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“A Sinister Resonance”

Vibration, Sound, and the Birth of Conrad's Marlow

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I shall vanish into space (there's no space) and the vibrations that make up me, shall go to the making of some other fool.

—Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, September 29, 1898¹

Another Art Altogether

A formalized theory of modernism finds one pronouncement in the 1909 critical preface to Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1884), in which James lauds a new sense of vision: “The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will.”² These windows do not “open straight upon life.” Each is equipped with “a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, ensuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other” (*PL*, 7). James invokes neither biography nor the psychology of the writer but rather the “posted presence of the watcher,” a center of consciousness positioned within the novel itself. As Douglas turns his back upon the group of listeners around the

hearth in “The Turn of the Screw” (1896), one might say that the Anglo-American novel lost its voice, an orally based aesthetic being synonymous, as it had been for Flaubert, with all that prevented the novel from achieving aesthetic freedom. In his 1921 study of French and English fiction, *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock ratified this aesthetic to argue that the modern novelist resists “a long and sociable interview with the reader, a companion with whom he must establish definite terms.”³ The writer “is so far from telling a story” (CF, 63) that “the scene he evokes is contemporaneous, and there it is,” for we now “follow the direction of his eyes” (CF, 113). The novel becomes “an object that you fashioned and abandoned to the reader, turning away and leaving him alone with it” (CF, 112).

The shift from telling to showing provides the most immediate terminology by which to understand the place of Joseph Conrad’s Marlow-narrated fiction within the modernist novel.⁴ Marlow was a “familiar spirit, a whispering ‘daemon’” whose origin and function Conrad was never willing to discuss fully or directly.⁵ As Fredric Jameson argues in an early study, Marlow “marks the vain attempt to conjure back the older unity of the literary situation of which narrative transmission was but a part.”⁶ Conradian “rhetoric,” opposed to Flaubertian (and by extension, Jamesian) “style,” determines Marlow’s sentences as among those that “emerge and disappear with all the permanent provisionality of spoken communication, telling, digressing, repeating, exclaiming, rambling, and apostrophizing” (“HC,” 35).⁷ Marlow continues to confront us, above all, as a voice, a storyteller haunting what Walter Benjamin once called “the realm of living speech,” the communal bond between mouth and ear.⁸

If Conrad’s early emphasis on the storytelling voice marked a turn away from the Jamesian category of point of view, it has not placed him outside of canonical visual terms of modernist studies. Resuscitated within the printed book, the task of storytelling is, as Conrad famously proffers in the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* (1897), “to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see.”⁹ This axiom grounds canonical accounts of impressionist perception in Conrad, marking his impor-

tance in the history of modernist visual aesthetics. In a pivotal reading, Michael Levenson redeems the 1897 preface as the origin of Marlow, showing how Conrad was among the first modernists to derive value from heightened perception. The storytelling subject brings meaning to the “muteness of the mere event,” visible surface alone being “insufficient.”¹⁰ In contrast, Jameson expands his earliest position on Marlow to argue in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1980) that Conrad’s “regressive” oral aesthetic also marked a “new ideology of the image” (*PU*, 232), “a self-generating sequence of sentences for which narrative and narrator are mere pretexts” (*PU*, 219). Each new hallucinatory detail transforms the “world into images” and, in a displacement of attention away from history, stands immediately before us not as material being, but a “mirage of structure, a fading effect” (*PU*, 242) or “the reunification of data which were originally chaotic or fragmented” (*PU*, 233).

It seems to escape us that, at a certain point, Conrad no longer conceived of narrative in explicitly oral or visual terms. In the 1917 Author’s Note to *Youth* (1902), Conrad notes that his understanding of Marlow changed after his first appearance in “Youth” (1898), a story in which Marlow’s repeated phrase “pass the bottle” reminds us of a social scene of direct transmission.¹¹ Conrad explains that while “Youth” had been a matter of “sincere colouring” (*Y*, xi), essentially concerned with verisimilitude and Conrad’s own biography, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) had represented a new aesthetic, “another art altogether” (*Y*, ix). *Heart of Darkness* “had to be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration that, I hoped, would hang in the air and dwell on the ear long after the last note had been struck” (*Y*, xi).

This description of Marlow represents one of the most provocative yet ignored theories of modernist narrativity. It elides the canonical terminology of visuality and orality to call upon another, subtler sphere of aesthetic existence. I address in this essay an alternative aesthetic tension in the emergence of Conrad’s modernism: a vibrancy within the realm of the audible and visible, a force that cuts through the dualism between the audible and visible fields, and with it, the assumed social immediacy of speech. In Conrad’s

statement about *Heart of Darkness*, we do not confront the novel as “watching” or “speaking” but rather as a subaural activity that permeates the apparent stability of entities: “another art altogether.” This other art is premised upon a way of thinking about the act of hearing in the nineteenth century made possible by the discovery of vibration and the physics of frequency, a discovery of which Conrad was not only fully aware but upon which he was deeply reflective.

In the persistence of frameworks lent by visual studies and oral traditions, we have not attended to a vast sonorous field that surrounds and invades the image and act of speech in early Conrad. Jameson’s account of the ideology of the image has played a central role in that elision, finding in the fibers of sound only what he calls a “strategy of containment,” a narrative that sonically registers the infrastructure of labor only to “absorb” it into the “formalized surface” of syntax and ship (*PU*, 213). Jameson cites *Typhoon*, a novel Conrad began in 1902, the same year *Heart of Darkness* was published: “suddenly in the depths of the ship, the harsh scrape of a shovel, the violent slam of a door, exploded brutally . . . while the slim high hull of the steamer went on evenly ahead, without a sway in her bare masts, cleaving continuously the great calm of the waters under the inaccessible serenity of the sky” (*PU*, 214). In this account of containment, an “auditory” Conrad only emerges in the late period of *Nostromo* (1904), a novel that sheds Marlow to discover, as Jameson writes, “the fully developed and now passively inherited apparatus of a purely visual impressionism . . . contested and undermined by the new idea of an auditory image” (*PU*, 239). Recalling not only the blind stillness of this novel but also its sounds that hang in midair, Jameson argues that “the entire sensory apparatus has been foregrounded, and the very experience of perception itself heightened to the point at which it touches its own outer limit and causes its own outer edge in the nonperceivable to rise before us” (*PU*, 239–40). Here the “thread of hearing” in late Conrad tenuously binds us to what Jameson calls “a void at the center of reality” (*PU*, 240).¹²

The auditory is rarely attended to in Conrad studies, and the problem of visual containment stands as the central theory of

sound in his early work.¹³ If we return to Conrad's remarkably sonorous account of *Heart of Darkness*, however, not only to do we find a Conrad deeply preoccupied with sound from the beginning, but we do in ways not fully supportive of an aesthetic-political theory of containment by form, a containment that Jameson argues dialectically resolves into the outer limit of perception as narrative content in late Conrad. In Conrad's consideration of Marlow, we encounter resonance as not only the outer limit of perception—not only silence, but the subaural—but also as vibration, as a third term or physical bond between voice and image. As I will show, Conrad's earliest thinking brings with it an attention to the deep materialism of the world, a reality not of void but of sonorous, vibrating relationality.

As a physical property, vibration crosses sound and vision in ways that courted Conrad's attention as the basis of frequency and light. Conrad's attraction to that crossing or passage, when assessed in terms of his early fiction and his development as an English writer, provides a series of insights into his own mobility within the Anglophone tradition. The "continued vibration" in Conradian narrative poses a remainder within the discourse of modernism as it moves from James to Lubbock to Jameson. The mysteries of the continued vibration ask us to return to the compositional history of the stories in which Conrad shaped and reshaped Marlow, discovering therein a series of sensory priorities that locate Marlow, as Conrad's English avatar, somewhat unexpectedly within the history of modern physics, a force field that also remains transnational and political in its resonances.

Conrad's most remembered aesthetic axiom, "before all, to make you *see*," appears to be independent of these concerns. While universal vision is the superlative moment of his statement, one reminiscent of the rhetorical figure *enargia* or "vividness," one might recontextualize his aesthetic theory in terms of the continued vibration. This wider aesthetic context, in its political registers, challenges the persistent thesis regarding Marlow—he represents a pre-modern nostalgia for the social immediacy of speech. We can return to a critical history of the voice of Marlow, his birth in a moment of rapid technological expansion and physical discovery, and find

Conrad's philosophical response to his predicament as a transnational writer, a writer working to identify the means of solidifying a place within the English literary tradition. Such a place paradoxically found ontological support in subaural and invisible motion.

A Sinister Resonance

In addition to two Marlow-narrated stories, "Youth" and *Heart of Darkness*, the 1902 volume *Youth* contained "End of the Tether," a story in place of which Conrad had originally conceived of the Marlow-narrated *Lord Jim* (1900). After extensive revision and expansion, however, *Lord Jim* had become what Conrad calls "a short story that had got beyond the writer's control."¹⁴ Editor William Blackwood decided that it was growing far too long to publish in the volume, and while Conrad began *Lord Jim* as early as 1896, he did not publish the final installment until November 1900, after leaving and returning to the story numerous times. Jameson notes how most critics experience "a tangible 'break' in the narrative of *Lord Jim*, a qualitative shift and diminution of narrative intensity as we pass from the story of the *Patna* and the intricate and prototextual search for the 'truth' of the scandal of the abandoned ship, to that more linear account of Jim's later career in Patusan" (*PU*, 206–7). Nevertheless, a tangible break occurs early in the narrative: *Lord Jim* does not begin with Marlow as its narrator, but abruptly turns at the end of chapter 4. This interruption does not break the novel into ever more sections. It bodes a curious turn toward a voice, a turn that, we will find, was not simply oral in nature but more broadly sonic, thereby dating Conrad's "auditory turn" to much earlier than *Nostromo*.

Indeed, Conrad composed the first pages of *Lord Jim* from an omniscient perspective on the blank pages torn out of a family volume containing Polish poems transcribed by his maternal grandmother's hand. There was something of *Lord Jim* that had already represented an urgent expression, one that again seems to detour with Marlow's interruption. While one might argue that Marlow intervenes in the novel to lend it precisely the nostalgic form of social immediacy admonished by Jameson, the compositional his-

tory of this novel tells the story of “another art altogether.” The undated first draft, “Tuan Jim: A Sketch,” likely predates “Youth,” the last pages of which were sent to David Meldrum on June 3, 1898. It was not until January 2, 1899, that Conrad wrote Blackwood to tell him that *Lord Jim* would now be narrated “by the same man” (CL, 145) as “Youth,” an idea Conrad disclosed several days after writing to Meldrum of a new idea for a story called “The Heart of Darkness” and after having already sent several omnisciently narrated chapters of *Lord Jim*.¹⁵ When the narration of *Lord Jim* later hands itself over to Marlow, his voice erupting from nowhere, it is as if the epiphany of *Heart of Darkness*—a novel that doubts the forms of knowledge upon which narrative omniscience is premised—intervenes in the composition of *Lord Jim* to change its course. It no longer believes in the kind of storytelling with which it begins. On the witness stand, Jim thinks that he will never speak again.

Edward Said once characterized Conrad as a writer who “wished to say something very clearly.”¹⁶ That epistemological predicament was equally vocal and clings to Conrad’s attention to his own acquisition of English in his memoir of becoming a writer, *A Personal Record* (1912). While Conrad’s sense of place, or rather placelessness, as a writer in a national tradition is a matter of extensive critical commentary, it is worth recounting how Conrad narrates his first encounters with the English language.¹⁷ He sidesteps the more important issue of how he learned to *speak* English, to narrate his first experiences with English *literature* in Polish translation. He was once commanded, at a young age, to read aloud the Polish text of his father’s translation of Shakespeare: “If I do not remember where, how and when I learned to read,” Conrad writes, “I am not likely to forget the process of being trained in the art of reading aloud.”¹⁸ As Christopher GoGwilt argues, the young Conrad experienced himself as being doubly tested by his father, not only in his skills of reading aloud but in “the spiritual *lingua franca* that abolishes all alienage of race” (POL, 9). As GoGwilt continues, this imagined spiritual *lingua franca* “is the privileged space of English literature, a space of reading in translation that resolves in advance the questions he had been evading [in *A Personal Record*], or hold-

ing at bay" (*POL*, 14). As Conrad later learned it when joining the British merchant marine, the English language, the only language in which Conrad wrote fiction, served as "a privileged language for embodying this essentially cosmopolitan ideal" of world literature (*POL*, 16).

As Conrad's first novel to depict an English crew on a journey home to England, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* announced Conrad's courageous self-fashioning as an English author. Marlow was born of those experiments, a vacillation between first- and third-person plural voices.¹⁹ It is as if Marlow first emerges in the conclusion of this novel when the narrator finally utters the word "I." Indeed, the status of Conrad's own authorial subject-position seems to be the larger project of this novel, one that aims, as Conrad writes in the 1897 preface, "to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood" (*NN*, xiv). The sensory conditions that support this vision in its desired social immediacy invoke a larger aesthetic bind, one irreducible to the distinction between showing and telling. It is a history in which hearing and seeing blend, register subtle motions, and thereby touch the sensing subject in ways that cannot be separated from Conrad as he was acutely aware of his own status as a naturalized English citizen attempting to reach an English audience. A "sinister resonance" lingered in Conrad's embodied sense of authorship, and it continually threatened an aesthetic theory that claims no distance from its subject. As Michael North describes, Conrad warned Cunninghame Graham of his "gibberish" upon Graham's invitation to introduce him to an English literary circle. "But you know I am shy of my bad English. At any rate prepare for a 'b—y furriner' who will talk gibberish . . . at the rate of 10 knots an hour."²⁰ These traces of learning English by overhearing it never left his own speaking voice.

What happens to Conrad's aesthetics if we take "sinister resonance" or "a continued vibration," and not "above all, to make you see," as Conrad's most central comment upon his own technique? How are we to approach a sense of composition that defines itself fundamentally as resonance, which is to say, in its displaced, redirected, and horizontal aural effects?

“Resonance,” according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, is a sympathetic vibration or “the condition in which an oscillating or periodic force acting on an object or system has a frequency close to that of a natural vibration of the object.”²¹ One system subjects another near its own frequency to vibration. Such amplification allows philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to ground his ethics in a physical event when he writes, “To sound . . . is not only to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself.”²² The pulsating resolution and return of vibration recalls the most explicit problem Conrad raises in the preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*—the means by which the literary work of art can become the basis of solidarity among men across time and space. The preface does not directly comment upon English naturalization, but Conrad’s most memorable theory aims to identify the means by which art may become a shared sensible object.

This aesthetic dilemma preoccupies canonical accounts of early Conrad, particularly that of Levenson. However, as it has more recently emerged as an object of study between media history and phenomenology, resonance allows us to depart from the existing frameworks of modernist studies to discover alternative realms of audition. Viet Erlmann’s *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (2010) recovers a shift in the seventeenth century when hearing was rethought as a principally sympathetic mechanism. Adriana Cavarero’s *For More Than One Voice* (2004) provides a sustained account of resonance as an urgently needed category within contemporary political and ethical thought. In this way, sound studies, a burgeoning field in its own right, reminds us of resonance’s neglected and repressed status within the oculocentric trajectory of Western thought. In particular, Cavarero notes that even in Ovid’s foundational tale of vision (recalled by the ship *Narcissus* in Conrad’s novel), Echo courts Narcissus away from his own image. The voice of Echo is a matter of resonance principally defined as the nonidentitarian qualities of afterwardsness and acoustic superimposition. Echo’s separation of sound from context drains voice of its semantic content, Cavarero argues, she being a pure resonance that “provides a sonorous substance to a seman-

tic that is not organized according to her intentions.”²³ The resonant body “produce[s] a linguistic flux that . . . results in a babble whereby the semantic system, and the subject that should sustain this system, are dissolved.” In this way, there is a for-ness of the ear, a pure relationality. There is nothing to be communicated, Cavarero writes, “if not communication itself in its pure vocality” (*FM*, 169).

By that account, pure voice as resonance is defined primarily as matter, but also as matter touching matter in ways that will prove important for Conrad’s own thinking through resonance in the literary event. Resonance studies has not penetrated the field of literature as deeply as history, media, and phenomenology, and, indeed, part of what a reconsideration of an early “resonant Conrad” achieves is one basis of a literary sound studies. Early Conrad seems to proffer not an ideology of the image but rather a literary event of sympathetic vibration, one historical field out of which contemporary phenomenologies and histories of sound have emerged. Resonance is “pure voice” in these accounts, and as I will return to below, it is a phrase used by Conrad in reference to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*—we will find that, for Conrad, resonance was no mere metaphor. Conrad’s understanding of vocality and orality hinged upon the materiality of listening: “The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense,” he writes in *A Personal Record* (*PR*, 3). The question remains, what did this power mean for his technique as a novelist, the book being a silent medium? As examples of early modernism, Conrad’s works are far from the kind of semantic babble Cavarero finds in such figures as Samuel Beckett. If for Cavarero the resonant event in literature is often an allegorical one, pointing back to ethical ways of hearing in the world, Conrad represents an attempt to conceive of the space of literature as itself resonant, and not merely representative of nonliterary acts of hearing. Indeed, the succumbing of the semantic to the sonorous, we will find, oriented Conrad’s earliest imaginings of Marlow not as storyteller but as the occasion of or medium for vibration, a physical event between writer and reader.

This problem of sympathetic vibration places Conrad somewhere outside of the theory of the novel as it was developing in

England. James, for example, did not negotiate terms such as “kinship” and “solidarity” in his theory of vision and the center of consciousness. Though we are accustomed to reading Conrad’s 1897 preface in explicitly visual terms (“before all, to make you see”), the genealogy of the continued vibration discloses alternative sensory priorities. As Conrad wrote to Garnett on September 29, 1898, “[t]he secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness” (*CL*, 94–95). This phrase sounds not unlike Conrad’s most famous axiom regarding the promise of English literature to bind men to each other and the sensible world. Despite being “sinister,” then, the continued vibration locates the hidden, connective fibers of physical space as Conrad was already seeking them in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* Vibration is the shared physical property of sound and image as well as the shared physical substance between beings. It is also perhaps *the* site in which Conrad negotiated the problem of transmitting and empirically validating his own aesthetic project, while also registering the psychical and political discord within it. The period of 1896–1899 saw the emergence of Marlow as Conrad’s English avatar but also a deep revision of technique premised upon a theory of vibration as a category alternative to visuality and orality. Vibration, then, is not merely a trope but a literary aesthetic that, while it finds no approximation in Jamesian or Flaubertian modernism, also functioned for Conrad as one way of working through the project of conjoining with a national tradition and entering the “cosmopolitan ideal.”²⁴ I will now address precisely how vibration functions as a narrative aesthetic and literary event, one that radically reformed the possibilities of the novel through Conrad’s encounter with new thoughts of physical reality.

“Something Else Besides”

The reality of vibration found Conrad on September 29, 1898, just before beginning *Heart of Darkness*. It was on September 8 that Blackwood had written to Conrad to excuse him temporarily from *Lord Jim*. Conrad had expressed agonized anxiety over its slow

production, it being at cross-purposes with the composition of *The Rescue* (1920). At this time, Conrad also writes to Garnett to describe his astonishment after meeting with a radiologist who had showed Conrad an X-ray of his own hand and played for him a recording of a Polish pianist:

All day with ship-owners and in the evening dinner, phonograph, X rays, talk about *the* secret of the Universe and the non-existence of, so called, matter. The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness. . . . And, note, *all* matter (the universe) composed of the same matter, matter, *all matter* being only that thing of inconceivable tenuity through which the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound, light, etc.) are propagated, thus giving birth to our sensations—then emotions—then thought. Is this so? (*CL*, 94–95)²⁵

Conrad notes two machines, the phonograph and the X-ray. The phonograph had been invented by Cros and Edison in 1877, and gramophone discs were first used in 1887. The X-ray had been invented just two years before this meeting, in 1895. Nevertheless, in this encounter and the discussions that followed, Conrad received a lesson in physics, extrapolating from it a new ontology. While the phonograph nowhere appears in *Heart of Darkness*, Ivan Krielkramp cites this letter to Garnett in order to open up several insights concerning this novel as it pivots around the haunting voice of Kurtz, a voice obeying what Krielkramp calls a “phonographic logic.” Like the “back” of the Captain which turns against the listeners, Krielkramp writes, “‘voice’ in *Heart of Darkness* is not an expressive trace of the fully human, but a material sign, a part-object standing for nothing beyond itself.”²⁶ After Marlow finally encounters the voice that he has so long sought, Kurtz presents himself not as a fully authorized voice or presence but as a failing one transmitting only the dying, phonographic anaphora, “The horror! The horror!” The speaking voice, Krielkramp asserts, wanes as site of a transmissible and verifiable authority, becoming “disembodied” and in the process losing the ancient, auratic privileges afforded by Benjamin. Indeed, what Krielkramp calls “a

voice without a body,” as a function of the instability of meaning in Conrad’s poetics, governs contemporary readings of the voice of Marlow.²⁷ But in his letter to Garnett, Conrad is not impressed by a supposedly fragmenting or disembodying power of phonography. As sound historian Jonathan Sterne writes, “the claim that sound reproduction has ‘alienated’ the voice from the human body implies that the voice and the body existed in some prior holistic, unalienated, and self-present relation.”²⁸ Conrad speculates a most invisible level of *embodiment*, the tie that binds a body to the world of matter. As the Polish audio recording ushers forth a lost location, Conrad values a propagation of matter in sensation. In vibrations, Conrad seems to have found *the* “spiritual *lingua franca*” he had been seeking in the preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and in English literature itself.

While Conrad was exposed to a series of thoughts regarding the differing media of vibration, the phonograph strikes us as the most primary given the vocality dominating *Heart of Darkness*. Nevertheless, there is in this novel a vast field of vibration that reaches not only the ears but also the body of Marlow with inchoate effect.²⁹ Conrad continually invokes the more subtle effects of the recently discovered spectrum of frequency, as the voice of Kurtz is rhetorically effective but also physically palpable as *force* with a power to disperse, linger, and set in motion. One must recall the physical force of Kurtz’s last words as they exceed, but also pulse just beneath, any event of oral narrative: “I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arms waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand. . . . A deep voice reached me faintly” (Y, 134). To recall Conrad’s Author’s Note to *Youth*, Kurtz’s last words ultimately “hang in the air . . . long after the last note had been struck” as they return to Marlow in England. While the continued vibration connects, it also registers an impossible resolution between individuals. Hardly disembodied, vibration poses a physical impact across distance that both unites and disrupts.

In the Conradian imaginary, there is a primordial and trans-substantial motion beneath matter. But it remains “sinister,” a quality that cannot be fully defined within the scope of the episte-

mological dilemma or crisis of meaning that frames interpretations of *Heart of Darkness*. In the drumming and cries of the invisible, African bodies complicate the continued vibration as that which connects two points of resonant origin. The echoing voice of Kurtz, which had “a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper” (Y, 151), finds its kinetic counterpart in his shaking body, which is everywhere surrounded by larger a resounding cry: “a cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land. . . . The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive mobility” (Y, 133). The sounds of objects and human bodies move in the air. Conradian narrativity continually struggles to represent these residual effects as registered by the perception of Marlow, “the beat of the drum regular and muffled like the beat of a heart, the heart of a conquering darkness” (Y, 155–56). Chinua Achebe argues that Conrad reduces Africa to a “setting” and “metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril.”³⁰ The connective body of the continued vibration is not without its discord; however, Conrad does not fully place its effects in Africa, but rather acoustically displaces them. “The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration” (Y, 140). In defining his relation to Marlow in the 1917 Author’s Note to *Youth*, Conrad collapses *all* sound into the sphere of vibration, locating an overarching “tonality” in *Heart of Darkness*, a tonality in which no voice or sound exceeds its status as resonance. When he writes of the continued vibration, Conrad imagines a leveling effect of vocality in the as-signifying medium, all audible sound being reduced to frequency and its acoustical effects.

The physical impact of acoustics is central to the subsequent experiments of *Lord Jim*. In the completed version of this novel, an alienated Jim sits on the witness stand to speak of his inexplicable decision to abandon ship. Marlow has not yet surfaced, and the third-person narrator addresses a certain excess of the sense of vision and reminds us of a spectral quality within Conrad’s own most famous imperative to see, an uneasy surface tension within the witnessable event:

The facts those men had been so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. (*LJ*, 30–31)

Before the anonymous narrator fastens upon the “something else” within the life of the *Patna* disaster, first defining it as “spirit” or “soul,” this force is, for a moment, an inexplicable kinesis, a motion within the life of matter that, without intention or motivation, propels the event forward and occupies the object. Jane Bennett might name this force, after the work of Bruno Latour, “actanal,” or “that which, by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event.”³¹ In Bennett’s object-oriented ontology, vibrancy is “a some-thing that is not an object of knowledge, that is detached or radically free from representation, and thus no-thing” (*VM*, 9). In the moment the ship meets with disaster, Conrad does not visually represent the event itself, only that which repercussively leads up to and away from it. At the end of chapter 3 of *Lord Jim*, Conrad’s narrative thus slips inexplicably into the past tense, connoting a witnessable event just beyond the narrative’s grasp: “What had happened?” (*LJ*, 26), the third-person narrator asks in a voice that, while focalized through Jim, relinquishes the very omniscience that had allowed a narrator to see Jim “very stiff and still, gazing, amazed, at the undisturbed level of the sea” (*LJ*, 26).

In the moment of disaster, the omniscient narrator continues to pose a series of unanswered questions in the face of kinesis:

Had the earth been checked in her course? They could not understand; and suddenly the calm sea, the sky without a cloud, appeared formidably insecure in their immobility, as if poised on the brow of yawning destruction. The engineer rebounded vertically full length and collapsed again into a vague heap. . . . A

faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration passed slowly, and the ship quivered in response as if the thunder had grown deep down in the water. . . . Its quivering stopped, and the faint noise of thunder ceased all at once, as though the ship had steamed across a narrow belt of vibrating water and of humming air. (*LJ*, 26)

Conrad does not depict the cause, only a series of vibratory effects. The vibration is beyond vision, beyond hearing (“less than a sound”), and yet undeniable in its sensory weight. It is between pure process and brute matter. In “Tuan Jim: A Sketch,” the earliest draft of *Lord Jim*, the narrator does not describe the event in such kinetic terms; rather, Conrad writes of the reflective mirror of the sea just before the event. “There was not a wave, nor an undulation, nor a ripple nor a splash.”³² This phrase will not survive the process of revision, but it does remain here in negative form, in the ship’s quivering responsiveness to the mobile depths of the sea. In his revision of the draft (into which intervened not only the epiphany of vibration but the experiments of *Heart of Darkness*), Conrad appears to have recognized the *Patna* event as something that cannot be visually depicted but that must be measured along the axis of the subaural motion, one that haunts the surface of the image as a residual acoustical force.

This introduction of acoustics registers the new direction of *Lord Jim* in its form. As he explains in the 1917 Author’s Note, at a certain point, Conrad no longer sought to depict an “episode” but rather an “event.” An event—repercussive, actanal, non-agential—shapes “the ‘whole sentiment of existence’ of a simple and sensitive character” (*LJ*, viii). This character also haunts the limits of what Marlow will call in reference to Jim, “one of us.” Conrad’s intervention in the novel of character, premised upon a new epistemology of the event and its recognition of physics, has everything to do with *Lord Jim*’s urgent political ontology as it also registers the limits of national belonging, or Conrad’s precarious relation to English authorial identity, being “one of us.”

In this way, the subaural vibration in the *Patna* event can be related yet opposed to the force within Conrad’s works allegorizing imperial relations between Russia and Poland. Conrad had come

of age in Russia after his father had been exiled there (indeed, the very scene of the young Conrad reading aloud took place in Russia). Aaron Fogel notes Conrad's recurring poetics of "detonation" as de-toning, or the loss of aural clarity, but also the threat of an actual explosion in such works as *Under Western Eyes* (1911). In a way that recalls Jameson's canonical theory of sound as containment in Conrad, Fogel writes that "detonation is probably his strongest and most typical closure: the loud silence which absorbs, without completely resolving or explaining, all the conflicted political noises and silences that have accumulated in the course of the action."³³ The acoustical event of detonation, within a larger political poetics of Poland, is a "commonsensical physics used to illustrate the most ordinary moral fact of power: the smaller unit always suffers" (CS, 2).³⁴ In the early genesis of Marlow, however, we might add to the poetics of explosion its necessary relation to vibration as a more subtle "event," one that may take shape as shaking and quivering, but also as a generalized kinesis between bodies in space and time. Vibration is that which moves through bodies and objects to connect them in ways that are narrowly perceptible or, as the narrator remarks of the *Patna*, "less than a sound." It would seem that rather than what Jameson had called a "thread of hearing" that tenuously links us to the imperceptible, "a void at the center of reality," there is that sympathetic resonance, a continued vibration that persists and survives such threat.

The impossibility of absolute silence or stillness frequently orients social encounters within Conrad's sensory spaces. There is continually some form of resonant motion waiting within darkness as what David Toop calls "the base condition of a hypothetical space in which sound and light are absent."³⁵ The voice of Marlow hardly detonates in *Lord Jim*, but his voice and body do manifest from out of darkness, as a field of vibration, to communicate the problem of solidarity to a group of Englishmen. It is in introducing the voice of Marlow suddenly at the end of chapter 4 that the novel becomes what Conrad calls "free and wandering" (*LJ*, viii). It appeals to its audience in ways sanctioned neither by the third-person Victorian voice nor the "men who wanted facts" (*LJ*, 30). Marlow speaks from out of a shimmering darkness and quivering silence:

Perhaps it would be after dinner, on a verandah draped in motionless foliage and crowned with flowers, in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes overshadowed by a fragment of an unruffled forehead; and with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past. (*LJ*, 33)

All is still, yet there is a palpable motion, the secret life of matter. The narrative voice that introduces the scene now recedes into it, falling into the glowing, still darkness out of which the voice of Marlow now manifests. It is as if in this moment the novel is becoming what Conrad calls "another art altogether." As the location and locatedness of voice is dispersed, the face of Marlow waits in relationship to a voice that comes from elsewhere, beneath the scene, working upon not simply the listener but an embodied speaker. This voice invokes a form of listening and reading that demands neither authority nor veracity. It collapses the moment of speaking into a place that is just beneath the visible body, toward which this place is pulled, as it were, behind or beneath the moment of speech. There is a voice that seeks, that moves through the body, but does not physically *originate* there—the voice comes from somewhere else. Indeed, in this mobile stillness, the oral and oratorical have receded into an all-embracing motion of sensation. The narrator's unexpected introduction of Marlow thus begins *in medias res*: "And later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail, and audibly" (*LJ*, 33). In the Norton Critical Edition, the editor here reminds us that Marlow is a recurring character, but this phrase, "and . . . many times," must be related to the *continued vibration*, moving from work to work, just as Marlow is a force that moves and moves between men.

How does Conrad get from the 1897 preface, which asserts, "before all, to make you *see*," to this moment of a lulled hearing

in darkness, a body through and around which moves “another art altogether”? These moments are not in contrast; rather, they are continuous in their effort to bind men. Conrad says little about the genesis of Marlow in the 1917 Author's Note to *Youth* as he who “haunts my hours of solitude, when, in silence, we lay our heads together in great comfort and harmony; but as we part at the end of the tale I am never sure that it may not be for the last time” (Y, x). Marlow is an “understanding man” (Y, x). Marlow, a spokesperson, is both subaural and suboptical: he speaks in the sonorous twilight, a backdrop against which the action is to take place; one listens not to him but *through* him, just as vibrations are the impalpable substance that carries all sound and voice.

Indeed, with *Lord Jim* the introduction of a “sinister resonance” is also the introduction of motion into stillness, motion being contrasted with vision during Jim's inquest (“something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition”). Not incidentally, the etymology of *episteme* is related to “view,” but also, as Cavarero describes, “the incontrovertible necessity of that which stands firm” (FM, 36). Just before the *Patna* meets with disaster in chapter 3 of *Lord Jim*, “a marvelous stillness pervaded the world . . . and the Arabian Sea, smooth and cool to the eye like a sheet of ice, extended its perfect level to the perfect circle of a dark horizon” (LJ, 17). This perfect view in the first portion of the novel upholds the Victorian point of view guiding the first draft scrawled in Conrad's family volume. In contrast, narrative voice in the completed version of *Lord Jim* sits radically between Victorian and modernist technique. It begins with an anonymous third-person voice, one that observes the perfect circle from all angles, only to hand itself over to Marlow. His appearance seems to be one continuation of the vibratory discord of physical space, the “faint noise as of thunder, of thunder infinitely remote, less than a sound, hardly more than a vibration, [that] passed slowly, and the ship quivered in response.” It is as if it continues on, for Jim then feels a “shiver run down his back” (LJ, 32) on the witness stand as his voice “rang startlingly in his own ears” and his words “came to shape themselves with pain and anguish in his breast” (LJ, 32). Marlow then shivers as the wind outside the courthouse passes by

(*LJ*, 28), and he later confronts a mad witness of the *Patna* case. “Quick jerks of galvanic shocks . . . he let go my shoulder and reached after something in the air; his body trembled tensely like a released harp-string” (*LJ*, 53). He releases a “wolfish howl” (*LJ*, 52): “An interminable and sustained howl. . . . The howl pursued me like a vengeance” (*LJ*, 54). Marlow then “shivered to the marrow” (*LJ*, 55). “Is his evidence material?” the Doctor asks Marlow. “Not in the least” (*LJ*, 55). The *episteme*, upheld by the “men who wanted facts,” has been undone in the midst of this uncanny motion, a political ontology of vibratory matter.

With chapter 4 and the introduction of Marlow, then, *Lord Jim* shifts not only in its narrative voice but into a new sensory horizon. This chapter concludes with the moment of disaster: the novel moves from omniscience to invisible, subaural motion: “I was about to ask him what he meant, when a sort of preparatory tremor passed over his whole person, as a faint ripple may be seen upon stagnant water even before the wind is felt” (*LJ*, 145). In the absence of words, there is a material continuity between trembling and quivering bodies, an affective monism that constitutes not the evidentiary identity of cause and effect but rather the material fiber of what Marlow calls, in reference to Jim, “one of us.” Vibration, as the “spiritual *lingua franca*,” belongs to a narrative discourse that now functions as the “inconceivable tenuity” of all things, that which physically binds reader and writer. Toward the end of the novel, Conrad allegorizes his own act of writing to “us,” an autobiography as defacement in acoustical dispersion: as the privileged man opens the packet of letters in “angular handwriting” from Marlow two years later, “the booming of a big clock on a tower, striking the hour, rolled past in voluminous, austere bursts of sound, with a shrill vibrating cry at the core” (*LJ*, 337–38). Sounds and motions are more than audible and visible, but pass between discrete bodies as Marlow’s story itself seeks to weave the fiber constituting the “us” of which both he and Jim (and Conrad and we) are a part. Jim has been situated in the group, but by way of a narrativity that is *itself* conceived as the inconceivable tenuity of vibration. Narrative is persistent, continuous—there is a materialist basis of kinship, a brute and thus irrefutable bond.

The sense of vibration, at the core of any (literary) encounter, suggests that the radiologist had a penetrating effect upon Conradian technique. Conrad appears to have been drawn to a promise to conjoin. As the Author's Note to *Youth* will recall twenty years later, the role of the "continued vibration" is to bind the ear of the reader to the work of art "long after the last note had been struck." Yes, the radiologist asserts in 1898, even the Whistler painting on the wall and Conrad's recently published novel, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* are nothing but vibrations. There is, then, not only a phonographic logic but also an X-ray logic, a vibratory logic of the permeation of the visible boundaries of matter that challenges the limits of an individual body. It challenges the definition of the modernist novel and the possibility of the basis of its reception. In defining the "sinister resonance" as that which hangs in the ear of the reader, Conrad extrapolates his encounter with the radiologist. There is something more than voice, the body of the reader now being positioned at the intersection of a continued vibration, the discovery of a physical basis of the solidarity Conrad had already sought philosophically in the 1897 preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* While matter disruptively shakes and quivers, a material *also* sympathetically passes through its observable limits, appearing to resolve the troubling distance between bodies. As James Wait speaks aboard the deck of *Narcissus*, men "vibrate in unison" (NN, 19). His "words, spoken sonorously . . . were heard all over the ship" (NN, 19). Even at this early date, Conrad was seeking the force that unites men: "The strain came on the windlass, the chain tautened like a string, vibrated—and the handle of the screw-brake moves in slight jerks. Singleton stepped forward" (NN, 26). Conrad wrote these words before his encounter with the radiologist, but they show the degree to which Conrad was already thinking through the possibility of connectivity within and between physical entities.

The possibility of the novel, which I have been suggesting at some point struck Conrad as an a-signifying, primordial "language" of vibration, promises through the paradoxical medium of the written word to erase its own status as writing. It promises to do so within an aesthetic theory that had in the previous year posited a world upheld "before all eyes" (NN, xiv). Conrad continually

addressed the problem of the physical process of writing in letters to his editors, speaking of blots, erasures, and the struggle to move to the page “whole paragraphs, whole pages, whole chapters [that] pass through my mind,” as he writes in 1898 to Meldrum of the paralyzing composition of *Lord Jim* and *The Rescue*.³⁶ In 1897 Conrad had submitted his critical preface accompanying *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* to *The New Review*, which had published James’s own “The Art of Fiction” (1884). James claims that the novel is illustrative, driven by the artist’s “power to guess the unseen from the seen” and to “convert” the impression of the moment into the reality of the “concrete image.”³⁷ The art of the novelist lies in his powers of observation, the ability to see and then represent the minute gesture of a woman as she stands up “with her hand resting on a table and look[s] out at you in a certain way. . . . If you say you don’t see it (character in *that—allons donc!*), this is exactly what the artist who has reasons of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you” (AF, 13). Conrad seems to recall the Jamesian aesthetic in his own axiom, “before all, to make you *see*.” Nevertheless, Conrad also refashions his definition of the concrete particular in his theory of the continued vibration, reducing it to its absolute substantial basis in a materialist pursuit of kinship. In the Jamesian image, which demands no such basis, a woman “looks out” at a “you,” the very form of address Conrad continually harbored doubts about reaching, a doubt plaintively registered by the epigraph to *Lord Jim*: “It is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it” (an ever so slightly misquoted Novalis). *The New Republic* rejected Conrad’s piece, yet its American title, also “The Art of Fiction,” shows the degree to which Conrad entertained thoughts of the inclusion of his essay within the Jamesian dialogue.

Indeed, James was an artist whom Conrad imagined as being without a problematic relation to the physical act of writing. As Conrad notes in his essay “Henry James: An Appreciation” (1915), James had been dictating, and Conrad’s images are powerfully nationalistic: “The stream of inspiration flows brimful in a predetermined direction, unaffected by the periods of droughts, untroubled in its clearness by the storms of the land of letters . . . never running

back upon itself, opening new visions at every turn of its course through that richly inhabited country its fertility has created.”³⁸ One can only recall Conrad's rebuke of his own “gibberish.” James, he describes, is profoundly “gifted with a power of expression” (*NL*, 13), nearly the same phrase that Marlow will utter in his regard for Kurtz. A “pure voice,” Kurtz echoes through the land and Marlow's very body, “like a dying vibration” (*Y*, 115),³⁹ as “the gift of expression . . . the pulsating stream of light” (*Y*, 113–14). Kurtz's voice is “grave, profound, vibrating” (*Y*, 135) and his written pamphlet “vibrating with eloquence” (*Y*, 117). His voice “rang deep to the very last” (*Y*, 147). This is a cosmopolitan written word imagined as reaching the body of the reader without peril.

The 1897 preface ends with a declaration of the novelist's task in terms that are also remarkably similar to the appreciation of James: “And when it is accomplished—behold! all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest” (*NN*, xvi). As Ian Watt observes of this final sentence, “If we look closely we see that Conrad's referent has been slipping.” There is “no wholly acceptable grammatical subject for ‘the return.’”⁴⁰ One can hardly tell if Conrad speaks of the novel or what he calls the “visible world,” or if the two have been collapsed. And that collapse, in part, seems to be the final goal: to make real in the novel the a priori perceptual ground of English “solidarity” as the vibrational monad, a spiritual *lingua franca*. As Conrad also writes in the preface, “the task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood.” Conrad continues:

It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate . . . one shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world. (*NN*, xiv)

This account predicts his account of matter in the letter to Garnett, in which Conrad locates a physical substratum in vibration, a “secret” and fourth dimension of affect. This earlier appearance of the trope of vibration in 1897, however, suggests the degree to which Conrad had already been seeking the substantive basis of kinship in the embodied sensation of the aesthetic object as sympathetic vibration. Conrad asserts that individual sensory experience is brought to representation and then beheld by the collective as that which exposes them to their condition *as* a collective. It is here that Conrad defines the collective not as plurality but as an eradication of difference, a binding together in the singular feeling that now resides *outside* of its participants as a mutual object. It is an experience that already relies on a sense of the object’s vibrating opening, a stability become gliding and mobile.⁴¹

Did the encounter with the radiologist ratify this aesthetic project? The letter to Garnett concerning that encounter does not show a Conrad once famously described as “obsessed with the optical process” but rather a writer finding in vibrations the sensory conditions of possibility of solidarity.⁴² Conrad articulated vibration as the spiritual yet primarily physical tissue between the body of the reader and the body of the writer. Conrad writes in the preface of “the never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences” (*NN*, xiii)—but it is as if he lost faith in the linguistic register alone. As North writes, “Conrad revives [in the preface] the literal, aural meaning of the old idiom ‘the ring of truth.’ What matters is the convincing sound of words, the tone or accent by which we recognize and respond to them” (*DM*, 57). In *Lord Jim*, North continues, “Marlow wearily admits, ‘I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth’” (*DM*, 57). With *Heart of Darkness* and its persistence into *Lord Jim*, some substance as matter, beyond yet below words, will “dwell on the ear long after the last note had been struck.” It is the continued vibration, the material *basis* of the sentence. Conrad considered narrative in neither explicitly oral nor visual terms, but rather as the vibrational property that cuts across voice, sound, and image—the act of reading. As Conrad writes to Garnett after his visit to the radiologist: “It was so—said

the Doctor—and there is no space, time, matter or mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something that waves and an eternal force that cause the waves—it's not much.”⁴³ Conrad does not assert voice as what Krielkramp calls a “part-object standing for nothing beyond itself.” Vibration is not much, but it is *something*. With this impalpable something that is no-thing beneath the claim of any work of art (he cites among other things the paintings of Corot and Whistler, his own novel *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* and Paderewski's playing in the phonograph), it is as if Conrad's own understanding of the capacity of the work of art shifts. Conrad perhaps asked, what is behind it, what drives it, and more centrally, what carries it to others?

The novel as form now dissolves into numberless vibrations as the writer, seated behind the novel, lingers in the ear of the body of the reader, seated on its other side. The novel vibrates. An investigation of “what had happened” in the years intervening the waylaid draft of *Lord Jim* and Conrad's sudden return to it, then, recasts the presumed status of Marlow as a storyteller and places him somewhat unexpectedly in the history of modern physics. The voice of Marlow is everywhere surrounded in ways that predict the vibration that overtakes the *Patna*, continuing to persist as the “something else besides” that dwelled within the case of Jim as he sits on the witness stand. Vibration stands as one site of working through Conrad's continued project of English solidarity. There is an “inconceivable tenuity” that cannot be brought to representation; however, for Conrad, it conditions all human relations, including aesthetic reception. Marlow's tale in *Lord Jim* provides the very material that binds those who may be counted among “one of us.” There is something posthuman about his narrative, his lips hanging in the dust, but it is also all too human: as medium, he only *almost* recedes into nothing as discord cuts through and moves from out of his very body in *Heart of Darkness*. After nearly eleven thousand words of unbroken narration by Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, the anonymous narrator aboard the *Nellie* interjects:

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody.

The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river. (Y, 83)

The phrase “shape itself,” intransitive yet actanal, appears in Conrad’s lexicon to describe the process of sensory data cohering into concrete form.⁴⁴ In a letter to Garnett in 1896, Conrad remarked of the agony of writing that “[t]hings get themselves into shape.”⁴⁵ “To shape itself” appears in both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* in reference to the manifestation of the voice of Marlow. With Marlow reconceived as vibration, Conrad posits the sensory origin of the voice as such. Even in this primary moment, however, it cannot dissolve its discord, the “sinister resonance” that seems to speak from behind the scene. It is also melancholically registered by the Polish music that traveled into the radiologist’s room in England via the uncanny speed of phonography. Challenging the fitful symmetry between logocentrism and phonocentrism, the voice of Marlow is caught in a dual desire, both to be and to disappear, to momentarily rise up as a spokesperson for solidarity and then disperse, yet palpably continue in men’s bodies.

One might go on to consider Conrad’s place not only in the history of the novel but in the history of modern psychology. William James had also discovered an intransitive “it thinks” at the heart of consciousness in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). What Conrad’s inclusion in this history promises, however, is one introduction of the problem of difference into the a priori. This “it” is conditioned by nation and language. It was that difference that allowed Conrad’s aesthetic project both to participate in and challenge a larger epistemic shift in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, if we follow the continuation of this trope of vibration, we are not witnessing the origins of Marlow or Kurtz as a disembodied voice behind which nothing stands. Nor are we witnessing an epistemological dilemma, but rather a delirious excitement that appears to solve *the* aesthetic problem of solidarity, kinship, and authorial identity that had driven *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”* Vibration

is the medium that irrefutably and primordially binds men to each other in Conrad's early aesthetic search for a means of expression. In the conclusion of *Matter and Memory* (1896)—published the same year as Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*—Henri Bergson writes that “matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and traveling in every direction like shivers through an immense body.”⁴⁶ Like Bergson's radical psychology, Conrad experienced vibration as the imperceptible material beneath all things. Conrad did not simply construe it as the fact of technological mediation, but also as the basis of narrative, of the novel itself. To consider technological mediation in Conrad's early fiction, then, is not only to consider how the human voice is reiterative, repetitive, or metonymic. It is also to consider how the voice opens upon questions of matter as motion, moving between discrete bodies themselves. Conrad shows us that vibration is the site at which subjects, across differing moments, may become more than physically bound.

Notes

1. Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 2, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928), 96. Hereafter cited as *CL*.
2. Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York: Norton, 1975), 7. Hereafter cited as *PL*.
3. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Scribner, 1921), 112. Hereafter cited as *CF*.
4. Marlow is the directly discoursing narrator of “Youth” (1898), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900), and *Chance* (1913).
5. Joseph Conrad, *Youth, and Two Other Stories*, vol. 16 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), ix. Hereafter cited as *Y*.
6. Frederic Jameson, “History in Criticism,” in *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition*, ed. Norman Rudich (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976), 35. Hereafter cited as “HC.”
7. In later readings of Conrad, Jameson maintains his early position: “It is clear that to return from the primacy of the Jamesian narrative

- category of point of view to the older fiction of the storyteller and the storytelling situation is to express impatience with the objective yet ever intensifying alienation of the printed book.” Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 219. Hereafter cited as *PU*.
8. Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Henry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 87. Also see Michael Greaney, “‘The Realm of Living Speech’: Conrad and Oral Community,” in *Conrad, Language, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11–26.
 9. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* vol. 23 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), xiv. Hereafter cited as *NN*.
 10. Michael Levenson, *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 21.
 11. *Youth* also contained, in addition to “Youth” and *Heart of Darkness*, an earlier story in which Marlow does not appear, “End of the Tether.”
 12. As Jameson also writes, *Nostromo* is “a text . . . from which the underpinning of a Marlow figure, the story-telling infrastructure, has been removed—the earlier commitment to the visual (‘above all, to make you see’) has given way to the primacy of that ‘most abstract of all the senses,’ as Adorno called the auditory” (*PU*, 228).
 13. See Sanjay Krishnan’s reading of marginal sounds and voice in the “yellow cur” sequence of *Lord Jim*. “Seeing the Animal: Colonial Space and Movement in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 37, no. 3 (2004): 326–51.
 14. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim, A Romance*, vol. 21 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), vii. Hereafter cited as *LJ*.
 15. In this aesthetic rift, the completed novel bears the traces of Conrad’s agonizing process of composition. If Conrad sent the first eighteen pages of *Lord Jim* to Blackwood on June 4, 1898, a day after he had sent the last pages of the Marlow narrated story “Youth,” one might conjecture that, indeed, Conrad began *Lord Jim* without any image of Marlow. Meanwhile, he toiled with *The Rescue* for Garnett and wrote to Blackwood on January 2, 1899, that *Lord Jim* would now be a 20,000 word story told by Marlow. It was not until July 31, 1899, however, that Conrad sent chapter 4, in the very last paragraph of

- which Marlow erupts as if from nowhere and does so in ways reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness*, first mentioned in a letter to Blackwood on December 31, 1898.
16. Edward Said, "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 7, no. 2 (1974): 120.
 17. Most recently, see Peter Mallios, *Our Conrad: The Making of American Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010), and Christopher GoGwilt, *The Passage of Literature: Genealogies of Modernism in Conrad, Rhys, and Pramoedya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), hereafter cited as *POL*.
 18. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, vol. 6 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), 72. Hereafter cited as *PR*.
 19. See Michael Levenson, *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Levenson argues for the relationship between Marlow and the split narration in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*: "Devotion to the visible universe stands at some point in need of a witnessing consciousness which can organize surface reality and ratify its meanings. . . . Invariably [the first-person narrator] appears in the middle or at the end of a paragraph, delicately altering perspectives; with his appearances, the text struggles towards self-consciousness, towards a reflecting human presence which will ensure due consideration for the unreflecting, the unconscious, the merely factual" (9).
 20. Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 53. Hereafter cited as *DM*.
 21. "resonance, n.," *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/163743?redirectedFrom=resonance&> (accessed July 29, 2012).
 22. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 8.
 23. Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, trans. Paul Kottman (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 166–67. Hereafter cited as *FM*.
 24. GoGwilt argues that in *A Personal Record* "Conrad sought to write about his Polish background at a time when he was increasingly reacting against the 'Slavic' label used by critics—even hugely sympathetic critics like Edward Garnett—to explain the relevance of his Polish background" (*POL*, 12).

25. One might recall the fourth dimension of Conrad's *The Inheritors* (1901), a novel whose origins Cedric Watts also posits in the encounter with the radiologist. Conrad was also corresponding with H. G. Wells at this time, writing to Wells to ask if he could borrow a copy of *Invisible Man*.
26. Ivan Krielkramp, "A Voice without a Body: The Phonographic Logic of *Heart of Darkness*," *Victorian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1997): 229.
27. See Vincent Pecora, "Heart of Darkness and the Phenomenology of Voice," *ELH* 52, no. 4 (1985): 993–1015. Also see Bettye London, *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990) and Ivan Krielkramp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 179–205.
28. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 21. Hereafter cited as *AP*.
29. Noting the mid-nineteenth-century work of physicist Johannes Müller, Sterne argues for an early awareness that "our other senses can also perceive vibration. Sound is a very particular perception of vibrations. . . . Sounds are defined as that class of vibrations perceived—and, in a more exact sense, sympathetically produced—by the functioning ear when they travel through a medium that can convey changes in pressure (such as air)" (*AP*, 11).
30. Chinua Achebe, "The Image of Africa: Racism in *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 2006), 433–34.
31. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 9. Hereafter cited as *VM*.
32. Joseph Conrad, "Tuan Jim: A Sketch," in *Lord Jim*, ed. Thomas C. Moser (New York: Norton, 1968), 290.
33. Aaron Fogel, *The Coercion to Speak: Conrad's Poetics of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 2. Hereafter cited as *CS*.
34. There is an explosion in *Lord Jim* as well, in chapter 31, when Jim shoots Cornelius. "The explosion in that confined space was stunning," reports Marlow (*LJ*, 183).
35. David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 200. As Toop observes, in *The Secret Sharer* (1910) "the auditory tension of the story, in which all sound is treated as an unnatural, if inevitable rupture of stillness (the cup before it breaks), questions the notion of silence as a possible absolute" (199–200).

36. Joseph Conrad, *Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), 27.
37. Henry James, *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 11. Hereafter cited as *AF*. James writes, “the glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. . . . She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality” (11)
38. Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), 12. Hereafter cited as *NL*.
39. As Conrad writes of Henry James, “He is so much of a voice that, for him, silence is like death” (*NL*, 13).
40. Ian Watt, “Conrad’s Preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus,’*” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 7, no. 2 (1974): 111. Hereafter cited as “*CN*.”
41. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson argues that Conrad’s call is a psychic response to “the repression of the aesthetic” in modernity, the over-valuation of the rational functions of the mind, and industrial capitalism’s relegation of the senses to “a kind of psychic backwater” (209). Conrad’s descriptive capacity, as he lingers over the visible in detail in a super-addition of adjectives, functions as an “aestheticizing strategy,” an attempt to mend the sundered sensible world by re-writing it in the code of a sensory absolute. His “sensorium virtually remakes its objects,” Jameson concludes, “refracting them through the totalized medium of a single sense, and more than that, of a single ‘lighting’ or coloration of that sense” (208).
42. As Ian Watt describes in his essay on the preface, Conrad undertakes the task of rescuing the “evanescent concrete particular” so as to show it be a part of “the collective repertoire of experiences” (110). Watt also describes how the preface was met with bewilderment and rebuke, as in the now infamous remark by David Goldknopf, “I cannot make coherent sense of it. I do find repeated statements of faith in visualization, embodied in a hodgepodge of platonic, positivistic, and romantic sentiments. And when those are shaken out, there remains, I suppose, a credo of impressionistic realism—in Henry James’s phrase, solidity of specification—qualified by the somewhat obsessive emphasis on the optical process” (“*CN*,” 101).
43. Joseph Conrad, *Chance, a Tale in Two Parts*, vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925), 95.

44. See, for example, in chapter 31 of *Lord Jim* when Jim calls out to Cornelius: "He saw shifting gleam of whites. 'Come out!' he cried in a fury, a little doubtful, and a darkfaced head, a head without a body, shaped itself in the rubbish." Cornelius then "emerged swiftly, and bounded towards Jim" (LJ, 183).
45. Joseph Conrad, *The Arrow of Gold, a Story between Two Notes*, vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of Joseph Conrad* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1925), 300-301.
46. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1988), 208. I am grateful to Alexis Nally for having pointed out this passage in her honors thesis on Faulkner and Bergson, "A Halo Full of Faces," written for the Department of Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, 2012.