

Aural philology: Herder hears Homer singing

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In 1769, Johann Gottfried Herder describes a private reading experience of a remarkably paradoxical nature. He tells us that he can only read 'his' Homer properly when he hears Homer singing Greek, while silently reading and translating by means of his German thoughts and mother tongue. Herder's performative reading is anchored in what I call aural philology, a method innovative in its emphasis on the aural dimension in reconstructively imagining historical epochs. It is one which demarcates cultural difference through practices of listening and their remediation into reading. The problem, for Herder, is how to constitute the particularity of the German people even in affective acts of reading that, however momentarily, suspend cultural differentiation through effects of presence. I distinguish Herder's philology from Vico and others who emphasized the oral origins of the Homeric epic, along with recent theories of philology as an affective, aurally mediated process. The article is an alternative view on the role of media in enlightenment theories of literature and culture separate from Friedrich Kittler's Discourse Networks 1800/1900. Herder's aural philology identifies a moment in the history of aurality and cultural difference, one that does not move fixedly towards modernity.

While reading *his* Homer, a German becomes Greek

In his 1769 'Critical Forests: First Grove', the German literary critic, philosopher, pedagogue, and pastor, Johann Gottfried Herder, describes a private reading experience of a remarkably paradoxical nature. He tells us that he can only read 'his' Homer properly, 'feel him with the whole soul' when he hears Homer *singing* Greek.

I must become a Greek when I read Homer, whatever the language in which I do so; why not, then, in my mother tongue? Secretly I must read him in my native tongue even now; secretly the reader's soul translates him wherever it can, even when it hears him in Greek. And I, sensuous reader that I am, cannot even imagine a truly profitable and [lively] reading of Homer without this covert translation of ideas. Only when I translate him for myself do I

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read him as if I heard him: he sings to me in Greek, and just as swiftly, harmoniously, and nobly do my German thoughts seek to fly after him; then and only then can I give myself and others a [lively] and definite account of Homer; only then can I feel him with all my soul.

In every other instance, I believe, one reads him as if one were a commentator, a scholiast, a classical scholar, or a student of languages, and this reading is indeterminate and lifeless. It is one thing, Winckelmann says, to understand Homer and quite another to be able to explain him; and in my soul this is accomplished by means of a translation, by means of a rapid transformation in my way of thinking and in my language.¹

In this passage, Herder performs his reading of Homer to his readers, ‘flying after’ Homer’s Greek without the disturbance of any scholarly or philological apparatuses slowing down and fragmenting its reception. Through a method he refers to as a ‘secret’ translation of the Greek into his own ‘mother tongue’, he projects himself onto the ancient community for whom this method of oral reception was routine, in which community formation — with all listeners present — was performed through the bard’s songs. In joining the bard’s audience, he *becomes* Greek. Transforming cultures was a basic precondition of this process of doubly mediated reading: to ‘understand’ (*verstehen*) Homer, he must ‘give [himself] and others a vivid and definite account’. Herder aims to show his fellow philologists how a silent reading practice must be doubled by an imagined listening. This dual-step process of mediation, the first step listening and the second a simultaneous Greek to German translation, is the complex Herder calls reading. Through this sensually charged, ‘rapid’, ‘harmonious’, and ‘lively’ reading practice, so immersive that he stages himself as having acquired access to an ancient culture and its community, he is aware that though he is ‘reading my Homer—thank goodness!—in his language’ he can only do so by means of his German thoughts.² It would connect not just Homer’s Greece and Herder’s Germany but the silent reading of an isolated individual to a larger community. It would transform an otherwise silent, withdrawn, and ‘lifeless’ practice of classical scholars into a sociability approximating vocal mediation between a tight-knit, closed circle of listeners. Herder’s statement takes some of the constitutive antinomies of Enlightenment classicism, invoking, while sublating, the juxtaposition of ancient and modern, but also that of German and Greek, the silent and the spoken, poetry and prose, and language both spoken and sung.

Herder was situated at a critical juncture within innovations in a wide range of disciplines, from translation theory, anthropology, theology, philosophy of language to literary criticism.³ His performative reading, I propose, is anchored in what I will call

¹ Herder (2006a: 133). I will use published translations when available; otherwise, all translations from the German are mine.

² Ibid.

³ Interest in Herder has re-emerged in multiple humanistic disciplines in the Anglophone world. For example, recent monographs devoted to him include Bohlman (2017), Gjesdal (2017), Noyes (2015), and Sikka (2011); also see Spencer (2012) and Zuckert (2019).

aural philology, a method which would reform the traditional eighteenth-century methods of scholarly reading and interpretation of the classics. These were rooted in philological accuracy, archaeological authenticity, textual criticism, or analytical abstraction.⁴ Rather, Herder proposed a reading that would be ‘imaginatively oriented’,⁵ in which he sought to be in the presence of Homer through a practice of reading and translating while listening. In his emphasis on the oral origins of the Homeric epic, Herder succeeds the Italian philologist and professor of rhetoric Giambattista Vico,⁶ the Irish antiquarian Robert Wood, and the Scottish scholar Thomas Blackwell. Vico in particular followed the lead of the Roman historian Flavius Josephus in emphasizing the orality of Homer.⁷ In Vico’s philosophy of the history of civil society as articulated in his 1725 *New Science*,⁸ ‘poetic wisdom’ and the imaginative, sensuous dimension in philology were key to unearthing historical truth, and of bridging the present of the philologist with the object of the past.⁹ For Vico, Homer was an idea ‘invented by the Greek people themselves, who simply *were* Homer’,¹⁰ influencing an eighteenth-century attitude of Homer as the ‘collective mind of a culture’ rather than an individual genius.¹¹ Vico wishes to historicize Homer, and ‘attacks readers of Homer who would discover an esoteric philosophy in him’.¹² In the decades preceding Herder’s performative reading, then, studies of Homer viewed him in a manner that was culturally specific, a product of particular historical and cultural circumstances, rather than normative and universalized.¹³ Blackwell too saw Homer as illiterate and a representative of the ‘thoughts and customs of early Greek culture’.¹⁴ Blackwell wrote in his 1735 *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer*, a text that was a major source for Herder in his knowledge of Homer in the 1767 *Fragments*,¹⁵ that ‘[Homer’s] poems were made to be *recited*, or sung to a *Company*; and not read in private, or perused in a *Book*, which few were

⁴ Simonsuuri (1976: 34).

⁵ Harloe (2013: 238).

⁶ While there may be no direct influence of Vico on Herder, Vichian ideas infiltrated to Herder through England and Italy, notably by Melchior Cesarotti, whose work Herder knew on Ossian. See Clark (1947).

⁷ Josephus opposed Aristarchus and Alexandrian scholars by introducing his oral theory of Homer, writing that it was ‘preserved by memory and assembled later from the songs. And it is because of this that there are so many *inconsistencies* in it’ (*Against Apion* 1.12–13).

⁸ The second and third editions (1730 and 1744) included a section on ‘The Discovery of the True Homer’. Vico (1948: 269–300). cf. Porter (2011).

⁹ Vico (1948).

¹⁰ Porter (2011).

¹¹ Simonsuuri (1976: 145).

¹² Porter (2011).

¹³ Simonsuuri (1976: 34).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁵ Herder (2002).

then capable of doing . . . His Stile, properly so called, cannot be understood in any other light; nor can the Strain and Manner of his Work be felt and relished unless we put ourselves in the place of his Audience, and imagine it coming from the Mouth of a *Rhapsodist*.¹⁶ Robert Wood in his expedition across Greece in the 1750s was also on the search for the historically accurate Homer, determined to conjecture the primitive origins of society, as he chronicled in *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer*, first commercially published in 1775.¹⁷ He had ‘absorbed the intellectual conditions of his times’, a time of ‘new interest in the sound of language and “primitive” speech of culture’,¹⁸ and, though we find no scenes of reading or translation in Wood, for him, Homer’s language exemplified the ‘passionate expression of Nature, which, incapable of misrepresentation, appeals directly to our feelings, and finds the shortest road to the heart’.¹⁹

While Herder shares such historicist and primitivist views with Vico and Wood, what is innovative is his emphasis on the aural dimension in the ‘reconstructive imagination’²⁰ into historical epochs.²¹ Like Vico and Blackwell, Herder too used a variety of documentary and literary evidence while bearing in mind their cultural specificity. Herder diverges from the other scholars in that their engagement with the historical Homer was concerned primarily with proofs, and, for Wood, in particular, accuracy. Vico aimed to authenticate the Homeric verses as evidence of the collective modes of thought of a set of ancient peoples.²² Philology, for Vico, was the interpretation of the history of words, things, and the deeds of people by grammarians, historians, and critics.²³ He described the Homeric epics as emerging from a point in history when ‘the poetic faculty’ ‘submerges the whole mind in the senses’ in contradistinction from the rationality of metaphysics which ‘abstracts the mind from the senses’. The former plunges ‘deep into the particulars’ while the latter ‘soars up to the universals’.²⁴ Homer’s ‘sentences, comparisons, and descriptions could not have been the natural product of a calm, cultivated, and gentle philosopher’, he says.²⁵ Such submergence is what Herder practices in his performative reading of Homer through listening, revealing a desire for presence, and an empathetic understanding of what he understood to be the original conditions of reception of the epic. For Wood too, experiencing the sensuous aspects of Homer’s world

¹⁶ Blackwell (1735: 118).

¹⁷ Wood (1824).

¹⁸ Hudson (2003: 251).

¹⁹ Wood (1824: 176). Cit. in Hudson (2003: 251).

²⁰ Hausheer (1996: 50).

²¹ For a different approach to Herder’s philology as practiced in his *Volkslieder* project, see Renner and Wagner (2016).

²² Haddock (1979: 595) and Carhart (2007: 144).

²³ Haddock (1979: 597–8).

²⁴ Vico (1948: 281) and Haddock (1979: 594).

²⁵ Vico (1948: 282).

would prove more impactful than a close reading and textual analysis of the Homeric text: ‘the Iliad has new beauties on the banks of the Scamander, and the *Odyssey* is most pleasing in the countries where Ulysses travelled and Homer sung’, he wrote.²⁶ The means to understand the epics most effectively for Wood is what Jonathan Sachs has called a ‘locative hermeneutics’,²⁷ visiting the original Homeric site to see the ‘actual remains of the ancient world and to report about them truthfully’.²⁸

Vico, Herder, and Wood all share a conception of philology that, as Sachs points out in an understanding shared contemporaneously by Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, is concerned with a desire for presence with antiquity.²⁹ Recent attempts to articulate a philology and, more particularly, a philology with sound will help strengthen the sense of what ‘aural philology’ means, and what distinguishes Herder’s project. Werner Hamacher, in his 2010 *95 Theses on Philology* has written that philology is fundamentally linguistic, remarking not on the sound of language, but ‘the relation that the many languages within each individual language, and all individual languages, entertain to another [is philology]’.³⁰ However, ‘the idea of philology lies in a sheer speaking to and for [Zusprechen] without anything spoken of or addressed, without anything intended or communicated’.³¹ It is not Aristotle’s *logos apophantikos*, the language of propositions relating to finite objects capable of truth, but rather *euche*, ‘the plea, the prayer, the desire’.³² As for Herder, philology for Hamacher is not about the ‘scientific method of dealing with linguistic, in particular literary, documents’, or mere erudition, but about affect and desire; he calls for a return to the etymological root of the word, *philia* that signifies ‘affection or, friendship with, inclination to’ *logos*, ‘speech, language, or relation’. Like Herder, Hamacher ‘rethinks the idea of definition, locating philology both in a specific kind of history’ of ‘thinking in and about language’ while ‘pointing toward a future speaking and thinking’,³³ one that would mark a rupture from tradition. Philology becomes a *paleonymy*, ‘the maintenance of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept’.³⁴ However, his philology is, departing from Herder’s, not aural or resonant, but a call for a ‘renewed turn toward the textuality of cognition’,³⁵ although one that works against ‘the idea of full hermeneutic accessibility and communicative disclosure’,³⁶ sought after by Herder in his desire to inhabit a Greek mode of reception.

²⁶ Wood (1753: Preface, no pagination). Cf. Simonsuuri (1976: 135).

²⁷ Sachs (2010: 134).

²⁸ Simonsuuri (1976: 135)

²⁹ Gumbrecht (2003a,b).

³⁰ Hamacher (2019: xi).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

³² Hamacher (2019: xiii–xiv). Cf. Richter and Smock (2019: 2).

³³ Richter and Smock (2019: 5).

³⁴ *Ibid.* They borrow the term from Derrida (1981: 71).

³⁵ Richter and Smock (2019: 5).

³⁶ Richter and Smock (2019: 6).

A textually oriented philology like Hamacher's has the potential to exercise itself as aural in ways that may lend light to Herder's specific techniques. Through readings of passages from the *Iliad* and Sappho, Sean Gurd shows how poetic techniques that play with the sounds of language, such as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia can draw attention to 'unheard vibrations constituting language'.³⁷ In a poem of Sappho's, which depicts the sound of murmuring of a stream, he shows how 'the language's sounds are orchestrated into patterns that evoke the complex pre-cognitive – that is pre-linguistic – acoustic wave'.³⁸ Similarly, dissonant lines in the *Iliad* depicting the noisiness of battle 'figure the acoustic substrate of speech',³⁹ that is 'the vibrations that strike the ear before the mind hears words'.⁴⁰ 'Poems recall their acoustic origin in the noise beneath language, in the interference between the 'singer's voice and the represented story world'.⁴¹ The poem [whether one of Sappho or the *Iliad*], in playing with sound, invokes sensation, it figures sound, it conjures or produces resonance or dissonance. The making audible of what would otherwise be inaudible (the pre-cognitive and pre-linguistic 'acoustic substrate of speech') occurs through an affective reading, one that Herder too performs when reading Homer. Gurd employs Brian Massumi and Deleuze and Guattari's definition of 'affect', which can productively be applied to Herder. Per Gurd's definition, affect is 'an essentially transitive capacity to change and be changed' and it occurs in art 'as the transformation of perceived objects into sensuous presences'.⁴² As an example, in a poem of Sappho, the speaker 'becomes a passionate vibration' in the course of the poem. Gurd describes this as 'an affective process, closely linked to sonic and auditory flows and impacts'. It results in the poem itself.⁴³

Herder's 'mental translation'⁴⁴ of Homer is an affective, aurally mediated process. From the Latin root *auris*, I use 'aural' to refer broadly to 'experiences, practices, and discourses of hearing and the ear'.⁴⁵ The aural, in distinction to the 'oral', emphasizes the *reception* of sound, rather than its production by the mouth. I do not use the term 'acoustic' as it refers primarily to the science of sound, its measurement, controlling, and conceptualizing.⁴⁶ The terms 'auditory' or 'audible' have been appropriated in teleological narratives pointing to increasing 'modernity, 'rationality', and the Enlightenment. Jonathan Sterne dates 1750 as the advent of a 'new regime of listening'⁴⁷ when 'a series of conjunctures among ideas, institutions, and practices

³⁷ Gurd (2019: 63).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ Gurd (2016: 13).

⁴¹ Gurd (2019: 67).

⁴² Gurd (2016: 18).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Gaier (2012).

⁴⁵ Steege (2012: 7).

⁴⁶ Pinch and Bijsterveld (2011: 5).

⁴⁷ Sterne (2003: 91) and Szendy (2008: 15).

rendered the world audible in new ways and valorized new constructs of hearing and listening'. From this point onwards, 'sound itself became an object and a domain of thought and practice, where it had previously been conceptualized in terms of particular idealized instances like voice or music.' Sterne writes that 'hearing was reconstructed as a physiological process, a kind of receptivity and capacity based on physics, biology, and mechanics. Through techniques of listening, people harnessed, modified, and shaped their powers of auditory perception in the service of rationality'.⁴⁸ Herder's investments in listening do not fit into the story of listening 'in the service of rationality', but neither can they be described as an 'idealized instance'. The 'aural' cannot be subsumed into a straightforward narrative of increasing rationality and Enlightenment. Veit Erlmann tells a story of the 'history of aurality', describing it as 'a moment in Western cultural history when reason and resonance developed in contiguity'.⁴⁹ Herder's particular philology may help us trace the emergence of such a history, one that is non-teleological, non-linear, and does not move fixedly towards 'modernity'.

Listening, for Herder, was not entirely relegated to the realm of the imaginary. While he emphasized the depth and intimacy of the ear with the soul, listening was simultaneously rooted in physiological and anthropological notions of resonance which resisted the dualism between the imaginary and the embodied.⁵⁰ He described the impressions perceived by the ear to be stronger, retained for a long duration, quicker in transmission, and preferable to any technique of production or reception dominated by the visual regime.⁵¹ His reformed method of interpretation would, by contrast, serve as the means to connect the private, aesthetic experience of silent reading with communal listening. Unlike reason and resonance, the cognitive model of Herder's theory of the apperception of texts read and heard requires 'adjacency, sympathy, and the collapse of the boundary between perceiver and perceived',⁵² in this case between the reader and Homer's verse.⁵³ Several contemporary philosophers too have turned to the phenomenology of listening in hopes that it might provide a model for an ontology that could overcome subject-object and mind-body dualism. For Jean-Luc Nancy, while listening is connected with inwardness, and opens up the self to itself, it consists of a resonance between the sounding body and the listener such that a definite listening subject and listened to object disappear.

⁴⁸ Sterne (2003: 2).

⁴⁹ Erlmann (2010: 11).

⁵⁰ Cf. Welsh (2003: 33).

⁵¹ Herder (1993: 355). See Couturier-Heinrich (2016) for a thorough close reading of this text. See also Maurer (2010), Singer (2006), and Trabant (1990).

⁵² Erlmann (2010: 10, 64).

⁵³ Simon (1998: 194–8) briefly attends to the paradoxical nature of the passage at hand from the 'First Grove', and argues for the relevance of sympathy and resonance, both physiological and as metaphor, for Herder's theory of reading and its hermeneutics of presence. The 'lively reading' Herder calls for is, according to Simon's argument, one which may re-animate a text's archive of tones and serve to reactivate memory.

Listening is, by necessity, never solitary due to these permeable boundaries. ‘Sense’ is not just disembodied meaning but embodied sensual perception,⁵⁴ which suggests that listening may be an alternative to the more limited interpretative capacities of visually oriented reading. Peter Szendy describes listening as an inscription onto human bodies, and because each act of listening is unique, the difference inscribed in a communal practice.⁵⁵

Herder’s aural philology aimed to develop a new kind of *German* reader, one wrought from Greek reception aesthetics. In his very desire to read Homer, so could he hear him and feel his presence, and in imagining that his voice was present in a written text, Herder, while keeping to his particular German thoughts and mother tongue, inhabits a fantasy that lies at what James Porter has determined is a ‘classical desire’,⁵⁶ at ‘center of the practice and ideology of [Graeco-Roman] classicism.’⁵⁷ As Porter has shown using examples from Aristophanes, Plato, Longinus, Dionysus of Helicarnassus, Philodemus, and the Euphonist critics, much of classical literary criticism holds an ‘expectation of sheer aural pleasure’, both aesthetic and emotional, and of an ‘immediate contact with the past’,⁵⁸ which was ‘either taken for real or was pretended for real’.⁵⁹ Additionally, the Greek verb *akouein* can mean both ‘to hear’ and ‘to read,’ and thus connotes both reading aloud or reading ‘for (or with) the sound’.⁶⁰ The Euphonist critics, and later Dionysus of Helicarnassus and Longinus, consider the ‘value of verbal art [to lie] in sound and not in the sense’.⁶¹ Texts are ‘encoding of this sound, which, when read out loud, come to life’, even for critics of the Euphonists such as Philodemus, who writes that ‘when Homer’s verses are read out loud, they all appear greater and more beautiful’.⁶² In his feeling of an immediate, live contact with Homer through listening, Herder is indexing a Greek aesthetics of reception.

The culturally particular reading practice that Herder advocates aims not for a ‘universal aesthetic experience’ otherwise characteristic of ‘Enlightenment aesthetics’⁶³ or even the universalizing conceit of Graeco-Roman classicism. Rather, Herder is invested in building a culturally differentiated German community through an imagined phenomenological encounter with immersive Greek aesthetics and their spoken and sung language. Porter has shown that in hearing a ‘classical or classicizing text’, what one hears is a *relation* rather than a sound or set of sounds by itself: what is heard, above all, is *the sound of a cultural or historical difference*’ (Emphasis in original). These sounds ‘must appear classical and antique, not only in

⁵⁴ Nancy (2007: 32), Janus (2011: 193).

⁵⁵ Szendy (2008).

⁵⁶ Porter (2006: 313).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 319.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 315.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 335.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 337.

⁶² Philodemus (2003: col. 43.9–12), cit. in Porter (2006: 344).

⁶³ Von Mücke (2015: xxvi).

the postclassical present, but also from their very first historical appearance'.⁶⁴ In Herder's postclassical fantasy of hearing Homer, then, Homer performs sounds upon which cultural and historical differences were *already* inscribed. They were further differentiated by the media-historical conditions of receptivity particular to Herder's literate society of eighteenth-century Germany. Herder's project was carried on into the nineteenth century, when, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche ignites the aural and sensuous dimension of language with a 'blistering attack on the deafness of the German ear'.⁶⁵ Ancient literature for Nietzsche was, as for Herder, 'rhetorical in the root sense of the term ("speech"-oriented); its focus is "the ear, in order to captivate it (*um es zu bestechen*)"', he wrote in his lecture notes on Greek rhetoric from 1872 to 1873.⁶⁶ His 'point of departure' in the lecture notes are the 'rhythm and the aural properties of language, particularly the contrast, which runs through all of Nietzsche's philology, between classical literary sensibilities and their modern correlative'.⁶⁷

Throughout his writings, Herder, a century prior to Nietzsche, represented his project as one which sought to retrieve the loss of voice, a marker of singularity, from the devocalized fixity of the written text.⁶⁸ For instance, in a 1795 essay devoted to Homer appearing in Friedrich Schiller's short-lived journal *The Horae*, Herder incisively declared that 'books were the tomb of the epic'.⁶⁹ Writing fixes the text beneath the rubric of the universal, and in contrast, the singularity of the voice resists absorption into the universal. However, songs, melodies, and tones are identifiers not only of individuals, but of the entirety of a culture or a 'Volk', for Herder. Song constitutes *Volk*, an ideal community that would bridge social classes, but one still differentiated by varying mother tongues. In a preface to his 1779 collection of *Volkslieder*, Herder remarks that 'song loves the collective, the harmony (*Zusammenstimmung*) of many'.⁷⁰ It was their oral poetics that fortified the community of Homer's Greeks. Herder describes their poetry and song as having as its potential audience all of sentient nature,⁷¹ in contrast to the hierarchies organizing the interactions between publications and their readership. He writes in the preface that, 'the song must be *heard*, not *seen*; heard with that which does not just count individual syllables, measuring and weighing them, but rather listens in to the sounding forth and swims off in it'.⁷² Instead of foisting an analytical measuring stick onto its rhythm and meter, the listener should immerse herself in the sound itself, thereby

⁶⁴ Porter (2006: 326).

⁶⁵ Porter (2010: 171).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 172–3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶⁸ See Wellbery (1996: 187–96) on what he calls Herder's 'primordial orality' and his role in making the 'notion of voice historically accessible'.

⁶⁹ Herder (1908a: 93).

⁷⁰ Herder (1990a: 247). Cf. Bohlman (2017).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

joining a collective of listeners. However, the dilemma constituting the project of the *Volkslieder*, that of reading lyric or song in print, must not be conflated with the one of listening to the Homeric epics sung while reading silently.⁷³ Unlike song, the epic is sharply marked as culturally differentiated and employs the hexameter, its own technology of inscription. While it can be actualized by the voice, which is particular and differentiates, it does not rely on a particular actor's instantiation.⁷⁴ Listening to the epic, for Herder, is an act of inscription upon the memory. However, Herder viewed the hexameter ill-suited to the German language, which had an accentual verse system rather than quantitative as the Greek language did, and he opposed a Germanic imitation of it.

Media theorist Friedrich Kittler declared in his influential *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* that German poetry around 1800 functioned as an inscription system, a recording medium, and a technology of storage. In the absence of competing technologies such as film and gramophone recordings, books stored 'phantasmagoria', 'optical hallucinations', and the 'audiovisual sensuality' of 'the seriality of a progression of sounds or images'.⁷⁵ Writers transformed into the 'inner voice' of the reader.⁷⁶ Kittler writes that in this 'phantasmagoric modality of hermeneutics', in which the proper interpretation of poetry led to audio-visual hallucinations, the materiality of the book, verbal signifiers, and the 'techniques of the [reader's] body', let alone meter, were all bypassed with the imagination replacing all senses like an independent faculty.⁷⁷ Philology for Kittler signifies 'love of the word', and German poetry is not a site in which sensory perception leads to a cultural conversion in the process of forming a community. The translation that occurs when reading in Kittler's narrative is from that of the material signifier, regardless of the particular language, to the transcendental signified, Spirit, or nature, rather than between particular languages. This is exemplified for Kittler in Goethe's *Faust*, in which the eponymous character translates Greek *logos* into German in the first line of the Bible. To do so, he 'undertakes a semantic quest for the 'transcendental signified'.⁷⁸ The meaning lies not in the affective structural or sensory components of language, but rather in a transcendental signified which equalizes all languages and signs. The reader believes that poetry is capable of translating a signified regardless of linguistic difference.⁷⁹ Kittler invokes Herder twice in his narrative. In explicating the concept of voice in this period, he cites Herder's 1772 'Treatise on the Origin of Language' where Herder wrote that language in its origins 'was full of living sounds.' Kittler extrapolates that

⁷³ See Mondelli (2018) for a recent study on Herder's attempt to re-oralyze song into print in his collection of *Volkslieder*.

⁷⁴ Saussy (2016: 70).

⁷⁵ Kittler (1990: 115ff).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

this statement was representative of ‘language in 1800’.⁸⁰ He later points out that while Herder’s ‘theory of national poetry allowed for the existence of untranslatable idioms (like the Johannine *logos*)’ in practice, ‘Herder Germanized folk songs from the most distant languages and cultures’.⁸¹ He summarizes Herder’s 1778 ‘On the Effects of Poetry on the Manners of Peoples in Ancient and Modern Times’, surmising that ‘language is only a channel, the true poet only a translator, or, more characteristically, he is the one who brings Nature into the heart and soul of his brothers’.⁸² It is nature itself that is being translated, not a distinct, culturally differentiated language into German. Breaking away from Kittler, I argue that the voice of ‘nature’ is enculturated: it is the voice of the Greeks, as there is no universalized human ‘voice’ (or ear) for Herder. For Kittler’s discourse network around 1800, the source of presence or of ‘phantasmagoria’ is naturalized rather than rendered culturally specific, an incomplete reading which highlights identity rather than difference.

The ideal reading technology imagined by Herder which would reduce cultural difference to a minimum, is, I argue, ultimately integrated into a programme of cultural modification, of transforming his German thoughts into Greek. This modification, the ultimate goal of Herder’s technology of reading, reinstates cultural differentiation at a higher level as a self-reflective, second-order cultural particularity. The problem, for Herder, is how to constitute the particularity of the German people even in affective acts of reading that, however momentarily, suspend cultural differentiation through effects of presence. The passage from the ‘First Grove’ shows how a performative aural reading practice upends the binary between orality and literacy while marking cultural difference. In wanting to transform his German thoughts into Greek, Herder desires an enculturated transformation into the imagined Greek culture of presence, one intimately connected to listening rather than visual or tactile presence. He uses the exemplary Homeric epic of the Greeks to stand for a universality that the Germans no longer have access to in their bookish times.

In what follows, I will first outline the components of these aural philological methods central to which are Herder’s concept of lively and lifeless reading along with the possibility of translating the Homeric hexameter into German. The aural reading operation, developed in dialogue with G.E. Lessing’s 1767 *Laocoon and the Limits of Painting and Poetry* to whom the ‘First Grove’ was dedicated, is one marked by a swiftness which would allow him to perceive and to understand Homer’s songs with a sense of immediacy potent enough to result in a temporary erasure of the print medium. I will outline Herder’s own embodied reading of a passage from the Iliad, and then discuss the phenomenological experience of listening to the metrical components of the hexameter which undergirded this new philological practice, distinguishing it from the affective resonance in the sense of touch. I will conclude by discussing the implications of Herder’s operation of reading in future projects in classical reception, poetics, and cultural theory.

⁸⁰ Herder (1966: 94), cit. in Kittler (1990: 43).

⁸¹ Kittler (1990: 71).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 73. Herder (1892: 339).

Lively reading

To find a way out of the fragmented, visually oriented reading practice of the traditional philologists contemporary to him, Herder draws on the accounts of ancient practices of reading from other contemporaries such as Blackwell and Scottish professor of rhetoric Hugh Blair. The conclusion they all drew was that the Greeks, in reading aloud or orally performing what was written were much more sensitive to their acoustic surroundings than the German, British, and Scottish contemporaries of Herder. As classicist Jesper Svenbro has pointed out, up until Plato, oral performance was the primary way to receive written texts.⁸³ The legislator relied on a poet who would memorize and sing the written law, a move interpreted by Svenbro as one meant to internalize the ‘voice of conscience’ in the populace.⁸⁴ This became the paradigm for the relationship between the writer (as legislator) and the reader whose vocal apparatus was instrumentalized. As early as the sixth-century BC writing came to represent the voice thereby requiring no physical voice to mediate with the letters conceptualized as ‘speaking’ directly to the eye. This confirms Shane Butler’s argument that the inscription of the voice initiated by Edison’s phonograph has its history as far back as in the ‘early chapters of Western writing’, a phenomenon he calls the ‘ancient phonograph’.⁸⁵

Herder describes the reading practices of the ancient Greeks as sensorily attuned and ‘alive’, speaking of himself as a ‘sensual reader’ performing a ‘lively reader of Homer’ (‘lebendiges Lesen Homers’),⁸⁶ suggesting that the visually oriented reading of his contemporary scholars was a lifeless one. The notion of a ‘lively reading’ was informed by Herder’s own interpretation of the European discourse of life sciences and anthropology at the time, which included the vital materialism of Denis Diderot, Albrecht von Haller, Pierre-Louis Maupertius, G.E. Stahl, Spinoza, Buffon, and Leibniz.⁸⁷ He conceived of nature as ‘a self-contained and infinitely creative system’,⁸⁸ self-organizing, self-formative, and a monistic continuity between the inanimate and animate. If a reading practice was lively, it would have a dynamic, genetic ‘living force’ (*Kraft*) a notion that was for Herder the ‘one organic principle of nature’.⁸⁹ The printed word, akin to inanimate or dead matter, was not separate but continuous with the animate. It too could become animate through certain techniques of reading and translation of the meter of oral poetry. The meter that propelled Herder’s ‘lively reading’ of Homer was a dynamic, genetic force, transmissible to future readers, reaching back to its origins in Ancient Greece as a mnemonic device

⁸³ Svenbro (1993: 4).

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

⁸⁵ Butler (2015: 11).

⁸⁶ Herder (2006a: 133). Cf. Wellbery’s reading (1996: 193) of Herder’s use of ‘living’ in the preface to his *Volkslieder*.

⁸⁷ Zammito (2017: 103ff).

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 190.

with the goal of educating new bards and forming ‘organic unity across generations’.⁹⁰

In the ‘First Grove’, Herder paraphrases the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann⁹¹ when he writes of the distinction between ‘understanding’ [verstehen] Homer and ‘explaining [erklären] him’.⁹² A philological reading practiced by traditional scholars is limited to explaining Homer. It is monadic, beginning and ending with one reader, and ‘indeterminate and lifeless’.⁹³ The reading performed by Herder, on the other hand, is an open-ended, affective, and generative reading practice for the *Volk*. *Verstehen* is the interpretive practice that is connected with Herder’s notion of life. He writes that such a lively practice of reading and interpretation is accomplished in his soul ‘by means of a translation, by means of a rapid transformation in my way of thinking and in my language’.⁹⁴

Verse translations and cultural difference

Translation was key for Herder and his contemporaries for transmitting cultural difference, thereby rendering their own language aurally distinct from other cultures. In the 1768 version of the ‘Fragments’, Herder concludes that ‘our language’⁹⁵ is in a time of formation (*Bildung*) and provided an opportunity to experiment, to erase, and to rework older elements and appropriate linguistic elements from other languages to form a strong basis for the ‘singularity of our language’.⁹⁶ This was part of a broader programme to form a language whose phonetic and structural elements would immediately betray, not only an individual author’s style but ‘who’ the Germans, collectively, are: ‘An eavesdropping ear will recognize and hear [who we are] in our language as well as in the rustling of our feet and in the unhurried pace of our steps’,⁹⁷ he wrote in the ‘Fragments’. It is the rustling noise of the metrical feet, the measured tempo of their steps that betray and constitute German identity.

In the ‘Fragments’, Herder paraphrases a passage from Lessing’s *Letters Concerning the Most Recent Literature* where he states the language will be improved the closer a German translation approaches Greek and Latin as the euphony of the languages would be transmitted to ‘our language’. The German people are not used to the periods and the rhythm of Homer’s hexameter, but only to prosaic periods, Herder responds. While the musical harmony of Greek poets and writers may be translatable, he remarks that their metrical forms

⁹⁰ La Vopa (1995: 12).

⁹¹ Winckelmann (1987).

⁹² Herder (2006: 133). Bickenbach (1999: 158) also points out this distinction in his reading of this passage.

⁹³ Bickenbach (1999: 156–7).

⁹⁴ Herder (2006: 133).

⁹⁵ Herder (1985: 597).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

cannot be stolen for ‘it is immediately apparent that these must be difficult to imitate’.⁹⁸ The Greek language, he writes, sounds like a string stretched tautly, which produces notes clearly and distinctly. However, ‘the string slackens by itself, and hence the sharpness of the sound will leave the note’⁹⁹ which would produce modern languages. The ancients were accustomed to speaking and listening to high pitches, and a range of accents and syllables even in their day to day life. ‘At that time the rhythm of the language was still so clear that the cadence in which the verses were recited or, as the ancients expressed it, sung could tolerate the pace of a hexameter [. . .] the recitation of common life ascended and descended a higher scale of pitches’,¹⁰⁰ he wrote in the ‘Fragments’. They were not limited to hearing iambs like the Germans. At the time of ‘*aidoi* and *rhapsodoi*’, ‘every ear could be the judge of prosody’.¹⁰¹ Herder inherited some of these ideas from the polemical writings of two literary critics, Johann Christoph Gottsched and Johann Jakob Breitinger. The former, in his 1730 ‘Attempt at a Critical Art of Poetry’ wrote how the ‘sensitive ears’ of the Greeks were adapted to music while those of Germans and Nordic peoples only to rhyme.¹⁰² In his 1740 response to Gottsched, Breitinger wrote that nations with more ‘sensitive ears’ develop metrical innovations in a more accelerated fashion.¹⁰³

For Herder, the Germans’ capacity for listening differed from the Greeks both due to culturally particular performances of poetry and song, and also due to physiological differences determined by varying geographical locations. ‘Now of course we are no Greeks, whose language sang and rang out like a play of strings in the pure ether of high Olympus; in contrast to it ours sounds (*tönen*) duller, like a flute under a thicker and baser heaven’.¹⁰⁴ If ‘we Germans’ try to be like the Greeks or raise ourselves to the same standards as them, he says, our flutes would pale in comparison to the sounds of their strings. The flute is a monotonal instrument, vulnerable as it is to the air pressures around it and of those blowing into it, and would be dulled down due to the ‘thicker und baser’ atmosphere around it, an embarrassing diminution in comparison to the ‘pure ether’ of the elevated Olympian air.¹⁰⁵ Like many of his contemporaries, Herder was influenced by Montesquieu’s influential climate theory in

⁹⁸ Herder (2002: 39).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Gottsched (1737: 73–4).

¹⁰³ Breitinger (1740: 18–19). I am grateful to Hannah Eldridge for bringing my attention to Gottsched and Breitinger’s passages.

¹⁰⁴ Herder (1985: 571).

¹⁰⁵ See Hamilton (2008: 37–8) on the mythical contest between Apollo with his lyre and Marsyas with his flute, likely referenced by Herder here. In fourth- and fifth-century Athens, the flute was degraded as an instrument for ‘slaves and prostitutes, drunkenness, and irrational behavior’, in part due to its non-Greek, Phrygian provenance. Further, it was banished from Plato’s republic.

his 1748 *Spirit of the Laws*, and understood the basis of cultural difference — which Montesquieu defined as the quality of different cultures' art forms, aesthetic values, passions, morals, or tempers — to be determined by their particular climates. These in turn also determined the kind of laws that would be appropriate to each of them.¹⁰⁶ Climatic proximity molded nerve fibres in similar ways, allowing for successful communication between groups arising in similar climes. As a corollary, the climatic difference between Greece and Germany implied physiological heterogeneity that further posed obstacles to translation.

In search for ancient tones

So how could cultural conversion of the kind Herder performs occur amidst such strictly defined differences? Herder wrote his 'First Grove' in the wake of the influential innovations in German hexameter by Klopstock, initiated by his epic *The Messias*, published in serialized form from 1746 onto the 1750s. Like Herder, he sought to cultivate for the German reading public the kind of communal resonances and rhythms lost in print culture. *The Messias* was unanimously considered a success by poets and literary critics, even those most sceptical of the adaptability of the hexameter for the German language. Klopstock approached German meter as quantitative as in Greek poetics rather than employing the accentual system used by Germans. He 'rejected the alternating verse forms that had dominated German poetry since Martin Opitz',¹⁰⁷ who in his 1624 *Book of German Poetics*, a canonical rulebook for future German poets, aimed to impose the iamb to ensure regularity in the placement of monosyllabic words, and syllabic stress and length.¹⁰⁸ In combining classical Greek hexameter with the affective expressions of 'sentimental interiority', his poetry elicited a major shift in poetics around 1740,¹⁰⁹ and remained unparalleled even twenty years later when Herder wrote in the 'Fragments' that the hexameter remained 'so little natural' to the German language and ear,¹¹⁰ not to mention the Greeks' tonal language. In soliciting the heat of the imagination, Klopstock's metrical innovations and his emphasis on 'free rhythm' intensified 'the physical dimension of prosody', far from abstractions and semantics.¹¹¹ Breitinger, in 1740, successfully implored Klopstock's generation of poets to adopt a 'heart-moving writing style' ('herzrührende Schreibart') producing 'forceful emotions',¹¹² which impacted poetry contemporaneous to Herder as reader of Homer in 1769.

¹⁰⁶ de Montesquieu (1989: 231–3).

¹⁰⁷ Pao (2019: 104, fn. 21).

¹⁰⁸ Opitz (2005).

¹⁰⁹ Pao (2019: 104).

¹¹⁰ Herder (2002: 40).

¹¹¹ Lee (2017: 512). See Menninghaus (1989, 1994) and Blackall (1978) for detailed treatments of Klopstock's poetics.

¹¹² Breitinger (1740: 353–4).

How could a translation activate such affective resonance and forceful emotion? Verse translation, Herder writes in his ‘Fragments’, would facilitate immersion in the ‘tone of the Ancients’ if the reader could translate an author with the same ‘fire’, the same temporality, with which he wrote.¹¹³ In an essay prefacing a 1756 edition of the *Messias*, Klopstock admired the ‘flow, momentum, and fire’ (‘Strom, Schwung und Feuer’) of the periods of Homer’s hexameter, which he sought to transfer over into his own German version.¹¹⁴ Earlier, Alexander Pope wrote in the preface of his 1715 translation of the *Iliad* that ‘the Reader is hurry’d out of himself by the Force of the Poet’s Imagination, and turns in one place to a Hearer, in another to a Spectator’, ‘in *Homer*, and in him only, [this *Fire*] burns every where clearly, and every where irresistibly’.¹¹⁵ Herder positions himself with Pope’s descriptions of Homer’s fiery, rapid verses, the course of which ‘resembles that of the army he describes, *They pour along like a fire that sweeps the whole earth before it* . . . It grows in the progress both upon himself and others, and becomes on fire like a chariot-wheel, by its own rapidity. Exact disposition, just thought, correct elocution, polish’d numbers, may have been found in a thousand; but this poetical fire, this *Vivida vis animi*, in a very few’.¹¹⁶ Herder writes that once the reader would ‘become’ the author: ‘we’ would hear with his ears, see with his eyes, imitate his rhythm which would even sound in our ear: all climactic, historical, physiological, and cultural differences and other untranslatables would vanish through this aural reading practice.

In the ‘First Critical Grove’, Herder relates his experience of reading about Apollo’s noisy descent to the Greeks to show how Homer ‘is as far above the prosaist writing in a modern language as life itself is above the picture’, situating Homer on the side of ‘life’ with its ‘progressive’ quality and the prosaist on that of a static picture. He aims to ‘demonstrate the difficulty of translating Homer’¹¹⁷ for a writer of modern languages. The reader witnesses what Kittler would call Herder’s ‘audiovisual hallucination’ of a cinematic episode. But the particular language of the Greeks and the epic meter’s processual quality are highlighted rather than rendered obsolete as general equivalents as in Kittler’s account. Herder presents himself as spatiotemporally present with Apollo while reading, emphasizing verbs of movement and the correspondingly swift progression of the narrative: ‘Not only do I see him descending, I also hear him. At every step the arrows rattle on the shoulders of the angry god. He strides on, like the night. Now he sits opposite the ships and lets the first arrow fly at the mules and dogs. Dreadful is the clang of the silver bow. Then, with more poisonous dart, he smites the men; and everywhere the pyres of the dead burn incessantly’.¹¹⁸ Another peculiarity of the *Iliad*, Herder writes, involves the ‘poet

¹¹³ Herder (1985: 414).

¹¹⁴ Klopstock (1989: 10).

¹¹⁵ Pope (1996: 4).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Herder (2006a: 135).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

recurring to an existing principal feature that serves as the thread drawing the picture along and binds its individual details together to create a whole' image.¹¹⁹ The 'musical picture' as Lessing described it 'rolls on' like Pope's description of reading Homer following the hexameter's rhythm: 'everything lies before our eyes, no detail is lost, no color has faded in the wake of a word rushing past; the poet retrieved and reiterated each detail at precisely the right moment, and the image rolls onward, round and round in a circle'.¹²⁰ The poet, like Apollo, 'does not have the time to explain' why he has 'thrown night around his shoulders', he 'allows the reason to be inferred', and 'shrouded by night, he sweeps past'.¹²¹ He 'does not allow himself to be distracted from the image of the marching god, working to ensure that the picture does not come to its end, that the movement continues. The technique used by Homer resulting in co-presence with Apollo is that of *enargeia*, defined by Aristotle as a rhetorical effect of the force of language as if what they signify lies before the eyes.¹²² Ancient critics such as Demetrius unanimously praised Homer for having achieved this in numerous ways, such as mimetically presenting events through the sounds of words describing them.¹²³ Homer himself uses the 'adjective *enargēs* ('visible,' 'manifest') to describe dreams and gods who appear in visible form to human beings'.¹²⁴ With the force of *enargeia*, the words on the page may acquire liveliness otherwise lacking on the printed page.¹²⁵

By immersing himself in the world of the 'Iliad', Herder was performing a reading of Homeric poetry as perceived by Homer's own Greek listeners. Herder seems to perform what Lessing describes in the semiotics of poetry in *Laocoon*. For Lessing, by a 'comforting deception', the materiality of the sign turns the signified 'lively', in large part due to the speed of his oral delivery. The deception is so successful that the listener (or reader) is made to forget the mediation of the signified by words.¹²⁶ In the 'First Grove', Herder summarizes this effect of immediacy by restating Lessing's claim that the 'alphabets, sound, succession of tones' lose their significance as criteria for describing the effect of the poem. It is rather the 'sense' that through 'arbitrary coincidence' lies in the words themselves; it is 'the soul that inhabits the articulated tones'.¹²⁷ These tones house the 'sense' of the poem and despite the fact that in this embodied reading practice the mediated elements seem to disappear as in Kittler's description of Romantic hermeneutics, they are an effect of the hyper-mediated nature of the epic. In my reading of Herder's own aural-performative reading of the Homeric epic, the effect

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Aristotle (1991: 123).

¹²³ Allan, de Jong and de Jonge (2017: 35).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Bickenbach (1999: 158) indicates Herder's use of the Aristotelian category of *energeia* in the 'First Critical Grove'.

¹²⁶ Lessing (1969: 97).

¹²⁷ Herder (2006: 136–7).

of immediacy upon the listener is a mark of belonging to the culture for which the bard or poet is singing. Per his own framing, Herder ‘becomes’ Greek through this practice, socialized into the Ancient Greek circle surrounding the bardic recital.

Unlike the multi-step process that Herder, as a German, had to go through to first hear and then read, the Greeks feel these words ‘with [their] whole soul’; the mere audibility of the ‘silver tones’ of the ‘simple singer’ makes him ‘always understandable’.¹²⁸ But for Herder, concentrated attention to the pace of the reading and a focus on ‘the whole’ is the only way to properly understand, just as for the poet, it was the only way to narrate by propelling the listener forward so as to create what Lessing called a ‘musical painting’. He stages his fast tempo of reading as one proper to the epic unlike the much more strenuous and more time-consuming process of commentators, academics, and students of languages whose contrastingly slow methods of reading and interpretation he describes as fragmented and as ‘indeterminate and dead’. Through their detached, slow reading, the philologists he pits himself against fail to perceive Homer’s songs with a sense of immediacy so strong as to result in temporary erasure of the print medium.¹²⁹

The ear: the ‘middle sense’

Herder goes on to write that ‘every one of Homer’s pictures is musical: the tone reverberates in our ears for a little while; if it should begin to fade, the same string is struck and the tone rings out once more, this time with greater force; and all the different tones combine to create the harmony of the picture’.¹³⁰ As each tone is struck and resounds for a while in ‘our ear’ and wanes, the next one appears. In this way, the Homeric epic with the repetitive rhythms of the hexameter is able to overcome the transitoriness of impressions which Lessing diagnosed as ailing spoken poetry. Herder continually uses the metaphor of stringed instruments to model the unification of reader-as-listener with the poet, a trope borrowed from physiological treatises by Diderot, Johann Gottlob Krüger, Moses Mendelssohn, and Abbé Jacquin.¹³¹ In his 1763 treatise on health, for example, Jacquin modelled the passions of the human body as functioning like a stringed instrument, ‘whose strings, struck in greater or lesser chords, produce more or less harmonious sounds and thus excite either pleasure or ennui. The nerves, which for the most part take their origin in the brain . . . are divided up into an infinite number of fibers spread across the whole body, covering even its surface. Those are the keys and strings of the instrument’.¹³²

¹²⁸ Herder (1990a: 231–2).

¹²⁹ See Bickenbach (1999: 157) for similar rhetoric used in Herder’s ‘Second Grove’ critically directed at the scholarly readers of Horace’s *Odes*.

¹³⁰ Herder (2006a: 137).

¹³¹ See Erlmann (2010: 116–20, 176), Simon (1998: 168–71), and Welsh (2003: 29–55) for passages from these and other French and German authors who employed the metaphor of string instruments in late-eighteenth-century writings on human physiology.

¹³² Jacquin (1763: 347).

When Herder describes communicability in the ‘Treatise on the Origins of Language’, he extensively borrows from this model to show that nature created not egotistic monads but rather a sociable network, one in which any struck string responds to itself through an echo by laws of physics: ‘The struck string performs its natural duty: it sounds! it calls to a similarly feeling Echo – even when none is there, even when it does not hope or expect to be answered by one’.¹³³ In the 1769 ‘Fourth Grove’, Herder explains: ‘All our sensations are here a play of strings [*Saitenspiel*] seized by what we call tone in all the intensity of its individual moments and beautiful variations and recurring delicacies of feeling’.¹³⁴ Different rhythms and modulations of tone can strike the strings in variable ways, directly impacting the nerves and the sentiments associated with them. Nerve fibres, like strings, could resonate and stir movements in the soul. Through his proposed energized reading while translating, the string struck by the poet would be heard and echoed by the reader. The sound would register as a feeling (‘Empfindung’) and would strike the strings of the reader’s own nerves, most significantly her ‘inner ear’, resulting in an intense affective bond with the poet.¹³⁵

Such an affective bond was not limited to that between the poet and reader-listener but could be triggered by the ‘feeling imagination’¹³⁶ of a beholder with a piece of sculpture and, at times, even with its creator.¹³⁷ A brief outline of the distinction in Herder’s aesthetics between the aural and haptic sense will illuminate how the former was a culturally specific sense that could form a collectivity, while the latter, while equally as immersive, elicited the erasure of difference between an individual beholder and a work of art, separated off from a community. Herder devotes a significant portion of the ‘Fourth Grove’, and the entirety of the 1779 *Sculpture* to the haptic sense, particularly in relation to Ancient Greek sculpture. His experience of viewing the ‘Sleeping Hermaphrodite’ bears significant resemblance to the aural–visual effects of presence he experienced while reading the *Iliad*. Alien to the ‘cold, analyzing eye’,¹³⁸ can he experienced in his imagined touching of the sculpture, a feeling ‘that courses through the entire body like a gentle fire’. He goes on to write that ‘whoever has not felt or perceived an involuntary resonance and echo of this play of strings [my modification; *Saitenspiel*] in himself – such a person cannot be made to understand’.¹³⁹ As Helen Slaney describes it, the statue ‘vibrates in the beholder like a plucked string, the *Saitenspiel* of its attitude awakening complementary echoes and the possibility of dreaming the same ‘Bacchic dream’.¹⁴⁰ The boundaries between the sculpture and the beholder’s body disappear as Herder leaves it

¹³³ Herder (2002: 66).

¹³⁴ Herder (2006b: 283).

¹³⁵ See also Simon (1998: 205–6).

¹³⁶ Herder (2006b: 219).

¹³⁷ Slaney (2018).

¹³⁸ Herder (2006b: 219).

¹³⁹ Herder (2002: 80).

¹⁴⁰ Slaney (2018: 115)

unclear to which one this dream belongs.¹⁴¹ He writes: ‘a sculpture before which I kneel can embrace me. It can become my friend and companion: it is *present*, it is *there*’.¹⁴² Either he ‘identifies proprioceptively with the sculptured figure’, as with a statue of Hercules in the ‘Fourth Grove’, or he ‘perceives it as a desirable other whose embrace is forever deferred’, as in the case of Hermaphrodite.¹⁴³ Unlike listening, this affective bond does not raise itself to a communal bond outside that of the intimate, erotically charged relationship between the beholder and the sculpture in which no cultural conversion occurs.

The ear is the ‘middle sense’ in Herder’s theory of hearing, the mediator that unites sensory impressions into a ‘coherent shape of an integral human experience’.¹⁴⁴ However, unlike the ‘human experience’ stimulated by the haptic sense, the aural was not framed as universal, but it was historically and culturally differentiated, and indeed, contributed to creating the possibility of such differentiation. Far from being the superficial sense due to its inability to record and replay performances, the ear is also distinct from touch in that it allows for a better kind of understanding, one that is whole, organic, communal, and endures in the cultural memory. The voice and all audible sounds are endowed with an ‘omni-translational capacity’ because the information gathered from each sense has an ‘audible tonal correlate’,¹⁴⁵ allowing them to be translated from one to the other and providing a sense of epistemological and aesthetic wholeness. Thus, Homeric verses give the impression of a ‘musical painting’ — not only because their sounds are repetitive and form an imagistic impression, but because the sounds could be translated by the ear into other sensual forms.

The visual register is instead much more liable to bad readings as the reader may continually go back and re-loop what was just read, endlessly dissecting what is on the page. While listening, one is expected to instantaneously grasp an abundance of information that will not be repeated. Over time, the ear learns to manage this information. Due to the instantaneous disappearance of what is heard, it is armed from the effects of information overload. Further, the bard has to quicken the pace of declaiming so as to effect enjambment; hesitation is disabling and breaks the flow of words. Herder reads Homer as fast as possible in order to simulate the sense of temporal singularity that each word or line has when spoken out loud. But the meter installs pauses in this fast-paced silent reading, simulating spoken performance in which the bard must pause to take breaths while reciting. Metrical structures allow for these pauses through their divisions into strophes, periods and at times, paragraphs on the page.

Herder described his reading of Homer as akin to soaring behind lines of texts, losing any semblance of choice with a heightened speed to his reading. Each line of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁴² Herder (2002: 45).

¹⁴³ Slaney (2018: 119).

¹⁴⁴ Wellbery (1996: 189).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

the poem imprints itself as an unchanging form. The hexameter too would necessarily have a lulling effect on the reader with its rise and falls. The reader will be determined to perceive the language in distinct ways during each performance depending on the repetition, rhythm, and prosody of the verse.¹⁴⁶ This effect is not limited to the receptive choices of a single reader-listener, but rather is perceived by the ears of Herder's *Volk*. The cyclicity and repetition of verse are described as akin to circadian rhythms, mimicking the involuntary physiological drive to sleep at the end of a verse to the sudden awakening at the start of a new line: 'The rhythm of the whole work is like a silver tone, that, sure enough, continually works itself in waves and circles through the air: circle encircles circle, wave crashes against wave, whirl subsumes whirl and so the noise (*Schall*) is driven into our ear'.¹⁴⁷ Even the repetitive, parabolic rhythm of the sentence, consisting of isocolons, mirrors the repetitive movements of waves. The sound affects the ear through circular motions. Homer's verses have a physiological effect upon the ears of the *Volk* for whom they were addressed and for whom they were audible, distinct from the methodological receptive practices of the scholars who rely only on the visual components of the text at hand.

Conclusion

Through listening, Herder advocates, on the one hand, the erasure of cultural difference at the precognitive level of reading as a phenomenological experience. On the other hand, he insists on cultural particularity at a hermeneutic level. The projected practice by which this may be accomplished, an operation of reading, is what I describe as aural philology, a method by which cultural difference may be demarcated through practices of listening and their remediation into reading. The practice makes explicit the insight that the act of listening was enculturated; the degree to which acoustic nuances could or could not be perceived varied among distinct peoples, which differentiated it too from the haptic and the optical. These variations among 'ears' served as the basis to unite, divide, and hierarchize communities. Herder's conceptions of listening and reading were the bases for developments in the philological and poetic practices of a range of provocative German philosophers from Nietzsche to Heidegger.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the anonymous readers of the article, the editor, Constanze Güthenke, and the associate editor, Alex Purves, for their generous engagement with this piece. Their suggestions resulted in considerable improvements to previous versions of this article, illuminated new directions for the project as a whole, and strengthened it conceptually. For all of this, the author is deeply grateful.

¹⁴⁶ Herder (1990a: 231).

¹⁴⁷ Herder (1877: 77).

Funding

This paper was written while the author was supported by the Yonsei University Future-Leading Research Initiative of 2018–9.

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