexander Graham Bell: The Man who Contracted Space* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 170-71.

With the rousing success of Bell's telephone at the Centennial Exposition and elsewhere, scientific interest in the telegraph began to fade with strings of telephone wires overtaking the telegraphic networks, as can be seen in this photograph of lower Manhattan (fig. 49). Soon thereafter, Bell became known, in words that echo telegraphic discourse, as "the man who contracted space."[107]

Shouting In

The same year that Bell had his first successful telephone conversation, Homer began to experiment with the ways the human voice traveled over vast distances, becoming more interested in the spatial dislocations these kinds of transfers incurred. In *Calling the Pilot [Hailing the Schooner]* (1876; fig. 50), we see a fisherman with his back to us, looking at a ship across the body of water. Wearing an oilskin hat and boots, the young man carries a small bundle and a stick in one hand and cups his mouth with the other, yelling to a tiny waving figure seen on the schooner. Exactly who has initiated the exchange is unclear, and with the alternative title, "hailing the schooner," Homer seems to equivocate about which language, aural or gestural, will effect the communication. This tenor of ambiguity is nothing new for Homer, as Cikovsky and Kelly explain, "The uncertainty about who or what is being called is not so much a narrative defect as, because it occurs in other of Homer's work, a narrative device with characteristically

[107] For example, consider the title of a biography of Bell written by one of his assistants: "Alexander Graham Bell: The Man who Contracted Space." See note 106.

ambiguous consequences."[108] We the viewer, as a result, have to make sense of what Homer has presented not only in terms of the sonic narrative, but spatiality as well.[109]

Poised on the liminal boundary between painting and viewer, Homer's fisherman serves an acutely aural function in a picture that turns on the aural transaction, a point that becomes clear when considering another period depiction of a fisherman facing the water. In Fitz Henry Lane's *Owl's Head, Penobscot Bay, Maine* (1862; fig. 51), the fisherman – with his back similarly turned to the viewer and facing a vista of sea and land – is presented as a miniscule figure against the vastness of nature, with the enormous sky as a kind of cosmic power over the ships and water below. Nothing seems to move and, by extension, make a sound, in Lane's work. Rather, the painting subsists and responds to the pleasure of seeing, with the viewer's eye taking in the still scene like the figure in the foreground. In contrast to Lane's decidedly ocular emphasis, Homer's work focuses on the large rendering of the fisherman – his embodiment – and the vocal exchange between him and the other man.

What appears to be a normative compositional structure is actually quite abstracted: the set of rocks in the foreground are crudely painted, and the embankment in the background lacks any sense of three-dimensionality. Nonetheless, Homer turns the small strip of water between the two parties into a convincing articulation of depth,

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[108] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 146. Cikovsky and Kelly point to several other works by Homer in which it is unclear who is initiating the communication and who is responding. Looking at "You Are Really Picturesque, My Love," published in *Galaxy* in June 1868 and "Come!," published in *Galaxy* in September 1869, they point out the viewer would readily presume that the woman in both instances is speaking to the man, but in both cases, it is the exact opposite. Ibid.

[109] The work has thematic similarities with a July 24, 1869 wood engraving by Homer for *Appleton's Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*, titled *On the Road to Lake George*, showing three children in the foreground, in various degrees of rotation, bidding farewell to a group of adults riding in and on a stagecoach. No one appears to be shouting or yelling; from the children's perspective, a simple wave suffices. The fashionably dressed women atop the stagecoach, all parasols and hats, turn to look at the children, one in particular waves a white handkerchief, mirroring the sole member of the group of children who actualizes any communication. Like *Calling the Pilot*, it seems unclear who is the sender in this exchange and who is the receiver.

mostly due to the extreme foreshortening of the figures and the fishing boat, but also because we see that the fisherman has to yell, cup his mouth, to be heard by the man on the boat. In other words, as the viewer's eye shifts back and forth between the two men, the aural exchange helps to quantify, even expand, the distance between them. In addition to the Albertian, visual-based system of spatial perspective, then, Homer uses one that is governed by the ear, resulting in a vacillation between visual and aural operations in the coordination of space.

In its manipulation of the two principal actors and denaturalization of space, I would suggest that Homer's work corresponds to period images of telegraphic (and later on, telephonic) exchanges where the figures' bodies, along with the relationship between figure and ground, are distorted to convey the implicit spatial lapses between the parties. In a diagram of a telegraphic circuit (fig. 52) printed in an 1873 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* article, the illustrator shows one hand on the left tapping out a message on a telegraph connected to a line that recedes with perspectivally-structured telegraph poles and connects to another hand reading the dashes and dots as the message comes in. Showing the people involved as floating hands only, and stripping the space of any topographical features, the illustrator subverts customary representations of body and land. In a more comparable example of an image (fig. 53a) from an 1877 Bell Telephone Company folder (issued soon after the company was created), we can also find this flattening of natural space. The size of the speaker (distinguishable by the fact that he holds the mouthpiece of the telephone to his lips whereas (all but one of) the others hold the receiver to their ears) is disproportionately large in contrast to the other parties even though there is little suggestion of three-dimensional space among them. As can be seen

with the blank areas around each telephonic vignette, figure and ground could not be pictorialized in traditional ways, and in effect, had to be abstracted. As this implies, period depictions of long-distance communication had to visualize the aural loop and compression of distance in previously untenable ways. A 1915 advertisement (fig. 53b) for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company pushes these pictorial strategies even further, connecting the speaker and receiver with thin radiating lines, filling in the rolling hills between the two parties with masses of people, and singling out the receiver in an encircled magnification. All of these techniques necessarily deviate from conventional representations of landscape and human interaction, but the images remain easily legible nonetheless. Like these images, *Calling the Pilot* flattens the space around the parties and tests the limits of how bodies can be depicted and foreshortened. Nonetheless, the painting retains a cohesiveness in spite of the disjunctions, and the connection between the tiny figure and the large shouting fisherman is one that is within sight, within earshot, within the realm of our imagination.

Shouting Out: For Whom the Bell Tolls (and the Hand Waves)

Our last vocalized signal can be found in *The Lookout, All's Well* (1896; fig. 54), which is also the last of Homer's sonic-themed paintings. The work was a dramatic departure for the artist – indeed for the art of its time. Having just rung the bell, the fisherman – wearing an oilskin hat like so many of the other shipmen that Homer painted, and he himself wore – turns around to gesture and shout "all's well" to his shipmates.[110] Behind the fisherman, we can see a large star-filled sky, some cresting waves, and several

[110] Homer's friend John Beatty recalled how Homer would don his oilskins to paint storms at Prout's Neck. Beatty, "Recollections," in Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 107, 211.

linear arrangements, vertical and horizontal, of ropes, rigging, and railing.[111] Homer has placed the protagonist close up to the picture plane and dramatically cropped his body, showing him from shoulders up, with only the raised right hand within the frame.[112] Like the bell, the fisherman's body tilts with the rolling ship, and indeed, the number of visual affinities between the two are striking – the gaping mouth rhyming the ringing bell's interior, the hat strap mirroring the bell's pendulum, the cloche shape of the hat echoing the dome of the bell, and the way the position of the fisherman's hand could so neatly grab the curved rod above.

In addition to the standard sketches, Homer prepared extensively for this radical depiction. He traveled to Boston to find the exact kind of ship's bell he wanted; unhappy with what was available, he ultimately made one of his own from clay. On another Boston trip, Homer also studied how a ship's mast and rigging would appear in moonlight. Finally, he asked a fisherman friend from Scarboro, John Getchell, to pose as the fisherman in the picture.[113] Homer describes the end result in a March 1897 letter: "I have a letter & telegram from Mr. LaFarge asking for one or more pictures. By good luck, I happen to have one that I have not shown & I have ordered it sent to N.Y. The title is 'The Lookout' [sketch] a moonlight at sea. You will be interested in it as it will be so unexpected & strange."[114] Critics responded favorably to the strangeness, with the inimitable Sadakichi Hartmann writing, "It is one of the few paintings of which I carried

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[111] Curiously, the ship's rail does not continue past the bell into the left part of the picture.

[112] Homer rarely depicted figures so largely. In a March 20, 1902, letter, the artist acknowledges another work where he emphasizes the figures, "only once in the last thirty years have I made a duplicate, and that was a watercolor from my oil picture now owned by the Layton Art Gallery, Milwaukee, called "Hark! The Lark." It is the most important picture I ever painted, and the very best one, as the figures are large enough to have some expression in their faces. The watercolor was called "A Voice from the Cliff," and well known…" Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer*, 149; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 338.

[113] Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 142.

[114] Ibid., 143.

away a recollection that will resist the tide of time … All the rest will sink into oblivion."[115]

Perhaps what made *The Lookout* so memorable was its newfound urgency, not only in terms of its spatial compression, but also in its outwardness and emphatic communication of speech. Homer, in effect, turns around the protagonist featured in *Calling the Pilot*, and brings him close to the picture plane, with the figure's corporeal propinquity almost impinging on the viewer's sense of space. This, along with the seeming loudness of the sonic exchange, largely controls the work's reception. Specifically, the closeness of the fisherman's head to the picture plane forces those standing in front of the work to become the receivers of his message, and, in effect, the space between painting and viewer is contracted. Both the dark sky and the gaping black hole of the mouth seem to anticipate this negation of space. In effect, the fisherman's strident call implores the viewer to be absorbed into the picture.

But at the same time, this sense of involvement is undercut by the disembodiedness of the fisherman. Homer's radical cropping shifts the emphasis from a physical *face-to-face* aural transaction to one that is more rooted in the imagination, and more particularly, in the imagination's transportive abilities. We can easily picture ourselves on the swaying boat with the fisherman, and quickly dismiss the spatial displacement this imaginary incurs in the process. For similar reasons, the motif of a bodiless talking head appeared throughout telephonic discourse. As seen in these illustrations and sheet music cover (figs. 55a, 55b, 55c) picturing the telephone, the

[115] Goodrich described the work as follows: "More than almost any other figure piece, *The Lookout* shows his bigness of vision. It is full of … movements [that] have the quality characteristic of Homer, energetic and full of vitality, but short, abrupt, confined to individual figures and objects, rather than rhythms that run through the whole design." Ibid., 144.

visualization of telephonic conversation often resulted in some kind of disembodiment, as if the body underwent some kind of assault from these new sensory experiences. Alexander Graham Bell's 1876 sketch (fig. 55a) of telephone prototypes, along with an 1877 illustration (fig. 55b) closely related to it, shows the dyad of speaker and auditor as heads only. Because the transaction requires the faculties of speaking, hearing, and imagining, the rest of the body is unnecessary, gestures or other embodied acts will not be seen on the other end of the connection. Such images echo Edward Bellamy's words from his 1897 novel *Equality*, "You stay at home and send your eyes and ears abroad for you. Wherever the electric connection is carried."[116] Indeed, this technique of disembodiment continued to be utilized into the twentieth-century by such artists as Norman Rockwell whose March 6, 1948, work in *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Gossips* (fig. 56), enlarges the chain of communicating heads for comedic effect. Homer's *The Lookout* fits easily into this corpus of telephonic imagery, and the work registers telephonic discourse in other formal aspects as well. The prominence of the bell in the work, a prop that Homer invested so much time in, had, by the end of the nineteenth century, become the symbol of the most powerful telephone company in the country. With his invention of the telephone, Bell founded the Bell Telephone Company (pictured in its early years in this photograph, fig. 57a), which later became the American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation and is now known as AT &T. Soon after its incorporation, the Bell Telephone company adopted the bell as their logo, as can be seen in this 1889 version (Fig. 57b). This period technological significance of the bell, the protagonist's shouting posture and disembodied head, along with the several wire-like forms that run throughout the picture – all these formal and cultural features transform

[116] Edward Bellamy, *Equality* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897), 347-48.

Homer's picture into his most telephonic, an instant communiqué that shouts "all's well" to viewers everywhere.

While certain aspects of *The Lookout* make it an unusual work in Homer's artistic production, Homer had been working through the problem of the gesturing figure for many decades. Cikovsky and Kelly characterize Homer's reuse of the figure as "an almost obsessionally recurrent image in drawings of the 1880s and 1890s," and as I have shown we can trace the character even further back in Homer's body of work.[117] The figure can be seen silhouetted in two 1881 watercolors: in *Observations on Shipboard* (fig. 58), standing in the middle ground of large ship's deck, and in *Wreck of the Iron Crown* (fig. 59), as a tiny addition on the large barque roiling in the background. In this latter sheet, the figure signals to the lifeboat that battles the large waves to reach him, and thus harkens back to the waving fisherman in *Calling the Pilot* as well as the miniscule farmer in *The Dinner Horn* (figs. 50 and 23, respectively). It was only in the 1890s, however, that Homer began to magnify this nautical figure and work out the details of its representation more extensively. In *"The Lookout" and "Sailor with Raised Arm"* (1895-6; fig. 60a), a charcoal and chalk on paper, Homer sketches a fisherman in oilskin with the raised arm and gesturing hand, and, in a different orientation, a closer view of the same open-mouthed protagonist we find in *The Lookout*. But the most detailed rendering of the raised-arm figure can be found in the painting *The Wreck* (1896; fig. 60b), which features a full-length view of a oilskin-clad sailor looking out at the viewer and gesturing to a shipwreck obscured by sand dunes and crashing waves.[118]

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[117] Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 338.

[118] There are several claims to *The Wreck*'s origins, Phillip C. Beam writes that Homer witnessed a wreck in Prout's Neck in 1896 and sketched the scene with a pen and envelope, sending it off to his brother Charles. Another possibility is that Homer sketched a wreck he saw in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1885-6.

The recurrence of the motif is remarkable for several reasons. First, through this figure, Homer shifts the boundaries of the communication from one that occurs between two actors within the pictorial space to one that centers on an outward-facing protagonist and the viewer outside the frame in *The Lookout*. Second, throughout all its adaptations, the figure serves a signaling function, either to show that someone has been heard or to direct someone's attention, and whatever the circumstances, insisting that it be seen. The gesture of the figure becomes a visual substitute for the aural operations of language. Thus, the fact that the protagonist's hand is the expressive mechanism echoes the hand-centered artistic processes of drawing and painting, and in this sense, the figure seems to allude to the artist himself, if not also the process of artistic expression. It follows very quickly from this point that particularly with the outright addressing of the viewer in *The Wreck*, the figure becomes a meta-pictorial reference to the dual acts of representing and viewing.[119] As if directing the viewer to take in the scene behind him, the signaling fisherman demands that we look at the picture, and imagine in our minds the wreck that cannot be seen. Even further, it is as if the act of painting is some kind of signaling in and

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The third and final possibility comes from Homer himself, who wrote Thomas B. Clarke in 1896, "After all these years I have at last used the subject of that sketch that I promised you, as being the size of and painted at the same time as the 'Eight Bells.' The picture that I have painted is called 'The Wreck,' and I send it to the Carnegie Art Gallery for Exhibition. I did not use this sketch that I am about to send you, but used what I have guarded for years, that is, the subject which your sketch would suggest." Letter to Thomas B. Clarke, 5 October 1896, in Downes, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer*, 188; quoted in Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 338.

[119] Cikovsky and Kelly consider *The Wreck* to follow the pictorial narrative initiated by *The Signal of Distress* (1890), a painting based on several works from Homer's 1881 journey to England on the ship *Parthia*, or perhaps a rescue he witnessed there. Cikovsky and Kelly, *Winslow Homer*, 335-338.

The title itself is the second of Homer's paintings to actually use the word signal (the first being *The Home Signal,* which was the parenthetical title for *Answering the Horn*) and continues the communication theme, but there is much more ambivalence in this later work, as the men on the endangered boat in the background appear to have already been lost. The signal in this case is not a human waving a hand or flag or blowing a bell, but the tattered white flag, and again it is placed deep into the pictorial space, immediately creating a relationship between the foreground and background. This time however, there is action closer to the middle ground, with two sailors climbing up the davits to enter the boat that will be lowered and paddled out to the boat in distress. Most of the men are seen from behind, a kind of refusal or reluctance on Homer's part to face the viewer, or perhaps, a means to engage the viewer, as if we, too, are in the scene among the crowd.

of itself, a mute, diagrammatic language that must be read and decoded by the viewer for a communication to have occurred. While I am reluctant to impose some sort of linear development or teleology on Homer's *oeuvre*, if we are to consider the arc of Homer's invocation of the gesturing figure, then we can see that *The Lookout* clearly departs from the previous depictions. In other words, we come to the inescapable conclusion that the final version of the signaling figure presented to us in *The Lookout* is one that demands to be seen *and heard*.

VI. Coda

From this shifting of the visual to the aural that we find in the iconographical trajectory of the waving figure, I want to consider another arc that precisely reverses this sensorial shift and moves from the aural to the visual. Painted in 1894, when Homer's artistic reputation was secure, *The Artist's Studio in an Afternoon Fog* (1894; fig. 61) depicts Homer's Prout's Neck home, known as the Ark, and to the right, his studio, distinguished by a lightened area for the balcony on which he stood and looked out at the sea for so many years. From this far vantage point, we are given no details of Homer's private world – few architectural features can be seen – just a long-distance, encumbered view. The buildings are merely shown as silhouettes, shimmering with the few glimmers of sun able to pierce the thick fog referred to in the title. Further, the coastal rocks in the foreground set up a barrier of sorts for the beholder, blocking our access to the artist's compound. In fact, though our vision allows us a view of Homer's home and studio, it is strained, not only by distance, but also by fog. In contrast, our view of the studio nearly thirty years prior in *The Studio* (fig. 22) was unfettered: we can see directly into the

artist's quarters and are within arm's reach of the easels and paintings on the walls. In that picture, Homer did not depict himself, nor did he show any of his paintings *per se*, instead he seemed to emphasize the mental and creative aspects of the artistic process, aspects that were likened to specifically aural processes, and, more generally, to the intimate workings of the artist's mind. From this image of listening, sound, and proximity, we move to the later depiction that centers on distance, detachment, and a decidedly pressured kind of looking. This juxtaposition between the earlier and later renderings of the artist's studio encapsulates just how equivocal Homer was towards the sensorial functions of looking and listening in artistic terms, and, in a different sense altogether, how the viewer's relationship with Homer's work constantly shifts from one of intense proximity to protracted remove, and rarely in between.

In this chapter, I have examined these developments, looking at the ways the artist shaped representations of sound and listening in different mediums and genres over the course of three decades, and more specifically how sonic themes allowed Homer to experiment with spatial and pictorial composition, narratival meaning, and the viewer's reception. In his Civil War pictures, the artist uses the very different motifs of music, bullets, and news delivery similarly, to limn the immediate impact of distal events, and simultaneously build and refuse spatial illusion between transmitter and receiver. This latter thematic continues in the dinner horn, bell, and shouting pictures, where the narratives center on the ways sound shapes the workday of rural, industrial, and maritime laborers. More specifically, these paintings are a sustained exploration of visual and aural signaling mechanisms across space that the viewer has to decode in order to read the pictorial composition and process the narratival messages within the works. In such

pictures as *Answering the Horn*, Homer also begins to experiment with how sonic tropes relate to ideas of embodiment and collapses the boundaries between viewer and frame, an experiential effect that is magnified in *The Lookout, All's Well*. And in several significant ways, his artistic enterprise registers telegraphic and telephonic cultures in terms of form and meaning – both tracking and creating ways of representing in paint how two parties communicate over vast distances. Just as the telegraph functioned as, according to Carey, "both a model of and a mechanism for control of the physical movement of things," Homer manipulates culturally specific representations of sound (such as the dinner horn and the bell), along with depictions of foreshortening, depth, and perspective, to initiate movement and displacement in his works.[120]

In effect, these works reconceptualize the relationship between figure and ground at a time when the relationship between self and community was being reconfigured. Discussing how these reconfigurations continue into the twenty-first century, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes, "[T]he gestures and behaviors of individuals have been reshaped from top to toe by the cellular telephone (which the Italians dub the *telefonino*). I have developed an implacable hatred for this apparatus, which has made the relationship between people all the more abstract."[121] Like Agamben, Homer seems to find an abstraction of human relations in long-distance communication – sentiments that the artist must have no doubt felt at one point or another during his time at Prout's Neck. In this vein, his work addresses not only the connections that people seek with one another, but also the ambiguities and gaps that such connections can and cannot

[120] Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 165.

[121] Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 16.

overcome, exposing the isolation inherent in the desire to initiate an act of communication.

Aside from these possible personal motives, the scheme of signaling that Homer gives visual form to throughout his artistic production bears on his professional objectives, and the complex, unspecified terrain of his ideas about reception. He so refused to reveal narrativity, as evidenced by his response to a letter from the Knoedler gallery requesting an explanation of the subject in *The Gulf Stream*:

> You ask me for a full description of my picture of the 'Gulf Stream.' I regret very much that I have painted a picture that requires any description. The subject of this picture is comprised in *its title* & I will refer these inquisitive schoolmam'ms to Lieut Maury. … You can tell these ladies that the unfortunate negro who now is so dazed & parboiled, will be rescued & returned to his friends and home, & ever after live happily.[122]

Homer's sarcasm thinly veils his indignation at the need for a response. He wanted his paintings to connect to and move people, and he always wanted his pictures to speak for themselves (echoed in the quote above by his contempt at having "painted a picture that requires any description"). Yet even though Homer wanted his works to have transparency – something that his illustrations so easily and of course, by design, had to, achieve – his paintings retained an open-endedness and ambiguity. In addition to the "ironic distance" and "narrative defect" that Cikovsky and Kelly find, his works fostered another kind of exclusionary effect, what can best be described as a phenomenological loss, sometimes as obvious as the fact that we cannot really hear the fisherman yell in *The Lookout*, and sometimes in the more subtle experience of the vast distance between the people in *The Dinner Horn* evincing a straining of eye and ear – ultimately, a desperation for proximity. These losses, between painting and viewer in *The Lookout*, and between

122 Goodrich, *Winslow Homer* (1945), 162.

the actors within *The Dinner Horn*, relate to the contradictions between the two major and fulfilling aspects of Homer's artistic output. His paintings could never be like his illustrations, the former category of works were attempts to communicate fraught with yearning and built-in defeat, confounding – indeed perhaps even flourishing – on their narratival shortcomings. Thus, the longing to connect between the actors in the paintings bears traces of Homer's own longing for his works to connect to the beholder. While his illustrations offered him the tracks of word and image as a soluble matrix for artistic expression, his enterprise as a painter was a thinned-out, difficult kind of recompense or coping mechanism for the solitary man of few words.

Homer's artistic strategies, as personal and unique as they are, bear relevance for the broader developments of American modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Not only did his stream-lined, flattened compositions pave the way for the kind of abstracted compositions we find in Joseph Stella's *The Telegraph Pole* (1917) and other works, but his cultivation and dependence on the aural imagination also enacted a complicated relationship between word and image. As we have seen, Homer's paintings thrive on two critical operations, both within the domain of the aural imagination. The first involves the dialectic between eye and ear, which generates tropes of connectivity and displacement, for example, between the farmer and the imagined horn-blower in *Answering the Horn*, and the second involves the quasi-ekphrastic title, which imbues the works with a sense of aurality, a soundtrack, if you will. As we have seen, in many cases, the titles of Homer's paintings carried much of the narratival burden. Well into the twentieth century, artists continued to pressure these two conditions according to the set

of problems they were trying to solve, but the function of the aural imagination started to collapse. For example, Charles Demuth's *The Figure 5 in Gold* (1928; fig. 62), inspired by William Carlos Williams' imagist poem "The Great Figure" (1921), ties together the aural structures of language and perception in a groundbreaking way, and its references to engine sirens, sound waves, and Doppler effects shape a viewing experience inextricably linked to sound. We see the figure five in gold, and we hear the same words in our head. But with the overt, facile representations of sound and language, the aural imagination was somewhat stripped of its role of helping us to see or visualize the unrepresentable.

This idea of a correlation between vision and language would be stretched and ultimately exhausted in the late 1950s and 1960s in the postmodern textual experiments of such artists as Edward Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner. Ruscha's *Oof* (1962; fig. 63), an exacting specimen of typographic font, uses the principal of onomatopoeia to conjoin eye and ear, what Ruscha described as, "an environment for what the word sounded like and looked like at the same time."[123] *Oof* functions as a closed system of signifier and signified - the primal scene, in a sense, of how we learn to read as children and first grasp the merging of letters with sounds. But with the migration of the title to the interior of the art object in works such as *Oof*, with the conflation of title and depicted image, sound inhabited the work of art and no longer had to be conjured in the imagination: looking at the object, we immediately read the word "oof" to ourselves. Instead of the title inflecting the work of art with a sense of sound, as we have seen in so many of Homer's works, language – and along with it, sound – was moved into the canvas. This immediate, unmediated process scales back the way the aural imagination was working in Homer's

[123] Ruscha in Paul Karlstrom, "Interview with Edward Ruscha in His Western Avenue, Hollywood Studio" (1980–81), in *Ruscha, Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*, ed. Alexandra Schwartz (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 19.

works where the visual representation was only an impetus, sound had to be imagined and understood as a multi-level experiential process. In Ruscha's word paintings, the visual representation condenses all these steps and the aural imagination no longer was needed to construct the unrepresentable; there was nothing, it seemed, left for it to do. If there is a trajectory in Homer's work of stretching and pulling the aural imagination to enact experiential and phenomenological effects in the beholder, sound and the aural imagination had reached an endgame of sorts in the painting of Ruscha and others. As seen most clearly in the experiments of John Cage around the same time, artists began to think of sound as an art form in and of itself – equal parts related and not related to this endgame and, in any event, overdetermined – one that could be molded according to the contours of chance, performance, and various ontological conditions.

The irony of this deterritorialization or co-optation of the aural imagination in Demuth's and Ruscha's paintings is that much of art and art history, from the networks among artists, dealers, and buyers, to our consumption in museums, classrooms, and elsewhere, is mediated by the inherently aural structure of language. Because our looking is bounded by our inability to touch, words describing what we see allow us to enter the work, or at least hover close to it. In a sense then, the strata of expression regarding works of art – titles, wall text, audio guides, catalogues, artist statements, dissertations – surround them with an ineffable linguistic, and yes, sonic, residue. And Homer's reluctance to talk about his works then, along with his requests for the public to refrain from poking into his pictures, was more than a deliberate effort to let the works speak for themselves, it was a purposeful exercise in seeing just how much the works could communicate, even signal, on their own terms to the beholder, an exercise that, much to

the artist's consternation, was only partially successful. As a result, it seems that we will never be able to keep our noses – or ears – out of Homer's pictures.

Chapter Two

Technologies of Transcription in Eakins's *Singing a Pathetic Song*

Though Thomas Eakins was a near contemporary of Winslow Homer and similarly shaped the pictorial language of realism to his own ends, the two artists could not be more distinct in terms of personality and the parameters of their artistic ambitions. Unlike Homer, Eakins's life was filled with many colleagues and friendships and he had an insatiable curiosity for scientific knowledge, one that inflected his body of work in sometimes direct, often latent, but always dense ways. In no other range of subjects is this latter point more patent than in the nineteen or so works devoted to musicians and singers that the artist created between 1870 and 1900. Based on his almost forensic observations of human behavior, the performers Eakins painted, according to Elizabeth Johns, appear "to have surrendered their separateness to the spell of what they are doing."[1] Eakins's desire to picture an individual's interiority was one facet of his particular approach to mimesis, a documentation of the psychic and physical dimensions of each sitter so insistent that, for some of his sonic subjects, the artist would have his sitters repeatedly sing and play their instruments throughout their sessions. Indeed, Eakins's project of picturing people in the middle of their musical performances is an agenda of meticulously recording the visual – and, to some degree, aural – coordinates of the human body as sonic subject. Yet in a different sense altogether, Eakins's artistic process also parallels

[1] Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 116. Describing the paintings as portraits first and foremost, Elizabeth Johns finds them also to be "investigations into certain qualities of music itself." Specifically, Johns claims that Eakins revealed music's ability to come from "beneath the rational surface of contemporary life and the apparatus of progress to pull man out of his materiality." Ibid. at 116, 143.

Mrs. Mary Hallock Greenewalt (1903) is a portrait of a musician that does not feature an instrument, and will not be considered in this present study. A pianist renowned for her interpretations of Chopin, Greenewalt invented the color organ later in the twentieth century.

the actions of the musical subjects he portrays, just as the performers translate the musical notations before them into song and instrumental sound, the artist translates or transcribes the living subjects before him into paint. In other words, both in terms of how these works were made and the activities they depict, the musical paintings evince a type of transcription, the act of recording, copying, or transferring and translating data from one form to another. This thematic of transcription was not just limited to the numerous pictures of music-making and singing made by the painter. Throughout his artistic career, Eakins chose to represent subjects engaged in various modes of transcription, most notably writing, lecturing, note-taking, sculpting, even the tallying of points in boxing matches.

To create these works, Eakins relied on a range of transcription systems, some of which were traditional, such as drawing and sculpture, and, some of which were less normative, such as photography, a medium he probably first learned of while in Europe as a young student. Eakins's use of the camera was more than a brief period of experimentation, however; it became a decades-long, sustained engagement and outlet of expression. All in all, nearly one thousand photographic images have been recovered from the artist's home, and this staggering amount does not include what has or may have been lost or destroyed.[2] The artist took photographs of everything around him, his friends, family, pets, studio – even his canvases and, whenever possible, himself. The

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[2] Kathleen A. Foster et al., *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 106. For further discussion of Eakins's photography, see Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, ed., *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and his Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994). In some cases, Eakins created works specifically for photographic purposes. For example, knowing that *The Gross Clinic* was too large to travel to Germany, Eakins created a pencil and ink wash that he sent to photographers in Alsace for their reproduction needs; he attached a note stating, "my drawing was made with the intention of coming out right in a photograph." Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 109.

purposes of these photographs varied: some were for pleasure, others to explore scientific questions about the body, and others still to create paintings. In fact, even before he purchased his own camera in 1880, the artist was incorporating photographs into his painting practices. As early as 1872, the artist employed the method of squaring (a convention of superimposing a grid on an image and then copying each square onto another grid-marked support) to transcribe photographs into paint.[3] For such significant occasions as his first self-portrait in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds* (1873-4; fig. 64a), for example, Eakins used the squaring method to transfer a photograph of himself (fig. 64b) onto the canvas. Time and again, for some of his most powerful works, including *The Gross Clinic* (1875), *William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1876-77), and *The Crucifixion* (1880), the artist looked to photographs in one way or another.[4] In no uncertain terms then, photography was of signal importance to the artist.

Yet for the time in which Eakins lived, it was somewhat unusual for a painter of his ambition to become so involved with the medium. Invented in 1839 and still a relatively new device, the camera was becoming a tool for some painters in the United States and abroad in terms of assessing issues of light and composition, but the dependence on the camera rarely went beyond these boundaries. In many ways, the two mediums (painting and photography) seemed incompatible with one another. Writing

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[3] While in Paris, his teachers urged him to use photographs as study aids for his paintings. W. Douglass Paschall, "The Camera Artist," in *Thomas Eakins*, organized by Darrel Sewell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2001), 240-41.

I should emphasize here that my arguments concerning the thematic of transcription also apply to the numerous photographs Eakins took that never were used for paintings, as well as to his use of the more traditional method of squaring a drawing onto a canvas. The latter, though completely devoid of any technological intervention, still implicated the project of transcription in terms of attendant themes of repetition and mediation, both of which are the concerns of this chapter.

[4] Paschall, "The Camera Artist," in *Thomas Eakins*, 242-43.

about the differences in his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin argued,

> The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web … [T]he picture … [that] the painter obtains is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.[5]

Unbeknownst to Benjamin, these notions of distance and penetration, of totality and fragmentation, had converged in the late nineteenth-century artistic practices of Eakins, who, after years of training in draftsmanship and painting, took his interest in photography one step further and began to trace projected photographs onto his canvases using either a pencil or a stylus to mark the underpaint with tiny incisions or lines almost invisible to the naked eye, as can be seen in this painting and detail enhanced by conservators (figs. 65a and 65b).[6] Conservators have observed these miniscule data in a handful of paintings completed by the artist between the years of 1874 and 1884, and suspect that he used this method to create other works not yet examined, especially those with extant related photographic materials such as *Singing a Pathetic Song* (1881; fig. 66), one of the largest and most visually complex paintings in the music series. Though there has not been a conclusive examination of *Pathetic Song* to confirm their opinions, curator Kathleen Foster and conservator Mark Tucker believe that there is a "strong indication" that the work was completed with the tracing method, particularly because of the existence of numerous photographs of the main figure in mid-song that closely track

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5 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," (originally published in 1936) in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* ed. Donald Preziosi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 439.

6 According to conservators, the confirmed paintings made from projection (as opposed to watercolors) are: *Sailboats Racing on the Delaware* (1874), *Pushing for Rail* (1874), *A May Morning in the Park* (*Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand*) (1879-80) (mixed sources), *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River* (1881), *Mending the* Net (1881), *Arcadia* (c. 1883), *An Arcadian* (c. 1883), and *Swimming* (1884-5) (mixed sources). Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, 225-38.

the painting and were taken by Eakins using a small portable Scovill camera that he had recently purchased.[7] Regardless of whether Eakins specifically resorted to tracing techniques in *Pathetic Song* though, he relied on photography to a significant extent for its creation; and the painting, therefore, cannot be fully understood without taking this aspect of its construction into consideration.

No doubt, Eakins's affinity for the technology of the camera played a part in his extensive use of photography, both in terms of the small number of traced paintings he made and the much more pervasive practice of recording the world around him. Unlike other artists who shied away from technical matters, Eakins gravitated towards issues of science, tinkering with mechanical parts, taking anatomy and dissection courses, and giving papers on such topics as his findings on the mechanics of a horse's leg.[8] But to my mind, the scope and unusual nature of Eakins's turn to photography is another, more extreme, manifestation of the artist's lifelong commitment to the broader project of transcription. This chapter will set out to examine the range of Eakins's endeavors in this regard, most specifically as they present themselves in *Pathetic Song*, but in a number of thematically related works as well. Specifically, I will argue that *Pathetic Song*, and the issues of recording an aural moment in time that its completion entailed, bears the literal

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[7] E-mail correspondence between author and Kathleen A. Foster, Robert L. McNeil, Jr. Curator of American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Mark Tucker, conservator, Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 31, 2006.

The camera came with three lenses and three dry plates. Foster speculates that Eakins probably had his own darkroom. Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 110. Speeding up the steps of exposure and developing, the Scovill camera boasted a new dry-plate technology that eliminated many of the cumbersome aspects of the wet-plate collodian process, and the simplified device appealed to many individuals, novices and professionals alike. As Foster notes, the Scovill camera intrigued the technophile Eakins. Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 110. She adds that Eakins must have had contacts with the Philadelphia Photographic Society or been aware of the latest developments through the journal, *Philadelphia Photographer*. Ibid.

[8] According to Lloyd Goodrich, at the age of seventeen, Eakins built a model steam engine, which actually ran. Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, published for the National Gallery of Art, 1982), I: 8.

and metaphorical traces of Eakins's comprehensive engagement with photography and the enterprise of transcription. Further, I will investigate how *Pathetic Song*, and its depiction of piano-playing, pressures a highly charged, albeit tacit, connection between Eakins's use of photographs and period discourses surrounding the phonograph and the piano-based typewriter, technologies of transcription that involved sound either through design, function, or both.

Even though Eakins embraced technical innovation throughout his life, it is unknown whether he utilized either of these sound-based technologies. He was probably aware of them, however, given his extensive associations with the scientific circles of his time – including several patrons and sitters who were connected to innovations in typewriting and phonography in one way or another – and his numerous visits to the technology exhibits at the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris and the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, where the typewriter and its antecedent, for example, were several stalls away from the sewing machines and pianos that the artist wrote home about.[9] But then again, attempting to pin down the ways that Eakins negotiated and appropriated these devices in his daily life, while certainly useful, only gets us so far in

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[9] Eakins's close friend Fairman Rogers owned one of the earliest prototypes of the typewriter and suggested improvements to the inventors. Edgar F. Smith, *Biographical Memoir of Fairman Rogers, 1833-1900, Read Before National Academy of Sciences, November 22, 1906*, (Philadelphia: 1906), 106. Eakins's path crossed with another inventor of a typewriter device when painting the portrait of Professor Henry Rowland in 1897, the same year that the physicist invented a typewriter-based telegraph machine. "Rowland Telegraph Abroad – Baltimore Multiplex Printing System to be Installed in Italy," *New York Times*, January 28, 1902. Rowland had also worked with the phonograph in the late 1870s. Also in the 1890s, Eakins painted the portrait of anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing (1895), who began to use the phonograph around 1890 to record the language of the Zuni tribe he was studying. As Erika Brady explains, according to one firsthand account, "Cushing had a graphophone from which he extracted the words of Zuni, Apache, and Navajo dances …" Erika Brady, *The Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1999), 57. Indeed, by the 1890s, many ethnographers were using the phonograph to record the language of the cultures they were studying. To prepare for the portrait, Eakins had Cushing perform various Zuni rituals and incantations.

Describing his time at the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris, Eakins wrote about seeing the sewing machine, which was in class 57, and Sweet's typographic compositor, a piano-based commercial type-setter, was in class 59 nearby, a proximity that suggests that Eakins saw Sweet's machine.

understanding the technological thematics within his paintings. A case in point is the clear disconnect between Eakins's commitment to the system and ideals of photography and the fact that the artist never once treaded near painting the act of photography on canvas: never once did he feature a camera in a genre scene, or portray a photographer in his series of important inventors and thinkers. Given this general avoidance of depicting the technology of photography that he used so pervasively, looking for tight relationships between Eakins's quotidian habits and technologies of sound, or, more to the point, direct representations of such mechanisms in his *oeuvre* will be of limited use in considering the parameters of the artist's engagement with the technological issues of his time. Rather, these omissions suggest that we must delve deeper into Eakins's paintings, and expand our lines of inquiry to consider the more latent, byzantine, even sublimated, forms of technological signification and narratives.

Further, it seems highly improbable that Eakins would be able to maintain an impenetrable divide between the values, structures, and principles of his photographic practices and those of his realist project of painting, not only because of the depth and breadth of his involvement with the camera, but also because of the common aim of recording everyday life that both his photographic and painting enterprises shared. As I will demonstrate, the phonograph and typewriter also overlapped with the camera (and the act of painting, for that matter) in this sense: all were mediating devices that recorded or transcribed an individual's sensorial impressions and experiences in a permanent form. In particular, period inventors and writers repeatedly emphasized the parallel between the phonographic recording of sound and the photographic recording of vision. With this in mind, I would suggest the transcription discourses of photography on one hand, and

phonography and typewriting on the other, intersect most critically and, to some degree, figuratively, in *Pathetic Song*. Through the painting's photographic origins, and aural subject matter and iconography, the artist sought to understand, even if subconsciously, the inextricable connections and gaps between the transcribing of sound and that of vision – connections and gaps that many in the Victorian era were themselves trying to understand. In this vein, this chapter will spend a considerable amount of time examining Eakins's visual strategies of transcription in addition to his attempts to picture aurality, and will explore how *Pathetic Song* interrogates the ways that visual forms of representation could record the invisible aspects of the human voice in song.

Published years before experts discovered the extent of Eakins's exploration of photography, Michael Fried's essay on Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* argues for the importance of the thematics of writing – its materiality, its visibility, etc. – in the artist's *oeuvre*, particularly in psycho-biographical and formal terms. Specifically, Fried asserts that Eakins's art evinces a tension "between the horizontally oriented 'space' of writing/drawing and the vertically oriented 'space' of painting."[10] Even though he claims at the outset that his discussion is "concerned with what it means for writing, as part of a historically specific network of cultural practices, to be something that can be painted," Bill Brown and Mark Seltzer have each pointed out how Fried's argument is ahistorical and tautological.[11] The fact of the matter is that, during Eakins's time, writing no longer

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[10] Michael Fried, "Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*," in *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xiii.

[11] Ibid., xiv; Bill Brown, "Writing, Race, and Erasure: Michael Fried and the Scene of Reading," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992), 387-402; Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Focusing on Fried's analysis of tropes of writing in the work of Stephen Crane in the companion essay to *The Gross Clinic*, Brown argues that Fried's discussion of Crane displays "a terminological means of sequestering literature from its culture." Brown, "Writing, Race, and Erasure," 388.

adhered to a static set of practices and ideologies: it was neither solely horizontal nor solely accomplished by a hand-held instrument. Along these lines, Seltzer mentions that Fried constructs an argument that fails to consider several significant period discourses in the late nineteenth century, including the "new technologies of writing at the turn of the century and their effects."[12] My aim here is not so much to revise Fried's thesis as to propose an entirely new one altogether. More than an obsession with the dialectic between writing and painting, Eakins's art insisted on the broader project of recording and copying what was before him: in pursuit of this project, the artist utilized a wide range of practices and methodologies. Equally important, this chapter will demonstrate the ways that Eakins's artistic production was inflected with an ambivalence about the time in which he lived. The artist painted many works containing handwritten script and an equal number that display mechanized type or machine-printed words, which suggests an individual who was bridging the eras of handicraft and mechanization, at once hewing to traditional means of representing what was before him and enthralled by the newer possibilities for transcription.[13]

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[12] Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 174-75, n. 8.

[13] While there are many important questions surrounding Eakins's practice, especially in light of the ways photography problematizes vision, memory, and reality, I am only focusing here on Eakins's copying of photographs and related ideas such as transcription. My inquiry is thus more along the lines of the questions David Lubin posed in his review of the 2001 exhibition originating at the Philadelphia Museum of Art: "So what if Eakins employed photography in the manner now detected? How does this revelation about the process by which he made a handful of his paintings alter the way that these or other paintings by him generate meanings of a social, aesthetic, or philosophical nature?" David Lubin, "Projecting an Image: The Contested Cultural Identity of Thomas Eakins," review of *Thomas Eakins: American Realist*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, October 4, 2001 – January 6, 2002, *Art Bulletin* vol. 84, no. 3 (September 2002), 510-521.

There are thirteen works with machine-printed matter: *Home Scene* (1870), *Portrait of Professor Rand* (book) (1874), *Baby at Play* (1876), *Portrait of Brinton* (trash can, books) (1876), *Singing a Pathetic Song* (1881), *Professionals at Rehearsal* (1883), *The Artist's Wife and Setter Dog* (1884-8) (Japanese picture book), *The Agnew Clinic* (1889), *Taking the Count* (1898), *Between Rounds* (1899), *Portrait of Frank Jay St. John* (1900), *Professor William Smith Forbes* (1905) (document), and *Portrait of William Thompson* (1910). There seems to be a near identical number – twelve, to be exact – of works with hand-written matter: *Street Scene in Seville* (1870), *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871) (on boat), *The Chess Players* (1876), *William Rush* (1877), *Sewing* (from early 1890), *The Crucifixion* (1880), *The Writing*

After setting out the artist's background and scientific interests, this chapter will lay out in an expository fashion some of the important problems presented by *Pathetic Song* and Eakins's photographic pursuits related to the painting, proceeding then to examine a range of works grouped according to thematics most densely presented by each figure in the painting, the stopping of the voice in the singer, the binding of ear, eye, and hand in the pianist, and the status of double-handedness in the cellist.

I. An Artistic and Scientific Mind

Eakins was born in Philadelphia in 1844, the oldest and only boy among the four children of Benjamin and Caroline Eakins. Benjamin Eakins was a penmanship instructor and writing master, and wholeheartedly supported his son's artistic proclivities, financially and otherwise. During his high school years, Eakins demonstrated an extraordinary talent at draftsmanship and, after a brief period of assisting his father in teaching penmanship, Eakins enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts to become an artist. During his four years there, as well as the following three years in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts, Eakins undertook rigorous academic training in drawing and painting, particularly with his French instructors, the noted academic painters, Jean-Léon Gérôme and Léon Bonnat.[14]

While studying in Paris, the young artist also attended the 1867 Universal Exposition at least seventeen times. He visited so frequently, though, not solely to view art for, as Lloyd Goodrich puts it, "the technological exhibits interested him as much as

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Master (1882), *The Concert Singer* (1890), *Portrait of Professor Henry Rowland* (1897), *William Rush* (1908), *Frank Jay St. John* (1900), and *Professor William Smith Forbes* (1905).

[14] Eakins also studied briefly with the sculptor Augustin-Alexandre Dumont while in Paris.

the artistic."[15] In a letter to his father dated May 31, 1867, for example, the artist opines on the craftsmanship of various inventions like the locomotive, sewing machine, and piano:

> The Locomotive the Press speaks about is by far the finest there. I can't tell you how mean the best English French and Belgian ones are alongside of it … One of the most amusing things in the American department is the soda water fountains … No people will think of competing with the Americans for sewing machines. There must be a specimen of nearly every kind here. … The heaviest machinery is the French, some of the engines are the largest I ever saw. … There is no doubt our pianos will take the premiums or have already…[16]

As this letter suggests, Eakins was more than just passing time at the exposition, he was interested in, if not fascinated by, the inventions displayed. More important, however, is the discrepancy between Eakins's marveling of the technologies in his letters and the utter avoidance of these machines in his artistic production, and as I will argue, his depictions of decidedly retrograde activities speak as much about his views on the past as they do about the technology-laden present and future.[17]

After returning to the States in 1870, Eakins painted a number of outdoor subjects of men rowing, fishing, sailing, or playing baseball (two of which include two self-portraits), as well as several domestic scenes, where members of his family, usually female, are seen in various poses of leisure, including playing the piano.[18] During this time, the artist returned to live in the home he was raised in at 1729 Mount Vernon Street.

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[15] Eakins's exhibitor's pass at the Hirshhorn shows that he visited the exposition 6 days in September, five in October, and five in November. Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 133.

[16] Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, May 31, 1867, Goodrich Papers, Eakins Research Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[17] The fact that Eakins marveled at sewing machines but later depicted his sister Maggie (*Spinning* (1881)) by an antiquated spinning wheel bespeaks Eakins's conscious avoidance of painting new technologies, as well as a manipulation of notions of temporality that these older devices signified.

[18] Eakins's two self-portraits, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871) and *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds* (1874), are, for the most part, no different than his depictions of his family and friends in that they place the artist in the act of doing something. With muscles flexed, hands in mid-motion, and eyes fixed in deep concentration, the artist shows himself as a thinking, yet fully corporeal, outdoorsman interacting with male companions.

Except for a brief period after he married, Eakins would continue to live in his parents' home for the rest of his life, painting in the third-floor studio that his father provided for him.

By 1876, Eakins was exhibiting a significant number of works in the States and abroad, as well as serving as a teaching assistant in both drawing and dissection at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His knowledge and expertise would soon earn him the position of professor of drawing and painting at the Pennsylvania Academy, and quickly thereafter, in 1882, he was appointed the Academy's director. The next few years would be both Eakins's best and worst: in 1884, he married Academy student and talented artist Susan McDowell, and in 1886, he was forced to resign from the position of Academy director after taking the loincloth off a male model in anatomy class, a method of study that Eakins had been advocating since he joined the Academy. In the years leading up to the scandal, Eakins encountered more and more resistance to his pedagogy of observing and drawing the human body unclothed. Stripped of income, respect, and stature by this incident, Eakins went into a deep depression and traveled to the Dakota Territory for reinvigoration. When he returned, he faced a sharp declension in patrons and the loss of formal employment, and began to paint the portraits of family, friends, students, and citizens of the Philadelphia area, creating a body of work that many hail as the most significant in nineteenth-century American art.

Eakins's wife, much like the artist's sisters, was a talented pianist, and the couple had many friends who were musicians. The pair regularly held musical functions in their home and attended concerts in Philadelphia, where Eakins would be known to cry when

listening to chamber music.[19] As colleague Leslie Miller recalled, music deeply moved the artist, both aurally and visually:

> He was fond of music, and used to take great pleasure in coming to my house … either to enjoy our own Sunday evening musicales, or to watch and listen to the old Symphony Society, - the predecessor of the present Philadelphia Orchestra, - which used to rehearse in my lecture room every Saturday evening. I say 'watch' as well as listen because he used to say that what he liked especially was to *see* the men play.[20]

As Miller suggests, Eakins's interest in music was not a purely sonic one, but one informed by the desire to observe the musical techniques as well as the psychic transformations that music visibly induced, a combination that his paintings duly convey in their efforts to pictorialize the visual and, in effect, aural, physiognomy of his sitters.

Matching Eakins's passion for music was his thirst for scientific knowledge, which only intensified during his years of instruction at the Pennsylvania Academy. As much emphasizing the traditional training that he received at the École des Beaux-Arts as introducing a rigorous scientific-based agenda (including the study of human anatomy, the mathematics of perspective, and a somewhat controversial focus on photography), Eakins's pedagogy at the Academy transformed the institution into, in the words of Foster, "the most progressive art school in the Western hemisphere."[21] Like his innovative approach to the curriculum, Eakins's drawing instruction was similarly a balance of standard exercises and unconventional methodologies, such as using lantern slides to illustrate his lectures and, as one student recollected, a discussion of perspectival

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19 Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 115.

20 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, II: 83.

21 Kathleen A. Foster, "The Tools of Art: The Drawing Manual of Thomas Eakins," *A Drawing Manual by Thomas Eakins*, ed. and with introduction by Kathleen A. Foster (New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2005), 10. Despite the meticulousness in teaching drawing, Foster observes that Eakins "didn't really like to draw, [and] … hurried his students into working with brush and paint." Ibid., 9.

accuracy that involved, "an elaborate mechanical construction which involved a wire screen, thread, and squares drawn on the floor."[22]

During his time as a drawing instructor, Eakins began drafting a guide to drawing, tentatively titled *A Drawing Manual,* that he subsequently abandoned after his forced resignation. Nearly a century later, curators and archivists at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts have carefully reconstructed the text after recovering key documents in what is now known as the Charles Bregler collection. *A Drawing Manual* provides significant insights into Eakins's views on drawing and picture-making, and adumbrates the artist's equipoise between traditional discourses and more marginal ones. For example, as Eakins stated in his first principal: "A perspective drawing is readily made by tracing on a window pane. Changes are produced by varying the relation of the distances between the eye and the picture plane and the objects drawn."[23] Though the painting concept of a window plane was hardly anything new, the artist advocated precise measurement and the somewhat overlooked practice of mechanical drawing as one of the central means to achieve a proper illusionistic image.

As exemplified by Rembrandt Peale's twinning of drawing and writing in his 1834 work, *Graphics*, draftsmanship had a distinct relationship to writing in artistic instruction; but drawing also shared much with mechanics, a point emphasized in John Gadsy Chapman's well-known treatise, *American Drawing-Book* (1847).[24] In the work, Chapman exhorts his readers to see that, "[Art] gives strength to the arm of the

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[22] Paschall, "The Camera Artist," in *Thomas Eakins*, 248; Foster, "The Tools of Art," in *A Drawing Manual*, 10.

[23] Thomas Eakins, "Chapter 1: Linear Perspective - Tracing on a Window Plane," in *A Drawing Manual*, 47.

[24] Rembrandt Peale, *Graphics, The Art of Accurate Delineation, A System of School Exercise, for the Education of the Eye and the Training of the Hand, as Auxiliary to Writing, Geography, and Drawing* (Philadelphia: E.C. & J. Biddle, 1850); Amy Werbel, "Thomas Eakins: Last of the Art Crusaders," in *A Drawing Manual*, 28.

mechanic… From the anvil of the smith and the workbench of the joiner, to the manufacturer of the most costly productions of ornamental art, it is ever at hand with its powerful aid … [to] produce whatever the wants or the tastes of society may require."[25] Mechanical drawing, one of the subjects Eakins studied as a student at Central High School (along with optics), was grounded in mathematics and isometric studies. The text assigned to Central students in this area was *A Course of Linear Drawing, Applied to the Drawing of Machinery* by the French civil engineer A. Cornu. With the overarching goal of training students to draw objects that would be manufactured, Cornu demonstrated how one of the most significant tools for a draftsman was measurement, a premise that Eakins adopted for picture-making. As Amy Werbel notes, "Eakins's insistence on correct measurement in his treatise, although informed by the larger context of the industrial revolution, aimed toward the creation of more convincing pictorial illusions."[26] For our purposes, Eakins's reliance on mechanics is significant because it suggests another sphere – in this case, an engagement with the visual and mechanical issues of manufacturing – in which the artist's interests in transcription overlapped with the technological issues of his day. Indeed, particularly because he was engaged in tracing practices during the same period that he was drafting the drawing manual, it seems that Eakins was self-conscious of the disparateness between nature and mechanics, artistic and scientific production, as evidenced by his comment in the drawing manual, "When a man makes a machine he moves a straight line along a straight line or a circle in a circle. His joints are mostly round holes with round pins in them. His sublime effort is the

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[25] Werbel, "Thomas Eakins: Last of the Art Crusaders," in *A Drawing Manual*, 28. The opposing forces of art and mechanics in Eakins's work can be seen as part of a broader, contemporary debate concerning the tensions between art-making and instrumentality in American art.

[26] Ibid., 31. As Werbel notes, "Philadelphia's profitable manufacturing industry was in desperate need of local draftsmen to produce drawings for machinists." Ibid., 42, n. 10.

surface of a cog wheel. Yet how different even this from the surfaces of Nature's joints."[27]

II. Painting and Taking Pictures

During this engagement with the seemingly contradictory practices of drafting the drawing manual and using photography and tracing technologies, Eakins began work on *Singing a Pathetic Song*, which draws on all of these divergent methodologies. In this section, I will lay out several of the more fundamental issues existing within the painting before turning to the exact parameters of the artist's photographic practices.

Singing a Pathetic Song

Created during one of the most stable and productive periods in his life, *Singing A Pathetic Song* (fig. 66) ties together the various strands of Eakins's artistic enterprise. The work is a multi-figure portrait in its depiction of the noted Philadelphia cellist C. F. Stolte and two of Eakins's art students, Margaret Harrison (singing), and future wife Susan MacDowell (playing the piano). And as the vast number of preparatory documents attest, it is an exploration of the human body in song, with the voice, in addition to the piano and cello, as instrument. Last but not least, the work also shows Eakins's desire to work out the disparate issues of transcription in the shifts from mental visualization to photograph to paint.

The figures are presented in somewhat linear fashion, with Harrison placed in the foreground and brilliantly illuminated by the raking light coming in from Eakins's studio window. Set to be married that year, the thirty-year-old Harrison stands with an air of

[27] Thomas Eakins, "Appendix II: Notes on the Differential Action of Certain Muscles Passing More Than One Joint," in *A Drawing Manual*, 110.

maturity and gravitas necessary to sing the pathetic song referenced in the title. Wearing a lace-trimmed silk dress with an intricate structure of pleats and ruffles, she holds a large musical score with both hands and looks off at an angle from the viewer. With the cropped foreground, the viewer is drawn close into the intimate setting and becomes part of the listening audience, an effect that comports with the nature of the song referenced in the title. Pathetic songs were hugely popular during this time, usually centering on a narrator recounting her or his woeful tale of misfortune or loss, with the musical accompaniment either intensifying or diffusing the emotions at the appropriate moments.[28] Though the accompanying musicians do not receive as much light and attention as Harrison, there is nonetheless a cohesiveness, however thin it may be, among the three in the painting, in part because they are grouped together in the relative center of the picture, facing the same direction (which offers us a fairly clear view of each figure's right ear), and holding their right arms in comparable positions. In the incredibly adept representation of the pianist listening for the notes that Harrison sings, too, Eakins preserves the unity of the group. At the same time, Eakins emphasizes the individuality of each member of the trio, as Elizabeth Johns draws out in her description of the scene:

> The pianist turns slightly toward the singer, sensitive to the slightest pause or change of dynamic level that would call for her mirroring it in her accompaniment, and the cellist focuses intently on the score of his obligato (a melodic line that paralleled or complimented that of the singer), the fingers of his left hand stopping notes high in the register of the strings, the fingers of his right hand holding the bow with precision.[29]

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[28] For further discussion of pathetic songs, see Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 134-135, and n. 34 in particular.

[29] Ibid., 133-34.

Yet despite the successfulness of the composition and rendering of the figures, the work has a bipolarity to it, with several powerful dispersive effects and competing forces that resist reconciliation.

One of the most discernible tensions involves opposing modes of visibility, as evidenced by the formal discrepancy between the luminous treatment of the vocalist and the dull chiaroscuro of the pianist and cellist. As can be seen in this detail (fig. 67), like the mottled wallpaper behind them, Susan MacDowell and C.F. Stolte are painted with relatively little color modulation and a flatness of form. The bodies of the musicians literally fuse with the fixtures and background: the black color of their clothing in particular contributes to their blending in with the other darkened aspects of the composition, including the piano, the stools on which they sit, and the tall cabinet on which the large vase sits at the left edge of the picture. In contrast to this obfuscation, Harrison is bathed in such sharp lighting that, among other things, the various drapings, wrinkles, and articulated ruffles of her silk gown gain a sculptural, almost animated, plasticity. The tautness of her hairstyle, the smoothness of her skin, the contours of her face and neck – all can be made out with relative ease. It seems surprising, then, that neither musician looks at the singer who so demands to be seen. The cellist focuses on the musical score, the pianist directs her ear towards Harrison instead. Despite the acuity of the singer's image – and by extension, the materiality of her presence – in the painting, seeing her is not required by her colleagues (indeed, in some ways, the painting can be readily imagined without her there, and conversely, without the musicians); and her hyper-delineated body becomes a somewhat odd moment of contradiction within the work.

The depth and range of Eakins's talents surely could have overcome these problematic aspects of the picture if the artist so desired. The disjunctive treatment of the figures seems deliberate and purposeful, signifying two separate set of issues, one more particular to the painting, and the other, a broader set of problems that Eakins was working through. On the level of the painting's subject matter, these contrastive modes of seeing, between the singer in the foreground and the musicians in the background, visually codify the aural topography of hearing the human voice accompanied by music – in this case, the sharpness of words articulated against the lyrical background of a softly modulating cello and piano playing the melody of the pathetic song. But on another equally important, technical level, the divergent visibilities track the fragmented nature of Eakins's photographic method, which, as I shall more fully describe in the next section, render the ostensibly traced area of the canvas in high focus and detail, while the other parts of the canvas retain the quality of a highly finished oil study. To put it another way, *Pathetic Song* preserves the different methodologies and sources Eakins likely utilized to complete the picture: the photographed Harrison remains photographic in the painting while the cellist and pianist remain, one could say, more painterly.

Another incongruity of vision can be found in the juxtaposition between the musical score in Harrison's hands and the non-visible texts for the musicians.[30] We can barely discern the text on the piano ledge, with only an upturned corner visible (fig. 68), and the cellist's score is completely obstructed by Harrison's body, an obfuscation that is unsettling not only because the cellist stares so intently at something we cannot see, but also because the musical score governs the entire concert. Though the singer's sheet

[30] Both Foster and Fried focus on the disjunctive views of the singer and musicians. Fried, *Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration,* 73-74. Foster describes the pictorial contradiction specifically as a "spotlight against void." *Eakins Rediscovered*, 44.

music is prominent, we only have an oblique view of it, requiring the viewer to expand the blurry musical notations on the page to imaginary melodious notes that fill the painting -- a magnification of paper and imagination not unlike the small piece of wallpaper tacked up behind Harrison in the studio photograph taken by Eakins (fig. 69) being unfurled as the entire backdrop in the painted, constructed scene.

A secondary tension implicated in this leitmotif of divergent visibilities is that of fragmentation and coherence. As the subject of the painting intimates, the disparate sounds of the instruments and human voice amalgamate in rhythm and tune to comprise the polyphonic pathetic song. To some extent, each figure seems fragmented from the other, with the emphasis of a singular sensory organ in each individual, seeing (shown most intensely in the cellist), hearing (with the pianist), and of course, the intonation of the human voice (in the vocalist), and this suggests the necessary, albeit disjunctive, collaboration of all of these faculties to create a single form of representation. Fusing the mechanical devices with the bodies, Eakins presents a highly compressed moment of human sensorial collaboration, individuals perspicaciously using their bodies and cognitive faculties to make music – a non-visual, but nonetheless artistic, form of creative expression. Perhaps because of the fragmented nature of this perspicacity, several scholars have noted the phenomenological incongruities the painting engenders. For example, Fried comments:

> [I]t has always seemed to me that the singer has been represented holding the final note in her song, and that if only one were sufficiently familiar with the sentimental repertoire of the day, as well as knowledgeable about the movements of the mouth and throat as they form specific notes and sounds, *one would be able to determine – in effect to see – the precise tones filling the shadowed room*."[31]

[31] Fried, "Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration," 73 (emphasis supplied).

Pushing Fried's assertion further, it is almost as if the problems of seeing and listening that the work so readily pressures – we are almost straining to see the musicians, the pianist is almost straining to hear the precise notes sung – parallel the challenges and contradictions inherent in depicting an aural subject in the mute medium of painting.

Perhaps because of this overall tenor of irreconcilability, some critics of the day did not respond favorably to the picture, Eakins's sole submission to the Society of American Artists in March 1881. Even though one writer found the singer to have "the expression of an intelligent soul transforming what is popularly considered ugliness into beauty," Eakins's friend Earl Shinn commented that the figure appeared to be, "executing a song with the fixity and rigidity of taxidermy."[32] For others, however, the sincerity of the scene was appealing, for example, Leslie Miller found the work to be Eakins "at his very best," adding, "There is no nonsense anywhere, but plenty of downright earnest sentiment. There is nothing in the whole collection that seems quite so genuine and sincere."[33] Echoing this remark, Mariana Van Rensselaer found the work to be "impressive" due to the artistic techniques but also because it was "absolutely true to nature, – a perfect record of the life amid which the artist lives."[34]

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[32] "Art Notes. New York. – American Art Gallery," *The Art Journal*, n.s., vol. 7 (May 1881), 57-8; cited in Marc Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 110; Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn]. "Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," *The Art Amateur*, vol. 4, no. 6 (May 1881), 117; cited in Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 110. Shinn's comment, like those regarding several of Eakins's other paintings, seems to pick up on the photographic qualities contained within, particularly photography's acute stopping of time and vision.

[33] L[eslie] W. Miller, "Art in Philadelphia. The Fifty-Third Annual Exhibition at the Academy," *The American Architect and Building News*, vol. 12, no. 361 (November 25, 1882), 253; cited in Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 111.

[34] M[ariana] G[riswold] van Rensselaer, "The New York Art Season, " *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 286 (August 1881), 198-99; cited in Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 110.

Taking and Tracing Pictures

Though she probably had no knowledge of Eakins's photographic studies for *Pathetic Song*, Van Rensselaer's use of the words "record" and "true to nature," allude to the photographic realism of Eakins depiction. In the array of extant preparatory photographs taken by the artist in his third floor studio, Harrison can be seen dutifully complying with what Foster characterizes as Eakins's "single-minded interest" in her.[35] There are eleven different negatives related to the painting in the Bregler collection, five of which show Harrison in the full-length pose seen in the painting, another three showing her at half-length (as can be seen in this photograph, fig. 70), and another three from the bust and above, either standing or seated, profile or full face.[36] Though there is a very close relationship between Harrison's figure in the photographs and the painting (see figs. 71a and 71b for comparison), no exact source survives for *Pathetic Song*; that is, none of the extant images *exactly* repeats all the minute contours and modeling of the singer in the painting. Thus, as mentioned earlier, while experts believe that there is a strong likelihood that work was made with the tracing technique, it seems plausible that Eakins completed the painting using a combination of any number of methods -- life studies, squaring, and tracing – all of which are nonetheless transcriptions in their own right.[37] The watercolor version of *Pathetic Song* (fig. 72), however, which is one-ninth the size of the oil, has been conclusively identified as a product of the tracing method.[38]

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35 Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 116.

36 Three of the full-length photographs include the canvas. Foster speculates as to why Eakins took so many photographs: "perhaps he was told that his principal sitter, Margaret Harrison, could not pose for long. Even more likely, he was overcome by the busyness of her elaborate silk dress but committed, in principle, to documenting every ruffle." Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 114.

37 Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 184.

38 The sheet was given to Harrison apparently as compensation for modeling, a practice that the artist did with other works such as *Starting Out After Rail* (bartered for a boat). Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 96, n. 105. There is also an oil study for *Singing a Pathetic Song*, that shows the dress, figure and pose in

Several photographs in particular offer insight into the development of the painting. The first is a long view of Harrison in the studio (fig. 69) that shows a portion of Eakins's painting in progress in the foreground; on what can be seen of the canvas, the figure of Harrison is blocked in, while the rest is incomplete. The early placement of Harrison's figure suggests her importance in the composition even at this early stage.[39] According to Foster, Eakins rarely deviated from his initial conceptualization of an image: "once his idea was confirmed by the sketch, further work simply pressed toward the more perfect realization of this image, drawing reality into reconciliation with concept."[40] Comparing the photograph of Eakins's studio to the finished work, we can see how Eakins replaces the chair and desk with the stool and piano in the painting. Also visible in the photograph is a framed reproduction of Gérôme's *The Two Augurs* (*Deux Augures N'ont Jamais Pu se Regarder sans Rire*) (1861) on the rear wall of his studio, under which, though not visible in the reproduction, is scrawled the name "Tom Eakins."[41] It is unclear whether Eakins retained the Gérôme work in *Pathetic Song* and simply changed the frame; nonetheless, he allocates the space for a painting of some sort, and thereby obliquely references the work of his painting mentor.[42] As can be seen in

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relatively same terms as finished oil painting, which, again, was not unusual, for as Bregler commented, "A most unusual characteristic of Eakins was that when he made a sketch for a painting or portrait he never made any basic change from his first conception that he made in the sketch." Charles Bregler to Lawrence A. Fleischman, 23 November 1955 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Eakins Archive), cited in Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 246.

[39] In its double, even triple (model, painting, photograph), references to the process of representing, Eakins's photograph functions as a powerful exegesis of the operations of realist painting – a "meta-photograph" of sorts – and deserves further inquiry.

[40] Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 200. Susan Eakins, the artist's wife, described the process as follows: "Often in starting a portrait he would make a small sketch of the subject, then with cross lines transfer it to the large canvas – by this means saving time for himself and the sitter." Susan MacDowell Eakins to Mrs. Lewis R. Dick (draft, c. 1930), cited in Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 200.

[41] Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 114. This is not readily visible in the photograph, but a discussion, as well as a reproduction, of the image can be found in Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 32-33.

[42] An augur was a soothsayer in the classical world, especially ancient Rome, who would read signs or omens such as the flight of birds to determine issues of national interest. Gérôme's painting won the

another photograph of *Pathetic Song* (which appears very close to its final state) in the Bregler collection (fig. 73), the musical notations, signature, and picture frame were the finishing touches. From this photograph, we can also discern that Eakins altered the face and clothing of Susan MacDowell after the photograph was taken, while keeping her pose intact.[43]

Eakins's method can be briefly summarized as follows: according to conservators, the artist would first obtain a glass slide of a photograph (which was relatively easy and inexpensive to do) taken either by him or someone else, place it in a magic lantern or other projection device (such as a catoptric lantern) that was positioned relatively close to the canvas, and would then, sometimes with a magnification lens, mark the contours of the image with tiny horizontal and vertical lines using a pencil or, as is the case for the figures in *Mending the Net* (1882; fig. 65), inscribe a needle-like stylus into the actual paint layers itself.[44] This latter method with a stylus meant that *no drawing was ever done*, either on paper as a study beforehand, or on the support. Working in his darkened studio, Eakins would have to cover intermittently the projector's lens to assess his progress and re-observe the details and shading in the reference photographs. He would trace quickly, not differentiating between major and minor contours. Conservators Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman also note that the artist did not merely draw the marks onto the canvas, but that, "in a number of cases, Eakins renewed datum lines that he had drawn in

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grand medal of honor at the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris, and the work obviously held personal meaning for Eakins.

[43] Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 405.

[44] For a discussion of Eakins's early exposure to photography, and tracing, see Paschall, "The Camera Artist," in *Thomas Eakins*, 240-41. Magic lanterns were inexpensive and commonly used for parlor entertainment throughout the 1860s. The father of Eakins's friend Henry Schreiber, Franz George, was a "pioneer" in using the magic lantern in early 1850s. Ibid. at 412, n. 19.

As this summary of Eakins's method suggests, Fried's characterization of the vertical spaces of painting and the horizontal surfaces of drawing becomes complicated, if not diluted, by Eakins's maneuvers of marking the upright canvas with pencil or stylus.

pencil at an earlier stage by incising them into the paint," a technique of incision or inscribing with a significance I shall explore further into the chapter.[45] Additionally, for certain works, Eakins would trace from several different photographs and combine them into a single composition.[46]

Interestingly enough, Eakins went to great lengths in many instances to make sure the tracing marks, as opposed to ones made by traditional squaring techniques, were not visible.[47] There was no doubt a general atmosphere of hostility to the new technology of tracing photographs among Eakins's contemporaries, who argued that relying on a photograph impaired the artist's creativity and imagination and was tantamount to cheating. In an 1883 letter in *The Studio*, one writer laments, "it is doubtless a surer, and it is certainly a much easier way, to paint from … photographs than from nature itself … [but] … we are not after all as much artists as when we do our own drawing and stand simply in our own thoughts."[48] The writer goes on to demand full disclosure by the artists using photographic methods so that others relying on more conventional methods would not be compared with them.[49] Yet for decades, photography was impinging on, if not displacing, the aims of drawing, a notion popularized by William Henry Fox Talbot's photographic book, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46).[50] As one Parisian artist exclaimed in the 1860s, "The old system of drawing, by which a man's stature must be eight times the

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45 Tucker and Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, 409, n. 28.

46 For a full discussion of Eakins's tracing methodologies, see Tucker and Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, 225-238.

47 Ibid., 409, n. 39.

48 Ibid., 408, n. 7. An 1875 article in *The Magic Lantern* discusses making enlargements for oil paintings. Ibid., 409, n. 22.

49 Ibid., 408, n. 7.

50 William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969) (originally published 1844-1846).

length of his head, could not stand beside the absolute verity of the photograph."[51] Indeed, the ability of the photograph to capture "reality" compelled many to hail its advances while mobilizing painters to defend their artistic goals. Beyond artists, many of the active thinkers of the day weighed in on the issues surrounding photography vis-à-vis painting. Edgar Allen Poe, for example, argued that:

> the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely … more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear – but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing only discloses a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.[52]

Whether Eakins agreed with the sentiments expressed by Poe is unknown (in some sense, it seems as if Eakins's tracing enterprise seems to respond to Poe's assertion). At minimum, for a draftsman of Eakins's extraordinary talents to engage in such a tedious, fragmented, and time-consuming set of practices suggests a certain kind of disregard for or willingness to depart from the preexisting – institutional, historical – models of aesthetic representation. Clearly, the artist enjoyed photography, fueled partially by his interest in the technological aspects of the camera (even designing his own at one point), and the thrill of investigating different types of experiences in picture-making.[53] It should be noted though that the works he made – conflations of photographic image and painting's indexical mark – were more than transcriptions because the scenes never actually existed, rather, the paintings are amalgams of imagination and creativity, pieces

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[51] Tucker and Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, 409, n. 27.

[52] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Daguerreotype," *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* 4, no. 3 (January 15, 1840): 2-4.

[53] As noted in *The Philadelphia Photographer*, Eakins unveiled a camera that included a component called the "exposer" of his own design. Robert S. Redfield, "Society Gossip: Photographic Society of Philadelphia," *The Philadelphia Photographer*, vol. 21, no. 241, (January 1884): 15, cited in Kathleen Brown, "Chronology," *Thomas Eakins*, xxxii.

of life frozen and posed, documented and recorded, cut and pasted, and then inscribed and painted onto canvas.

III. Stopping Sound

So far I have only been examining the intersection of photography in *Pathetic Song* in terms of the polemics of Eakins's working methods, which, while significant, tend to minimize the other issues related to photography presented by the painting. As the numerous photographs of Harrison singing suggest, Eakins seems to be pursuing two different, albeit related, sets of problems implicating photography and sound: first, Eakins seems intent on arresting Harrison's singing voice in a manner similar to his photographic motion studies, and, second, in the process, the artist strives to record or transcribe her singing as a kind of permanent document, much like photography did and phonography so revolutionarily promised to do.

Stop-Action Photography

During the period that Eakins worked on *Pathetic Song*, he invested considerable energy into investigating the effects of stop action photography, the results of which can be seen in two paintings that bracket *Pathetic Song* (and have been confirmed to include tracing marks), *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)* (1879; fig. 74) and *Swimming* (1884; fig. 75). One of the leading photographers working on stop action photography during this time was the Englishman Eadweard Muybridge, who first gained nationwide attention around 1877 while working in San Francisco with railroad magnate and former California governor Leland Stanford. Aiming to resolve the question of whether all four of a galloping horse's hooves simultaneously left the ground,

Muybridge placed a number of cameras, spaced at small intervals, that connected to wires the horse tripped as it ran along the race track.[54] Fairman Rogers, an engineer on the board of the Pennsylvania Academy, had been following Muybridge's project and he and Eakins together decided to emulate the subject on their own. Their efforts led to the painting titled *A May Morning in the Park* (fig. 74) which shows four horses in mid-motion pulling a carriage driven by Rogers. Based on the numerous tick marks throughout, the work seems to have been completed with photographic studies, though none are extant.[55] Despite the photographic accuracy of the horses and the carriage wheels' movements, the painting was met with disdain. Deeming it a mistake because of the whirling carriage wheels next to the "motionless" horses limbs, critic Sylvester Koehler wrote: [T]he artist must fail when he attempts to depict what *is*, instead of what *seems to be*."[56] A few years later, Eakins attempted another stop-action subject with the diving figure in *Swimming* (fig. 75), but that work, too, was not well-received, with one reviewer in particularly noting that the painting, "evidently intended to show the results of instantaneous photography, but it does not convey the impression of any possible motion."[57] These tensile qualities between perception and representation noted by the critics also probably disturbed the patron for whom the latter work was made, Edward H. Coates, for he requested (and received) *Pathetic Song* in its place.

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[54] For discussion of the Muybridge-Stanford experiments, see John Ott, "Iron Horses: Leland Stanford, Eadweard Muybridge, and the Industrialized Eye," *Oxford Art Journal* 28:3 (Fall 2005): 409-28.

[55] Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 109.

[56] Sylvester Koehler, "Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists," *American Art Review* (January 1881), 110 (emphasis original); cited in Michael Leja, "Eakins and Icons," *Art Bulletin* 83, No. 3 (Sept., 2001), 484.

[57] "At the Private View. First Impressions of the Autumn Exhibition at the Academy of the Fine Arts," *The Times* (Philadelphia), October 29, 1885, 2; cited in Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 114.

Eakins more than likely first met Muybridge in February of 1883, when the photographer was giving a lecture on equine movements at the Pennsylvania Academy. Later that year, when the University of Pennsylvania offered to support Muybridge's proposal to study human and animal locomotion, Eakins served on a commission overseeing the project.[58] The two worked together at the University of Pennsylvania, off and on, for the next several years, with the artist sometimes splitting off on his own because of dissatisfaction with Muybridge's methodologies. In a light-blocking shed that Eakins designed on the university campus, he conducted his own series of experiments, using a camera type invented by French physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey, with some modifications by the artist.[59] Eakins's extensive body of work, most of which involved collaborations between himself and his students, included the "Naked Series," a set of photographs showing the movements of the body walking, running, and leaping (fig. 76). Eventually his work led to a lecture in May of 1885 on the movement of a horse using Muybridge's zoetrope motion studies.[60] The next year, Eakins showed *History of a Jump*, a motion photograph, at an exhibition for the Photographic Society of Philadelphia. Eakins's interests in photographic motion studies abruptly came to an end, however, when he was forced to resign from the Pennsylvania Academy the following month (February of 1886). Muybridge continued to work on his project, and having taken some twenty thousand motion photographs of men, women, and animals while at the

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[58] Remarking on Muybridge's photographs, Eakins noted, "[it is] pretty to see the sharp & blurred motion in these photographs. They mark so nicely the relative speed of the different parts." Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 151.

[59] Assisting Eakins in this regard was his friend and colleague, Professor William D. Marks, who invented the chronograph. Eakins painted Marks's portrait in 1886.

[60] Eakins would eventually publish a paper on this subject, "The Differential Action of Certain Muscles Passing More Than One Joint," in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences*. Foster, *A Drawing Manual*, 109.

University of Pennsylvania, he published over seven hundred of the plates in his book, *Animal Locomotion* (1888).[61]

Dancers and Whistlers

Though these photographic experiments occurred in the 1880s, Eakins's investigation of the body in movement began with his very first painting made more than a decade earlier. While studying in Europe, the artist spent over six months in Spain, staying briefly in Madrid before traveling to Seville. Charmed by the culture of the southern city, Eakins wrote home that, "I know ever so many gypsies, men & women & circus people, street dancers, theatre dancers, and bull fighters."[62] One dancer, a seven-year-old gypsy named Carmelita, especially captured his attention and Eakins drew her head and shoulders in a painted study. He later incorporated the study, as well as information gleaned from purchased photographs of gypsies, into his first large oil, *A Street Scene in Seville* (1870; fig. 77), which shows a young man playing a cornet on the left, a girl playing the drums on the right, and Carmelita in the center dancing to the music. Describing his first attempts at painting out of doors and fresh out of school, Eakins wrote that, "Picture making is new to me, there is the sun & gay colors & a hundred things you never see in a studio light & ever so many botherations that no one out of the trade could ever guess at."[63] Using a mostly darkened palette with a few touches of a glowing red, Eakins places the group against a wall that depicts a bullfight in almost cartoon-like graffiti. Though the lights and darks in the work help to articulate the notion of mobility, the sunlight that spotlights the dancer is severe, creating an odd

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[61] William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 2002), 150.

[62] Thomas Eakins to unknown recipient, January 16, 1870, in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 44.

[63] Ibid.

shadow on the cobblestones. As scholars have noted, there is an awkwardness in the figures: the relationship between figure and ground is unnatural and there is a lack of cohesiveness among the group. But what is significant about this first work is that it is a depiction of sound, music-making to be exact, and more interestingly, a kind of sound that impels movement. Even though the music frees the little dancer from the block of shadows along the wall and moves her into the sunlight, like the bullfighter scrawled on the wall behind her, she is arrested, rendered motionless, by the act of representation. As we shall see, this conjunction of sound and stop-action is something that Eakins continues to explore throughout his career.

Another early example of Eakins's interest in the nexus of sound and movement is *Whistling for Plover* (1874; fig. 78), a watercolor from his first few years back in Philadelphia. Eakins wrote to his friend Shinn that it was "not near as far finished" as the oil painting of the same subject (now lost) but was painted "in a much higher key with all the light possible."[64] The sheet features a hunter facing out of the picture plane, crouched down low, holding a rifle and pursing his lips, with the opening of the rifle's shafts echoing the opening of his mouth. The shot bodies of fowl pepper the blonde field and the low horizon line, which like the sunlit atmosphere, emphasizes the African-American protagonist. Several other contemporaneous works by Eakins feature African-Americans hunting fowl, *Rail Shooting on the Delaware [Will Shuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail]* (1876) and *Pushing for Rail* (1874; fig. 79). In the latter painting, another work featuring a low horizon and flat marsh, several pairs of hunters are shown with pole-men pushing the boats through the reeds, most of whom are African-American. Instead of this decentered, distant view of the hunting scene in *Pushing for Rail*, Eakins

[64] Thomas Eakins to Earl Shinn, January 30, 1875; cited in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 65.

brings us closer in to focus on the single whistling man in *Whistling for Plover*. Though the hunter does not directly address the viewer, his position suggests that the prey he is calling is somewhere out in the viewer's space, and that soon the bird will fly forth and be located by the rifle. While an unusual subject matter, Eakins's attempt to pictorialize whistling was not without precedent: in 1872, Frank Duveneck painted *Whistling Boy* (fig. 80) while living in Munich. A masterful combination of dark tonal structure and slashing brushwork in the tradition of Frans Hals, *Whistling Boy* shows a young boy with red, moist lips plumped together, staring out towards the viewer. Duveneck's composition reverses the darks and lights seen in *Whistling for Plover*, with a completely darkened background and the only light area in the whole picture appearing in the boy's tattered rags. And whereas *Whistling Boy* centers on the pluck of a boy in unfortunate circumstances, Eakins's work uses the motif of whistling to enact a mechanics of movement, creating an imaginary space and time where bodies are simultaneously in motion and being stopped.

This idea of an African-American protagonist making sound develops into an entirely different picture altogether in *The Dancing Lesson (Negro Boy Dancing)* (1878; fig. 81), a watercolor that received much praise at the Watercolor Society exhibition at the Academy in New York. The sheet shows three figures against a shallow setting, not unlike *A Street Scene in Seville*, with a young man playing the banjo while a boy tentatively dances and an elderly man taps his foot and watches. Though the actors are better integrated into the scene than those in *A Street Scene in Seville*, the watercolor resembles the Spanish subject in that the music being played in the scene compels one of the figures to dance. The picture on the wall of Abraham Lincoln reading to his son Tad,

a clear Civil War reference to the newfound liberty for African-Americans, echoes this ability to move freely.[65] Also creating a sense of movement is the congruity between banjo player and dancing boy that transverses the picture plane, further seen in the alignment of the two figures' hands and legs. In the perspective study for *The Dancing Lesson* (fig. 82), the careful delineations reveal how the artist planned to place the figures in space, with the figure of the banjo player and the two chairs on the side of the work rendered in darker outline. In a certain way, the perspectival lines of the study recall the strings of a banjo, and, more abstractly, how these strings are linked to the dancing body of the boy in space. This sense of activation becomes clear when we consider another work devoted to African-Americans and banjo-playing, Henry Ossawa Tanner's *The Banjo Lesson* (1893; fig. 83). Instead of the lateral composition that Eakins's employs, Tanner creates a nuclear one, emphasizing the bond and stability between man and boy in the center of the composition. Critics readily responded to Eakins's narrative of movement, with Clarence Cook describing the work as follows: "Here are three living human beings, each distinctly marked in character and each absolutely truthful in the presentment. So far as the drawing has to do with the representation of the bodily action and that action the result of thinking and will, drawing here does all that it can ever do."[66]

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[65] As noted by Marc Simpson, though many of Eakins's contemporaries were depicting the "interior, private moment of African-American life," they chose to show the protagonists amidst the themes of either education or music – Eakins's work was unusual in showing both. Marc Simpson, "The 1870s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 38.

For further discussion of depictions of the banjo throughout the history of the United States, see Leo G. Mazow, ed., *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005).

[66] C[larence] C[ook], "The Water-Color Society Exhibition at the Academy," *New York Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1878, p. 5; cited in Simpson, "The 1870s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 38. Shinn described the work's lack of finish as the following: "These telling strokes and sweeps, these foreground forms felt as mere blots of color, these nearer members without outline while farther features are modeled and hardened with all precision, give the system of painting a perspectiveless look when seen close, and a look of pure atmospheric harmony when seen from the proper distance." Earl Shinn, "Fine Arts: Eleventh Exhibition of the Water-Color Society. II," *The Nation*, vol. 26, no. 661 (February 28, 1878), pp. 156-57; cited in Simpson, "The 1870s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 38.

Like *The Dancing Lesson*, *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66) features three figures in an intimate, musical setting. Yet while *The Dancing Lesson*, and for that matter, *A Street Scene*, show a correspondence between the transmitter of sound and the body that responds and moves, *Pathetic Song* shows the main protagonist in a very slight range of motion, her mouth barely open and body motionless, what Shinn called the singer's "rigidity." Of course, this is explained somewhat by the fact that the earlier works depict dancers, and that Eakins had mostly displaced his interest in the moving body from painting to photographic experiments by the time he began work on *Pathetic Song*. But there is another point to be made regarding Eakins's shift from dancing to singing and his newfound emphasis on the human voice. If we can agree that in all the representations discussed thus far, Eakins more or less attempts to manifest the effects of "stopped" sound on the body – much like he attempted to show the effects of "stopped" sight with the body in his motion studies – then it becomes the case that in *Pathetic Song* Eakins attempts to show the stopping of sound not just with the hand placement of the cellist or the turned head of the pianist, but also with the human voice, which is a much more ambitious picturing of sound altogether.[67] Not only does this picturing of the human voice explore the limits of vision in the representation of sound but it also pressures the idea of how sound has invisible or unrepresentable effects more intensely.

Photo-/Phono-graphic Realism

In certain ways, the stopping of sound, as I have been calling it, had already occurred in the late 1870s with the invention of the phonograph. Thomas Edison arrived

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[67] Though *Pathetic Song* shows the movement of bodies with the musicians handling their instruments, their movements are almost hidden and repressed from view, MacDowell's hands cannot be seen (as I later discuss) and the cellist's hands lack the precision to which Eakins accords the body of the singer.

at the first prototype in 1877 while working on the telegraph and telephone, but individuals on both sides of the Atlantic were making discursive advances in creating a sound reproduction device around this time. Utilizing a transducer and inscription techniques, French scientist Léon Scott invented a machine to visualize or "write" sound called the phonautograph in 1857, producing a phonautogram on April 9, 1860, which is arguably the earliest recording of sound.[68] Another French scientist, Charles Cros, described his idea for a machine that could store and reproduce sound months before Edison's announcement.[69] Both of these French efforts were essentially variants of Edison's machine. In Edison's first model, upon speaking into a mouthpiece, sound vibrations would be indented onto a rotating tinfoil cylinder with a diaphragm-and-needle unit; a second such unit played back the recording (fig. 84). Though successful at recording sound to a certain degree, the cylinder was problematic in terms of mass production and durability, eventually replaced with the disk with which we are more familiar. When he introduced the phonograph in 1878, Thomas Edison described it as a machine that could "gather[] up and retain[] sounds hitherto fugitive… [for] their reproduction at will."[70] This idea of capturing sound, which had been "hitherto fugitive," and recording it is something that, I propose, Eakins was also attempting, albeit using entirely different means.

As suggested by Scott's phonautograph described above, the development of recorded sound has a complicated and intertwined relationship with writing technologies. In fact, inventors neither created nor initially used the phonograph to record music, but

[68] Jody Rosen, "Researchers Play Tune Recorded Before Edison," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2008.

[69] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 77-78.

[70] Thomas Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," *North American Review* 126 (May/June 1878): 527.

for textual or linguistic practices like reading, speaking, and writing.[71] Predicting the phonograph's future uses, Edison imagined the machine primarily to "write" letters through the use of dictation, as well as preserve the "last words of dying persons," allow for the "preservation of languages," and create phonographic books.[72] Lisa Gitelman argues that Edison's designs for the phonograph reflected broader cultural concerns about forms of writing: "The phonograph and contemporary inscriptive forms were deeply dependent upon reworkings of the social and economic relations of textuality, of print culture and print capitalism."[73] These reworkings are suggested in a promotional brochure from 1878 titled, "All about the Telephone and Phonograph:"

> [L]overs, we have heard, delight to read tender epistles over and over again; but now they can *treasure up old voices!* – preserve the little metal slip, and hear again and again the words so dear, and the tones still dearer. The last utterances of a dearly-loved parent, child, or friend may be treasured and listened to, though continents and oceans intervene.[74]

The desire to replace written letters with the recordings of loved ones continued on for several decades, as demonstrated by an 1894 poem entitled "Visible Sound": "If human voice may on the plastic disk/ Breathe into being forms of beauty rare,/ And we may see the voices that we love/Take shape and color, infinitely fair…"[75] As these period statements suggest, the phonograph emerged from a variety of transformations and concerns occurring within American society, responding to such imminent needs as

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[71] Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1. As Gitelman points out, print culture was in a state of flux because "[the phonograph and contemporary inscriptive forms] helped question authors and readers as subjects and modify the experienced subjectivities of speakers, performers, publishers and literates." Ibid., 13.

[72] Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," 527. For further discussion of Edison, see Theresa M. Collins and Lisa Gitelman, *Thomas Edison and Modern America: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 2002).

[73] Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, 13.

[74] *All About the Telephone and Phonograph* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1878), 99.

[75] Ellen Knight Bradford, "Visible Sound," *The Century* 48, issue 2 (June 1894): 217.

modes of communication for an expanding country and more efficient use of time for the growing class of businessmen.

Equally important for our purposes, the phonograph arrested the temporal nature of auditory experience, recording it in units that could be played back and stopped as desired. In this sense of arresting and recording, the phonograph was similar to photography, and not surprisingly, discussions of the phonograph appropriated much of photography's discourse. In fact, Edison exploited the culturally constructed nexus of photography and phonography when he promoted the phonograph throughout the 1880s, stating that the phonograph could record anything "exactly as it was said, with the faultless fidelity of an instantaneous photograph."[76] In the same article, Edison even draws on the idea of stop-action photography, "In fact the phonograph will do, and does at this moment accomplish, the same thing in respect of conversation which instantaneous photography does for moving objects; that is, it will present whatever it records with a minute accuracy unattained by any other means."[77]

As was the case with photography, a key aspect of phonographic rhetoric was the term "realism." Aiming specifically at consumers, Edison touted the phonograph as the "acme of realism," as can be seen in this early advertisement (fig. 85). Years later, promoting the latest model of his phonograph in a 1921 interview, Edison explained that, "the object of an inventor, attempting to produce a phonograph, should be to achieve the highest possible degree of realism."[78] He added:

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[76] Thomas Edison, "The Perfected Phonograph," *The North American Review* 146 (June 1888): 648.
[77] Ibid.
[78] "An Interview with Thomas A. Edison Regarding the Imperfections of the Human Voice," *Cosmopolitan*, vol. 73 (March 1921), 92. The introductory note explains: "The realism of the New Edison is so perfect that this wonderful instrument brings the full benefits of music into every home. In this interview, Mr. Edison explains, in his characteristic way why this perfect realism causes him to be exceedingly careful in his selection of artists." Ibid.

> [T]hrough the agency of our new phonograph, and because of its realism, I can produce the same effects as would result from the original music, provided I use artists who emit pure tones and have artistic potentialities which are fully felt by the listener, even though he does not see the artists.[79]

Edison's words provide an interesting framework to consider Eakins's realistic, but mute, paintings of music. Even though Edison concedes the limits of phonographic realism by noting that the listener could not see the artists, he offers as compensation his use of "artists who emit pure tones" and can sing in a way "fully felt by the listener." Similarly, in light of the viewer being unable to hear the music in *Pathetic Song*, Eakins visualizes his singer in a way that can be "fully felt" by the viewer, delineating her with a mimetic accuracy that pushes the limits of pictorial realism in its use of photography and tracing techniques.

As this juxtaposition of the camera and phonograph suggests, even though technologies like the stereoscope and camera had been touting realistic effects for decades, they were configured as solely visual experiences, with sound and the other senses ignored.[80] As soon as it emerged on the market, the phonograph began to mimic this cultural production, but with hearing replacing vision. In effect, the quest for realism in these technological devices was a sensorial fallacy of sorts, promoting the acuity of one sense over others. Realism, which had previously been a feature of visual and artistic terrains, was re-shaped in technological spheres as a similarly unilateral or fragmented sensory operation; and as the nineteenth century drew to a close, looking and listening

[79] Ibid., 93.

[80] For a discussion of sight as a locus of perception and knowledge slightly before Eakins's time, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

became mutually exclusive modalities or vehicles of realism.[81] For Eakins, the incongruity between the "verity" or "reality" offered by the photograph and the constructive nature of painting beleaguered the artist in various ways throughout his career. The realism that many saw in his works papered over the absences or fallacies of what was perceived, much like the realism touted by the phonograph.

Stop-Action Singing

Just a few years after Edison claimed that the phonograph accomplished for sound what "instantaneous photography does for moving objects," Eakins completed two remarkable portrayals of individuals in mid-song, intensifying the aural effects of the singer seen in *Pathetic Song*. In *The Concert Singer* (1890-2; fig. 86), twenty-three old Weda Cook is shown full-length against a shallow, mostly abstracted, sparsely populated space. Making her formal debut at the Philadelphia Academy of Music at the age of sixteen, and student of well-known musician Charles Schmitz, Cook began singing in Philadelphia choral societies, concerts, and recitals around 1887. After meeting the artist through mutual friends at the Art Students' League of Philadelphia in 1889, Cook began to pose for Eakins in 1890, three to four days a week for nearly two years, stopping only after Eakins insisted on her posing nude. Eventually, Cook returned to ask for the portrait, to which Eakins replied that he could not bear to let it go because of all the memories the work held for him, keeping the work in his studio for the rest of his life.[82]

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[81] As Jonathan Crary has argued, technological inventions were but one of many period forces and events that helped to forge the oscillating relationship between the senses in emerging processes of perception. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999). According to Crary, the idea of attention can only be understood by considering modern distraction and the premise that "from the mid-1800s on, perception is fundamentally characterized by experiences of fragmentation, shock, and dispersal." Ibid., 1.

[82] Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 143.

In the painting, Cook is wearing a pale rose sleeveless gown made of silk brocade and adorned with a fall of beaded pearl clusters from chest to waist. Clasping her hands in front of her and holding her head back, she sings with mouth open and looks out into the distance. The lighting from the right illuminates her pale skin and the side of her face and neck. Even though half is in shadow, the details of Cook's face and its physiognomic accuracy, are, like the tiny pearly clusters decorating her dress, the subject of endless looking. Cook was fully aware of Eakins's desire to fully transcribe her features, and Goodrich describes Cook's account of the lengthy sittings as follows:

> Cook explained that every day, "Eakins asked her to sing "O rest in the Lord" so that he could observe the muscles of the mouth and throat. 'I got to loathe it,' she said. But she spoke of how accurately he had caught the singer's action in producing the utmost fullness of tone. He would look at her 'as if through a microscope'…[83]

Indeed, the microscopic accuracy of Cook's singing "O Rest in the Lord," the opening phrase of an aria from Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, has led some scholars to conjecture as to the exact syllable being sung in the picture based on the position of her throat muscles and mouth.[84]

Cook's repetitive singing of Mendelssohn also left its mark outside the canvas. In an unusual move, Eakins carved the opening bars of the aria on *The Concert Singer*'s chestnut frame (partially visible in this image, fig. 87), later explaining, "to musicians I think it emphasized the expression of the face and the pose of the figure."[85] Except for these incised notes (which are placed somewhat cautiously outside the boundaries of the picture), *The Concert Singer* has no other marks of textuality. Yet even though the

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[83] Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, II: 84.

[84] See Fried, *Realism*, 173, n. 64. For discussion of the significance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* for nineteenth-century Philadelphia society, see Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 140-143.

[85] Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, II: 84.

incisions were done on the frame instead of within the painting, the fact that Eakins incised the notes just as he would incise the canvas with a stylus when tracing conjoins the two acts of tracing and sonic transcription, materially and phenomenologically. That is, through the writing of the musical notes, Eakins annexes visual representation with auditory experience, so that those who can read music can hear in their heads what in fact the figure before them is singing. In effect, Eakins's inscribed musical notations function much like the inscribed sound waves on the phonograph record: just as the phonograph translates the grooves into music, so, too, does the music-reading viewer translate the incised notations into the aria being sung before them. The painting, then, is an attempt to unify two different parallel tracks of realisms – to create both a visual and aural record – that Eakins would never undertake again. And whereas *Pathetic Song* relies on its descriptive title to convey what is being sung, *The Concert Singer* delivers a more specific kind of aural information by the inscription on its frame.

The fact that this sonic tracing occurs outside the boundaries of the canvas reveals a hesitancy about the painting's capability to represent sound so intensely, a hesitancy that is also suggested by the number of compositional elements placed along the margins of the canvas. Like the musical notations outside the frame, all of the accoutrements shown in the painting bear audio-visual significance. The roses on the floor, which Eakins's friend William R. O'Donovan would replace everyday, link to Cook's dress in terms of pattern and color, as well as their general orientation on the stage. With their ruffled edges and wayward arrangement, they remind us of the singing Cook, how the notes of her voice would similarly undulate like the tips of the petals and move in various directions. The beaded pearls on her dress, too, seem to have some kind of sonic quality

to them, each cluster echoing the shape of Cook's open mouth and cascading downwards as we would imagine the notes of her song to do if they could be visualized. Similarly, the frond seems to suggest the idea of sound waves in terms of its graphic, abstracted form and propinquity to Cook. Lastly, the hand holding a composer's baton encourages the viewer to imagine the rest of the orchestra pit, replete with musicians and instruments, positioned below the scene. If we compare this work to *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66), Eakins has intensified the emphasis on the singer by eliminating her surroundings and dispersing everything around her, pushing any accoutrements as far as they could be placed within the pictorial plane. Given the more emphatic opening of the mouth and the sensorial barriers that *The Concert Singer* was attempting to overcome, this traversal of the painting's borders seems almost necessary.

Johns notes the unusual nature of Eakins's depiction of Cook actually singing: "it was definitely not 'done' in the repertory of images of concert singers."[86] Artists usually portrayed the singers in costume with some kind of stage property, but their mouths would be closed. Like Eakins's departure, French Impressionist Hilaire-Germaine-Edgar Degas offers his singer mid-song in *Chanteuse de Café* (c. 1878; fig. 88), boldly providing a detailed view of the singer's face and even teeth. Degas (who also seemed interested in stop action as evidenced by his sculpture, *Horse Trotting, the Feet Not Touching the Ground* (c. 1881 -1890)) crops his singer from the waist up and lights her from underneath to put more emphasis on her dramatic gesture. Though the Frenchman was obviously more concerned with the immediacy of sensorial effects, both he and Eakins hone in on "freezing" their protagonists, more interested in the recording of a person mid-song than creating a personalized narrative of the performer. This seems

[86] Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 140.

especially the case for Eakins, who was so intent on capturing the fleeting aural experience, anatomical details, and muscle movements in paint that he would have Cook slavishly repeat the vocal poses again and again – an almost mechanical, phonographic process of play, stop, and play again.

In this vein, the composer's baton at the left edge of the canvas serves as visual totem of the studio process and the hand that created the lasting image. In the initial sketch, the baton was held as if it was a paintbrush; later on, Eakins procured Cook's mentor and conductor, Charles Schmitz, to hold the baton correctly.[87] Aside from Cook's clothing, the baton is the only non-organic element in the entire picture: even though probably made of wood, it has been shaped and honed by individuals to become a professional tool, a device. And as much as it guides the singer as she modulates her voice, she also avoids looking at it, focusing on a higher, more distant site. But in one very small way, the uprightness of the baton seems to echo the standing singing figure, and if we consider this further, then the baton seems instrumental in not only the aural conduct of the figure, but also in its role in visual configuration; in other words, the baton/paintbrush suggests the creation – or, given the pointed tip, inscription – of the figure, thereby memorializing Eakins's artistic process.

A pendant of sorts to *The Concert Singer* is *Home Ranch* (1892; fig. 89), an oil painting made during the same period and also showing a figure in the throes of singing. Instead of a female protagonist, *Home Ranch* features a male, Eakins's student Franklin Schenk, who was a talented guitarist and singer, sitting on a kitchen chair while another

[87] Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, II: 85.

student, Samuel Murray, listens at a table and holds a fork.[88] In this and another oil (*Cowboy Singing* (ca. 1890)), Eakins dressed Schenk in the cowboy suit that he brought back from his rest cure trip to the Dakota Territory after the Academy scandal in 1887. Just as Cook sang the Mendelssohn aria over and over again, Murray reported that Schenk sang the whole time that Eakins painted, to the point that when visitors were at the studio, Eakins would say, "Would you mind stopping singing a minute?"[89] Like *The Concert Singer* and *Pathetic Song*, the singer in *Home Ranch* seems transported by his singing, his head similarly thrown back, and eyes looking off into the distance, amidst a featureless background. Also like these other works, the shallow space in *Home Ranch* denies a circulation of sound within the pictorial space, encouraging instead the imaginary sound waves to emanate into the viewer's space. But perhaps the most interesting resonance among the three images is the unbalanced focus on the details of the sitter's clothing. Indeed, it is as if the sartorial minutiae pictorializes the aural modulations of the voice in song, a connection between fabric and the idea of articulation that I shall have more to say about later in my discussion. Eakins goes to great lengths to particularize the curling fringe on Schenk's shirt and pants, while Schenk's reddish brown hair doesn't receive as much attention. Like the strings of the guitar that Schenk plucks, the abundant fringes bordering his clothing and framing his body twist and move, visual homonyms of the sound of the moving song that Schenk croons. The directionality of the singers' gazes, that is, at a diagonal and away from the frontal space of the canvas, also deserves mention, for this non-confrontation allows the viewer to see how the

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[88] Elizabeth Johns describes Murray's gesture as follows: "like that of Mrs. Frishmuth in *Antiquated Music* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) [it] is blunt and startling – but certainly to the point." Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 137, n, 38.

[89] Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, II: 25.

singers are in a different world, how they are enthralled and carried away by the sentiments of the song and the sound of their own voice in song. Also shown with this sense of reverie is the listener pictured in *Home Ranch*. Murray seems to be listening so intently (a behavior boldly reinforced by the utensil he holds resembling a tuning fork) that his eyes seem glazed over, not focusing on anything in particular.[90] Murray's listening posture is significant because, while his ears are shown, they, like much of his face, are obscured by the darkened shadows covering much of the pictorial space; instead it is Murray's hand, and the fork he holds with it, that seem to be a significant marker of his auditor status, and the same could be said of the conductor's hand and baton in *The Concert Singer*.

In light of these efforts to memorialize sound, singing repetitively session after session, stopping and starting an aural experience, Eakins's *The Concert Singer* and *Home Ranch* parallel the recording process of the phonograph – in the place of phonographic needle and wax or tinfoil, sound is visually transcribed onto canvas with paint and brush.[91] Like his depictions of Cook and Schenk, Eakins's rendition of the singer in *Pathetic Song* also evinces a phonographic kind of realism, an attempt to capture fugitive sounds in image. And just as the thin, meticulous spirals inscribed on the plane of a record capture sound so, too, do the detailed, repetitive marks on the clothing on Cook, Harrison, and Schenk metaphorically suggest the iterations of sound waves their singing would produce, not to mention the tiny marks of Eakins's projection

[90] Invented in the early eighteenth-century by British musician John Shore, tuning forks were used to test the vibrations made by sound. Hermann von Helmholz used tuning forks to expound theories of frequency and vibration in his scientific treatise on sound, *On the Sensation of Tone.* Hermann L. F. Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*, transl. Alexander J. Ellis (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954).

[91] Eakins's *Portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing* (1895), made during this period, also has phonographic ties. See note 9.

methods. All – that is to say, the grooves of the phonograph, the notations of music, the datum of tracing, the articulations of pleats, beading, and fringe – are types of inscription-like texts. Lisa Gitelman describes phonographic transcription as follows: "words were inscribed naturally, by the modulation of sound, and were recoverable as sounds without the intrusion of script, intelligence, or sight."[92] Similarly, the camera (and projector) allowed Eakins to directly inscribe the canvas, without the need for drawing. In one sense, it was an unmediated process because it removed a step, but in another sense, another form of mediation was put in its place. As if responding to the growing complaints about the phonograph creating a musical experience that was only listened to and not watched, Eakins seems to offer his sonic transcriptions as an intertwining of the fields of looking and listening; as if to compensate for the muteness of his representation, he records the singers with an intense physiognomic and sartorial accuracy instead.[93] But even though we are presented with all these details, we are not given the full aural access or pleasure of a real live concert; similar to a phonographic concert denying the visual source, Eakins's paintings deny our hearing of them, and the clearest sensorial function is what is imagined in our minds.[94]

IV. Eye-Hand-Ear Coordination

Though she is not spotlighted or in the foreground like Harrison, the figure of Susan MacDowell holds considerable meaning in terms of her role within *Pathetic Song* and for the larger stakes of Eakins's artistic enterprise. Of the three figures, she had the

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92 Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines*, 22.

93 Ibid., 131.

94 The motif of performance is another agenda shared by Eakins's singing pictures and phonographic discourse. As Gitelman notes, the phonograph was a technology of "mechanical reproduction" that was both "performative and inscriptive." Ibid., 18.

closest connection to the artist; she was his confidante at the time, and would be engaged to him a year after the painting was completed. In addition, her depiction was a culmination of sorts of Eakins's interest in the pictorial motif of women playing the piano – all of which, like MacDowell's representation in *Pathetic Song*, pressured notions of mediation and the relationship between the hand and perception. But MacDowell's figure also bears significance in terms of a broader cultural production. Related to the piano in terms of design, reception, and designated operators, the typewriter also knotted the hand, eye, and brain, going on to become the dominant means to record one's thoughts and transcribe the words of another. After briefly looking at the motif of transcription in several other works by the artist, this portion of the chapter will explore how Eakins's piano paintings from 1870-1875, such as *Home Scene* (1871) and *Elizabeth at the Piano* (1875), merge with significant aspects of the transcription discourse of the typewriter, what some called the "literary piano."

Listening and Transcribing

Even though MacDowell is the pianist in the arrangement, it is her listening, not piano-playing, skills that Eakins emphasizes (Fig. 68). More than the cellist, MacDowell seems in synchronous time with the singer and this is accomplished through Eakins's keen manipulation of the trope of listening. Beyond a straightforward depiction of the ear, Eakins draws on his detailed observations to calibrate a head position, body posture, and specific gaze that masterfully convey the acuity of hearing needed for the musical arrangement. In the way MacDowell looks slightly upwards in particular, Eakins pries open the split second in time when she waits for Harrison's next note to ensure that the

piano precisely matches the pace of Harrison's singing – a stop-action of listening of sorts.

This was not the first time Eakins had shown such an engrossed auditor. In *The Gross Clinic* (1875; fig. 90), we find a lecture hall filled with listeners who are both watching the surgery and waiting to hear the next words of Professor Gross, who seems, in the words of Fried, as if he is "about to speak."[95] Eakins shows himself among the students, holding paper and pencil and leaning forward with furrowed brow (a position emulated to some degree by Susan MacDowell in *Pathetic Song*), simultaneously looking at the operation and listening to the instructor. The artist depicts himself in the process of recording or transcribing his visual observations, and in light of the tracing practices Eakins was using at the time, the scalpel Dr. Gross holds can be seen as a literal marker of Eakins's tool and how it would incise the canvas. This constellation of listening/transcribing/tracing is therefore of particular significance for our inquiry.

In fact, *The Gross Clinic* is one of several works conjoining these tropes in the venue of a lecture hall: *The Agnew Clinic* (1889; fig. 91) (which also features Eakins in the audience, this time painted by his wife Susan) and *Professor William Smith Forbes* (1905) complete the series. Of the three, *The Agnew Clinic* seems to delineate the audience most legibly. As Marc Simpson describes the work: "Eakins more distinctly limned the auditors, too, bringing them closer to the picture plane and lavishing care on their individual features. … The postures and attitudes of the listeners vary from studious attention to extreme casualness."[96] Indeed, the high degree of description Eakins accords the auditors in *The Agnew Clinic* is fostered by the lightened effect in the entire painting.

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[95] Fried, *Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration*, 44.
[96] Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 119.

Generally, though, the chiaroscuro in these lecture paintings adheres to a specific formula, the speaker is foregrounded and dramatically lit, while the auditors are cast in heavy shadows in the recessionary space. *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66) also follows this schematic, only that instead of an instructor, Eakins features the singing Harrison, and instead of students, there are musicians. In fact, the lecturing Dr. Agnew repeats the position of Harrison in certain ways. And whereas the listeners in the surgical theater and classroom are seen taking notes, transcribing the visual and aural information in front of them into writing, the cellist and pianist reverse this process, transcribing the musical notations in front of them into song.[97]

Typing

During Eakins's lifetime, the notion of transcription, along with other aspects of writing and textuality, underwent one of the most massive and long-lasting transformations in history, with the typewriter as the most material manifestation. As a technological novelty, the typewriter would have interested the scientifically inclined Eakins, just as we know it did his long-time friend and kindred spirit, the engineer Fairman Rogers, who kept one of the first models in his library and was said to have suggested improvements to the inventor, most probably in the late 60s and early 70s.[98] Another possible point of intersection between Eakins and the machine, aside from the Centennial Exhibition that Eakins attended a number of times, could have occurred when the artist painted *Portrait of Professor Henry A. Rowland* (fig. 92) in 1897, the same year

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[97] Though deviating from the schematic of speaker and auditor, *Between Rounds* (1898-9) and *Taking the Count* (1898) feature reporters and match record keeper who are also transcribing the scene before them.

[98] Edgar F. Smith, *Biographical Memoir of Fairman Rogers, 1833-1900, Read Before National Academy of Sciences, November 22, 1906*, (Philadelphia: 1906), 106. Rogers became director of the Academy in 1871 and Eakins became officially affiliated with the institution in 1876, though he may have known Rogers earlier.

that Rowland invented the multiplex printing telegraph, a device that transmitted multiple telegram messages simultaneously in alphabetic format with the use of a typewriter.[99] To be sure, the artist and physicist must have discussed the scientist's many projects and experiments during the numerous sittings for the painting, for Eakins took great pains to feature another of Rowland's inventions, the diffraction grating (a mechanism astronomers used to analyze issues of light in stars), in the portrait.

In historical terms, the movement from hand-based to mechanical writing originated with Johann Gutenberg's 1450 creation of metal moveable type in the printing press and led to its cohort, the mechanical typesetting machine. Typesetting involved the tedious process of hand-selecting each letter to create a matrix to be used for inking, and so publishers relied on writing copyists or scriveners to reproduce and create documents more easily. Yet, as early as 1822, inventors began to create composing machines that used levers, wheels, and gravity to speed the process along.[100] In the 1840s, a new design based on the piano became popular, including this 1842 British compositor (fig. 93) that created a "typographic symphony" as well as the 1850 Mitchel composer from New York. Describing the reaction to his pianotyp, a composing machine invented in 1840, Sir Henry Bessemer stated:

[99] "Rowland Telegraph Abroad – Baltimore Multiplex Printing System to be Installed in Italy," *New York Times*, January 28, 1902. Rowland had also worked with the phonograph while studying the effects of magnetism on a charged rotating disk in Berlin in the late 1870s.

[100] As Friedrich Kittler explains, "Ever since 1810, the introduction of the rotary press and continuous form into the printing trade made typesetting machines desirable in which [like the piano] "the various types fall, through a touch of the keys, into place almost as quickly as one speaks." Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, transl. with an introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 189.

> This mode of composing types by playing on keys arranged precisely like the keys of a pianoforte would have formed an excellent occupation for women, but … the lords of creation … strongly objected to such successful competition by female labour, and so the machine eventually died a natural death.[101]

The underlying design of the pianotyp lived on, however, as did the presumption of a female operator: a New York inventor resurrected it as the stereotype matrix machine at the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris, an exposition that, as mentioned earlier, Eakins attended at least seventeen times. Despite being nestled among such showstoppers like the massive locomotive and the sewing machine (both of which Eakins saw and wrote home about), the stereotype matrix compositor was apparently quite a spectacle. In his 1868 *Notes and Sketches of the Paris Exhibition*, reporter George Augustus Sala commented,

> there was also a really astonishing machine … The compositor sits before a species of keyboard strongly resembling that of a pianoforte. His foot works the pedal; in fact, you might think that … he was some boarding school miss practicing her exercises on an instrument whose keys had been carefully muffled out of consideration for the nervous lodger next door…[102]

Interestingly enough, the commenter not only relates the compositor machine to the piano but also converts the male operator to a female piano player, adumbrating how women would dominate the field of typists by the end of the next decade. Thus, despite all these variations among the numerous typesetting machines created between 1840 and 1867, in the United States, France, and elsewhere, the presumption of a female operator, along with a piano-based design, remained constant.

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[101] Sir Henry Bessemer, *Sir Henry Bessemer, F.R.S.: An Autobiography, with a Concluding Chapter* (London: Offices of "Engineering," 1905), 47.

[102] George Augustus Sala, *Notes and Sketches of the Paris Exhibition* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1868), 66.

Concurrent with these developments in typesetting machines were attempts to build a piano-based *personal* writing machine. On April 24, 1858, for instance, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* carried an article about New York physician and inventor William Francis's writing machine, which, as we can readily see, wholly resembled a piano (fig. 94). Francis's machine was unsuccessful and it was not until 1867 that Pennsylvania-born Christopher Sholes created the first working typewriter. His prototype (fig. 95) was conceived and executed with actual piano parts, using piano wire and keys in its construction. Originally intended to have two long rows of piano keys, the first ivory, the second of ebony, the actual prototype had only 11 keys, typing its few letters in upper case. Not surprisingly, when word spread of the invention, many discussed the device in terms of the piano. In a July 1867 *Scientific American* article, for example, editor Alfred Beach, referring to the innovative design of a typewriter wrote, "the weary process of learning penmanship in schools will be reduced to the acquirement of the art of writing one's own signature, [instead we will all be] playing the literary piano."[103] The connection between the piano and typewriter also seeped into the typewriter's sonic attributes. As Gitelman notes, even though "skilled typing had only the mechanical noise of letters, marks, and spaces hitting the paper in sequence, punctuated by the arrival of every new line of type as the carriage was returned," many who used the invention, such as Henry James, called the clacking of the keys "music."[104]

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[103] Frank J. Romano, *Machine Writing and Typesetting* (New Hampshire: GAMA, 1986), 4.

[104] Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines*, 216; Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers, eds. *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xxiii; quoted in Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines*, 217. In fact, near the end of the century, James was so accustomed to the particular sounds of his secretary's Remington typewriter that he professed he couldn't "write" with any other. Regarding the movements of the typewriter, Eakins's *Child at Play* (1876), with its motifs of standardized letters in the building blocks and "carriage," also has some suggestive parallels.

Between 1870 and 1872, the Sholes-Glidden typewriter, as it was called, assumed its iconic shape, and news of it spread quickly, with publicity events in New York and scientific journal articles discussing the machine, usually with an illustration based on this famous photograph (fig. 96) of Christopher Sholes's daughter with the invention. Soon after, the Remington company, a gun and sewing machine manufacturer, began mass producing the machine and released the first commercial typewriter in 1874, creating some models attached to the same bases used for sewing machines (fig. 97). Two years later, the Remington No. 1 typewriter was displayed with considerable fanfare at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, an exposition that Eakins attended at least sixteen times, where a young woman sold samples of typed writing for 25 cents apiece.[105]

Playing the Keys

During the same period that inventors and manufacturers were promoting the typewriter throughout the country, Eakins created four paintings (within the same number of years) of a female playing the piano, *At the Piano* (1870-1), the related work, *Frances Eakins* (1871), *Home Scene* (1870-1) and *Elizabeth at the Piano* (1875), revealing an obsessiveness with the trope that intersects with the discourse of the typewriter in several interesting ways. Two of the depictions, *At the Piano* and *Frances Eakins* (fig. 98), both of which feature the artist's sisters, are delineated with a straightforwardness and seem to focus on the interaction between player, keyboard, text: all three elements are lucidly shown in *Frances Eakins*, for example. In several of the paintings, however, Eakins reveals uncertainties and tensions that only intensify in *Pathetic Song* a decade later.

[105] Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 133; John A. Zellers, *The Typewriter: A Short History, on Its 75th Anniversary 1873-1948* (New York: The Newcomen Society of England, American Branch, 1948), 13.

In *Home Scene* (fig. 99), we find Eakins's sister Margaret sitting at a piano while younger sister Caroline writes on a slate by her feet. With the verticality of the piano and its player contrasting the horizontality of the slate and its scribe, there is a discernible bifurcation between the two, amplified by the way the colors and patterning of Caroline's dress relate to the patterned rug while Maggie's black dress elides with the piano. This opposition of the two models also can be seen between the barely visible marks on the slate and the many discernible notes on the printed sheet music, which along with the fact that the writer on the floor is a mere girl while the pianist is a grown woman, suggests a progression from the artisanal child's writing to the more mature, sophisticated machine-related activity and text.

Despite the prominence of the looming piano and articulated sheet music, Maggie turns away from the instrument, preferring to gaze at her sister's handwriting instead; in a sense, then, the piano is rejected in favor of writing. In this same vein, not only is the piano treated with somewhat indifference, the sheet music is to some extent as well. Maggie's body casts a strange shadow on it, many of the notes are rendered ambiguously, and the placement of the orange further obscures our view of the notations on the paper. We should notice, too, that while the child-scribe's marks are not legible either, she at least faces her text. In other words, the avoidance that besets Maggie does not seem to afflict Caroline and her writing, just as it does not affect Eakins's father in *The Writing Master* (1876; fig. 117). And even though there is a piano in the work, the keys are silent, the only noise to be heard is the faint sound of the young girl's chalk.

In light of this scene of writing in the painting's foreground and the thematic of progression between the two sisters, the piano in *Home Scene* can be related

iconographically to the typewriter, and correspondingly the sheet music to typed page -- a reading that becomes even more plausible when we consider the various historical instances of mechanized writing that subsumed the piano. Put another way, there is a connectedness between the two protagonists and their activities, they are sisters after all, both possess instruments (chalk, piano) and text (slate, sheet music), and just as Maggie's vest picks up the colors of Caroline's dress and Caroline's body forms the base of a pyramid that Maggie and the piano top, so, too, can writing be viewed as the base upon which the "more advanced" act of typing forms the apogee. *Home Scene* is a crucial image in the narrative of sound and aural transcription that I am developing in Eakins's work. The title "home scene" immediately announces the personal setting and intimate relationship between artist and subject, but more than this, the painting offers substantial clues as to the artist's personal equivocations between two poles of handicraft and mechanization.

The conjoining of human and machine that *Home Scene* adumbrates becomes more attenuated in the later piano pictures, *Elizabeth at the Piano* (fig. 100) and *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66), where the women seem to be fusing with their pianos. Elizabeth's fingers, for example, dissolve into the keys, and her legs meld with the piano's legs, and MacDowell similarly appears as part of the piano she plays in *Pathetic Song*, her black dress indeterminately blending with the instrument. This disarticulation between bodies and objects should not surprise us given that for the first twenty years of the typewriter's existence, the word "typewriter" simultaneously referred to the machine and the usually female operator, as exemplified by an 1895 *Atlantic Monthly* article written by a female

typist titled, "Being a Typewriter."[106] The women and instruments in *Elizabeth at the Piano* and *Pathetic Song* easily slide into these etymological and aesthetic elisions, that is, piano being conflated with typewriter machine and typewriter machine being conflated with female operator.

The preternatural fusion of human and machine can also be detected in the drawing manual that Eakins was drafting during his most intense period of tracing. To illustrate his principles regarding linear perspective, Eakins shows a boy looking at an empty frame held by a man, the boy's line of sight delineated by two projection lines that make a cone of vision (fig. 101). In light of the tensions between human and machine in Eakins's painting methods, and, for that matter, in certain passages of his drawing manual, this illustration takes on new meaning: the lines emanating from the boy suggesting the projection of sight also may be viewed as the projection of a negative to be traced by Eakins. In other words, boy transmutes into projector, while the man-artist traces the projected image onto the canvas close by. This suggested elision of projector and viewer gains more weight when squared with Eakins's insistence in his drawing manual that a picture can be correctly viewed from only one particular point, and "the spectator should have care to place himself at that point."[107] Surely Eakins was cognizant of the mechanized aspects of his tracing techniques as he was drafting the manual, and this drawing adumbrates the tensile combination of machine and human elements that constituted his paintings during this time.

In addition to this dynamic of bodily transmutation, both *Elizabeth at the Piano* and *Pathetic Song* manifest the problems of limited visibility and the materiality of text

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[106] Lucy C. Bull, "Being a Typewriter," *Atlantic Monthly* 76 (Dec. 1895): 827.

[107] Eakins goes on to state, "A picture is in this respect unlike a piece of sculpture." Thomas Eakins, "Chapter I: Linear Perspective - Tracing on a Window Plane," *A Drawing Manual*, 47.

that continue to appear throughout Eakins's *oeuvre*. However, there are slightly different, perhaps equally significant, issues present in each of the pictures that require us to examine each in turn. In *Elizabeth at the Piano*, even though the spectacle of writing is no longer arresting the pianist's activity, she does not confront her text, which, out of all the piano paintings, is the most legible. Rather, Elizabeth's downcast gaze, combined with the heavy shroud of darkness surrounding her, intimates a sense of blindness. A similar dynamic beset the typewriter for the first few decades of its operation. Until the mid 1890s, all typewriters were upstrikes, meaning that the keys hit the bottom of the platen cylinder to which the sheet of paper was fixed and that the typist was unable to see the words she typed until several more lines were created. As a result, front strike typewriters, which allowed the operator to see the words as they were typed, came on the market, and advertisements like the one seen here broadly promoted their visibility with statements like, "Work in sight" and "visible writing" (fig. 102). Thus, despite the fact that typewriting was perhaps the most legible form of personal writing, there was an inherent, initial blindness as the words were being created. In fact, some typewriters, such as the 1867 Malling Hansen ball from Denmark, were created for the blind, with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche turning to the typewriter in 1882 partly because of his poor eyesight.[108] Probably the most well known typist in this category, however, was a woman, Helen Keller (fig. 103), a leading blind-deaf author and activist who wrote extensively about her condition using a Braille typewriter.[109]

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108 Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 207.
Suggestions of tactility can be found in *Elizabeth at the Piano*, where a glimmer of white paint highlights, in addition to her ear, the pinky finger of Elizabeth's right hand, as well as the soft red flower in her hair.

109 One period writer described the typist looking "not on the keys but on the copy, as the eyes of the pianist rest on the score." *The History of Touch Typing*, (Remington Typewriter Co. [n.d.]). In fact, even those typists who could see used the touch-typing method, where the fingers were trained to find letters not

The schematic of obstructed visibility in Eakins's work perhaps become even more attenuated when considering the piano pictures painted by his contemporaries in Paris, of which there were many. As can be seen in Édouard Manet's *Madame Manet at the Piano* (1868; fig. 104), made by an artist who was quite adept with the Spanish tonal structure that skeptics could say accounts for the darkness in Eakins's pictures, the pianist faces the piano and the sheet music in lucid, patent terms, with the body easily distinguishable from the instrument. The obfuscation so present in Eakins's paintings, more than just the maneuverings of an artist adept at subtleties, seems to suggest an ambivalence towards a machine culture that was transforming much of Victorian society, indeed impacting the profession of Eakins's very own father.[110]

For women, the opportunities created by the typewriter were a welcome change in light of the male-dominated professions of typesetters and scriveners. The typewriter delineated a bifurcation of the sexes, with the virile typesetting men who worked in the print shop and the nimble, consumed female typists in the office. In Kittler's words, the typewriter "inverted the gender of writing" and created a cultural shockwave that left male scriveners like Eakins's father pondering the future of their profession.[111] As an 1875 advertisement boasts, women could earn $10 to $20 an hour because, "No invention has opened for women so broad and easy an avenue to profitable and suitable

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by sight, but by touch and placement of the eight fingers on the middle bar. Thus, the historical evolution of the typewriter was fraught with problems of visibility and a dissociation from the materiality of writing. Not only were typists denied access to the words they were creating, but also they were trained to avoid looking at the typewriter's lettered keys, the only immediate, albeit disjunctive, proof that they actually were writing. For the blind, the heightened faculty of touch helped them to adapt to typewriters quickly.

[110] To be sure, many individuals resisted the idea of typed writing, finding it impolite to receive typed letters and thinking that the writer assumed that they could not read handwriting.

[111] Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 183.

employment as the type-writer."[112] Women took heed of such calls for employment; between 1870 and 1880, the number of female stenographers and typists jumped from 4.5 to 40 percent, and continued to increase until they reached 95.6 percent by 1930.[113] Within a few years from the typewriter's introduction into the market, stenography and typing classes in institutions like the YWCA began to appear, as can be seen in this 1910 photograph (fig. 105) where a female instructor drills women, and the occasional man, on the fundamental manual skills required to write quickly and be an efficient office worker, be it as a stenographer or a typist.[114] The breadth of different typing experiences and opportunities in Victorian culture cannot be overstated. Some typists even transcribed dictation from phonographic recordings, as seen in this illustration (fig. 106).

We should note, too, that a typist's primary function was more than an ability to transcribe spoken words into writing, but to do so quickly, for as Kittler puts it, "[the typewriter was a] writing instrument that could coincide with the operating speed of nervous pathways."[115] Photography operated within a similar matrix of speed, perception, and the recording of this perception. According to Benjamin, "Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction [in photography] was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech."[116]

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[112] Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 54.

[113] United States Bureau of the Census, 1940; cited in Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 184.

[114] A related notion is the intersection of the typewriter and sewing, a convergence I discuss in next portion of the chapter. Kittler frames the connection as follows: "Prior to their industrialization the two sexes occupied strictly symmetrical roles: women, with the symbol of female industriousness in their hands, wove tissues; and men with the symbol of male intellectual activity in their hands, wove tissue of a different sort called text. Here, the stylus as singular needlepoint, there, the many female readers as fabric onto which it wrote." Ibid., 186.

[115] Ibid., 189.

[116] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, 436. In the same passage, Benjamin repeatedly conjoins photography with recorded sound: "A cinematographer shooting a scene in the studio captures the images at the speed of an actor's speech. Just as the illustrated newspaper virtually lay hidden within lithography, so the sound film was

Benjamin's annexing of orality and transcription with photography places the camera on the same conveyer belt with the typewriter. Both machines captured the fleeting moment, inscribing either word or image more quickly than human efforts alone, even though both machines were *interventions* in the physiological processes. As Mark Seltzer puts it, the typewriter "disarticulates the links between mind, eye, hand, and paper," in much the same way, I would suggest, Eakins's replacement of drawing with projected photographs altered the painting experience, fragmenting the links between mind, eye, hand, and canvas with the placement of a mechanically-obtained, albeit highly original, composition that dictated the movements of the artist's hands.[117]

Through a twentieth century representation of typing, this point of fragmentation comes into sharper focus. Though nearly half a century apart and featuring different, albeit related, mechanical devices, *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66) and Norman Rockwell's *And Daniel Boone Comes to Life on the Underwood Portable* 1923 advertisement for a typewriter (fig. 107) have some provocative resonances, and a comparison sheds considerable light on Eakins's tracing practices. Both the advertisement and the painting feature structures of dramatic chiaroscuro that illuminate some of the figures in a cold, eerie light while the rest of the setting remains dim.[118] Also in both images, paper, not seen easily in either work, seems to resist the analogy to the perfectly planed surface.

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latent in photography," and "[T]technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its site to be received in the studio of an art lover; the choral work performed in an auditorium or in the open air is enjoyed in a private room." Ibid. at 436, 437.

[117] Mark Seltzer, "The Graphic Unconscious: A Response," *New Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Winter, 1995), 25. See also Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 10.

[118] Another representation of the typewriter that depicts the act of typing with specter-like imagery is the 1899 novel, *The Enchanted Typewriter*, by John Kendrick Bangs. The novel contains several illustrations of a "ghost" at the typewriter while the human narrator looks on in disbelief. Further consideration of this novel in relation to *Pathetic Song* is necessary. John Kendrick Bangs, *The Enchanted Type-writer*, illustrated by Peter Newell (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899).

Perhaps most importantly, the sheet of paper in each work is linked to a powerfully articulated, glowing figure, who in some senses can be seen as an alter ego of the individual at the keyboard.

In *Pathetic Song*, the alter ego relationship between the pianist and the singer occurs in two different ways. In a more literal fashion, Harrison and MacDowell – both women, shown with similar hairstyles and looking in the same general direction outside the canvas – are connected by Harrison's sheet music, which literally overlaps the span of MacDowell's body. At the same time, however, Harrison seems to be the antithesis of MacDowell - she is precisely delineated, luminous, and offers us the hands that MacDowell does not.[119] But it is in the absences, somewhat ironically, where the correlation between Harrison and MacDowell is at its most intriguing. Even though Eakins does not show the keyboard of MacDowell's piano, it is strongly suggested in the hyper-articulated pleats of the ruffle that descends the length of Harrison's dress, pleats that could also be seen to echo the extensive minute dashes and marks that Eakins would have made in the tracing of the photograph onto the canvas. In effect, the pleated ruffle of Harrison's dress signifies much of what we cannot see, the arrangement of the keys on the piano, the incised datum of Eakins's hands, and in the much more abstract, phonographic sense discussed earlier, the inscribed sounds of the trio's song. Further, the ebony and ivory of the piano keys that we cannot see, just like the black and white of the photograph of Harrison that Eakins kept from the public, transform into the colored,

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[119] In contrast to the absence of hands in the work, consider *The Piano Duet* (before July 1886) by Giovanni Boldini, an Italian painter active in Paris during the same time Eakins was studying there. *The Piano Duet* depicts a cropped view of two women playing, focusing only on the two pairs of hand and the piano keys.

painted representation of the prominent ruffle.[120] If we consider the close relationship between MacDowell and Eakins, then the artist's representation of her becomes even more self-reflexive. That is, Eakins is channeled through the figure of MacDowell, who through her piano-playing (and continuing with the analogy, the artist's incisions) conjures – key by key, ruffle by ruffle – the shimmering singing figure. Through a similar dialectic of oppositions and affinities, Rockwell's advertisement also negotiates the thematics of artist, machine, and the power of the imagination with the repetitive, individualized fringe of the feral Boone's jacket materializing the unseen typewriter keys that the buttoned-up writer presses. Just as Boone "comes to life," to use the words of the advertisement, from the keys of the typewriter, literally streaming as a puff of smoke from the machine, so, too, does the singing figure appear as the singular brilliant creation from MacDowell (the artist surrogate) and the piano to which she is attached.

V. Manual Articulations

Though this last portion of the chapter looks to the figure of the cellist, the thematics I examine apply to the figure of MacDowell as well, as both are using their hands to create an artistic form. The cellist's manipulations are just one example of Eakins's long-standing fascination with the hand, which can be more readily seen in several works that feature protagonists employing both hands with a high degree of dexterity, what I call a "bi-dexerity."

[120] Because color photography was not commercially available until 1907, issues of color could not be resolved through Eakins's tracing techniques.

Mechanical Repetition

From the first stirrings of mechanization in the Industrial Age, machines symbolized a more proficient kind of laborer, and as more and more technologies replaced repetitive human functions, this tension between machine and human intensified. Describing the Machinery Department at the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition, for example, one writer could not help but relate the exhibited inventions to the limits of the human body:

> [T]he Machinery Department [exhibition], notwithstanding the deafening noise which assails the ears and the nauseous smell which pervades the atmosphere, is a great centre of attraction. Men and women … seem alike interested in studying these wonderful achievements of man's genius which make up for his weakness, to watch those iron arms which are never unnerved by toil … [We] have replaced the fatiguing and irregular action of the hand-work by the uniform and productive labour of machinery."[121]

This focus on the "iron arms which are never unnerved by toil" continues when the writer views the American exhibit, observing, "the Americans' main object is to supply the want of hands by the powerful aid of machinery" and that Elias Howe's sewing machine was an attempt to replace "women's fingers by iron prongs."[122] Nearly forty years later, the thematics of the hand still prevailed in representations of technology, as suggested by this photograph of a train and railroad by Alfred Stieglitz titled *Hand of Man* (1902; fig. 108).

Primarily because writing underwent the same mechanization as sewing, the typewriter began to be compared to the sewing machine as another intervention in the relationship between hand and eye. According to Kittler, before the Industrial Age,

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[121] Eugene Rimmel, *Recollections of the Paris Exhibition of 1867* (London: Chapman and Hall, c. 1867), 44.

[122] Ibid., 260-61, 253.

"women, with the symbol of female industriousness in their hands, wove tissues; and men with the symbol of male intellectual activity in their hands, wove tissue of a different sort called text."[123] This notion of a distinctly outmoded use of hands can be seen in Eakins's interest in sewing thematics and is relevant for our discussion of *Pathetic Song*. For example, in the watercolor *Spinning* (1881; fig. 109) – made the same year as *Pathetic Song*, a year before *The Writing Master*, and two years before *Professionals at Rehearsal* (a chronological sequence that shows just how proximate the subjects of sewing, writing, and music-making were in Eakins's mind) – Eakins's sister Margaret ("Maggie") seems to be in a time and place long past, wearing a dress much like those worn during Colonial times and hunched over a spinning wheel, twisting the fibers of the yarn together with both hands.[124] As was the case with *Spinning*, Eakins generally depicted his sewing protagonists in a specifically old-fashioned setting or mode of dress, and with nostalgic titles such as *In Grandmother's Time* and *Seventy Years Ago*.[125] To Marc Simpson, the presence of these historical subjects in Eakins's *oeuvre* belies the artist's intellectual agenda in creating these pictures:

> All the themes that lie deep within the Colonial Revival's antimodernist impulse – a glorification of handicrafts over modern technologies, of rural over urban existences, of simple rather than competitive relationships – are far distant from the way Eakins lived and practiced his art. The lure of spinning for Eakins, more than Colonial Revival inspiration, reveals an interest in the tool itself – its treadle and rotating wheel, for instance, relating to his youthful mechanical drawings and ever-growing concern with the depiction of motion…[126]

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[123] Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 186.

[124] *Spinning* shows the same part of the studio depicted in *Professionals at Rehearsal.*

[125] Out of the one hundred and eighty four works that Eakins created between 1877 and 1883, fifty portray historical costumes or themes. Simpson, "Eakins's Vision of the Past and Building of a Reputation," in *Thomas Eakins*, 211. Both *In Grandmother's Time* and *Seventy Years Ago* sold to museums within Eakins's lifetime, which was unusual, and perhaps Eakins capitalized on the commercial viability of the subject matter. For further discussion of Eakins's relationship with the historical past, see Akela Reason, *Thomas Eakins and the Uses of History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[126] Simpson, "Eakins's Vision of the Past," in *Thomas Eakins*, 218.

Simpson's observation is a keen one, but to some degree the opposition he sets up, that of handicrafts on one pole and modern technologies on the other, glosses over how the two spheres seeped into each other and just how significant the use of hands was for the technological devices of the day. In other words, the stethoscope, telegraph, typewriter, and phonograph – all these pioneering devices required the use of hands. In this sense, the relationship between such handicrafts as spinning and modern technologies like the sewing machine is not so much a binary as it is a continuum, one that Eakins moved fluidly (if somewhat subconsciously) from one seemingly contradictory position to another.

In addition to their obvious exploration of mechanization and movement, Eakins's depictions of sewing also can be seen as attempts to explore specifically feminine spheres of labor, and more broadly, attempts to articulate a feminine subjectivity. Several decades before Eakins painted *Spinning*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow featured a spinning protagonist in his poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish" (1858).[127] In a scene between the spinning Priscilla and suitor John Alden, Longfellow draws out the confluence of weaving and the allure of a woman's interiority:

> So as she sat at her wheel one afternoon in the Autumn
> Alden, who opposite sat, and was watching her dexterous fingers,
> As if the thread she was spinning were that of his life and his fortune,
> After a pause in their talk, thus spake to the sound of the spindle,
> "Truly, Priscilla," he said, "when I see you spinning and spinning,
> Never idle a moment but thrifty and thoughtful of others,
> Suddenly you are transformed, are visibly changed in a moment;
> You are no longer Priscilla, but Bertha the Beautiful Spinner.[128]

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[127] Eakins greatly admired Longfellow's poetry, claiming that it surpassed that by any Englishmen, "even Tennyson." Simpson, "Eakins's Vision of the Past," in *Thomas Eakins*, 217.

[128] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Courtship of Miles Standish," in *Poems and Other Writings: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2000), 433.

With the emphasis on dexterity, the sound of the device, and the ability of what was made with the hands to have expressive qualities ("as if the thread she was spinning were that of his life and his fortune"), Longfellow's spinning wheel tracks the experiences and subjectivities related to both the piano and typewriter, a connection that becomes more interesting in light of the fact that, as mentioned before, the piano-based typewriter was attached to a sewing machine base in its first few years of production.[129]

Even further, we can note how the manipulation of sewing tropes accorded women an agency that they otherwise may not have had, a point playfully emphasized in John Rogers' sculpture, *Why Don't You Speak for Yourself, John?* (1885; fig. 110). Visualizing the moment in Longfellow's poem when Priscilla turns from the spinning wheel and confronts Alden about his feelings for her, Rogers' sculpture is significant for our discussion because it annexes the act of speaking with that of spinning, an attenuation of the idea that processes of sewing function also as expressions of selfhood. A final example, painted nearly a century before Eakins's and Rogers' works, is Gilbert Stuart's masterful painting *Catherine Brass Yates (Mrs. Richard Yates)* (1793-94; fig.111), which also probes the interlocking of feminine self-possession and sewing in the tight format of a formal portrait. Surely Stuart's sitter would not appear as self-assured were it not for the elegant arrangement of her hands and thread; indeed, in some ways, it seems as if Yates is actually fabricating herself out of the silvery thread.[130] In the articulation of personhood through the regular and repetitive movements of the hand, there are obvious resonances between these representations of sewing and the set of forces motivating the

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[129] William K. Jenne, who led the sewing machine subdivision of Remington & Son, transformed Shole's rough model into a commercial success in 1874, using a sewing machine base. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 187. Longfellow's poem predates the typewriter by approximately nine years.

[130] Indeed, with the similarity of dress color and fabric, there seems to be a correspondence between Mrs. Yates and the singer in *Pathetic Song*.

figures in *Pathetic Song*. As the cellist manipulates the string of his cello and the pianist presses the keys of her instrument, it is almost as if they enable or encourage Harrison to sing her moving tune.

But there is another group of works, the series of paintings Eakins made related to the sculptor William Rush, that pushes these ideas even further. In the first of the three paintings devoted to the subject, *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1876-7; Fig. 112), we find Rush in the rear of a darkened studio, using hammer and chisel to carve the bottom portion of a wooden sculpture of a woman holding a bittern. In the foreground is an arrangement of three forms that receive most of the light and detail in the work, a pile of discarded clothing, a nude woman seen from behind, and an elderly seated woman (presumably the chaperone) who is engrossed in knitting. A key figure in the overall composition, the knitting woman not only corresponds to the sculptor in her manual act of creating, but she also is linked to the model and pile of clothes, in terms of propinquity and the suggestion of a feminine self-fashioning, one that must be chaperoned and shaped by certain codes of conduct. Indeed, many critics of the time readily associated the disproportionate amount of attention Eakins lavished on the clothing to the model's "lack of modesty." As one writer lamented,

> What ruins the picture is much less the want of beauty in the model … than the presence in the foreground of the clothes of that young woman, cast carelessly over a chair. This gives the shock which makes one think about the nudity – and at once the picture becomes improper![131]

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[131] "The American Artists: New Paintings in the Exhibition – Duveneck and Twachtman – Philadelphians Who Exhibit," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1878, p.4; cited in Simpson, "The 1870s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 37.

As a result of the overall schematic among figures and placement of objects and clothing, the nude model almost seems to be borne – coming to life – from the very different constructive processes presented, the body constituted by the sculptor, the self-awareness, by the knitter. Applying this set of relations to *Pathetic Song*, just as the sculptor and knitter seem to reference the artist and "create" the live model in the *William Rush* painting, the cellist and pianist in *Pathetic Song* suggest Eakins bringing the singing Harrison to her fully articulated form.

As several scholars have noted, Eakins extensively researched Rush's life and work and greatly admired the sculptor, and in some sense, the figure of Rush in this work signifies Eakins's idealized self, an emulation that becomes more emphatic in the later painting, *William Rush and His Model* (1908), where Rush is shown with the same hunched physique the artist had developed by that time.[132] With this premise in mind, we become aware of Eakins the artist and how his hand movements are a fusion of both sculptor and knitter, at once creating and clothing, replicating and vivifying, all the painted figures in the scene.[133] Further, we can note that the sculptor/artist is shown carving in the 1876 painting, inscribing a duplicate while the natural form is in front of him, and thus, in this sense, too, strongly suggests Eakins's tracing methods and commitment to transcription.[134] The sounds of the hammer, the repetitive taps of the

[132] Simpson, "The 1900s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 327; Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, 20, 166, n. 23. The third painting in the series is *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1908).

[133] The inordinate amount of attention lavished on the clothing in his depictions is surprising for an artist who, known to wear shabby smocks and for making his sitters look homely, was the very antithesis of John Singer Sargent and his indulgent sartorial narratives of fashionable women.

[134] In addition, the idea of replicating the female body as a mechanical device recalls the novel *L'Eve Future* by Frenchman Jean Marie Mathias Philippe Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (begun in 1878 and published in 1886), which explores the idea of casting the ideal woman in terms of the new technology of the phonograph. The plot centers on a fictionalized Thomas Edison as the inventor of a female android (from where the term originates) named Hadaly whose lungs are a working phonograph. Comte de Auguste

sculptor's chisel, are in and of themselves sounds of inscription, a repetitive clacking that can also be related, in a completely different sense altogether, to the typewriter/piano.[135] Through the relationships among the figures and the theme of artistic creation seen in *William Rush*, then, we can deepen the relationship between musicians and singer in *Pathetic Song* from one of enabling to that of creation, similar to the effects seen by placing *Pathetic Song* in dialogue with the Rockwell advertisement.

With its focus on sculpture, the *Rush* series also underscores how Eakins's artistic enterprise explored a kind of transcription that displaced draftsmanship and relied on a different set of rote movements. Intrinsic to the meaning of transcription is the contradictory notion of something *changing* in the repetition of the original. Under this premise, when Eakins repeats or traces the photograph with a stylus, he transmutes the lights and darks ingrained by the chemical photographic process into tiny brushstrokes of colored oil paint. These striations, first by projected photograph, then by pencil, then by incision into paint under layer, and then with a final brushstroke all suggest the topos of automatized repetition that populated the burgeoning discourse of machine culture. With Herman Melville's Bartleby the scrivener mechanically repeating the phrase "I would prefer not to," or Andre Breton's comment as he was learning to type that "[muscular] location and letter … associations are now in progress of automatization," or a young

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Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve*, trans. Robert Martin Adams (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

[135] In the manner the artist surrogate's inscriptive efforts create the artistic representation of a female in *William Rush* then, we also, although somewhat circuitously, come to the same conclusion that the tapping of the piano keys in *Pathetic Song* leads to the fully formed Harrison.

Worth pursuing in this regard are the automaton performances by German inventor Joseph Faber during the 1830s and 1840s. The automaton, known as Euphonia the Amazing Talking Machine, was comprised of artificial lungs, bellows for lungs, and a mask of a woman's face that attached to a keyboard-controlled apparatus. In this same vein, Edison created phonographic talking dolls, which were unsuccessful and pulled quickly from production. See Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines*, 173, 177-178.

woman typing the same phrase over and over again to convince Mark Twain of the machine's speed, the notion of rote-ness or repetition punctuated the narratives of writing and mechanization during Eakins's lifetime.[136] Looking at *Pathetic Song* , just as our musical trio repeats the notes of the sheet music to play the pathetic song, so, too, does Eakins repeat images from various projected photographs or squared studies into paint, creating painted transcriptions of photographic or drawn transcriptions of a single moment in time and space.

Bi-dexterity

As the previous section suggests, Eakins's interest in the mechanical, repetitive movements of the hand overlaps with his fascination with the idea of bi-dexterity, another notion intrinsic to certain cultural modes of transcription. Eakins most materially explores this thematic of bi-dexterity in several representations of an unusual instrument called the zither, which was originally used for folk music in the Alpine region in Europe and

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[136] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Science, Literature and Art, vol. II, July to December 1853* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co, 1853); Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 205; Mark Twain, *The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 225-6.

Twain's account of the encounter with the typist bears quoting in full: "Nasby and I saw the machine through a window, and went in to look at it. The salesman explained it to us, showed us samples of its work, and said it could do fifty-seven words a minute--a statement which we frankly confessed that we did not believe. So he put his type-girl to work, and we timed her by the watch. She actually did the fifty-seven in sixty seconds. We were partly convinced, but said it probably couldn't happen again. But it did. We timed the girl over and over again--with the same result always: she won out. She did her work on narrow slips of paper, and we pocketed them as fast as she turned them out, to show as curiosities. The price of the machine was one hundred and twenty-five dollars. I bought one, and we went away very much excited. At the hotel we got out our slips and were a little disappointed to find that they contained the same words." Twain, *The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories*, 225-6. According to Kittler, Mark Twain's 1876 novel *Tom Sawyer* was the "first typescript in literary history," Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 192.

When first hired as a copy clerk for a Wall Street attorney, Bartleby, the protagonist in Melville's short story, "did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. … I should have been delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically." Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 550. Soon thereafter however, even the machine-like productivity of Bartleby begins to enervate, and with the rote uttering of the phrase, "I would prefer not to," Bartleby ceases to write and, eventually, live.

brought to the United States by German immigrants in the 1830s. The artist made two works featuring the playing of the instrument, the first, a watercolor titled *The Zither Player* (1876), and several years later, an oil titled *Professionals at Rehearsal* (1883).[137]

The Zither Player (fig. 113) portrays two of Eakins's friends, William Sartain and Max Schmitt, in a shallow abstracted space. Sartain sits with a contemplative posture as he listens to Schmitt, who focuses intensely on playing, his fingers splayed over the board and the pick on his thumb in prominent view. In addition to the zither, on the table is an open bottle of wine, two wine glasses, a corkscrew and tuning instrument. The table gleams with a peculiar quality given the medium of watercolor, as do the wine glasses and a portion of Schmitt's forehead and hands. Most of the background is a darkened wall, with a portion a muddled gray bearing some strange black markings above Sartain's head. The only other adornment in the space is Eakins's signature by Schmitt's right foot, projected perspectivally onto the floor. In terms of its basic structure, the sheet bears a notable resemblance to Degas' *Monsieur and Madame Manet* (1868-9; fig. 114), a painting showing Édouard Manet listening to his wife Suzanne playing the piano.[138] Like Manet, Sartain is shown with his hand to his head and seems lost in his psychic response to the music. Whereas Manet is placed behind the musician and looks off into the distance, Sartain faces the player and gazes at the instrument as well as, more significantly, the musician's lively hand motions.

[137] Though watercolors are mostly associated with a general spontaneity, Eakins's were deliberative and usually worked out in oil studies beforehand. Indeed, much of *The Zither Player* has an oil-like appearance, particularly in the rich color notes of the wooden table. Watercolors have significant purchase in Eakins's career, for they were the first works of any kind that Eakins exhibited in the United States. Even though he never became a member, Eakins contributed annually to the American Society of Painters in Water Colors in New York from 1874 to 1882. Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 120.

[138] Degas gave the work to Manet as a gift only to have Manet slash the right portion of the canvas picturing his wife.

Perhaps still intrigued by the subject, or perhaps resurrected at the specific behest of Thomas B. Clarke, the New York collector (and patron also of Homer) who commissioned the work, Eakins revisited the scene of zither playing almost six years later, this time in a small oil canvas. In many ways, *Professionals at Rehearsal* (fig. 115) tracks the schematic design of *The Zither Player*. Featuring Eakins's student John Laurie Wallace playing the zither and George Agnew Reid, another student, with the guitar, *Professionals at Rehearsal* similarly positions the two figures at the eighteenth-century tilt-top table shown in the watercolor, with the same items more or less on the table. Intensifying the chiaroscuro effects in the oil, Eakins illuminates the zither player with a raking light. Other major compositional differences are the fact that the listening figure plays an instrument and the inclusion of a number of music texts on the floor, in a large stack on the left and a sole book on the right. As the placement of sheet music in two different spaces suggests, the theme of bifurcation or doubling can be found throughout, in the two players in the scene, the two faintly rendered wine glasses, what Marc Simpson notes as the "rhyming forms of corkscrew and tuning key" on the table, and, most intriguingly, in the two-handedness of the activities presented.[139] Indeed, like the watercolor, the dramatic gesticulations of the musician's hands hold the viewer's attention. Johns describes the actions as follows: "[The player's] left-hand fingers press the strings on the melody board, his right reach out to pluck the long accompaniment strings, while the plectrum on his thumb sounds the melody notes."[140] The double-handedness we find in *Professionals at Rehearsal* – like that in *Pathetic Song* (though

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[139] Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 113.

[140] Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 122. Johns also notes, "In using the term 'Professional' to describe his zither player and guitarist, Eakins probably meant to compliment their standards of performance rather than to designate that music making was their livelihood." Ibid., n.10.

there it is less emphatic) – is significant, for it is intrinsically required for both the aural and visual forms of artistic expression suggested by the works, music-making and the act of painting.

Eakins's attraction to displays of über-dexterity dates back at least to his time as a young art student in Paris. In the same letter where he discusses the various machines at the 1867 Paris Exposition, the artist expresses his fascination with the nimble skills of the Moors:

> You have perhaps seen the beautiful mosaic work of the Moors on their jewelry. They have a big workshop at the exhibition. I took interest in nothing more than in seeing these blacks working with tools entirely dissimilar with our own. … The old fellow sits down on it cross legged wraps the string of a bow around the nose of this primitive lathe and then takes the bow in the left hand and saws in and out with it while he grasps his heavy chisel between his hand and bare foot, *which seems indelica[tely] almost another hand. ... they certainly must have the credit of being very dexterous and they work very fast.*[141]

The thematic of über-dexterity in the same letter in which Eakins describes gleaming new machinery is telling in many ways, and certainly can be seen in many of the countless works Eakins created throughout the 1870s and 80s that feature two-handed protagonists, including, among other subjects, rowers, boxers, knitters, hunters, baseball players, and, of course, musicians.[142] During this same period, the notion of bi-dexterity was inflecting other forms of cultural production, most patently with the transcription technologies of the typewriter and camera. As can be seen in this 1901 *Munsey's* illustration of a woman holding "a light, small, modern camera[ ]" (fig. 116), unless one had a tripod,

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[141] Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, May 31, 1867, Goodrich Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art (emphasis added).

[142] There are other instances of Eakins's fascination with hands in general, such as the protagonist's waving gesture and the clapping figures in *Salutat* (1898).

photography required two hands to handle the device.[143] And just as visual transcription was accomplished with the dexterous use of the camera, written transcription could be completed with the dexterous use of the typewriter; both devices, in other words, converted the single-handed acts of drawing and writing into two-handed ones. On some level, there would be no question as to how Eakins would have embraced these new technologies, not only as cutting-edge mechanisms, but also as apparatuses that required a high degree of dexterity, but the fact remains that Eakins was surrounded by many people who still adhered to older systems of representation, in both his professional and personal life, and thus in some respects, the artist was caught between two eras.[144]

A perfect illustration of Eakins's equivocation towards this motif of two-handedness is *The Writing Master (Portrait of Benjamin Eakins)* (1882; fig. 117), a portrait Eakins made of his father the year before *Professionals at Rehearsal.* Though *The Writing Master* is nearly twice the size of *Professionals at Rehearsal*, there are many formal similarities between the two works, and the former painting is an interesting precedent to the latter. Simpson notes that both works feature, "a man seated at a table, looking down intently at his hands."[145] Indeed, the similarity of posture necessary for these two very different activities, as well as the inclusion of a text and the actors' relationship to it within the composition (which is of course much more direct in *The*

[143] W. I. Lincoln Adam, "The Evolution of the Camera," *Munsey's Magazine* 25, no. 5 (August 1901).

[144] It would be far too reductive to argue that the subjects of Eakins paintings bear a one-to-one correspondence to the kinds of artistic processes used, i.e., single-handed protagonists were painted with the single-handed act of conventional drawing and painting while double-handed subjects were completed with the (probably) double-handed use of a camera, and, in any event, Eakins mostly combined the two different techniques of traditional painting and tracing techniques. Rather, I focus on this motif of double-handedness to show that Eakins's artistic enterprise edged toward a double-handedness that in some cases can be viewed as distinctly belonging to machine culture and as a direct refutation of the single-handed activities of writing, drawing, and painting.

[145] Simpson, "The 1880s," in *Thomas Eakins*, 113.

Writing Master) is striking; at minimum, these resonances speak to the coordination of brain, eye, and hand that both writing and music-playing share. The difference between the textual materials shown in the two paintings, however, points to a broader divergence between the works, one that brings us closer to Eakins's ambivalences and preoccupations. In *The Writing Master*, the paper shown is one that Eakins's father is himself inscribing with a quill. The penmanship on the sheet is elegant, florid – in no uncertain terms, a display of the aesthetic value of what the hand could achieve.[146] In contrast, the bound music shown in *Professionals at Rehearsal* is not shown and more than likely made with the technologically advanced process of stereotype printing, by then the prevalent form of publishing that permitted the manufacturing of sheet music in huge quantities.[147] With this difference in mind, *The Writing Master* can be seen as depicting an elder laboring at a quickly disappearing kind of textuality, a decidedly single-handed one, while *Professionals at Rehearsal* shows a bi-dexterous younger generation with a newer, mass-produced, machine-made printing technology.[148] With the knowledge that the models in *Professionals at Rehearsal* are Eakins's very own students, one could argue that the painting holds just as much meaning, albeit in a very different sense, for Eakins as does the portrait of his father, and that even further, Eakins seems to

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[146] According to Goodrich, Benjamin Eakins engrossed documents, such as diplomas, deeds, and testimonials, and taught old style Spencerian hand at Friends Central School from 1845 to 1896. Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I: 2. Eakins applied unsuccessfully for the position of professor of drawing, writing, and bookkeeping in Central high school in September 1862, and helped his father with engrossing and teaching penmanship from 1862 to 1866. Nonetheless, as Goodrich describes it, the "demand for fine writing was diminishing, and the older man must have realized that there was little future in his profession." Ibid., 8.

[147] Though sheet music publishing was widespread in the United States since the early nineteenth century, the stereotype process, which involved duplication using a relief printing matrix and molten metal, replaced the previously used method of lithography (just as it did for the illustrated weeklies discussed in the previous chapter). With the rising popularity of parlor music in the 1860s, music publishers began to take advantage of the blank pages in the issues by placing advertisements.

[148] The fact remains, however, that Eakins shows both of his father's hands in a very intense way. Thus, even though Benjamin Eakins is only using his right hand to transcribe, the left is shown with just as much care.

be suspended between these two very different moments in time and cultural eras, a psychic posture that to some extent all individuals inhabit, but one that this artist in particular was able to image in all its complex and contradictory manifestations.

Despite these differences, *The Writing Master* and *Professionals at Rehearsal* are tied to one another, not only in their picturing of an act of intense concentration, but also in that both of the protagonists are in process of transcribing something. Though this may be obvious, Eakins's father was himself a transcriber, making written documents as records of events and announcements. Interestingly enough, in addition to making a record or copy of something, transcription also connotes the arrangement of musical composition for some instrument or voice other than the original. Because the zither was originally a folk instrument, there was hardly any original music created specifically for the instrument, thus, as Johns notes, the zither was used for "transcriptions of favorite operatic arias."[149] Eakins emphasizes this in the painting by showing the original sheet music on the floor, a placement that shows both how important the texts were to the musicians as well as how they did not ultimately rely on them.[150] This same general idea, though through very different operations, appears in *Pathetic Song* (fig. 66). All the figures are, in their own way, transcribing or translating the score to music and song. Even though the cellist in *Pathetic Song* depends on the sheet music, staring at it intently as he manipulates the bow and strings, it is completely hidden from view by the body of Harrison, just as the pianist's score is obscured and Harrison's music is illegible, and we are left with the impression that even though the text governs the entire scene, what is

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[149] Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*, 122.

[150] In this display of simultaneous deference and departure, Eakins's depiction of musical transcription provides an interesting framework to consider his own techniques of transcription: while he used photographs to guide his copying of an image, they were not the end-all in his picture-making process.

done with the mind and body – hands, eyes, ears, and mouths – is ultimately what moves us.

VI. Obsolescence

Unlike the other musical subjects that I have been examining throughout this chapter, Eakins's last piano picture, *Antiquated Music* (1900; fig. 118), does not depict the engaged playing of music, but the bleakness of the pressing of a single piano key. Showing the antique collector Sarah Sagehorn Frishmuth surrounded by her vintage music instruments, including an eighteenth-century piano, the painting is preoccupied with a broader theme of obsolescence that has been a subtext throughout this entire chapter.[151] Much of the work has the pale wash of a *memento mori*, from the weary, elderly protagonist and her elegiac, finale gesture, to the dingy instruments strewn in the foreground suggesting a final resting place of sorts. With this careless arrangement, Eakins reminds us that no matter how precious the collectibles are, they are nonetheless outdated and of no functional value. And with the automatized Mrs. Frishmuth, Eakins seems to equate the aging of humans to those of mechanical objects.[152] In particular, Eakins's choice of the word "antiquated" imbues the instruments and Mrs. Frishmuth with a kind of historicity, and speaks to a self-awareness about the unstable status of objects, people, and, of course, technology within one's lifetime, a significant departure from an artist obsessed with innovation throughout his entire career.

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[151] Simpson finds the work to center on the idea of possession. Simpson, "The 1900s," in *Thomas Eakins,* 319.

[152] Mrs. Frishmuth's vacuous gaze echoes the automatic expression and hand position of the female figure in Manet's *In the Conservatory* (1879), a connection that needs to be considered further.

Over 40 years after *Antiquated Music*, German philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote, "Even if we do not actually operate [the typewriter], it demands that we regard it if only to renounce and avoid it. This situation is constantly repeated everywhere, in all relations of modern man to technology. Technology *is* entrenched in our history."[153] In one sense, Eakins seems to renounce and avoid certain technologies, such as the typewriter and the phonograph, as Heidegger suggests, even if his renunciation was articulated as latent explorations of the devices' effects – repressed representations – in his paintings. Indeed, his embrace of the camera led to artistic techniques and pictorial subjects that, as I have been arguing throughout, enacted experiences and subjectivities much like those of the typewriter and phonograph.

This chapter has explored how Eakins's interest in recording the world around him intersected with *Pathetic Song*, both in terms of his personal use of photographic methods and the broader cultural framework of technologies of transcription. Eakins's project of transcription was extensive, continuous, and pervasive, mostly showing itself through an inordinate number of preparatory studies and photographs, and more briefly (and more controversially), in tracing projected photographs onto canvas.[154] For the artist, the various forms of aurality that music encompassed – singing, listening, playing an

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[153] Kittler, *Gramophone, Typewriter, Film*, 199.

[154] One aural-themed work that has been confirmed to be the result of the tracing techniques that I do not discuss in this chapter is *Arcadia* (1883), a pastoral of man playing a pan flute, a woman, and child, all in the nude. Looking at the preparatory photographs for the work, the standing figure was probably based on the photograph of Eakins, and that the reclining figure closest to us was probably based on this photograph of his wife, making the work a family portrait of sorts. For Foster, the painting portends another theme: "Although the painted figure is youthful and slender, Eakins literally enacted this role in front of the camera as well as in his imagination, identifying himself with the artist/musician who enthralls all listeners and – by extension – his students and patrons." Foster, *Eakins Rediscovered*, 179. Further consideration of this work is required.

The most lucid observation about Eakins's interest in the nude form comes from Elizabeth Johns, who states, "Whereas painting generally frustrated Eakins's interest in nudity, photography enabled him to exploit it freely." Elizabeth Johns, "*Swimming*: Thomas Eakins, The Twenty-ninth Bather," in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture*, Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash, ed. (Lunenburg, Vermont: The Stinehour Press, 1996), 71.

instrument – were corporeal movements that could be arrested just as the photograph arrested vision, a bold extension of his depictions of dancing bodies made early in his career. Sensitive to the muteness of his representations, Eakins compensated with several mimetic strategies, including highly accurate renditions of the performers' physiognomy and, in one significant instance, inscribing the notes of the song on the painting's frame. At the same time, the artist relied on metaphorical and more imaginary visualizations of sound, such as the minute articulations of the performers' clothing, articulations that also recalled his tracing method. Both the mimetic and metaphorical approaches to his sonic subjects track the discourse of the phonograph in terms of the value placed on a kind of realism and the transcribing of sound into an inorganic, inscribed product that could be experienced repeatedly. The hands of his performers also play an important role in the narrative of sonic transcription I have been describing, with the artist extolling manual dexterity in many different kinds of subjects, from writing and note-taking to sewing and music-making. And in the particular emphasis on bi-dexterity and attendant issues of creativity, repetition, and mechanization, Eakins's works converge with period notions related to the typewriter. Both in terms of its subject matter and the techniques involved in its creation, *Pathetic Song* contains all these dense, interrelated forces, the relation among hand, eye, and ear; the tension between body and machine; and most significantly, the push-pull between faithful recording and leaps of imagination. In this latter sense, the work seems a perfect illustration of Eakins's acknowledgement that art-making was not a wholly scientific or mimetic process: "The big artist does not sit down monkey like & copy a coal scuttle or an ugly old woman like some Dutch painters have done … but he keeps a sharp eye on Nature & steals her tools."[155]

[155] Eakins to Benjamin Eakins, March 6, 1868; cited in William Innes Homer, "Eakins as a Writer,"

Perhaps equally important is how *Singing a Pathetic Song* foreshadows Eakins's abandonment of the tracing techniques, steering the equivocating artist on a path towards less radical representational methods. In many ways, *Pathetic Song* tracks what Gitelman calls the late-nineteenth-century "oppositions of ear and eye, mouth and page. . . and man and machine."[156] Yet just as the painting contains all these tensions, Eakins's overall body of work cannot be reduced to the facile opposition of his father and the written page on one side, and the artist exploring the realm of representation associated with the mouth on the other. Fully cognizant of the twinned paradigms of machine and body within his time, the artist continuously attempted to negotiate the seemingly disparate modes of handicraft and mechanization, seen most vividly in such works as *Home Scene*, *William Rush*, and *Professionals at Rehearsal*. For many years, Eakins was hewing closely to his artistic training while wildly deviating from it, and his use of the camera suggests an individual completely fascinated by the machine age, and equally important, how the ideologies of the era affected realism as a paradigm.

To some degree, by confronting the set of issues surrounding the visual language of realism in the face of machine culture, Eakins's artistic enterprise can be viewed as a precursor to the mechanical and precisionist thematics of the early twentieth-century artists Francis Picabia and Charles Sheeler, respectively. In terms of Eakins's specific use of photography, it was only in the 1960s that others began to attempt the difficult project of amalgamating photography into painting that he abandoned, most obviously with such Photorealists as Richard Estes and Chuck Close, for example, but most intriguingly with

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in *Thomas Eakins*, 378.

[156] Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines*, 15.

the tracing practices of the German artist Gerhard Richter.[157] As can be seen in the oil and graphite work *Helen* (1963; fig. 119), Richter's practice of tracing projected photographic images onto canvas went beyond Eakins's. Intentionally blurring the final image, Richter explicitly agitated the problems that realist painting had attempted to salve, namely, constructs of history and memory, resulting in what Graham Bader calls Richter's "embrac[ing of] painting's necessary failure and ambition alike."[158] Though Eakins, too, manipulates conventional notions of historicity and memory for his own ends, he never veered towards the kind of flamboyant disavowal seen in Richter's work, which would have been tantamount to a kind of self-negation.[159] Rather than reveal the problems and contradictions of art-making and realist painting in the finished product as Richter did, Eakins's work was at its most self-critical in the various stages of its production, in its search for other methodologies to supplant drawing and painting and its attempts to dismantle a moment in time into as many parts as possible so that it could be reconstructed as one seemingly undisturbed image in the end. In this light, Eakins maintained what can only be described as a doggedness – one that was radical and ambitious for his time – in representing and remembering the world around him in a highly mimetic language.

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[157] Charles Sheeler watched Eakins prepare for portrait of Leslie Miller (his teacher): "this careful procedure led us to the conclusion that the man, whoever he was, could not be a great artist, for we had learned somewhere that great artists painted only by inspiration, a process akin to magic." Quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2: 183.

I intend to pursue the connections and incongruities between Eakins and Richter, particularly in terms of issues of aurality, at some point in the future.

[158] Graham Bader, "Tabula Rasa," *Artforum* vol. XLIX, no. 1 (September 2010): 97.

[159] Also for further exploration is how Eakins's visual records of singers in mid-song intersect with issues of memory, particularly in light of the fact that many individuals touted phonographic recordings for their preservations of the voice and, therefore the memory, of loved ones. Indeed, the power of a voice to spark memories cannot be underestimated. Consider, for example, Roland Barthes' discussion of the voice of his recently deceased mother: "How strange: her voice, which I knew so well, and which is said to be the very texture of memory ("the dear inflection…"), I no longer hear. Like a localized deafness … " Roland Barthes, "Journals: A Cruel Country - Notes on Mourning," *The New Yorker*, September 13, 2010.

Ultimately, Eakins's paintings show an emergent kind of realism, one whose boundaries were expanding beyond the visual to include the aural in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Almost seeking to make his audience listen with their eyes, his artistic endeavors sought the fusion of sound and vision in one, instantaneous, "real" moment, an attempt to meld previously distinct, unilateral sensorial faculties. Ironically, Eakins attempted to recover the gestalt of sensorial experiences through a bricolage of fragmented methods and techniques, a cutting and pasting of different moments, some "real," others imagined, an approach to painting that at once bypassed it by using photography and stayed densely within its borders through elaborate drawing schemes. Nonetheless, no other artist confronted the contradictory, undeniable terms of realism in such wide, sweeping strokes and tiny, almost invisible marks.

Chapter Three

Listening and the Splitting of Sight and Sound in Dewing's *A Reading*

> "In the voice we have an organ answering to hearing; we have no such organ answering to sight, and we do not repeat colors as we repeat sounds. This supplies an additional means of cultivating the ear by practicing the *active and passive organs one with the other*."
> – Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (1762) [1]

Thomas Wilmer Dewing's painterly explorations of music and song, like those of his contemporary Thomas Eakins, spanned the artist's nearly forty-year long career.[2] But whereas Eakins focused on the mimetic set of problems related to the visual representation of music-making – how the individuals' faces and bodies looked as they sang or played music, the ways they handled the instruments, the freezing of the singer's voice in mid-note – Dewing approached musical subjects from another point of view, and with a decidedly different aesthetic program. In *The Lute* (1904; fig. 120), for example, a work that typifies Dewing's mature style, we find several fine-boned, graceful women amidst a lush, abstracted landscape listening to another play the elongated instrument referenced in the title. In the arrangement of the figures and bifurcated composition, Dewing emphasizes the bimodality of the musical experience, with the playing of music on the right side of the canvas and its aural perception on the left. While to a certain

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1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. and with introduction and notes by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 148 (emphasis added).

2 Dewing's predilection for musical subjects was so well-known and respected that the piano manufacturer Steinway and Sons commissioned the artist in 1902 to paint the lid of an ornate grand piano to be given to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House. For the underside of the piano lid, Dewing chose a non-musical theme – an allegorical painting of Columbia receiving the nine muses in a misty landscape. He decorated the elaborate case with gilt, garlands, and such symbols of the United States as the bald eagle and the coat of arms for the first thirteen states. Literally conjoining the art of painting with the art of piano-playing, the piano, now at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, serves as a material reminder of Dewing's ethereal, floating women.

extent Dewing suggests the soft plucking sound of the lute through the muted color palette, carefully blended brushstrokes, and, more abstractly, the way the figures pierce the misty background, the work promotes a lyricism that is more a sense of mood than any particular impression of sound. Indeed, in some ways, the painting is concerned with the tranquility and contemplation that certain kinds of music induce – a state of mind that preoccupied Dewing throughout his *oeuvre*. The pictorial syntax of *The Lute*, in other words, encourages a synaesthetic experience that centers more on the interiority and passiveness associated with listening to music than the active, sonorous specificities of its creation. Indeed, throughout his career, Dewing manipulated the idiom of music for this purpose; and his emphasis on the imaginative powers of listening, along with the fact that his artistic techniques conveyed a sense of aurality more convincingly than did his depictions of the musical subjects themselves, did not go unnoticed by the critics of his time. Consider, for example, this review of a 1908 painting by Dewing titled *A Lady Playing the Violoncello*:

> As in Debussy's music, you find yourself not so much concerned with the idea as with the procedure. … The beauty of the picture is not so much the composition but its lovely tonal modulations. *It is the wall and the floor that sing [in Dewing's painting], not the violoncello.* We can think of nothing more musical than to have Dewing paint a room in his neutral tones – through which surge smothered chromatics – and sit and gaze upon the ceiling until one is wafted into a beautiful neant.[3]

Similarly, a critic writing in 1907 observed, "The mind creates its own associations in a picture like this: the painter exercising, as the musician does, an indefinable magic of

[3] Freer Gallery of Art Archives ("FGAA"), "Art Notes," *The Sun*, February 12, 1909 (emphasis added).

suggestion. Are not the purposes of the two arts the same as regards the touching of dormant emotions through chords of tone?"[4]

Dewing's emphasis on the ability of listening to spark the imagination – visualized in dematerialized forms, misty atmospheres, and tonal modulations – extended beyond his musical subjects. One of the most compelling works in this regard is *A Reading* (1897; fig. 121), which features two elegant women seated at a large, polished table. According to the painting's title, the woman on the right in the picture has been reading aloud to her listening companion nearby. Yet even though the picture largely visualizes an oral reading – the open book here, the contemplative listener there – it is difficult to understand the experiential loop between the two women as speaker and listener. It seems, rather, that we are suspended in a thick pause, and it is difficult to imagine the next words that will be spoken. Put another way, the entire painting seems blanketed in a mood of silence or contemplation and our aural imagination is neither stimulated nor satisfied.[5] While Dewing's decision to picture silence, instead of speech, emphasizes the contemplativeness that an activity such as an oral reading surely induces,

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[4] FGAA, "Art Exhibitions," *The New York Daily Tribune*, February 20, 1907.

[5] Using a similar term in philosophy, phenomenologist Don Ihde posits both an "auditory imagination" and "visual imagination," arguing that both are fields that correspond to but are distinct from their equivalent in perception. According to Ihde, the auditory imagination, like auditory perception, comes from any direction and is not necessarily accompanied by visual imagery. The uniqueness of the auditory imagination, Ihde argues, lies in its continuity, demonstrated most clearly by the phenomenon of inner speech, or the thoughts that continuously stream in our mind. Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 203-215. In contrast, my term, the "aural imagination," as discussed in my introduction, describes the synaesthetic process of the sounds called forth in our minds when looking at a work of art. Just as a work of art can evoke a certain mood or sentiment; in a similar way, it can also stir a kind of imaginative aurality and overcome the medium's muteness. Without the visual stimulus of, say, a painting or a sculpture, my concept of aural imagination does not exist. Inextricably attached to or enacted by a visual referent, the aural imagination hinges on the correlation between the mind and a work of art. The relationship, then, between a work of art and aural imagination is codependent, but not reciprocal. See Introduction, 9.

it also leaves us with somewhat of a visual paradox when viewing the picture, an incongruity between the painting's title of "a reading" and its visual effect.[6]

Indeed, some art historians have been careful to account for the painting's quiet mood in their construction of the painting's sonic narrative. Consider Kathleen Pyne's interpretation:

> … the resulting vacuum [in the room] produces a silence that confers upon the reading of a poem the tenor of a ritual. Immured in a silent interior world, both women look down, one intoning the words as she reads, the other listening as she contemplates the words and the fragile white flower in her hands.[7]

Pyne's artful reading of the painting reconciles the incongruity between what the painting shows us with what the title of the painting tells us. Yet instead of tamping down this incongruity into the surfeit of familiar issues surrounding Dewing's *oeuvre*, this chapter will make its ambiguities a central line of investigation as I seek to interpret the densities and silences contained within *A Reading*. Specifically, I will argue that this disjunction between the painting and its title is sensorially based, a tension between seeing one thing and hearing another; and further, that the tension between these sensory functions pervades *A Reading* in several important ways, with the women around the table and the viewers in front of the painting, with constructs of power and the imagination.

To date, scholarly understandings of *A Reading* have largely accrued in relation to Dewing's participation in Aestheticism, an Anglo-American movement and style that

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[6] According to Susan Hobbs, the work was initially shown as "*Reading"* in the 1900 exhibition at Montross Gallery. Similarly, for the 1901 Pan American Exhibition in Buffalo, John Gellatly lent the painting as "*Reading.*" With the 1924 Macbeth Gallery exhibition, "The Thirty Paintings by Thirty Artists," the painting began to be shown as "*A Reading*." The Smithsonian Institution acquired the painting as part of the Henry Ward Ranger bequest in 1914, and the work was first exhibited as part of the bequest in a 1929-30 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art as "*A Reading.*" E-mail correspondence with the author, March 10, 2009.

[7] Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 177-78.

promoted transcendence in the contemplation of aesthetic objects. Yet little has been done to explore the fact that ideas about listening and sound insistently mediated many of Dewing's depictions of aesthetic redemption. Self-refinement, interiority, repose, the power of the imagination – each of these Aesthetic practices and beliefs was overlaid with tropes of listening and (non-) sound. With this premise in mind, I consider the ways *A Reading* engages, indeed thrives on, the oscillating forms and meanings of listening and sound in the Gilded Age. A crucial issue for my examination will be the signification of gender, for women anchored – indeed, served as the leitmotif in – both the Aesthetic program and period depictions of listening. As scholars such as Bailey Van Hook and Susan Hobbs have shown, Aesthetic artists proffered women as vessels of culture and models of self-cultivation, with Dewing's women in particular presenting an ideal and essentialized cast of femininity.[8] As I will demonstrate, this investment in women in the late nineteenth century was also occurring with, if not precipitated by, the cultural forces that were circumscribing women as modern society's ideal listeners, and *A Reading* wholly participates in this realm of constructions and meanings. My aim here is to map these kinds of interrelationships between the painting and historical tropes of listening in order to suggest a perceptual, multi-sensory significance for Dewing's silent women, to reveal how the painting sustains pre-existing systems of social and sensorial authority, and to situate Dewing's art squarely within late nineteenth-century Western modernity, despite its prior relegation to modernity's backwaters and peripheries.

[8] Susan A. Hobbs, with a contribution by Barbara Dayer Gallati, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

To this end, I focus here not on what the women might be listening to, but *how* they are listening. As we have seen in the previous chapters, a significant set of forces transformed the meaning of sound and the act of listening in the second half of the nineteenth century. Culminating with such technologies as the phonograph in the late 1870s, voices became disembodied, and listening became detached from its visual referent. This fragmented effect occurred not only with the musical functions of the phonograph (such as not being able to see an opera as one listened on phonographic disk), but also with its textual uses, for as Lisa Gitelman puts it, "[f]or the first time reading aloud was explicitly severed from the human subject."[9] As this suggests, the phonograph was part of a discursive framework that normalized the fragmentation of the senses in the late nineteenth century. Disconnecting sound and sight, the phonograph would offer, in the words of its inventor Thomas Edison, "amusement [to] the lady or gentleman whose eyes and hands may be otherwise employed."[10] Like the phonograph, Dewing's *A Reading* – and the ears, eyes, and hands of the women he depicted in it – registers the period reorganizations between looking and listening. The painting, of course, does not depict a phonograph, but in its explicit bifurcation of the two senses, as well as its exploration of problems of aurality, orality, and replication, the work explores a range of issues that intersect with the technological form. Equally important, in its emphatic promotion of a feminized, cultivated kind of audition, the painting tracks, both visually and substantively, period consumption of the phonograph. As I will demonstrate, the targeting of middle-class, refined women as the phonograph's key consumers by

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[9] Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 145.

[10] Thomas Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," *North American Review* no. 126 (May – June 1878): 533.

corporations and advertisers was part of broad network of practices and beliefs regarding the confinement of women in Victorian society.[11] As Carolyn Marvin explains in her landmark study of technologies, "the early history of electric media is less the evolution of technical efficiencies in communication than a series of arenas for negotiating issues crucial to the conduct of social life; among them, who is inside and outside, who may speak, who may not, and who has authority and who may be believed."[12] These problematic issues of aurality and power are precisely what link the cultural construction of the phonograph and the inert, quiet women of *A Reading*.

I offer my efforts in this regard as a significant addition to the "interpretability chain," as Leo Steinberg calls it, of a polysemous or inscrutable picture, an effort with its own preconceived notions, limits, and set of difficulties.[13] Regarding Dewing in particular, Sarah Burns recently has discussed how his representations of women have been subjected throughout the decades to an array of meanings that are not necessarily uniform or consistent with each other.[14] My reading of Dewing's artistic production continues this somewhat disparate approach, and is decidedly influenced by the historical set of issues surrounding technological forms. In this current age of portable media consumption, emerging modes of self-expression and communication are challenging notions of public versus private spaces, creating vastly different forms of "listening," and

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[11] I think here of Michael Baxandall's discussion of the intention of pictures, "a construct descriptive of a relationship between a picture and its circumstances." In this same passage, Baxandall also discredits the notion that paintings are created synoptically: "The point is, of course, that in fact it takes a painter much longer than a moment to paint a picture: it takes hours or months. … Should one not make a virtue, again, of the truth, which is that we do not just have a single sense-impression of an object important enough for us to paint? We have thought about it, analytically about its parts and synthetically about their constitution." Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 42, 45.

[12] Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

[13] Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant "Last Supper,"* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 23.

[14] Sarah Burns, "How Words Matter," *American Art* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 2-4.

reconfiguring again the relationship between looking and listening. We might well trace the underpinnings of these phenomena to the immense transformations that occurred in the nineteenth century. In this light, Dewing's work seems particularly, and newly, relevant.

After describing the artist's background and some of the threshold issues related to period constructions of listening, this chapter will consider the ways that Dewing approaches sound within *A Reading* and, through the title, outside of it, following which I will examine other ways the painting splits the act of looking from that of listening. The last portion of my discussion will explore the intersections between the painting and the phonograph in terms of iconographical and gender issues.

I. The Artist and Listening

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1851, Dewing apprenticed at a lithography firm at an early age before studying art at the nearby Lowell Institute. With this relatively scant education, he began to earn a living by creating portraits that, even though made with chalk, evinced a high degree of technical skill and captured the exact likenesses of his sitters. News of his prodigious talents as a portraitist quickly spread beyond Boston art circles and, with the money earned from commissions, the artist went abroad to study at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1876, working mainly with Gustave Boulanger and Jules Lefebvre. Upon returning to Boston, Dewing briefly taught at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, before leaving for New York in 1880, the city he lived in for the next fifty years of his life. Very soon after moving there, Dewing met Maria Oakey, an artist who had studied with Thomas Couture and John LaFarge, and was very well connected to the

New York artistic community. The two married the following year and, though Maria cut down on her painting activities, she collaborated with her husband on many projects, including painting the floral or garden imagery in some of his works.

After a trip to England in 1883, Dewing's artistic style began to show the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites, a group of British painters who advocated a return to the dense colors and emphatic detail of fourteenth-century Northern European and Italian painting. Slowly though, the artist abandoned this somewhat staid pictorial language and developed his own distinct, dematerialized style, particularly in his paintings of women in abstracted landscapes and spare, refined interiors. He also began to teach at the Art Students League of New York and the National Academy of Design, coming into contact with many of the prominent artists of the day. It was through friend and noted architect Stanford White, however, that the artist's career truly began to take shape. White knew many wealthy businessmen, and most likely introduced the artist to John Gellatly and Charles Lang Freer, two successful industrialists who were avid collectors of American art and became the largest patrons of Dewing's work. Freer bought *The Piano*, his first painting by Dewing, in 1891, and by the following year, the artist, along with Dwight Tryon, was composing works for the magnate's Detroit home. Freer also supported the work of American expatriate James McNeill Whistler, and probably facilitated Dewing's travels to London to work with Whistler from December 1894 to March 1895. By the late 1890s, Dewing's position in the American art scene was secure, and the artist co-founded the group called the Ten American Painters in 1898 with Impressionists Edmund Tarbell, Frank Benson and others. After the first decade of the twentieth century, however,

Dewing's career began to decline, particularly in light of the new currents of modernism and abstraction, and the artist died in relative obscurity in 1938.

One of the most productive aspects of Dewing's life was the time he spent at the artist colony in Cornish, New Hampshire. From approximately 1885 to 1903, he and his wife would summer there, socializing with intellectuals and other artists such as Augustus Saint-Gaudens, George DeForest Brush, and participating in skits, theatricals, and living tableaux.[15] Such activities of refinement and culture, despite the natural surroundings, were paramount, and many evenings centered on music, including concerts by the famed Kneisel quartet. Frances Grimes, a Cornish colony resident from 1894 to 1909, explained that "music heard looking out at the landscape with people who were sensitive to the beauty of both, was heard, we felt, as it should be."[16] In many ways, the artistic community, as well as its atmospheric, moody landscape, greatly inspired the artist, particularly at critical junctures in his career. During the 1880s, critics both vaunted and maligned Dewing: he was elected an academician at the National Academy of Design in 1887, based on the success of his Pre-Raphaelite inspired work *The Days* (1884-87), even though the powerful critic Clarence Cook skewered the painting for its lack of narrative and imitative style. According to Susan Hobbs, Cook's opinions probably steered the artist towards the misty, tonalist depictions of women in airless

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[15] Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Dewing*, 129.

[16] Frances Grimes, "Reminiscences," in *A Circle of Friends: Art Colonies of Cornish and Dublin*, exh. cat. (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 1985), 61. Remarkably, Grimes's account of her time at the Cornish colony includes a number of aural recollections. For example, describing how the colony residents viewed the uncultivated and nouveau riche with disdain, she recalled, "I can still reproduce in my mind the tone of the word *Philistine*, how often I heard it." Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life,* 140. She also recalled that lunch was eaten at Saint-Gaudens's studio "with our eyes on the landscape and the songs of the birds and sighing of the pine boughs in our ears." Ibid., 159.

interiors that *A Reading* exemplifies – a pictorial subject with which Dewing would experiment for the next twenty years.[17]

Somewhat surprisingly, these subdued paintings stand in marked contrast to the artist's personal life. Dewing was a brash, surly man, with garrulous friends and, at times, a rowdy lifestyle – as can be seen in this photograph of a May 26, 1888, banquet honoring Harry Siddons Mowbray (fig. 122; Dewing is the last person on the left). Not always seeking such boisterous activities, Dewing once wrote to Freer about his close friend Stanford White, "There is always such a row going on where White is that I hope you can get here a few days ahead of him so that we can have a quiet time together and tramp off regardless of everyone."[18] Overall, though, those in Dewing's circle seemed to relish their raucous gatherings, as suggested by Freer in this passage of a letter to Dewing:

> I never saw men more enthusiastic and doubt if I ever attended a more harmoniously jolly dinner … [A]fter the dinner was over and the Sabbath morn well advanced Gen. Alger … insisted on having the musicians go to his own house and play for his family. It is said that the spire of the near-by Presbyterian church still trembles from the uproar made by the boys after they got inside the General's home …[19]

In addition to these kinds of vociferous activities, Dewing was known for his sharp tongue. As Grimes recalled, "He was constantly quoted, his jests at the expense of the other artists were called 'nuggets' and one trod carefully for fear of being the subject of a nugget … The knowledge that he was a rare artist with an incorruptible love of beauty as well as a malign wit gave him authority."[20] In many ways, Dewing, and his male

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[17] Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Dewing*, 13

[18] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 18, Letter 62, August 28, 1894.

[19] FGAA, Freer Letterpress Books, Vol. 4 [November 13, 1896 to October 31, 1898], Letter 146, February 23, 1897.

[20] Grimes, "Reminiscences," in *A Circle of Friends*, 64.

colleagues dominated the Cornish and New York artistic communities, while women were expected to be taciturn and submissive. As noted by Grimes, Cornish "was a place where the men were acknowledged to be more important than the women, where the men talked and the women listened."[21] There was one exception to this aural hierarchy in Cornish however, the wealthy Annie Lazarus, who, according to Grimes, was the "one woman there who ranked as a man … To me this was a new thing, to see men listening to the talk of a woman with the same kind and degree of interest they did to a man, as pleased by her praise of their work as if she had been a man and an artist."[22]

Grimes's pointed references to listening as a female sphere of activity was nothing new, of course. But while the auditory expectations for women were slow to change, listening as an overall set of social behaviors and practices underwent dramatic upheavals during this period. Prior to the nineteenth century, audition was not considered important in its own right. This was especially evident in concerts: primarily considered venues of sociability, audiences chattered and hawkers shouted, leaving little time to listen to the music.[23] Yet alongside scientific discoveries in sound and hearing, concertgoers began to focus their attention on the aural events at hand. Incrementally, periodicals, too, began to signal the individual modality of listening. In 1872, *Harpers New Monthly* featured a poem titled "The Listeners"; in 1873, *Scribner's Monthly* published a short story called "The Automaton-Ear."[24] This burgeoning interest by musicians, writers, and critics amounted, according to Peter Gay, to a "small army of

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21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud, Volume IV* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 14.

24 Marguerita Willets, "The Listeners," *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 45, issue 270 (Nov. 1872), 816-17; Florence McLandburgh, "The Automaton-Ear," *Scribners Monthly* 5, issue 6 (April 1873), 711-720. For discussion of tropes of sound, noise, and voice in Victorian literature, see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

single-minded preceptors struggl[ing] to train listeners in requisite introspective postures," ushering in an "ascent of inwardness in the Victorian Age."[25]

With this new emphasis on listening came a new set of cultural concerns. Lecturing in 1894 in New York, the city in which Dewing lived at the time, the architect and psychologist Henry Rutgers Marshall hypothesized that more people would attend concerts if they could "[avoid] the disagreeableness which goes with the necessity of listening after they have become tired … [and if they were able] to change their [visual] field of attention …"[26] Marshall's interest in the psychological aspects of aesthetic pleasures make his statements more than just a reprieve for the weary concertgoer. Alongside ideas of Aesthetic self-refinement and discussions of Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and "superior races," Marshall offered suggestions to salve "the social difficulties that go with control of the stimuli to the ear."[27] With such ideas as resting one sense's pleasure field and mentally shifting to different kinds of beauty, he emphasized a kind of reciprocal relationship between looking and listening: "we all, but women especially, feel impelled to wear our finest clothes and to make ourselves as attractive as possible, when going to hear a play or opera, at which conversational distractions are less allowable than in the picture gallery, where we find dress much less considered."[28] While much of Marshall's discussion implicates period concerns with distraction, the terms of his discussion are limited to the eye and the ear, pitting in opposition what he considers to be the aural forum of a play against a visual one such as the picture gallery, and reducing each venue to a dyadic relationship between looking and talking. In effect, Marshall

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[25] Gay, *The Naked Heart*, 11, 18.

[26] Henry Rutgers Marshall, *Aesthetic Principles* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1895, 1901), 29.

[27] Ibid., 27.

[28] Ibid., 27-28.

seems to be arguing for the soothing effect of one sense in this dyad when the other is over-stimulated. Similarly, Marshall's associate, psychologist William James argued that subjectivity in the late nineteenth century was inherently fragmentary, temporal, and ever-changing, requiring a series of sensorial disengagements to continue the flow of perceptual experience.[29] During the 1880s and 90s, other individuals such as French psychologist Pierre Janet also studied the dispersive effects of this kind of sensorial exchange, what Jonathan Crary terms, "perceptual and sensory derangements, in which autonomous sensations and perceptions, by virtue of their disassociation and fragmented character, acquire[ ] a higher level of intensity."[30] Marshall, too, explored these sensorial responses. As he suggested, even in such anodyne experiences as going to the picture-gallery, there were pressures on the relationship between looking and listening, with a desire to shape listening to conform to the rapidly changing demands of social and cultural intercourse.

It is unknown whether Dewing attended Marshall's lectures, but shifts in listening, technological or otherwise, figured emphatically in the artist's life. In fact, Dewing's closest friends were actively engaged with the latest innovations in sound: between 1892 and 1900 Stanford White's architectural firm built one of the most acoustically advanced music halls in Boston and patron Charles Lang Freer relied on the new inventions of the piano-based typewriter and telephone for the day-to-day business operations of his railroad-car company.[31] Dewing himself had telephones in his home and

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[29] See William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 1: 246, 236.

[30] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 96.

[31] The architectural firm McKim, Mead & White consulted with pioneering physicist Wallace Sabine in structuring the acoustics for Boston's Symphony Hall, and from that point on, continued to seek his advice on other projects. For example, Stanford White wrote Wallace in 1903 for advice on the poor

studio, and frequently communicated with Freer through the sound-based technology of the telegraph, as can be seen in letters where the artist wrote, "[w]e are doing nothing but expect you now everyday I look for a telegram … are you not coming up"? and "[w]hat the h—l is the matter? I haven't heard from you for a month. Telegraph me if you are all right."[32] While it is unknown whether Dewing used the phonograph, his use of the telephone and telegraph, in addition to the technophile activities of his close associates, suggests that he had some familiarity with the unprecedented developments in sound and listening that were occurring everywhere around him.

Trained in the violin and an avid concertgoer, Dewing also was well acquainted with the artistic powers of listening.[33] The painter was a passionate fan of the operas of Richard Wagner and he and his friends would listen to the Kneisel quartet play at the studio of Augustus Saint-Gaudens on Sunday afternoons.[34] This love of music is apparent in *An Artist* (1916; fig. 123), one of Dewing's last paintings. In the work, a broad-shouldered woman is seated next to her cello, holding a bow and looking away from the viewer. The subtle conflation of music and painting in the picture – the "artist" referred

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acoustics in an indoor tennis court he had designed for John Jacob Astor: "Although it has an earth floor, the echo and reverberation are very unpleasant. The only reason I am anxious about this is that high-born gentlemen 'holler,' and very beautiful ladies 'scream,' and get their remarks back in their faces from the vaulted wall. What shall we do about this?" Stanford White to Wallace Sabine (13 November 1903), quoted in William Dana Orcutt, *Wallace Clement Sabine: A Study in Achievement* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Plimpton Press, 1933), 234; cited in Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 69. For further discussion of the relationship between Sabine and McKim, Mead & White, see Thompson, *The Soundscape of* Modernity, 13-81.

[32] His studio phone number was 2249, 18th Street, and home, 887, Riverside. Box 13, Stanford White Papers, Avery Library, Columbia University; FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 19, Letter 66, September 22, 1895; Folder 19, Letter 70, November 19, 1895. Dewing also wrote, "Not hearing from you makes me fear that some d-d thing is going to keep you away." FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 18, Letter 62, August 28, 1894.

[33] When Dewing summered in Cornish, New Hampshire, the Kneisel quartet would also occasionally play in his home. Susan Hobbs, "Thomas Dewing in Cornish, 1885-1905," *American Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 19.

[34] Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Dewing*, 168, citing Bryant, "Some Famous Artists," roll 2542, frame 185, AAA; "In the World of Art," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 27, 1905, 4.

to in the title could be one who works with paint or music, and the bow begs comparison to a paintbrush – echoes a sentiment apparent in the manifold paintings devoted to music throughout the artist's career: music and painting were intertwined in the artist's mind and both non-verbal forms of representation were of signal importance to the artist. Indeed, the artist is perhaps best known for his depictions of music, such as *The Song* (1891) and *Girl with a Lute* (1905).[35] Dewing was not alone in his pursuit of musical subjects during this period, for he numbers among many artists who wrestled with the problems of sound and aurality at the end of the nineteenth century. Many painters – American and European, Impressionists and Symbolists – were depicting individuals listening to or making music at home or at concerts during this time.[36] Yet with *A Reading* and its exploration of the aurality of reading aloud, Dewing changed course in his own *oeuvre* and parted company with virtually all of his contemporaries. His British colleague Lawrence Alma-Tadema also ventured to paint such an unusual subject, with his *A Reading from Homer* (1885; fig. 124). Alma-Tadema's painting, completed a few years before Dewing's *A Reading*, somewhat stultifies the metaphysical operations at play, in large part a result of the work's stylized vocabulary and classical setting. Dewing's interpretation, in contrast, capaciously permits connections to period depictions of listening by showing the aural transaction in contemporary terms and probing issues of subjectivity.

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[35] See Susan Hobbs, "Thomas Wilmer Dewing, The Early Years," *American Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 4-35. To this day, many art historians annex Dewing's aural depictions to his musical avocation: "Dewing's love of music is well known, so it is not surprising to find this connection between his ethereal compositions and the insubstantial art of sound." John Davis and Jaroslaw Leshko, *The Smith College Museum of Art: European and American Painting and Sculpture, 1760-1960* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 2000), 144.

[36] For a discussion of several European paintings on this subject (such as Fernand Khnopff's *Listening to Schumann* (1883) and Edgar Degas' *Manet and His Wife* (1868-69)) in terms of Wagnerism, Symbolism, and the painters' desires to overpower music's status at the time, see Anne Leonard, "Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (2007): 266-286.

II. Audio Difficulties

While Dewing's painting conveys interiority more successfully than Alma-Tadema's picture, the work nonetheless avoids a direct representation of the sonic activity of reading aloud, and is complicated by the somewhat unusual emphasis on the psychic effects of listening. For each figure, Dewing creates an insular, contemplative persona whose sonic capabilities are significantly diminished, and the sense of pause in which both women are suspended is further heightened by the compositional elements within the work.

Omissions of Sound

One key aspect of the re-shaping of listening behaviors during Dewing's lifetime was a valorization of the ability to be silent. This was nothing new for the act of picture-making, of course, for a model was required to sit quietly for hours on end as the artist created her likeness on canvas. The painter-narrator in Henry James' 1893 short story "The Real Thing," intimates this process when, after the elegant Mr. and Mrs. Monarch offer themselves to him as models by strutting about his studio, he remarks, "I thanked [them], observing that what a draughtsman most valued in his model was the faculty of keeping quiet."[37] Beyond the allusion to studio operations, however, silence functioned as a powerful signifier of different psychic and sensorial states. According to Susan Canning, silence carried several interpretative possibilities: contemplation or meditation,

[37] *Henry James: Complete Stories 1892-1898* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 36. Mrs. Monarch's husband also praises his wife's ability to be quiet, for as he boasts, "she was known as the Beautiful Statue." Ibid.

Indeed, *A Reading* readily visualizes the silence required not only to listen but also to be painted; the painting, in this small sense, can be seen as conflating the act of production with the representation itself.

admonition against speech, and religious devotion.[38] In the late nineteenth century, American artists usually represented silence in terms of contemplation, as exemplified by Augustus Saint-Gaudens's 1874 sculpture of a woman holding a finger to her lips, titled *Silence*.[39] While Dewing's women in *A Reading* do not adopt this pose or function as allegories of silence; their lack of sound equivocates – problematically so – between a silence-like interiority and the aural receptivity of listening, an ambiguity that Dewing creates using principles of Aestheticism and formal and compositional strategies of omission and immobility.[40]

Though he rarely discussed specific paintings, Dewing was tendentious about his work overall. Writing to his patron Freer in 1901, Dewing remarked, "[My landscapes] are not understood by the great public who go to an exhibition like the Pan American. … My decorations belong to the poetic and imaginative world where a few choice spirits live."[41] Despite the fact that Dewing did not include *A Reading* as part of these poetic and imaginative decorations, scholars today interpret the work as visualizing the meditative

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[38] Susan Canning, "Fernand Khnopff and the Iconography of Silence," *Arts Magazine* 54 (December 1979): 170-76.

[39] Paradoxically, the personification of silence originated with the Egyptian child-god of fertility Horus's gesture of a finger to his lips to signify speech, with the meaning inverted when the ancient Greeks later adopted Horus's gesture for their god of silence, Harpocrates. Ibid., 171-2.

[40] Dewing's fine brushstroke, haziness of forms, and soft palette also contribute to the women's silence. The soft brushstroke, particularly in the art of Whistler and George Inness, recently has been explored in an exhibition at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Marc Simpson at al., *Like Breath on Glass: Whistler, Inness, and the Art of Painting Softly*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

These facture-related issues have led some art historians to place Dewing as a Tonalist, a loose stylistic category centering on a harmonious palette of subtle tonal variations that simultaneously evokes comparison to the ideas of music and a sense of softness. Discussing the important 1972 exhibition of the Tonalists she organized, Wanda Corn explains that she took the term "tonalism" from period criticism of these paintings, roughly during the years of 1880-1915. Wanda Corn, "Reflections on the 'Color of Mood'," in *Like Breath on Glass*, 210. For further discussion of Tonalism, see Ralph Sessions, *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005).

[41] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Letter 110, February 16, 1901. Dewing goes on to say, "[My interiors] stand squarely on their technical excellence. … This makes nine corking things producing a concentrated effect against which there is a chance for carp or quibble." *A Reading* was one of the nine "corking" paintings.

state inherent in aesthetic experience, one of Dewing's main preoccupations throughout his career-long engagement with Aestheticism.[42] Commonly associated with the mantra "art for art's sake," the Aesthetic movement privileged formal issues of harmony and beauty over narrative. Though many painters, thinkers and collectors advocated the principles of Aestheticism, it was James McNeill Whistler who became its most famous spokesman. In an 1878 letter, for example, Whistler wrote, "As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and subject matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of color … [Art] should stand alone, and … that is why I insist on calling my works 'arrangements' or 'harmonies'."[43] As Whistler's remarks suggests, music, and its stimulation of the imagination, was central to his aesthetic strategies, with harmony taking precedence over subject matter.[44] Patrons and collectors of Aesthetic paintings who supported Whistler's program similarly prized the powers of the imagination and railed against literalness. For example, Charles Lang Freer exclaimed, "So many people … seem to want buckets full of pigment where its intelligent absence

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[42] Kathleen Pyne argues that this is the main thrust of *A Reading*: "[the painting] adumbrates the higher condition that can be reached when the frippery of life is cast away …" Kathleen Pyne, "Evolutionary Typology and the American Woman in the Work of Thomas Dewing," *American Art* 7, no. 4. (Autumn, 1993): 17. Pyne goes on to state that Dewing's women contemplate an object to gain entrance to an "ideal world of imagination," for "worship of art." Ibid., 19. For further discussion of this topic, see Sarah Burns, "The Poetic Mode in American Painting: George Fuller and Thomas Dewing" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979).

For further discussion of Dewing's decorations and engagement with the tenets of Aestheticism, see Bailey Van Hook, "Decorative Images of American Women: The Aristocratic Aesthetic of the Late Nineteenth Century," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 55.

[43] James A. McNeill Whistler, letter to *The World*, May 22, 1878, reprinted in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: Dover, 1967), 127-8.

[44] Judith Zilczer explains that Whistler's later canvases relied on a near abstract formal elements and that "[m]usical terminology was meant to convey this subordination of representational to formal values." Judith Zilczer, " 'Color Music:' Synaesthesia and Nineteenth-Century Sources for Abstract Art," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (1987), 102.

stands for higher imagination and greater subjective pleasure. Is the world never to learn the great value of omission?"[45]

Dewing, too, apparently believed in the value of omission with respect to the imagination, for he reduced *A Reading*'s legibility by altering the figures in significant ways.[46] As Susan Hobbs has noted, according to x- and auto-radiographs of the work, the reader was originally making eye contact with and lifting her face toward the listener, and the listener had an outstretched arm to the reader. Instead of showing these sensorial empathies and narrative gestures – all of which would suggest that the women were participating in an oral reading – Dewing changed each figure (fig. 121) to appear non-communicative and diffident.[47] These efforts to obscure the subject matter suggest an unusual artistic agenda, one that was clearly differentiated from other period depictions of speaking or singing. For example, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Dewing's contemporary Thomas Eakins attempted to transcribe the physiognomy of professional singer Weda Cook in *The Concert Singer* (1890-92; fig. 86) in his quest to investigate the human body and psyche. With her head lifted in song and mouth wide open, even the subtle modeling of the throat, Cook's sonic powers are easily comprehensible. In her

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[45] FGAA, Freer Letterpress Books, letter to Alfred Chapman, October 1, 1904.

In one of his seven lectures in New York in 1893 titled *Art for Art Sake's*, John Van Dyke states, "Does it affect the beauty of their pictures if their women be called by the name of Madonna, Venus, Mona Lisa or Fornarina? … Not a bit of it. The pictures live today not by virtue of name or story, but by virtue of their modeling, coloring, light, character, force, power, all of them pictorial motives." John Charles Van Dyke, *Art for Art's Sake: Seven University Lectures on the Technical Beauties of Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 17.

Henry Rutgers Marshall also advocated for "omissions" in his 1894 lecture: "[Gotthold Ephraim] Lessing [calls] for an incompletion of detail in the artist's work, that the imagination may have room in which to work its expansive effects. We thus look for a fullness of non-fulfillment of exact detail; for an avoidance of strictness of realism…" Marshall, *Aesthetic Principles*, 175.

[46] Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing*, 161.

[47] Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses the signifying capacity of gesture and compares the gesture's mute sense of language to painting's muteness in his essay, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. and with introduction by Richard C. McCleary (Chicago: Northwestern Press, 1964), 46.

dress, too, with the extraordinary detail in the beading and the abstracting of the brocade pattern, Eakins suggests, respectively, both the aural acuity and transcendence associated with listening to music. Leaving no doubt as to the source of his efforts, Eakins went so far as to carve the opening bars of Mendelssohn's aria onto the painting's chestnut frame. Dewing makes no such overtures to stir the aural imagination in *A Reading*. In fact, in many of his pictures, the artist avoids endowing his protagonists with the specific qualities of talking or singing. In *The Song* (1891; fig. 125) (which bears a tonal and compositional affinity to *A Reading*), for example, even though the singer throws her head back, her mouth remains closed.[48] Near the end of his career, however, in *The Singer* (1924; fig. 126), the artist pictures the protagonist with an open mouth, which, in combination with the body language of the performer and the lute that she holds, renders a somewhat more believable representation of the scene.

The importance of gestures in sonic representations cannot be overstated. In an essay entitled "The Sound of Pictures," Nelson Goodman argues, "symbols from other systems – gestural, pictorial, diagrammatic, etc. – [function as] predicates of a language."[49] Reframing Goodman's idea in aural terms, symbols such as gestures, facial expressions, and text can parlay visual communication strategies into sonic events.[50] As can be seen in this detail of *A Reading* (fig. 127), Dewing eliminates the gestural symbols that connote speaking, creating instead a speaker who, with closed lips, face tilted down, and eyes averted from the listener, turns inward, lost within her own absorptive orbit. With this effect, the speaker resembles the countless depictions of women reading

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[48] Dewing repeats the head position for the singer in another work, *The Song and the Cello* (c. 1910).

[49] Nelson Goodman, *Language of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1976), 57.

[50] Other visual strategies used in abstraction, such as using bold or brash colors, vivid pattern, or linear suggestions of movement, also are particularly common in evoking a sense of sound.

silently to themselves created during this period. Cultural historian Martha Banta argues that such portrayals touted the female mind at work, disagreeing with the premise that they showed "a life exposed as indolence, passivity, emptiness, and negation."[51] Banta's logic, applicable to silent readers or thinkers, cannot rescue the speaker in *A Reading* however, for Dewing creates a woman who projects a sense of passiveness not commensurate with the task at hand.

This was nothing new for Dewing. Time and time again, the artist depicted women in various sonic activities who either display listlessness or a kind of non-engagement. For example in *The Spinet* (ca. 1902; fig. 128), we can see a fine-boned woman seated at the piano-like instrument, but while the keyboard is visible, her hands are not. Instead, Dewing focuses on the alluring female form, shifting the emphasis away from music-making. The beauty of the musician's shoulders and back, accentuated by the neckline of the dress and her hair pulled up in a bun, demand our attention. The work strokes our imagination, nonetheless, by denying us a frontal, clear view of the woman, and with the mirror above the spinet amplifying the reflective mood of the painting. Similarly, in *Music* (ca. 1895; fig. 129), two women are inside a colonnaded area, one seated and playing a large lute, while the other stands listening in profile. Again, the indistinct, shaded female forms, open compositional structure, and loose color arrangement help to instill a tranquil mood in the viewer, but our response has very little to do with the supposed music being made by the lute player. Just as the performers in *The Spinet* and *Music* convey a serenity and sense of reflection, the speaker in *A Reading*

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[51] Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 345-47.

(fig. 121), too, seems more concerned with her own interiority than reading the text in front of her aloud.

In addition, even though Dewing intended the painting to depict the aural contemplation of a written text, there is no sense of sound or text-like stimulus in the painting. Most tellingly, the open book has crisp, delineated pages, but no words. This, along with the narrative gestures that Dewing eliminated, contributes to an overall program of omission or evacuation. Even the expanse of the table and the bare arrangement of flowers in the vase seem to aggregate this feeling of absence. All anticipate an act of artistic expression, suggesting a desire for the artist's mark – a production of objects on the table, flowers in the vase, or words on the pages. Instead, Dewing evacuates these spaces for the most part, and along with the altered speaker, the silence or contemplation we sense in *A Reading* becomes an emptying of sound.

Unclear Listening

The listener, too, presents difficulties in terms of aural meanings. While Dewing created many depictions of listening, few works feature a listener in such dense, ambiguous ways. For example, in *Lady with a Lute* (1886; fig. 130a), Dewing shows the listener in profile, an artistic convention to depict listening that permits a comprehensive view of the ear.[52] Another audio-visual aid is the fact that the figure touches an object that transmits sound. In other words, the sonic narrative in this painting is manifest. Yet in *A Reading*, even though the listener (fig. 130b) is shown in profile, the ear is covered,

[52] The use of the profile to convey listening has not been widely acknowledged, although Jennifer Roberts alludes to the centrality of the ear in her discussion of the profile in her essay on John Singleton Copley's *Boy with a Squirrel* (1765). Jennifer Roberts, "Copley's Cargo: *Boy with a Squirrel* and the Dilemma of Transit," *American Art* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 33.

and the ear's sonic powers are thereby obscured.[53] This was not the only instance that the artist obfuscated certain qualities of audition in his representation of women. In *The Recitation* (1891; fig. 131) where, we should note, the speaker also seems to have her mouth closed and the women float in a landscape that seems more suggestive of the mind than any specific geographical area, the auditor is turned away from the viewer and obscured in *profil perdu*. Thus, similar to the scene of *A Reading*, we the viewer are given little information that a sonic activity is taking place.

Along with this sense of occlusion, the listener in *A Reading* (fig. 121) seems enervated, with her left arm particularly limp, hinting at the fascination with hypnosis or trance that so gripped the *fin de siécle*.[54] The most infamous example of this trend is the series of lectures given by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot. At the hospital at Salpêtrière, Charcot conducted studies of women afflicted by hysteria by hypnotizing them for classes of male students, pictorialized by André Brouillet in the work, *A Clinical Lecture at the Salpêtrière* (1887; fig. 132). Emphasizing the sexual pleasure implicit in this spectacle, Brouillet bathes the patient and her décolleté in warm light as the suit-clad Charcot discourses next to her. Within this inequity of power there are sonic implications, for it is Charcot who speaks and the female patient who is rendered mute by his efforts.[55] To put it differently, silence in this case is not an admonition of speech, but the draining

[53] According to Giovanni Morelli, a nineteenth-century Italian writer, artists revealed their personal style when painting seemingly insignificant details like earlobes. For further discussion, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes. Clues and Scientific Method." *History Workshop* 9 (1980): 5-36; and Richard Wollheim, "Giovanni Morelli and the Origins of Scientific Connoisseurship," in *On Art and Mind: Essays and Lecture*s (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 177-201.

[54] Another painting by Dewing that more explicitly deals with these ideas, particularly the séance, is *The Fortune Teller* (1904-5). For further discussion of this work, see Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 180.

[55] For a discussion of Brouillet's painting in terms of a sexualized male audience, see Susan Stanford Friedman, "Hysteria, Dreams, and Modernity: A Reading of the Origins of Psychoanalysis in Freud's Early Corpus," in *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 46-7.

of sound. If we can connect Dewing's women in *A Reading* to Charcot and hysteria (through Brouillet's painting), it is because of their overlapping strategies of suppressing the female voice in spite of her physical presence, through techniques of restraint or immobilization.[56] Further, as these examples illustrate, while silence and listening are two very different – albeit sometimes related – perceptual experiences, these differences can disappear in visual representation, creating a paradox of sorts that the artist must overcome with visual markers or pictorial strategies. Dewing, on the contrary, not only avoids this kind of auditory illumination (as suggested by the fact that critics dubbed him a "quietist"), but he also makes changes to *A Reading* that diffuse the aural experiential loop between the women and evacuate any possibility of sound within the painting.[57]

Immobility and the Table

Along with these sonic omissions, Dewing immobilizes the women in the painting, an effect that further minimizes their sonic powers. This strategy comes into

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[56] With its wallpapered interior, female protagonists, and general timbre of malaise, *A Reading* dabbles in another late nineteenth-century neurosis, neurasthenia, a condition made notorious by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1891 short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." The physician George M. Beard faulted neurasthenia to a rapidly developing civilization: "The chief and primary cause of this development and very rapid increase of nervousness in modern civilization, which is distinguished from ancient by these five characteristics: steam-power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women." George M. Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York, 1881), vi – vii; cited in Sarah Burns, "Old Maverick to Old Master: Whistler in the Public Eye in Turn-of-the-Century America," *American Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 45.

The connection between neurasthenia, which primarily affected women, and silence is further testament to period forces suppressing the female voice. Consistent with my argument above, this reputed pandemic was yet another stratagem to quell women's desire to leave the home and achieve independence. As Wanda Corn states, "The late nineteenth-century American paintings of quiet women … were consonant with both the diagnosis and the cures for nervous disorders. In their repose and calm, women-at-home images modeled the behaviors doctors recommended to stave off nervous dysfunctions." Wanda Corn, "Introduction," in *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, exh. cat. (The Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2004), 4.

In terms of Dewing's artistic production, Zachary Ross argues that his leisurely women have overcome such neuroses, having attained "physical and mental relaxation." Zachary Ross, "Rest for the Weary: American Nervousness and the Aesthetics of Repose," in *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, 23.

[57] There were two exhibitions on Quietism in the 1970s: a 1970 show entitled "Some Quietest Painters" at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York and "Quiet Moments in American Painting" in the Wickersham Gallery in New York in the 1970s. For a brief historiography of Quietism, see Corn, "Reflections on the 'Color of Mood'," in *Like Breath on Glass*, 219.

fuller view when considering Walter McEwen's *Ghost Story* (1887; fig. 133), a work made by the Munich- and Paris-trained American artist while he lived in Holland.[58] Though more academic and of a different stamp than Dewing's painting, we can discern immediately how *Ghost Story* is successful at provoking our aural imagination. In front of a light-filled window and near spinning wheels that lay idle, a group of maids sit rapt with attention as they listen to a gesticulating storyteller. We can easily identify the latter by her hand movements and animated expression, with the listeners' bodily and facial responses as further generous indicators of the sonic transaction. A more subtle marker, however, is the way McEwen positions the speaker, the transmitter of sound, in the center of the painting with the other bodies encircling her so as to create a motif of circulation not unlike the concentric movement of sound waves. In addition to the placement of the women within the painting, other emblems of movement such as the ascendant leaves of the plants on the windowsill suggest the propagation of words and the organic processes of the mind. Even with the unused spinning wheels, McEwen suggests the thematic of sonic mobility that pervades the painting, transferring to the storyteller the power to "spin the yarn." With all of these strategies, then, McEwen completely enacts an aural experiential loop within the boundaries of the painting, with sound being transmitted and received in many directions.

In contrast, each woman in *A Reading* appears trapped by her surroundings, an effect amplified by the suppressing compositional structure. With its wedge-like position and stark orthogonals, the table pins the women in place, restricting any possibility of movement within the painting's geometric system, an arrangement also seen with the

[58] The painting was exhibited with much fanfare at the Paris Salon in 1888 and World's Columbian Exhibition in 1893, and won a gold medal in Austria in 1902. "Austrian Honor for Walter McEwen," *New York Times*, April 22, 1902.

lady pinned behind the massive piano in *The Piano* (1891).[59] In *A Reading* (fig. 121), the women also become fixed, inert coordinates, like the vase and the mirror nearby; their motionless state minimizes the potential for the durational, mutable operations of speaking and listening. Opposing this stasis, the flowers in and around the vase offer a hint of mobility: some droop, one is strewn on the table in front of the vase, and another is turned upside down so that its bloom touches its own reflection. Unlike the lively vegetal growth near the storyteller in *Ghost Story*, the flowers in *A Reading* are thin and few however, incapable of overcoming the vast emptiness of the scene. In fact, Dewing actually removed some of the flowers in the arrangement, making the scene sparer and therefore even quieter.[60]

The table, one of the most powerful aspects of the painting, also continues this thematic of emptiness. Amidst the excitement surrounding his retrospective at the Montross Gallery in New York in 1900, Dewing wrote Stanford White, "Did you notice the one with two girls at a big table, I think it the best thing that I ever did."[61] Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that "the one with two girls at a big table," as Dewing himself put it, is just as much about the table as it is about the girls. The table helps to order a logical relationship between the two women as an aural circuit of sorts, with one as the transmitter of sound, and the other as the receiver. In *Brocart de Venise* (1904-5: fig. 134), another work by Dewing picturing both nodes of the aural loop, the listener is

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[59] The table's surface tilts at a somewhat unrealistic angle and does not seem to be perspectivally accurate, unusual considering Dewing was a highly skilled draftsman. Susan Hobbs notes that the skewed perspective resembles the style of Degas. Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing*, 160.

[60] Ibid., 160-1.

[61] White Papers, Columbia University, Dewing to White, February 3, 1900, SW 42:8. An acclaimed architect, White designed many of the frames for Dewing's paintings – a collaboration that has received little inquiry to date. For general discussions of White's frames, see Nina Gray and Suzanne Smeaton, "Within Gilded Borders: The Frames of Stanford White," *American Art* 7 (Spring 1993): 32-45; and Susan Hobbs, "A Note on Frames," in *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing*, 83-85.

spatially dislocated from the source of sound, brought close to the picture plane and looking away from her companion playing in the background. In *A Reading* (fig. 121), however, the table marshals the two women, a convergence further suggested by the similarity of dress and facial expressions so that the speaker and listener appear as close iterations of each other.[62] Not only does the table facilitate the reading referenced in the painting's title, it also acts as a metaphor for the intended linguistic operations at the very heart of *A Reading*, the reiterative transmutation of words from written to oral form. As the bodies and objects near it turn into filmy reflections, the table reminds us how words read aloud shift from the material to the immaterial, evaporating into thin air as they are read off the page.

Yet as much as the table dominates and uniquely shapes the painting, it also causes difficulties and contributes to the work's somewhat unsettling character, boasting improbable orthogonals and resisting the role of a perfect reflective surface. "There is this marked difference in the substantiality of the figures and the furniture," wrote one reviewer, "[and] in the table there is a sort of milky opaqueness about its top untrue to its presumed luster."[63] The critic had every reason to be transfixed by the table in the work, for our reading of *A Reading* unfolds on its surface, a parallel suggested by the open book invoking the shape of the table itself. The inconsistency of the table's gloss, what the

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[62] According to Susan Hobbs, who is preparing a catalogue raisonné on Dewing, it is unknown whether the artist used models to compose *A Reading*, and if so, who they were. Conversation with the author.

Allyn Cox, son of Kenyon Cox, suggested that the woman on the right is Dewing's daughter, Elizabeth. However, this possibility seems unlikely as Elizabeth would have been twelve years old at the time of this picture. Note in Curatorial File for *A Reading*.

Also unknown is whether Dewing used one model for both figures. Dewing arguably used the same model for different figures in previous works. For example, in *Spring Moonlight* (1889), Dewing is reputed to have based all three women in the painting on the 26 year-old model Ruth, a woman much admired by the critic Sadakichi Hartmann. Hobbs, "Thomas Dewing in Cornish, 1885-1905," 6.

[63] FGAA, "Various Exhibitions," *Art Interchange* 44 (April 1900), 93.

reviewer quoted above called the "milky opaqueness," simultaneously yields to moments of sharp reflection with the vase, for example, and passages of sheer haze with the women's faces, torsos, and their light colored dresses. The reflection of the woman on the right is particularly obfuscated – a pool of forms swirling on the table's surface. In this sense, the table's incapacity to register the women's reflections only heightens the ethereal quality of the bodies seated around it. As we shall see, these unusual, difficult aspects of the table bear significance for the work's aural meanings, particularly those suggested by the picture's title.

III. The Artist's Voice

The relationship between painting and title in *A Reading* bears more complications and tensions than most other works. More than any other pictorial style before it, the role of the title in Aesthetic painting offered the artist the opportunity to amplify, even instill, sonic or musical motifs in their works – an effect seen most intriguingly in the works of Whistler. Dewing capitalizes on this convention in *A Reading*, and beyond the title, ensures that certain aspects within the painting are inflected with his presence.

Dewing's Possessions

If Dewing goes to great lengths to drain the picture of sound, he goes to equal lengths to fill the painting with self-referential, reflective devices. The most important example of this is the Empire mahogany table featured in the work, as it was one of the artist's most prized acquisitions. As Dewing later wrote, he bought the table from William Merritt Chase's Tenth Street studio because he had to "have something [of

Chase's]."[64] Dewing's desire to acquire part of Chase's studio legacy is telling. According to Sarah Burns, Chase was the consummate self-propagandist and his opulent studio contributed to his own myth-making.[65] From Chase's studio to Dewing's then, the table signifies self-promotion; and Dewing's inclusion of this table, rendered more vividly than the women around it, materializes Dewing's desire for an artistic legacy and turns the work into a powerful self-construction.

Most significantly, while the same table is featured in several of Dewing's other paintings, in no other work do we find it so clearly controlling the composition as it does in *A Reading*.[66] In addition, in this painting specifically, the table suggests the act of artistic representation – its vast span of mimetic surface a lateral substitute for the canvas itself. When we consider, too, that the massive table would direct any sound made by the women, the gleaming structure annexes an aural, in addition to a visual, significance. Because a surface's acoustic properties (whether it can absorb or reflect sound waves) directly correspond to the material composition of the surface and how it appears to the human eye, it is one instance when sound has a visual correspondent. [67] In *A Reading*, the thick, slick surface of the table would seem to deflect any sound made near it, its massive plane commandeering any verbal, sonic production. As this suggests, the table undeniably controls the scene both formally and in autobiographical terms, bearing the metaphorical fingerprints of the artist in many ways.

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[64] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 19, Letter 72, January 10, 1896.

[65] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 63. Burns characterizes Chase's studio as a performative space that emphasized the "aesthetic commodity." Ibid.

[66] In other works featuring this table, such as *The Fortune Teller* (1904-5) and *Lady in Grey* (1911-12), we do not have such an expansive view of the tabletop, nor does it subsume the women around it.

[67] Even though the field of acoustics dates back to the time of Roman architect Vitruvius, it was not until 1853 when the sound-absorbing properties of materials would be discovered. American physicist (and secretary of the Smithsonian Institution) Joseph Henry realized that certain materials, like rubber, allowed energy to be converted into heat rather than sound, thereby absorbing the sound waves rather than allowing them to bounce off the material's surface. Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 1-27.

This sense of autobiography becomes clearer if we consider that the setting of *A Reading* was an actual room in Dewing's Cornish, New Hampshire, home designed for him by Stanford White. Furthermore, provocatively placed within this scene of art imitating life is another motif of self-reference - the mirror, which also carries associations of the artist and the act of artistic representation in the way it offers mimetic capabilities. Most artists relied on mirrors to paint their own portraits and this convention would not have been lost on the academically trained Dewing. In *A Reading*, the mirror not only references self-portraiture, but also suggests the possibility of a self-portrait. With close looking, we can arguably make out a hazy image of the artist's head, white shirt collar, and dark torso in the mirror, similar to the self-portrait Dewing painted a few years later in 1906 (figs. 135a, 135b, respectively). This possibility gains more force when we consider the mirror's placement in the room, reflecting the position of the artist in front of the canvas. Regardless of whether the reflection in the mirror constitutes a literal self-portrait or not, it serves a potent role within the painting's schematic overall. Notice that the mirror is not near the listener (where it might suggest the mind's capacity to imagine) but closer to and in fact above the ostensible speaker, relegating the model and any possibility of voice to the mirror above her and the artist reflected in it.[68] In fact, the speaker seems to be making room for the mirror, as if she is in its way; she is displaced by it, her head and body askew in the Windsor chair. Thus, even though

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[68] Martha Banta characterizes Dewing's paintings in which women look into mirrors as the following: "Mirrors are minds in Dewing's world. They invite us to consider the possibility that the women who gaze into them are looking at their own thoughts …" Banta, *Imaging American Women*, 373.

On the mirror as a trope of the mind reflecting nature, see Meyer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1958), 69. Abrams also notes how seventeenth-century British philosopher John Locke formulated the now outmoded stereotype that the mind, like the mirror, is a passive object that "fixes the objects it reflects." Ibid., 57; citing John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.C. Fraser (Oxford, 1894), I: 142-3; II: 25.

Dewing is not depicted within the painting, the entire *mise-en-scene* he has constructed is self-referential, imbuing the work with his metaphorical presence.

Painted just a year after Chase gave up his famed Tenth Street studio (and sold his table to Dewing), Chase painted *Did You Speak to Me?* (c. 1897; fig. 136), featuring his daughter Alice in the artist's summer home in Shinnecock Hills, Long Island. Most notably through the setting of the painter's studio, Chase's work suggests the realm of the artist – more overtly, in fact, than do the references to Dewing's summer home and personal possessions in *A Reading*. Furthermore, the playful pose of his model and the questioning title. "Did you speak to me?" serves a rhetorical function, one that emphasizes the physical position of the artist in relation to the model as well the imbalance in power relations between the two parties. Though the child is asking the question, it is presented through the artist's titling of the scene and thereby inflected with his voice – a dynamic that *A Reading* incurs to a limited sense as well.[69]

The Sound of the Title

While none of the table's characteristics amounts to a sense of sound per se in *A Reading*, these reflective, autobiographical markers provide a crucial bridge - a fulcrum - between the women in the work and the artist who created them, and more generally, between what is occurring within the picture and outside of it. Indeed, one could say that in the way the table's orthogonals lead the viewer into the painting, the legibility of the painting in effect centers on a structural metonym of the artist. A more literal means of

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[69] Many in the art world linked Chase to the elegant furnishings such as the mahogany table that Dewing acquired. Shortly after Chase's death in 1916, collector Duncan Phillips stated, "It is more than a trick of cool light on reflecting surfaces, mahogany table-tops and hard wood floors … It is the hint of once familiar moments long forgotten, a sentiment of the quiet dignity of a patrician home." Ronald G. Pisano, *Master Paintings from the Butler Institute of American Art*, ed. Irene Sweetkind, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). http://www.butlerart.com/pc_book/pages/william_merritt_chase_1849.htm (accessed on August 26, 2010).

legibility is Dewing's title for the painting, and perhaps the table, in this abstract sense, too, helps to direct the metaphorical sound that comes from the title into the work. That is, for all his efforts to evacuate sound within the painting, Dewing selected a title that inflects the otherwise silent picture with a sense of sound. Instead of a Whistlerian title that evades narrative, Dewing does the very opposite with his choice of words. With the aid of the title then, the viewer can construct sonic narratives for the women in *A Reading*. No longer isolated, silent, or static, perhaps the reader has just paused in her reading, or as Pyne suggests, the reader is in fact "intoning" a poem as the woman nearby listens.[70] The title unites the women in a joint enterprise, mobilizing the painting with a narrative cohesiveness and legibility that is implicitly unfolding. In this significant sense, Dewing's title serves a crucial, almost *ekphrastic* function.

Exemplified by Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in the eighteenth book of *The Iliad*, ekphrasis traditionally has been considered a poetic form that describes a visual work of art, but can be more broadly defined as the "verbal representation of visual representation."[71] As Jaś Elsner explains, it was only in the twentieth century that writers confined ekphrasis to descriptions of works of art, for in antiquity, ekphrasis described events or any kind of visual experience.[72] For eighteenth-century theorist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ekphrasis was a means to consider the contrastive qualities

[70] The dynamic between Dewing's title and painting is not unlike the period relationship between sub-title and silent film. As William K. Everson explains, "The title, in the pre-1906 period, [was] a necessary informational device … [as it] told the audience what was happening…" William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 129.

[71] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other" in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 152; James Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3.

[72] Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality & Subjectivity in Art & Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 67-68. In his keen exploration of ekphrasis, Elsner also considers the myth of Narcissus and Echo, a text bearing obvious thematic and iconographic resonances with *A Reading*. Ibid., 131-176.

between poetry and the visual arts of painting and sculpture.[73] Favoring poetry's diachronic capacity, Lessing argued that painting should represent the moment when action is about to occur, in order to overcome the medium's inability to represent more than one moment in time. According to Lessing, "painting uses completely different means or signs than does poetry, namely figures and colors in space rather than articulated sounds in time."[74]

More than just an interest in the problem of duration however, Lessing's statement also begins to adumbrate the sensorial divisions between the visual medium of painting and the aural one of poetry, divisions articulated more fully in the recent work of James Heffernan and others.[75] Heffernan, for example, argues that ekphrasis "entails prosopopeia … [it] speaks not only about works of art but also *to* and *for* them."[76] Equally important for our purposes are the gender implications patent within this model of word and image, for as W. J. T. Mitchell explains, ekphrasis can be seen as the "suturing of … the image identified as feminine [and] the speaking/seeing subject of the text identified as masculine."[77] Of course, these oppositions staged by ekphrasis between image and text, seeing and speaking, female and male, can only be fixed to a certain degree – as Mitchell points out, when discussing a female author for example, these

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73 Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laocöon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, intro., notes, and trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). See also Murray Krieger, "The Ekphrastic Principle and Still Moment of Poetry; or Laocöon Revisited," in *The Play and Place of Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1967). Krieger's essay subsequently was expanded into the book, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

74 Lessing, *Laocöon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, 78.

75 For consideration of ekphrasis in terms of other sensory modalities beyond vision, see Andrew Laird, "Sounding out Ecphrasis (sic): Art and Text in Catullus 64," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 18-30.

76 Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 6-7.

77 Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other" in *Picture Theory*, 181. Mitchell concludes by stating, "The more important point is to see that gender is not the unique key to the workings of ekphrasis, but only one among many figures of difference that energize the dialectic of the imagetext." Ibid.

categories readily collapse. But in the particular case of *A Reading* with its display of silent, beautiful women and offer of narration by the male painter's title, these oppositions seem intractable -- and bear out in other ways as well.[78]

Ekphrasis, then, in its capacity to offer narrativity to a visual object, parallels the relationship between the title of Dewing's *A Reading* and the painting itself. Dewing, in turn, takes on the role of the ekphrastic poet, a mediator between the object and viewer, the latter being a visual equivalent of what Mitchell describes as, "the listening subject who … will be made to 'see' the object through the medium of the poet's voice."[79] Dewing was familiar with ekphrastic operations in reverse, as he created several works in response to specific poems. His 1884-87 painting *The Days* was inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem of the same name. In fact, Dewing was so insistent on the relationship between word and image that he inscribed the poem's text on the frame (several years before Eakins's similar maneuver on *The Concert Singer*).[80] A few years later, Dewing returned to this method in his attempt to pictorialize a poem by Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rosetti titled "The One Hope" in his 1892 work *After Sunset (Summer Evening)*. In a letter to Freer, Dewing wrote that he had "hit" upon something that would capture the "Rossetti address to Hope."[81] Dewing's attempts to "hit" upon a visual embodiment

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[78] Ibid., 161-64, 181.

[79] Ibid., 164.

[80] Dewing's wife, Maria Oakey Dewing, also was an ardent admirer of Emerson's work. In fact, she was related to Cyrus Bartol, the youngest of the circle of the transcendentalists around Emerson and the minister of the Old South Church in Boston. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 163.

Emerson's poem reads: "Daughters of Time, the hypocritic days/ Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,/And marching single in an endless file/ bring diadems and faggots in their hands./To each they offer gifts after his will,/Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds/them all./I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp/Forgot my morning wishes, hastily/Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day/Turned and departed silent. I too late,/Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn."

[81] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Letter 145, October 19, c. 1892. See also Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 153-54.

Dewing's paintings in turn inspired others to write poetry. Based on the 1890 work *Summer*, Dewing's friend Richard Watson Gilder wrote the poem, "The Dancers," in which he writes, "Each maiden

of the poem, a venture into the shared domain of sound, language, and the imagination, attest to the artist's willingness to explore ekphrastic principles. With *A Reading*, he takes these efforts further, as the title literally lends a voice to a mute object and creates, in effect, a gendered binary that bifurcates sight from sound - with the silent, highly visible models and the ekphrastic voice of the invisible artist.

IV. Splitting Looking and Listening

Two other works by Dewing from this period, *The Four Sylvan Sounds* (1897; fig. 137) and *The Hermit Thrush* (1890; fig. 138), elaborate *A Reading*'s emphasis on the imagination and the fragmentation of sight and sound.

Stretching Imaginative Sounds

Charles Freer commissioned Dewing to create the paneled screen called *The Four Sylvan Sounds* (fig. 137) sometime in 1896, with the inspiration possibly coming several years earlier when Dewing wrote to Freer, "[w]e can walk in the woods, paddle about on the brook as you can hear very good music or in short you can take your choice of idleness."[82] Building on this conflation of music with sounds heard in the countryside of Cornish, New Hampshire, Dewing depicts four female figures looming somewhat

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in each motion owns,/As if she were a living note/which from the curved harp doth float. "The Dancers, on a Picture Entitled Summer by T. W. Dewing," *The Poems of Richard Watson Gilder* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 156; cited in Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing*, 127. Significantly, Gilder's last few lines equate the women in Dewing's painting with sonic signifiers.

[82] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 13, Letter 9, July 18, 1892. Another possible source for the screen may have been Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "Woodnotes," which begins, "When the pine tosses its cones to the song of its waterfall tones, who speeds to the woodland walks?" Hobbs, "Thomas Dewing in Cornish: 1885-1905," 21.

Dewing was to become "America's most prolific screen maker of the period." Michael Komenecky and Virginia Fabbri Buttera, *The Folding Image*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 159. Of course, the impetus for this mode of production lies in Dewing's patron, Charles Freer, who was an avid collector of works by James McNeill Whistler and Japanese art, including screens. Dewing visited Whistler's studio in Paris in 1894 with Freer and had seen the expatriate's *Blue and Silver: Screen with Old Battersea Bridge* (1872). *See also* Kathleen Pyne, "Classical Figures: A Folding Screen by Thomas Dewing," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 59 (Spring 1981).

disjunctively against flattened landscapes on the panels, each holding an instrument to represent a different sound: the lyre for the wind in the pine, the drum for the woodpecker, the xylophone for falling water, and the flute for the hermit thrush. More than a manipulation of the allegory construct, Dewing's screen actually concerns a subject that is neither shown nor heard, engaging the viewer's mind in an attenuated perceptual syllogism: woman plus instrument equals music; music equals sound in nature; sound in nature cannot be heard and is not pictured. As Sarah Burns explains, "the conception may seem a rather too elaborate conceit … [for the instruments do] not in the least resemble that sound as one would actually hear it in nature."[83] To put it differently, the *sine qua non* for accepting the title is the viewer's imagination, both visual and aural. Dewing's screen concerns a subject that is absent visually and, of course, aurally; what the eye sees does not readily correspond with what the ear should hear, literally or in the imagination.

A perhaps even more persuasive example of this activation of a dual imagination occurs earlier in Dewing's *The Hermit Thrush* (fig. 138). Dewing created the work in Cornish, where the call of thrush was known to thrill residents, men and women alike.[84] In Dewing's depiction of such an aural event, two women are lodged in a sea of color and transfixed by the sound of the reclusive bird that is not shown. In a synaesthetic sense, the

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83 Burns, "The Poetic Mode in American Painting" (Ph.D. diss.), 296.

84 The thrush, known for its melodious call and reluctance to appear, was so popular in Cornish that as Frances Grimes described it, "[I]f the house was not close enough to the woods to hear the thrush, the artists would leave work in their studios to go to the woods to hear the bird." Grimes, "Reminiscences," in *A Circle of Friends*, 61. Birds were ever present at Cornish, Grimes described summer afternoons spent at Saint-Gaudens's studio and home, Aspet, "The white-threaded sparrows threaded the air with their long sweet notes and Louis [Saint-Gaudens] talked on, loving the heat and the sunshine, unconscious of the hours that were passing." Pyne, *The Art of Higher Life*, 158.

swirling dense foliage evokes the musicality of the thrush.[85] Yet, our willingness to imagine the sounds only goes so far, for what we see bears little correspondence to that which the title of the work suggests. Once again, it is only with the aid of the title that we realize that this is a picture about sound, in particular the enthralling calls of the hermit thrush.

A comparison to another painting made by Dewing around this period brings this point into sharper focus. In *Summer* (c. 1890; fig. 139), we find a pair of women similarly floating in a green-blue tinged atmosphere: one is wielding a fishing rod in the indiscernible landscape while the other watches. Like the women in *The Hermit Thrush*, those in *Summer* are bedecked in evening gowns, and in certain ways, the two paintings look similar to one another. Indeed, the latter painting could carry the title "the hermit thrush" with a certain amount of credibility. In other words, only with the benefit of the title does the sonic element of *The Hermit Thrush* become apparent; other than the women looking up, there is no suggestion of the bird, or for that matter, an intense depiction of close listening to readily suggest the sonic subject matter. With the linguistic data of the title in *The Hermit Thrush*, our eye then begins to gather the clues of the sonic scene before us, just like the two women who search for the bird in the painting. Significantly, the fact that Dewing chose to depict something that was not readily visible, and further, something that plucked the faculty of hearing (also not visible), demonstrates the complex phenomenological demands his works make on the viewer. Like the Freer screen, *The Hermit Thrush* centers on significant visual and aural absences, actively

[85] Hobbs describes *The Hermit Thrush* as follows: "Just as the French symbolists explored the correspondences of sight and sound, so Dewing expressed an aural concept through the use of line, color, and the suggestive placement of his figures." Hobbs, "Thomas Dewing in Cornish: 1885-1905," 11.

soliciting the assistance of the imagination.[86] With this in mind, we can now begin to see the thread in Dewing's works of the rupture between sight and sound, which will help us begin to unravel the more difficult, mordant qualities of *A Reading*.

Fragmented Reading

As in these earlier works, *A Reading* (fig. 121) manipulates the dialectic between what is outwardly seen and inwardly experienced, most obviously with the cognitive act that it depicts. The act of reading spans both the visual and aural senses, as the printed letters that form words are transformed into the aural sounds that comprise language. In this sense, Dewing's concerns in *A Reading* can be connected to another kind of splitting of sight and sound, the metaphysical tensions between the written and oral word. This inquiry has an early precedent in Plato's *Phaedrus* where the philosopher expresses misgivings about the ability of the written word to fully articulate the workings of the mind. According to Walter Ong, writing down words that were previously only spoken in Plato's time constituted the "reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent space, the separation of the word from the living present …"[87] In the twentieth century, Jacques Derrida characterized the phenomenological problems of the written word as a binary construct of the absence of writing and the presence of speech, ultimately privileging vision and what he found to be writing's "metaphysics of presence."[88] Though centuries apart, both philosophers focus on the ontological absence of writing; for Plato, it is an irrevocable loss, for Derrida, a visual, albeit silent, articulation of self.

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[86] For further discussion of Dewing and the imagination, see Burns, "The Poetic Mode in American Painting" (Ph.D. diss.) 272- 281, and *passim*.

[87] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 81-2.

[88] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 131 - 268.

Within Dewing's own lifetime, reading was just beginning to be explored as a cognitive operation, as evidenced by this excerpt from the work *Eyes and Ears* (1860) by clergyman and orator Henry Ward Beecher:

> [From] a few black marks upon paper … a picture comes forth … The ready reader never thinks of *letters* [or words or sentences] … But even the sentence seems not to be seen, but to be seen through. We see the thought rather than the symbol by which it is set forth.[89]

As Beecher suggests, moving from "marks upon paper" to "thought," the letters dematerialize as they conjure linguistic and visual associations in our mind – a translation that becomes more apposite when listening to words read aloud because the words on the page are processed aurally.[90] While the Platonic/Derridean dialectic between presence and absence certainly exists in *A Reading*, it is complicated by the lack of text or graphics in the book.

In a significant sense, this omission can be seen as the Aesthetic strategy of suppression of narrative and the devaluation of a painting's title. Most notably with Whistler's use of "nocturne," "harmony," or "symphony," artists working in the Aesthetic style created titles that had little to do with what was depicted (as mentioned earlier) and instead conjured musical constructs to suggest synaesthetically harmonious modulations of color. In his famous 1893 series of lectures entitled "Art for Art's Sake,"

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[89] Henry Ward Beecher, *Eyes and Ears* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 187-88. The excerpt is from a book comprised of his weekly essays in *The New York Ledger*.

[90] Similarly, William James was interested in the ways that a word's meaning became unhinged from the letters that comprised it upon repeating the word multiple times: "Let the reader try this with any word on this page. He will soon begin to wonder if it can be the word he has been using all his life with that meaning. It stares at him from the paper like a glass eye, with no speculation in it. Its body is indeed there, but its soul has fled." James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2: 80-81.

In a study at the University of Iowa Psychological and Phonetics Laboratories examining techniques of silent and oral reading, author Joseph Tiffin noted, " 'oral reading' [means] vocalizing to oneself … the vocalization is simply an exaggeration of the *ordinary subvocal speech which is frequently, if not always, present in silent reading*." Joseph Tiffin, "Simultaneous Records of Eye-Movements and the Voice in Oral Reading," *Science*, New Series, 80, no. 2080 (Nov. 9, 1934): 430, n.1 (emphasis mine).

American critic John Charles Van Dyke promoted these kinds of titles, exclaiming, "The sad jumbling of figment and pigment, the telling to the eye with a paint brush half a story and to the ear in the title or catalogue of the other half, is quite unnecessary."[91] In the refusal to adhere to convention and use descriptive language for titles, Van Dyke suggests that words were not as important as the feelings or sentiments created by the work of art. Though Dewing relies on a somewhat informative title in *A Reading*, the blank pages in the work suggest that the mood of the painting (and the imaginative response it initiates in the viewer) is more important than any literal representation of text or reading aloud. We should also consider that the Aesthetic artist's choice to create a work that is disassociated in some respects from its title (as we have seen with Dewing's *Hermit Thrush* and *A Reading*) in and of itself elicits an inherently fragmented operation between sight and sound. Many critics overlooked the lack of narrative in Dewing's work, as suggested by this 1906 review: "Not one of his four pictures in this exhibition has more than the ghost of a story to tell, and perhaps it scarcely tells even that. … Yet when all is said, the painter of these pictures remains as much the poet as any maker of illustrations after the great writers. Only his is the poetry which springs from the half unconscious contact of imagination and mere paint."[92]

In *A Reading* (fig. 121), the tensions between these two senses of vision and hearing are most powerfully compressed in the figure of the listener. Unlike hearing a play or opera, listening to someone read aloud does not necessarily have a direct optical correspondence: the text being read is not acted out or visualized in any way. As

[91] Van Dyke, *Art for Art's Sake: Seven University Lectures on the Technical Beauties of Painting*, 13. Van Dyke goes on to state, "There is something radically wrong with those pictures, other than historical works, which require a titular explanation. For if they be pictorial, in the full sense of the word, they will reveal themselves without comment or suggestion." Ibid.

[92] FGAA, "Art Exhibitions," *The New York Daily Tribune*, January 5, 1906.

Dewing's listener demonstrates, to look at the speaker is unnecessary, for whatever is heard conjures its own image in the imagination. In effect, looking away from the source of sound allows a different kind of listening experience, one that is not interrupted by the visual aspects of the performer. French Impressionist Hilaire- Germain- Edgar Degas' *Father Listening to Lorenzo Pagans* (1869-72; fig. 140) depicts this same precise phenomenon. With his right ear clearly delineated, the artist's father sits near the guitar player but does not look at him, preferring instead to focus on what he hears and the mental associations that the music invokes. Degas suggests how the visual stimulus is removed by framing his father's head with the sharp white sheet on the piano ledge behind him. As a result, the absence of a visual referent can result in *two* "visualities": what the eye sees and what the mind, with the assistance of the aural imagination, "sees." In *A Reading*, we can find the suggestion of this multiplicity of vision in the inverted flower and its reflection, in effect two different images of the bloom.[93]

Also shown with the listener is the disparity between sight and sound: one of her hands, suggesting vision, is readily visible, active, and holds an object to be beheld while her other hand can be viewed as suggesting hearing, limp, passive, underneath the table, and hidden (fig. 141a). Proximate to this obscured hand is a curious zigzag that resembles period inscriptions of sound, or even a sound wave, a tympanic form increasingly visualized around this time in Hermann Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone* (1863)

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[93] The listener's flower and its reflection are also part of a schematic exploration of tactility within *A Reading*. From the flower's bloom and its contiguous reflection to the maladroit left hand of the speaker and the murky surface of the table, Dewing seems to be putting pressures on ideas of touch throughout the work. This can be related to the sensory function of hearing in the ways that sound waves enter the ear and are transformed through a series of tympanic and nerve connections into sound. For further discussion of sound and touch, see Steven Connor, "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing" in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann, (New York: Berg, 2004), 153 -172.

and other media (fig. 141b).[94] Regardless of what this mark may mean, we can note that it functions as a counterpoint to all that can be seen or readily experienced above the table – its graphic line a stark contrast to the painting's mottled background – and thereby continues the painting's disintegrative effects. In this same vein, the differing materialities seen throughout the work register divergent aspects of looking and listening. For example, the book near the speaker reinforces the substantiality of seeing and the faint flowers near the listener remind us of the fleeting character of hearing, especially the flower by the vase that seems to be vanishing before our eyes. In addition, the painting's internal structure separates the woman who is reading from the one who is listening, with the large empty space in the foreground suggesting a psychic gap between them and the left pilaster and strips of wallpaper acting as scores or ruptures that further cleave them. The left pilaster especially creates a schism between the listener and the speaker, with all the objects (even the flower in the listener's hand) existing in the same material world as the speaker. In other words, the compositional structure of the work itself is fragmented, for the strong horizontal and the verticals create a grid that separates looking from listening.

V. Disembodied Voices

Dewing's dispersive effects were but one cultural product of the discursive set of period forces splitting looking from listening, what I call the "fragmentation of the senses." To Victorians, the phonographic experience of listening, with no visual referent,

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[94] Hermann L. F. Helmholtz, *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* transl. Alexander J. Ellis (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954), 85, 160, 166.
It appears that Dewing decided to leave this mark visible, for while he went to great lengths to paint over the changes he made to the women, he made no such efforts in this area.

was a sensorial shock. Various cultural agents, such as manufacturers, advertisers, writers, and painters, manipulated the mystique of this uncanny experience to create their own motifs and suit their specific ends, but they all ultimately relied on essentially the same notion of the disembodied voice.

Visual Strangeness

While *A Reading* makes little effort to reconcile this split between sight and sound, other cultural actors within this same historical moment set out to address precisely this task. Unsatisfied with silent films, several individuals attempted to create the first "talkies," the first films with sound. For example, in 1894-5, William K. Dickson, an associate of Thomas Edison, recorded a seventeen second film with sound where he played a violin into a phonograph horn and two others danced around him.[95] Also attempting "the first pictures with sound," as suggested by the writing on the photograph (fig. 142), two young men who worked together at a soap factory in Pennsylvania used a Columbia Cylinder Graphophone with two speakers in conjunction with a glass slide projector and a portable generator. Though not truly a film with sound, the project stands out as another corrective response to the distress brought on by the fragmentation of the senses that so characterized the latter half of the nineteenth century.

As necessary a component as it was in the Pennsylvanians' attempt to reconcile sight with sound, the phonograph was one of the leading sources for the splitting of the two senses. As discussed in the previous chapter, though various inventors tried to create different kinds of phonographs, the majority involved attempts to replicate words and

[95] Sound and image would not fuse synchronously in film until the 1920s. To see the Dickson film, go to tp://memory.loc.gov/mbrs/edmp/4034.mov. For more information on the restoration of Dickson's soundtrack by Walter Murch, a film editor and sound designer, see his essay at http://filmsound.org/murch/dickson.htm.

text. [96] Attending the phonograph's emergence as a textual device, however, were problems of acoustic fidelity, replication, and the materiality of vision in relation to hearing.[97] Media historian Jonathan Sterne notes that, "manufacturers and marketers … felt that they had to convince audiences that the new sound media belonged to the same class of communication as face-to-face speech."[98] One of the most effective ways to "convince audiences," to normalize the new media's elimination of the visual source of sound, was through advertisements. For instance, promotional literature in 1878 taunted, "I cannot see you smile, but if you laugh, / Shall hear the merry tones by Phonograph."[99] Even more remarkable, those in the phonograph industry went to great lengths to show how standard models of visual perception were no longer relevant. As can be seen in this 1900 trade catalogue for Bettini phonograph diaphragms (fig. 143), for example, the base of the pedestal holding the phonograph features a classical Greek figure with his hands covering his eyes, while the singers advertised are not shown as normative vision would dictate but as bodiless heads within the phonograph cylinders on which their voices were recorded. In effect, advertisers and manufacturers had to skew standard models of seeing because of the phonographic separation of sight and sound.

As the catalogue cover demonstrates, within years of being introduced on the market, the strange visual disjunctions implicit in phonographic listening were quickly

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[96] In fact, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published the same year that Dewing started to work on *A Reading*, features the phonograph as an inscription technology, recording the thoughts and observations of Dr. Seward in his hunt for the vampire. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, Inc., 1897).

[97] For discussion of the issues regarding an "original" sound and its recording, see James Lastra, "Reading, Writing, and Representing Sound," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 65-86.

[98] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 25. See Chapter 5 in Sterne for a more detailed exploration of this topic.

[99] *All About the Telephone and Phonograph* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1878), 99. Disembodied sound also was manipulated to fool the public: "Visitors to spiritualistic 'mediums' are often astonished by hearing tunes played on a piano at which no visible performer is seated." Ibid., 30.

appropriated, even fetishized, for its cultural construction. Strikingly, advertisements for the phonograph began to feature two different kinds of seeing, one with the eye, and the second with the phantasmic aural imagination – as if the disembodied voices had to be embodied in some way. In this period advertisement (fig. 144), for example, the listeners are shown looking at the phonograph while the scene they hear described in the recording floats nearby. Even though this specter-like image is as detailed as the rest of the advertisement, it is rendered in a lighter manner to suggest its unreal nature, not unlike the hazy aesthetic Dewing so often used in his atmospheric depictions of sonic events. In other words, just as period depictions of the phonograph relied on specter-like imagery to suggest the aural imagination, so, too, do Dewing's dematerialized women suggest the interiority of aural experience. For both Dewing and phonographic discourse, vision was no longer solely perceptual, but subsisted also within the aural imagination. Equally important, as shown in this and most other advertisements, women played a central role in these campaigns of phonographic listening. The female listener (note that she appears in profile) touches or holds the cylinder records and leans in towards the phonograph, transported, with her capacity to literally see occluded by what her mind sees. With tropes of a spectral presence and latent desire, this advertisement serves as a visual testament to the ways the aural imagination gained a legitimacy and dominance in phonographic discourse.

These phantasms of the ear occurred in other modes of cultural production as well. Consider this passage from the 1900 short story from a promotional brochure:

> [A]s we fumbled with wraps and gloves in the silent hall of the house, our feelings were divided between personal discomfort and wonderment that no one was there to greet us. Suddenly there piped up a thin little voice seeming to come from nowhere. It grew louder and stronger, and we heard …'Take off your wraps; lay them on the table. James will see them safely laid away.' Astonishment gave way to curiosity, and we drew aside a curtain and found the cheery speaker to be – a Phonograph.[100]

Another example, the 1893 novel, *The Adventures of Uncle Jeremiah and Family at the Great Fair*, centers on a farmer from Indiana marveling at the technologies on display at the World's Columbian Exposition. After playing a record on the nickel-slot phonograph and "listening to melodies by musicians unseen," Jeremiah remarks, "wasn't that out of sight?"[101] A final example focusing on the sensorial disjunctions in phonographic listening is Edward Bellamy's 1889 short story "With the Eyes Shut," which features a narrator musing on the uncanniness of the phonograph in numerous everyday objects. Listening to a female voice in a phonographic clock, for example, the narrator confides: "I lay awake [in bed] … enjoying the society of my bodiless companion and the delicious shock of her quarter-hourly remarks."[102]

Phonographic Painting

But perhaps the most famous example of the phonographic bodiless companion is *His Master's Voice* (1897-8; fig. 145), a trademark for Victor/RCA records and originally a painting by Englishman Francis Barraud made a year or so after Dewing's picture.[103]

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[100] *The Phonograph and How to Use It: Being a Short History of Its Invention and Development Containing Also Directions Helpful Hints and Plain Talks As to its Care and Use, Etc. (including also a reprint of the Openeer Papers and Phonograph Short Stories)* (New York: reprinted by Allen Koenigsberg, 1971, originally printed 1900), 135.

[101] C. M. "Quondam" Stevens, *The Adventures of Uncle Jeremiah and Family at the Great Fair* (Chicago: Laird & Lee Publishers, 1893), 52, 55.

[102] Edward Bellamy, "With the Eyes Shut," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 79, issue 473 (October 1889): 738.

[103] Shortly after completing the painting, Barraud sent a photograph of it to the Gramophone Company, later known as the Victor Talking Machine Company. While company executives expressed

With cocked head and pricked ears, Nipper the dog looks with curiosity at the machine that blares his master's disembodied voice. According to Michael Taussig, Nipper the dog "is what assures the fidelity of technical reproduction."[104] In conjunction with this important etymological (think of "Fido the dog") and visual sign of acoustic fidelity, the polished surface of the table that reflects the dog and the phonograph suggests the polished surface of the record and the mimetic, reproductive technology of the machine. In other words, the terms of vision are stressed to emphasize the wondrous, immaterial effects of sound reproduction. At the same time, the reflection also portends how vision is multiplied, but not necessarily repeated: we see the dog and phonograph but perhaps imagine the dog with the master whose voice seems to intrigue him so. Other scholars trace this homology between reflection and bodily absence to ideas of mortality and ontological anxiety. Jonathan Sterne argues that the fact that many contemporary viewers considered Nipper to be sitting on the coffin of his master evinces a "Victorian culture of death and dying."[105] And Theodore Adorno found the image of Nipper to be,

> the right emblem for the primordial affect [sic] which the gramophone stimulated … What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person...[106]

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interest in the work, they asked Barraud to update the phonograph shown in the painting with the latest model. Barraud complied by replacing the cylinder phonograph with the flat disk phonograph. By October 18, 1899, the Gramophone Company had acquired sole reproduction rights to the revised image. Ruth Edge and Leonard Petts, *The Collectors Guide to "His Master's Voice" Nipper Souvenirs* (Great Britain: The Manson Group Limited, 1997), 987-88. For more information on Nipper and *His Master's Voice*, see Leonard Petts, *The Story of "Nipper" and the "His Master's Voice" Picture Painted by Francis Barraud*, intro. Frank Andrews (Bournemouth, England: Ernie Bayly for The Talking Machine Review International, 1973).

[104] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 224.

[105] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 301-2, 304. On the phonograph, spirituality, and the exteriorization of the voice, see also Steven Connor, "A Gramophone in Every Grave," in *Dumbstruck, A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 362-393.

[106] Theodor Adorno, transl. Thomas Y. Levin, "The Curves of the Needle," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 54. The essay was originally published in 1928.

Both of these interpretations center on the implications of the visual absence of the master (for Sterne, they are cultural; for Adorno, psychological), but this sonic construct of absence and presence extends beyond phonographic discourse. As some scholars contend, French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir's gendered opposition between immanence and transcendence, posited in her 1949 classic text *The Second Sex*, can be re-cast as women being confined to their physical bodies while the male voice is disembodied – the voice of Reason and God.[107] In this sense, the tenor of spirituality in *A Reading* (and in many of Dewing's other works) subsists in aural terms as well, with the devotional silence of the female subject and the sonic possibilities of a dematerialized authority.[108] Central to such sonic binaries of materiality, whether it be de Beauvoir's or Adorno's, is the voice of the empowered who cannot be seen.

Within this paradigm, Dewing's *A Reading* (fig. 124) is no exception, for it is Dewing's disembodied voice that imbues the silent painting with a sense of sound. Just as *His Master's Voice* centers on the presence and absence of Nipper's master with the exteriorization of the master's voice, I would suggest that *A Reading* hinges on Dewing's simultaneous presence and absence with the ekphrastic operation of the artist's voice. Though not as ambiguous as *A Reading*, *His Master's Voice* also operates ekphrastically; that is, it is only with the aid of the title that the viewer grasps the full sonic import of the

[107] Barbara Engh, "Adorno and the Sirens: Telephono-graphic Bodies" in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 129; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Khnopf, 1952), 63-68.

For further discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's dualism of immanence/transcendence, see Andrea Velman, "Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics of Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 113-131.

[108] Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 183. See also Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 28-37.

image, the voice of the master. Just as important, in both paintings, the bodily absence intensifies the hierarchy of power between subject and master, model and artist.[109]

While it is doubtful that Dewing saw *His Master's Voice* before he completed *A Reading*, the British painting is hardly the only instance of the reflective table in the visual lexicon for recorded sound; as this period advertisement shows, this motif began to gain currency around this time (fig. 146). To be sure, the fact that Dewing chose even to include a table in his rendition of a reading of this nature is unusual - most Victorians would think of such an affair occurring in a parlor or salon. Nonetheless, whatever Dewing's intentions for including the polished table in *A Reading*, the painting demonstrates a transatlantic preoccupation with ideas of reflection and aurality during a period when sound could be reproduced for the first time.[110]

With its tropes of reflection, repetition, and fragmentation, *A Reading* rightly can be considered within the discourse of sound reproduction. Dewing's speaker and listener are almost interchangeable, a similarity that suggests the motif of replication.[111] At the same time, the listener in *A Reading* functions much like the phonographic listener in that she would hear something that is not visualized before her. As seen in the phonograph

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[109] A similar (non-aural) model of power was offered by eighteenth-century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham's panopticon model for a prison, where the prisoners would be watched without being able to see the guards. See Jeremy Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings,* ed. and intro. Miran Bozovic (New York: Verso, 1995).

[110] Dewing would not have been able to see Barraud's painting, which was completed sometime around 1898. Engravings of the painting were completed sometime after December 5, 1899, with a first run of 5,000 copies. 3,000 remained in London while 1000 each were sent to France and Germany. Ruth Edge and Leonard Petts, *The Collectors Guide to "His Master's Voice" Nipper Souvenirs*, 12.

[111] Lee Glazer also notes the repetition of the same model, " 'A Modern Instance': Thomas Dewing and Aesthetic Vision at the Turn of the Century," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 63.

This concern for the original in phonographic culture was exploited in Edison's "tone tests," advertising campaigns in the first decade of the 1900s requiring audiences to distinguish between a singer's live performance and phonographic recording, typified by the slogan, "Which is which?" For further discussion of these "tone tests," see Emily Thompson, "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 131-171.

advertisements discussed above, the women are depicted like the phantasmic imaginings that listening incurs. In addition, much like the reflective table in *His Master's Voice*, the mirror functions metaphorically in phonographic discourse for the ability to repeat or reproduce sound realistically. In this 1903 catalogue for Edison Records (fig. 147), the phonographic cylinder is held up to the gilt, ornamented mirror (not unlike the mirror in *A Reading*) showing the reflection of a hand bearing Edison's signature and confirming the authenticity of the brand. Another example of the use of the mirror metaphor is a popular phonograph manufacturer's logo, "the true mirror of sound," as seen in the 1900 catalogue cover discussed earlier (see fig. 143).[112]

Along with the doubled women and reflective surfaces, the theme of proliferation appears in the numerable instances of flowers found throughout the painting. Not surprisingly, flowers, too, functioned as powerful sonic emblems. In their organic cycle of bud, bloom, and decay, flowers offered Victorians an appropriate metaphor for the way sound reached human ears – and ultimately faded away. Suggesting the fleeting (and reproductive) character of sound, flowers began to appear in the marketing, design, and production of the phonograph as well, most notably in the way the horn of the phonograph was shaped (figs. 148a, 148b, see also fig. 144). Sound in effect emanated from flowers – even though Victorians were looking at a flower-shaped horn, words and music emerged from it. In *A Reading*, Dewing's careful placement of flowers in and around the vase in the center of the painting may have reminded viewers of these sonic connotations.[113] Perhaps even more remarkable is the resonance between the wilting

[112] *True Mirror of Sound: Bettini Micro Phonograph and Graphophone Diaphragms* (Bettini Phonograph Laboratory, 1900).

[113] A similar construct of organic sound is offered in a 1909 illustration of a phonograph with a rotating Christmas tree in Adorno's essay. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," 55.

flowers in the painting and phonograph earphones, which, when unused, similarly drooped over the edges of the machine (figs. 149a, 149b). Like the limp female patient in Brouillet's painting, the wilting flowers here suggest an unavailability. We also can note the correspondence between the articulation of flowers on the vase's surface and the process by which sound was initially recorded, where a needle would inscribe the vibrations of the sound waves onto a cylinder as it rotated on the phonograph (fig. 150). Interestingly, Adorno, too, compared the phonograph to pottery: "a tone-mass is formed upon both [turntable and potter's wheel], and for each the material is preexisting. But the finished tone/clay container that is produced in this manner remains empty. It is only filled by the hearer."[114] Indeed, this quality of rotation extends beyond the vase in *A Reading* to the vast table on which it sits – the angle of the table and the emphasis on its flatness permit our imagination to think of its active surface – and in this very small sense perhaps suggests a rotating phonographic disk.

VI. The Feminization of Phonographic Listening

These formal resonances are harbingers of the broader concerns of gender and class shared by *A Reading* and phonographic discourse. Dewing's strategy of evacuating the sonic subject of any sense of sound and focusing instead on the contemplative, psychic effects of audition in the picture results in an overall schematic of passive female listeners. As the American economy expanded, businessmen realized that this "innate" characteristic of women would benefit their corporate practices. Phonograph manufacturers, too, appealed to women, particularly those in the middle-class, with

[114] Ibid.

tantalizing images of domestic bliss and refinement similar to Dewing's pictorial strategies.

Consumers

With advertisers reaching out to mothers and wives desirous of an elegant lifestyle and high position in society, women became the phonograph's ideal consumers (fig. 151). According to media historian Lisa Gitelman, "[D]uring the years 1895-1910, recorded sound was reconceived as a commodity for home consumption."[115] Many advertisements displayed the talking machine as a fine piece of furniture and promoted the phonograph exclusively for house-proud women, often using a pictorial language that resembled Dewing's (fig. 152). With their hair pinned up to reveal their fine-boned frames and ruffled low-cut dresses, the women in these advertisements belong in the same cultured circles as Dewing's women, projecting a middle-class desire for refinement. Like the advertisement with the shiny table noted earlier, the bearded patriarch and requisite child are nearby, framing the woman in the traditional role of mother and wife to stabilize the family economy (see fig. 146). And like *A Reading*, these advertisements participate in the late nineteenth-century network of ideas that promoted Spencerian repose, aesthetic contemplation, and in the words of Alan Trachtenberg, the "cultured home [as] domestic island of virtue and stability."[116] Maria Oakey Dewing, Thomas's wife, wrote as much in her 1882 work, *Beauty in the Household*, insisting that women should have servants to help around the house so that the wives would have time

[115] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 59. For further discussion of the phonograph, women, and the domestic setting, see Nathan David Bowers, "Creating a Home Culture for the Phonograph: Women and the Rise of Sound Recordings in the United States, 1877 – 1913" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2007).

[116] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 149.

to create an "atmosphere of peace and beauty" for their families.[117] As shown by the advertisements considered here, the manufacturers of the phonograph wanted to project precisely this kind of atmosphere, manipulating what Bailey Van Hook calls the "Aristocratic aesthetic" to target both the men who desired the models in these images and the women who wanted to emulate them.[118]

These inexorable connections between women and the phonograph may help us understand how women were meant to be seen and not heard in so many aspects of Victorian society (beliefs that some women were rebelling against with the burgeoning suffragist movement). As Peter Gay notes, "a majority of the protagonists in [depictions of listening] are women … [because] [t]he dominant ideology of the nineteenth century took women to be more sensitive, more passive, more receptive than the male."[119] With the phonograph then, the stereotype of the passive listening female, while not necessarily new, proliferated in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.[120] Dewing's Aesthetic production was a visualization of these attitudes, consumed over and over again by the male patrons and captains of industry that supported the artist for much of his life. Whatever Dewing's reasons for not giving voice to the speaker in *A Reading*, her silence in a refined domestic setting would have resonated in a Victorian culture that pictured women as passive and receptive, in other words, as ideal listeners.

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117 Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 167, citing Maria Oakey Dewing, *Beauty in the Household* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), 173, 182-3.

118 Van Hook, "Decorative Images of American Women: The Aristocratic Aesthetic of the Late Nineteenth Century," *passim*.

119 Gay, "The Art of Listening," in *The Naked Heart*, 33.

120 For discussions of female subjectivity in terms of sound in twentieth century cinema, see Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), and Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Workers

For all its popularity in the domestic sphere, the phonograph also gained significance in the office, a burgeoning sector of employment. Edison and other manufacturers promoted the machine for its efficiency and reliability, particularly in conjunction with the typewriter, for the tasks of recording meetings and dictation.[121] As we have seen in the previous chapter, secretaries could use the phonograph in conjunction with the typewriter, and play back their bosses' phonographic recordings to create typewritten letters, as seen in this illustration from 1892 (fig. 106). As typists, then, women became listeners in the workplace as well.[122] Thus, as more and more women left the home to learn typing and stenography and become secretaries, the binary of women listening and men talking, however problematic and overdetermined, became more and more entrenched.[123] Put another way, in a few more years, the placid, patrician women in *A Reading* very well could transmute into the plucky, pretty secretaries who populated so many facets of American business culture in the twentieth century. This gendered division of labor is reiterated in an undated photograph (fig. 153) of a secretary listening to and typing out a phonographic recording, while nearby, a man at his desk, presumably her boss, speaks into a second phonograph to create another recording.[124]

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[121] See Thomas Edison, "The Phonograph and its Future," 527-536.

[122] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, transl. and with introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 183.

[123] Bailey Van Hook states that, "As embodiments of leisure, women were portrayed in late-nineteenth century paintings as having pastimes, not occupations. … The languor of the women was compatible with their powerless status but not with the reality of their increased visibility in such arenas as recreational sports, the workplace, and the university." Van Hook, "Decorative Images of American Women: The Aristocratic Aesthetic of the Late Nineteenth Century," 59.

[124] Aggrandizing this nexus between women, listening, and shifting class structure a decade or so later, George Bernard Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* (1914), the story of phonetician Henry Higgins' transformation of Eliza Doolittle's working-class dialect with the aid of the phonograph and laryngoscope.

Not surprisingly, while women and their listening practices migrated from the home to the office, the voices of men remained hegemonic. Though there were some men in clerical and typing positions at the end of the century, the vast majority of secretaries were female, all of whom answered to male supervisors. In her study of gender and class in the American office in the early decades of the twentieth century, historian Sharon Hartman Strom notes, "Men who dominated elite business professions were happy to recruit women as assistants as long as they respected the central rule: men were in charge and would remain in charge."[125] As Strom explains, male business executives co-opted an array of strategies to keep women in clerical positions, arguing, for example, that women could not grasp the late nineteenth-century systematic management system of Frederick W. Taylor because of its inherent "scientific" nature.[126] Employing a different tactic, Herbert Spencer argued that women should be kept out of the workforce, as societies were more civilized in not treating women as slaves.[127] In a significant sense, Dewing's agenda of elegant, listless women at home contributes to this ideology of exclusion.

Inasmuch as the phonograph allowed the possibility to "hear us as plainly as if we were present" then, it was the voices of men who were mostly heard.[128] In this vein, it should come as no surprise that for many years, the phonograph had difficulty in recording women's voices, as evidenced by a 1900 trade catalogue announcing: "the only

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[125] Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1992), 95.

[126] Ibid., 73.

[127] Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*,189, n. 138, citing Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. 1, part 3, ch. 1, pp. 734ff.

[128] Edward H. Johnson, "A Wonderful Invention–Speech Capable of Indefinite Repetition from Automatic Records," *Scientific American* (November 17, 1877): 304.

In an April 20, 1878 *Punch* cartoon, a well-dressed Victorian lady stands in the street cranking a phonograph, and the caption reads, "How much better if instead of hirsute Italian organ-grinders parading our streets, we could have fair female phonographers playing our best poets in their own original voices!" Cited in Theresa M. Collins and Lisa Gitelman, *Edison and Modern America: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 74. This is another example of the sensorial disjunctions of phonographic listening and the gendered binary of presence/absence.

diaphragms which successfully record and reproduce female voices."[129] Offering his own reasoning for the ineffectual sound reproduction of women's voices, Adorno states:

> The female voice easily sounds shrill – but not because the gramophone is incapable of conveying high tones … Rather, in order to become unfettered, the female voice requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it. But it is just this body that the gramophone eliminates, thereby giving every female voice a sound that is needy and incomplete.[130]

Unwittingly or not, Adorno reinforced the gendered operations at the root of late nineteenth-century phonographic culture: women were meant to be seen and not heard, and if they were heard, it was only within a scopophilic regime where they were always attached to their bodies and the accompanying sexual possibilities.[131]

As all of this suggests, the paradox of depicting women as vessels for intellectual and cultural refinement while simultaneously essentializing them in Aestheticism also existed within phonographic discourse.[132] In the domestic sphere, the phonograph functioned for women as a means of conspicuous consumption and leisure – what Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, dubbed modern upper-class women's "sole economic function."[133] At the same time, manufacturers and advertisers traded on images of beautiful female listeners *to sell* phonographs. In the public realm, the phonograph was a woman's ticket out of the home and into the workforce– but in accomplishing this transition, she entered another sonic and scopophilic domain of powerlessness. Within this multivalent economy of phonographic

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[129] *True Mirror of Sound*, 1.

[130] Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," 54.

[131] For further discussion of Adorno, the phonograph, and the female voice, see Engh, "Adorno and the Sirens: Telephono-graphic Bodies," 120-135.

[132] As Pyne argues, this incongruity "left women in their separate sphere of domesticity … [while endowing] them with a mark of advancement that was nonthreatening to male hegemony in the public sphere." Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, 196.

[133] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), 43, 179.

listening, Dewing's listeners circulate simultaneously as workers, consumers, and currency. Though *A Reading* represents all of these countervailing forces and tensions – a moribund leisure class and emergent working class, the splitting of sight and sound and fragmentation of the senses – the painting is remarkably still; Dewing's innate sense of compositional balance and cool atmosphere a veneer for all that lies underneath.

VII. Dewing's Receptive Tensions

Despite leaving the tensions between vision and hearing unresolved in his artistic production, Dewing devised specific rules for his work's reception that were in effect strategies to fuse sight and sound. With commissions coming from all over the United States, Dewing would try to prevent situations in which he would send off finished works to patrons sight unseen. For example, as Dewing was completing the screen for Freer in May 1897, he wrote his patron: "I would like to know what day you wish me to come out. I can't deny myself the fun of opening the box of screens with you …"[134] Taken alone, the fact that Dewing wanted to be with Freer to view the finished work, not just hear about his reaction in a letter, may not be remarkable, but consider also this letter from Freer to another patron, William K. Bixby from February of 1900:

> Now about the Dewing. I think it had better remain with the artist at his studio until you see it, because he does not want you to have it unless it pleases you perfectly. Mr. Dewing is very sensitive in many respects, and I believe he had one experience with a patron to whom he let a picture go before the patron had seen it, and the result was rather embarrassing… I think we had better hold shipping it until you have seen the picture in Mr. Dewing's studio …[135]

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[134] FGAA, Dewing Correspondence, Folder 20, Letter 82, May 19, 1897.

[135] FGAA, Freer Letterpress Books, Volume 5, November 7, 1898 to February 19, 1900, Letter 665, February 9, 1900.

In light of my arguments thus far, I propose that Dewing's "sensitivity" was more than the preemptive maneuverings of a perfectionist or controlling person, it was a stratagem (conscious or unconscious) of the artist to procure the aural responses of his patrons *in front of the works themselves*. As Nelson Goodman states, "Talking does not make the world or even pictures, but talking and pictures participate in making each other and the world as we know them."[136] In a broader sense, having his patron stand in front of the object and talk about it may have offered Dewing some kind of coping mechanism or antidote to the fragmentations that a work like *A Reading* precipitated.

In this chapter, I have considered the various forms of interaction between the aural and visual narratives in *A Reading* – the inert contradictions between the two that the painting so slowly reveals and the disparate ways that Dewing probes the intersection of the two sensorial functions of sight and hearing to reveal the invisible vaults of the aural imagination. Dewing's unusual, difficult agenda for *A Reading* involved evacuating sound from the painting, using such techniques as obfuscation and immobility, and channeling any sense of sound into the title. At the same time, the artist filled the painting with a self-reflexiveness that renders the table in the painting as a kind of acoustic artifact of the artist. As these complicated operations suggest, Dewing's artistic enterprise was ultimately concerned with the visual representation of sound not so much as a technical set of problems, but a metaphysical inquiry that sought to unveil the psychic state of audition, all the while ensuring that his voice is the only one that is heard. And as beautiful and superficial as Dewing's women and artistic style appear, the artist shaped his extraordinary talents to visualize them as personifications of the intangible interiority

136 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 88-9.

that listening suggests. In this light, his pictorial syntax of dematerialization and tonal modulations makes perfect sense.

Thus, *A Reading* and its explicit bifurcation of speaking and listening – regardless of the artist's attempts to purposefully obfuscate the exact distinctions between these very different aural acts – is a visual testament to the imaginative powers of listening, and tracks, to a certain degree, the sensorial and perceptual experience of phonographic listening. In addition to this dematerialized aesthetic, there are significant parallels between *A Reading* and phonographic culture, in the ways that certain motifs, such as flowers and mirrors, carried specific connotations in the material culture of recorded sound, and in terms of the social and historical issues surrounding the construction of woman as the mediator of communications and ideal listener. Offices and corporations needed female auditors to do their clerical and secretarial work while phonograph manufacturers and advertisers wooed women with the lure of a harmonious, reified home. Dewing's lovely, quiet women – projections of the airy world of listening that they are – are at the same time fleshy tokens of a rigid sensorial hierarchy, a world, in the words of Cornish colony resident Frances Grimes, "where the men talked and the women listened." It is a system of power that continues to this day in many societies.

Conclusion

Over fifty years after Dewing painted *A Reading*, on August 29, 1952, to be exact, the musician David Tudor performed a composition titled "4'33" " to a filled concert hall near Woodstock, New York. For four and a half minutes, Tudor sat in front of a piano, looked at a stopwatch, turned the pages of the score in front of him, and opened and close the piano keyboard cover at the beginning and end of each movement. Not a single note was played throughout. During the three movements, all that was heard were the ambient sounds of the wind and, later, raindrops, as well as the periodic noises of audience members shuffling, some to get up and leave. The conceptual piece, composed by John Cage, created quite a stir, and inspired many artists to challenge and experiment with preexisting notions of music and performance.[1] But rather than discuss these issues, I bring the renowned avant-garde composer into this final portion of my dissertation to suggest links between his work and Dewing's, and to consider briefly the set of issues surrounding the intertwined relationship between sound, silence, and art that the 4'33" recital unties.

In no uncertain terms, Cage's composition pressured the sensorial functions of looking and listening. Filing in to the rustic concert hall, with the evening's program in their hands, the audience members sat down in their seats and expected the musician they saw on the stage to play the piano in front of him. Anticipating the sound of piano keys and musical harmonies to fill their ears, the audience heard near silence, and their

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[1] The body of scholarship related to John Cage is vast, particularly because of the interdisciplinary nature of his projects. For two recent discussions of Cage and 4'33", see Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), and Julia Robinson, *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009). For a re-performance of the piece by Tudor, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY.

attention soon turned toward, in addition to the thoughts in their heads, the slightest of sound or noise made in or around the hall. Though the composition may have not satisfied the audience's auditory expectations, it nonetheless stressed the act of listening as a psychic experience and social construct. Similar to Dewing's *A Reading*, the performance of 4'33" was the emptying of an aesthetic form that shifted the emphasis away from the active transmission of sound. In this sense, and in the metaphysical explorations of auditory experience and its passivity, Cage can be considered Dewing's kindred spirit.

Both artists, to some degree, explored the aural state for its capaciousness – for the ways that silence could facilitate the hearing, seeing, and imagining of previously unnoticed or non-articulated aspects of human experience. Indeed, much of the artistic process is a highly subjective state of "listening to oneself," and the making of art could not subsist without this kind of contemplation and interiority that constitute the very structure of creativity. While the creation of music is filled with the sounds of instrument and voice as musicians test chords and progressions, the making of fine art is a much more quiet practice. In the painter's studio, moments of quietude can be interspersed with a wide range of sounds such as music, noises from the environment, or the intermittent conversation, but, for the majority of time, there are the long swaths of silence that looking and concentration entail – between artist and model, or artist and canvas – marked only by the noise of materials and tools: wiry bristles brushing against canvas, the mixing of paint, scrawling pencils, crisp papers. For the most part, painting is devoid of sound, and this silent process results in an object that is also soundless.

The artists I have examined in this dissertation created objects that attempted to flout these silences with their distinctly sonic subject matter. Winslow Homer painted the everyday sounds of laborers in the American countryside and out at sea, shaping these aural exchanges to enact space and generate tropes of connectivity. Always wanting to signal something with his art, Homer sought to pry open the relationship between word and image, at once building and resisting the interdependency between the two. Eakins, in contrast, had little interest in the sonic possibilities of titles. Piquing our aural imagination with the physiognomic and sartorial acuities of his musicians and singers, not to mention the mimeticism of their actions, Eakins attempted to pack the parallel visual and aural experiences of realism tightly into painting, despite the limits of the medium. Transferring his photographic experiments of capturing the human body in mid-motion to the painterly stopping of musical sound, his works result in their own meta-technology of transcription. Whereas Eakins sought to unify the eye, ear, and hand in one split second of representation, Dewing sought to disperse them: a pulling apart of sight and sound that left only a trace of these sensorial experiences in his paintings, most notably in terms of attenuated sonic transmissions and the idea of pause. His arresting of sound was more for psychic effects, primarily for the imagination to take flight, and these suspended aural scenarios tended to cabin the women he so often portrayed. Interestingly, Homer and Dewing were both lithographers before becoming painters and though each relied on a completely different, and, arguably, equally effective, set of artistic practices to portray different aspects of aural experience, their approaches to titles bear some striking similarities. Perhaps because of their previous reliance on text as illustrators –

and the knowledge that images could always be explained with words – many of the titles for their paintings amplify the pictorial narrative in an aural and ekphrastic sense.

The various paths that these artists established took many turns in the twentieth century. Musical sound played a significant role in the developments towards abstraction for many artists, most provocatively with Wassily Kandinsky in the century's first few decades.[2] And though some painters continued the ambivalence towards issues of technology in their work, others, such as Joseph Stella and Charles Burchfield, were able to incorporate technologies of sound into meaningful representations. Burchfield's *Song of the Telegraph Pole* (1917-1952; fig. 154), for example, a decades-long endeavor for the watercolorist, is a gothic, pulsating view of rural land in and around Buffalo, New York.[3] There, among the coal mines, wet clay, and "wide windswept fields in afternoon sunlight," Burchfield, would, in his own words, "listen[ ] to the March wind singing in the telephone & telegraph wire – their vibrating fills my whole being."[4] For Burchfield, the strange song of these wires in the wind – sounds that he heard and noticed since he was a boy – had an ontological, and nostalgic, significance.

Like Burchfield, Homer, Eakins, and Dewing attempted to visualize more than the material coordinates of sonic scenes. From the sounds of the Union army military brass band, and the icy call of a fisherman on the Maine seaboard, to the sentimental musical

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[2] For further discussion of Kandinsky in these terms, see Hartwig Fischer and Sean Rainbird, eds., *Kandinsky: The Path to Abstraction*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2006); Judith Zilczer, "'Color Music:' Synaesthesia and Nineteenth-Century Sources for Abstract Art," *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987), 101-126.

[3] The majority of Burchfield's works and papers are housed in the Burchfield Penney Art Center at Buffalo State College. Critic Peter Schjeldahl describes *The Song of the Telegraph* as "the most successful attempt I know, by anyone, to convey sound visually." Peter Schjeldahl, "Life in a Small Town: Charles Burchfield, Homebody Modernist," *The New Yorker*, July 5, 2010.

[4] Charles E. Burchfield Journals, Volume 23, January 29, 1915, 45-6; cited in Nancy Weekly, "Song of the Telegraph: An Interpretation," http://www.yournewburchfieldpenney.com/pdf/songOfTheTelegraph.pdf (accessed March 28, 2010), 2; Burchfield Journals, Volume 36, April 7, 1926, 79; cited in Weekly, "Song of the Telegraph," 2.

performances on a creaky, third floor studio of a Philadelphia town house, and the contemplative moments of an oral reading in an elegant salon in a Cornish, New Hampshire, home, the artists revealed how these aural moments were the trappings of emotions, place, and memory for a time that was quickly passing by.

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