NATHALIE AGHORO

Sounding the Novel

Voice in Twenty-First Century American Fiction

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

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To my family

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1 Introduction: Listening as Literary Practice

The sound of a voice is all too easily missed on the silent page of the novel. Nevertheless, sonic fictional worlds invite readers to tune in to the sounding dimensions of vocal expression in their auditory imaginaries. Within the textuality of the novel, fictional references to voice tell of its fundamental significance for the active engagement of a subject with the experiential world. Sound, according to anthropologist Tim Ingold, is "a phenomenon of experience—that is, of our immersion in, and commingling with, the world in which we find ourselves" (11). The sound of a voice, i.e. the most adjustable sound produced by a human being, places the subject in a material environment precisely because of its unique capacity as a corporeal expression to mediate between body and world. Novels concerned with the mediality and sonority of voice textualize a vocal resonance that exceeds the conventional dramatization of speech in novelistic dialogue. A cry of pain foregrounds the corporeality of voice and its relation to the physical world of the senses in Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker*. In *The Time of Our Singing*, a work by the same author, the sonority of singing voices calls attention to the performative characteristics of vocal expression. The amplification of vocal protest by means of a megaphone reconfigures the soundscapes in public and private places in Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel*. The audio record of a voice on the answer machine exposes the listening protagonist to the intersubjective dynamics of vocal address in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Finally, the breath of a singer on a record player in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* pitches the organic mediality of voice against the flawless audio tracks of digital media. Together, these fictional representations of voice emphasize its sonic potential in order to carve out a space for the mediality of vocal expression in literary discourse.

The present study investigates discursive formations on voice in American twenty-first century fiction that explore the material impact of vocal expression in the contexts of auditory culture and (inter)medial representation. According to sound studies scholars Michael Bull and Les

Back, listening challenges "the dominant mode of apprehending and understanding society … through staring at its spectacle" (1). Along these lines, this study focuses on the textualization of soundscapes in fiction to assess literary reflections on the socio-cultural potential of voice, asking how its "[s]ound makes us re-think the meaning, nature and significance of our social experience" (Bull and Back 4). A novel engaging with voice as sound shifts critical attention to the sonic dynamics that govern the storyworlds and proves that hearing sound is not a prerequisite for reflections on acoustic meanings and functions. Rather, this study understands the silence of the textual medium as a catalyst for the conceptual exploration of voice as sound in literary discourse. In the twenty-first century, novels concerned with voice openly address the limitations and possibilities of intermedial relations between sound and text as they seek to incorporate the auditory experiences of their characters into the narrative and ask readers to direct their attention to vocal sonority, to use their auditory imagination, and ultimately, to become listeners.

The auditory approach to voice in literature goes hand in hand with the conceptualization of listening as a literary practice in the present study. The notion of a critical listening to fictional sounds is based on phenomenologist Don Ihde's "philosophy of sound" that he formulates in his work *Listening and Voice* (xix). First published in 1976, an extended second edition of his work was released in 2007, when academic interest in sound studies increased. "[S]ometimes there is a 'singing' of voice *in* writing," Ihde argues, and he compares the evocation of a familiar voice by a letter of a friend to the silent recognition of music "when reading a score" (xx). For him, the sounds one is accustomed to are engrained in memory and can thus be remembered anytime. "These phenomena," he writes, "are not only perplexing but intriguing and must be part of the sense of the [phenomenological] investigation" (xx). Consequently, he concerns himself with the mental retrieval of vocal sound—a capacity that human beings acquire through the life-long collection of sensory impressions. It is Ihde who coined the term of *auditory imagination* by discerning "[t]wo modes of experience, *perceptual* and *imaginative*, [that] are possible for both visual and auditory dimensions" (210; 204). The distinction between perceptual and imaginative experience opens up an opportunity to assess the role and functions of voice in literature because it acknowledges that beside the actual perception of sounds it is also

possible to imagine them. In other words, we are able to imagine what a musical piece on the piano or a car crash sound like as much as we are able to envision the black and white keys of the instrument or the red color of a SUV. For Ihde, "auditory imagination displays the free variation of contents possible in all forms of the imagination. I may imagine, with or without visual imagery, voices of all kinds, an argument between two or more persons, noises of all types, music, and so on. Further, the range of sound, from silence to deafening roar parallels the auditory perceptual range" (210). Auditory imagination does not only account for a specific kind of sound, but also for many of its acoustic markers, like the shape that a sound takes on according to the volume of transmission. The breathiness of a whispering voice hence features in an imaginative repertoire as much as the reverberations effected by a scream. In Ihde's phenomenology, listening is hence a "thoughtful listener['s]" critical inquiry into the meanings and functions of vocal expression and auditory perception (5).

Whereas listening is a philosophical method of investigation for Ihde, it is an ethical act, above all, for sociologist Les Back. In "The Listeners," he advocates the notion that "listening is not merely the instrumental extraction of information or a matter of 'ticking the box' of consultation" (2010). Instead, he argues for listening as an outreach or invitation to others; a considerate relationship between voicing and listening subject. Listening needs to be learned and practiced on a regular basis in social interactions since, in his view, it represents the foundation for a more humane society. Therefore, he calls on humankind "to develop a prosaic and everyday ethics of attentiveness" (2010). The literary discourses on voice discussed in the present study elicit an auditory imaginary that serves as a framework for the discussion of ethical, social, cultural, and political explorations as they bring the auditive aspects of voice to the attention of a listening reader. Therefore, listening as literary practice means to be attentive to representations of resonant vocal expressions as well as to silenced or hushed voices hidden between the lines.

Sounding the Novel examines how fiction negotiates the cultural and social significance of the audible and the silenced voice and scrutinizes the novelistic strategies used to enable a literary imaginary that reflects the acoustic range of voice in content and form. This study identifies literary conceptions of voice as corporeal expression, sonic performance, and medium in the contexts of auditory culture and (inter)medial repre-

sentation. Furthermore, it expounds the various ways in which novels establish dynamic and productive relations between their own mediality and the sensory experiences of voice and listening. This auditory take on literature calls for an interdisciplinary approach that facilitates a conceptualization of voice as sound in the novel. For this reason, the study at hand situates itself at the intersections of literary studies, sound studies, and philosophy of voice.

The appreciation of the novel as a vital site for the cultural production of voices distinguishes *Sounding the Novel* from previous studies invested in auditory culture. So far, the majority of scholarly works in the field of sound studies assign dedicated spaces to the exploration of noise, sound, and voice, particularly those allowing for the acoustic unfolding and auditory perception of a certain sonority. Consequently, venues such as the concert hall, the opera, the cinema, the museum, and the theater attract academic attention. The determination of the site as a point of departure for investigations in auditory culture goes back to the foundation of *The World Soundscape Project* by R. Murray Schafer, Barry Truax and others. In *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Soundscape*, originally published in 1977, and *The World Soundscape Project's Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* (1978), Schafer and Truax introduce the notion of *soundscape* to describe the collection of sounds that determines the auditory perception of particular locations, in other words, the acoustic environment. Emily Thompson takes up the concept in her 2002 work to historicize the sounds of American modernity in her book *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America; 1900–1933* by focusing on places where modern technology shapes the local acoustics and, by extension, the listening experience. She analyzes how modern construction measures influence the sound of singing voices and musical instruments in buildings like the Boston Symphony Hall or the Metropolitan Opera House to prove that "[a] soundscape's cultural aspects incorporate scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener's relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what" (1-2). Michel Chion focuses on the cinema as a location in his books *The Voice in Cinema*, first published in France in 1982, and *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen* from 1994. In the first study, he delineates the effects that the "acousmatic" or disembodied voice has on film art after the shift from on-site sound accompaniment in the cinema to presumably sourceless soundtracks

replayed by loudspeakers (*The Voice in Cinema* 18). In *Audio-vision*, he dedicates his critical attention to the listening modes involved in the constitution of the film spectacle from the moment when "the house lights go down and the movie begins" (3). Doris Kolesch declares the performative space of the theater as a suitable site for studies on the aesthetic deployment of voice in her essay "Staging Voices" (2013) as well as in the collections *Stimme: Annäherung an ein Phänomen* (coedited in 2006 with Sybille Krämer) and *Stimm-Welten: philosophische, medientheoretische und ästhetische Perspektiven*, published in 2009 (with Vito Pinto and Jenny Schrödl). In contrast to the long-standing inextricable connection between vocal expression and the theatrical stage, the introduction of voices as part of sound art installations to the museum is a more recent phenomenon that Salomé Voegelin analyzes in her works *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* from 2010 and the 2014 *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*. With their edited collection *The Auditory Culture Reader* from 2003, Michael Bull and Les Back move away from exclusive reflections on cultural institutions where singing and acting voices resound in a predetermined, architectural context with the inclusion of essays on the sounds of the city. Here, vocal expression, sound production, and auditory perception take place in the field of tension between public and private space. In the same vein, Brandon LaBelle declares the socially stratified spaces of the street, the sidewalk, and the underground, as well as the shopping mall, and the privacy of the home as "acoustic territories" in the monograph *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, published in 2010. He understands these sites as locations where the movement of sound waves constitutes a battleground for social and cultural developments and ascribes a fundamental significance to everyday sounds, thus broadening the scope of sound studies with the definition of day-to-day acoustic encounters as valuable, informative additions to the field of research.

The steadily increasing amount of scholarly work in the field of auditory culture proves that listening to sound provides revealing insights on cultural dynamics. As Sarah Banet-Weiser argues in the introduction to *Sound Clash*, a 2011 special edition of *American Quarterly* on American auditory culture, sound is "a cultural form with a material force" (v). Taking into account the sounding dimensions of a society thus contributes to a better understanding of its structures, challenges, and developments. Nevertheless, previous studies usually remain committed

to actually perceptible soundscapes, in other words, sites of sonic (re)production that exhibit an acoustic connection to listening subjects. As a result, the impact of presumably silent, literary soundscapes on the socio-cultural perception of sound remains largely unexplored with only a few exceptions. The works of literary scholars Philipp Schweighauser, Justin St. Clair, and Carter Mathes constitute an important step toward the academic appreciation of the auditory imaginary in literature. Published in 2006, Schweighauser's *The Noises of American Literature; 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* expounds the reception of noise in literary history. Literature, Schweighauser argues, "is not solely a privileged site for the representation of the noises of our acoustic world but is itself a discourse that generates noise within the channels of cultural communication" (3). This understanding of a reciprocal influence permeates his work in which he delineates the fictional negotiations of the uproars of war and the prevalent din of urbanization from naturalist to postmodern American writers. In the 2013 study *Sound and Aural Media in Postmodern Literature*, St. Clair conceptualizes the formal strategies of novelists such as Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, or Ishmael Reed as transcriptions of a postmodern "[h]eterophonia (or 'multisoundedness')" into writing (3). Hence, he disassembles the notion of noise into a multiplicity of individually discernible background sounds broadcasted by various transmission media in order to provide, as he writes, "an account of the cultural function of several twentieth-century audio technologies" (3). Whereas these two studies deal with the overload of acoustic information increasingly disseminated by technological media in modern and postmodern times, Mathes highlights the potential of resistance that resides in literary sound in his 2015 monograph *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature after Civil Rights*. He argues that sound represents "a fusion of the sensory … and the political" in African American literary aesthetics because it represents an "experience that resists overdetermined perceptions" in an ideological cultural framework where visual delineations are dominant (8). With his focus on the Black Arts movement in particular, he widens the scope of literary sound studies to include the radical and subversive functions that sound can adopt in writing. By rereading literary history through the lens of auditory culture, acoustic technology, and sonic aesthetics, these recent academic interventions demonstrate that cultural conceptions of sound affect

literary and cultural imaginaries as much as literature shapes perceptions of sound and approaches to acoustic phenomena throughout history.

Sounding the Novel complements these recent publications on sonic writing with a novel approach to literary voice, a priority topic of scholarly investigation. It proposes to reconsider fictional voice as a textual engagement with the sonic materiality of human vocal expression. In the novel, voice is primarily understood either as a key element of fictional dramatization in dialogue or as the metaphor of *narrative voice* that designates the mode of narration relating the story. Thus, the consideration of voice as sound in fiction represents a nonnarratological rereading of the notion in the context of literature. This study pursues this largely understudied aspect from the perspective of auditory culture with the examination of recent literary discourses on the sounding dimensions of voice and reads voice as a foregrounded acoustic element in twenty-first century fiction. The novelistic devices that the present work takes into consideration are fictional representations of vocal sound and technological remediations of voice, intermedial references to vocal expression, as well as the metafictional concern with the mediality of voice in a textual context.

On the occasion of a reemerging interest in voice as a resounding, corporeal expression in philosophy (a field that is traditionally closely intertwined with literary theory), this study revisits fundamental ideas on voice in writing. Most notably, Adriana Cavarero's *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005) and Mladen Dolar's philosophical treatise *A Voice and Nothing More*, published in 2006, have particularly informed the theoretical approach. Both philosophers seek to break through the longstanding suspicion against voice as an academic topic since Jacques Derrida's debunking of the logocentrism prevalent in Western philosophical discourses from antiquity to the modern age. They revisit the critical propositions on voice that Derrida mainly delineates in two publications: *De la grammatologie* and *La voix et le phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, both issued in 1967. Both insist on the academic reconsideration of voice after the deconstruction of its former discursive uses and evince productive ways to theorize voice without essentializing the concept as the transcendental emanation of a Platonic ideal. The present work most notably benefits from their insights in the outline of the necessary distinction between a voice and its linguistic function. In

this vein, the second rereading this study broaches is Mikhail Bakhtin's literary concept of polyphony. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" and in the work on *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*—the former written in 1934 and 1935 but unpublished until 1973, the latter first released in 1929—he establishes the term as accompaniment for the notion of heteroglossia. In a departure from considerations of the diversity of linguistic stratifications, I reread polyphony as an acoustic notion in concert with Ihde's auditory imagination. In this sense, polyphony is a literary device that orchestrates a multiplicity of fictional voices, underscoring their resonance and taking part in the textual projection of a many-voiced literary soundscape. The present study unites recent developments in philosophy with literary theory to reconceptualize the idea of voice in literature as a corporeal expression that reimagines sensory experience on the level of the fictional world.

The selection of novels discussed in the following chapters reflects the concern with listening as literary practice, since all of them, by implication, ask the reader to listen to their soundscapes as they draw attention to the resonant voices that they textualize in their narratives. Two criteria have determined the selected body of novelistic works, the most important one being that voice as sound constitutes the primary motivation for the narrative. The literary discourse on voice is the central concern of these five novels and vocal sound the main driver for the stories they relate. These novels show a heightened interest in paralinguistic and nonlinguistic vocal expressions and they challenge the silencing of the sounding dimensions of voice when it is subordinated to speech. Although voice is an important linguistic medium, they emphasize that vocal expression assumes a multiplicity of other functions as well. Therefore, they delve into the aesthetics of singing; they make sense of vocal phenomena such as laughter, sigh, and scream; and they immerse their storyworlds in resonances and echoes. From the almost inaudible, quiet voices to loud vocal outburst demanding attention, these novels illustrate how voice shapes the subject, addresses the listener, and influences the dynamics of the literary soundscapes they evoke.

Furthermore, the study focuses on novels written after 2000. Thus, it concentrates on the most recent phase of a literary history that is still in the making. Published after the turn of the century, at a time when ongoing processes of digitalization increasingly reshape not only the media ecology, but also social conditions, these works focus on voice as a

corporeal medium within a large, diversified, and predominantly technological media environment. The contemporary concern with interconnectedness and networks determines the novels' pronounced interest in remediations of voice and intersubjective dynamics between listening and voicing subject.

Overall, *Sounding the Novel* carves out the major discursive formations of voice as sound generated by twenty-first novelistic concerns and determines the corporeal, performative, and medial characteristics of voice in the selected body of works. It analyzes the functions of voice as fictional theme and as intermedial reference point, and it retraces the reach of voice from the moment of its corporeal production to the socio-cultural implications of its resonance. Literary discourses on voice as sound in twenty-first century fiction position voicing and listening subjects in a literary soundscape where vocal expression fundamentally shapes the relationship between the individual and the experiential world. I read these literary voices as means to remap onto the plane of auditory imagination the socio-cultural, political, and intersubjective dynamics that these fictions concentrate on, either in order to amplify or to subvert their repercussions on human experience. Simultaneously, these novels reflect on the roles and functions of voice in a connected media ecology through intermedial considerations while they self-reflexively investigate the boundaries of textual representation.

This study retraces the trajectory of vocal sound waves in literary soundscapes from their corporeal production to the auditory enlistment of a listener's attention and to the resonant gaps left behind by voices fading away into silence. Hence, voice, listening, and silence constitute its three-part conceptual structure. The intention behind this segmentation is to take into account the inextricable interconnections between these three related notions by outlining the unique aspects that each perspective adds to the conceptualization of voice as sound in the novel. Thus, the study at hand reflects on the literary engagement with acts of vocal expression as well as with fictional reflections on the impact of the vocal sound event on sensory perception.

Chapter 2, "Sounding Voices," establishes an interdisciplinary, theoretical framework for the study of voice in fiction by carving out a critical space for the assessment of the intersections between auditory culture and literature. It introduces phenomenological perspectives and considerations from sound and performance studies to literary criticism, thus

proposing a critical focus on the fictional textualizations of sounding voices. After retracing the philosophical and linguistic discourses on the relation between voice, language, and textuality, I shift the vantage point from signs and signification to the processes of the body with the conceptualization of voice as a corporeal expression able to fulfill media functions and performative acts. Based on reflections on the vocalizing mouth, I discuss how voice as a medium intersects with the body while communicating and performing the acoustic identity of the subject that expresses itself vocally. The second chapter establishes the three aspects of body, medium, and performance as defining characteristics of vocal expression. Auditory imagination links these vocal features to the textual storyworlds of the novel. The distinction between perceptual and imaginative experience that the notion expresses opens up an opportunity to assess the role and functions of sound in literature.

Chapter 3 and 4 constitute an extended case study of Richard Powers's novels *The Echo Maker* (2006) and *The Time of Our Singing* (2003). Voice or, more precisely, the act of voicing determines structure, content, and form in both of Powers's works. In chapter 3, called "The Scream and the Word: (Non)Human Voices in Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker*," I argue that the novel defines the corporeal expression of voice as a shared sonic feature of humans and animals alike in order to foreground the systemic embeddedness of human beings in the world. Voice in *The Echo Maker* represents the corporeal medium capable of connecting humans to the social environment they live in and to the ecosystem that they share with other nonhuman beings. The novel explores cognitive, paralinguistic, and linguistic aspects of voice and, in the process, develops a literary simulation that reflects the human embeddedness in global, systemic networks while self-reflexively situating itself in a media ecology where voice and writing converge.

Chapter 4, "Singing Time: Vocal Performance and Temporality in Richard Powers's *The Time of Our Singing*," shifts the attention from the everyday usage and functions of vocal expression to the musicality of voice. In this chapter, I discuss the aesthetic and socio-cultural functions of the singing voice in *The Time of Our Singing*, arguing that the novel projects a multi-temporal literary soundscape where past, present, and future converge in the here and now of vocal performance. I retrace the ties that the novel establishes between singing voices on the one hand and musical, historical, and scientific constructions of time on the other hand

through the analysis of the novel's nonteleological, musical structure, its singing characters, and its intermedial references to famous vocal performances in American history.

With Chapter 5, "Listening for Voice," this study changes the perspective from vocal expression and musical production to the auditory perception of voice. It marks the beginning of a section that focuses on voice in combination with listening as a major novelistic device that comes to the fore in the subsequent chapters. "Listening for Voice" expounds aspects of auditory perception that affect the listener's awareness of and reactions to the experiential phenomenon of voice as sound event. It conceives of listening and voice as two linked notions and describes the various listening modes that determine the sense-making process involved when one hears the sound of a voice as much as the listening intentions of a subject. The shift from considerations about vocal expression to the sensory perception of voice hence illuminates the intersubjective dynamics of voice and moves the auditory orientation of the listener within the experiential world into the center of attention.

Chapter 6, "Polyphonic Soundscapes: Vocal Resonance and Place in Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel*," deals with the novel's polyphony from a listening perspective and investigates the vocal resonances projecting an auditory reflection of the place where the various storylines intersect. The 2011 novel textualizes the sound of the many voices that define the culturally diverse site of the fictional I Hotel in San Francisco at the time of the Civil Rights movement. I argue that Yamashita's work explores the varied political positions of the era through the deployment of an auditory imaginary in which voices resonate with the site and thus recreate a literary soundscape capable of representing the proliferation of their sound in manifold ways.

In chapter 7, "A Listening Self: Vocal Sound Event and Intersubjectivity in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*," the title that announces a concern with auditory perception represents the point of departure for a study on the listening subject in twenty-first century fiction. I discuss how *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) reflects on the intangibility of tragic events through the immediacy of listening. In my understanding, the novel retraces the repercussions of 9/11 on a changed community through the intersubjective network of a listening protagonist who reaches out to others as he seeks to come to terms with his personal experience of loss.

Finally, Chapter 8, "By Way of Conclusion: Silence in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*" (published in 2010), concludes the present study with an exploration of the silent "horizon" of voice in the literary imaginary of twenty-first century fiction. Taking the example of a novel where a concern with punk rock music coalesces with a penchant for silences of anticipation and musical pauses, I maintain that the potential for absence always accompanies the sound of a voice. In literary soundscapes, the omission of vocal sound signals the presence of inaudible voices shaping the auditory imaginary of their storyworlds even though they fail to resound.

2 Sounding Voices

The human voice, although embodied, is ephemeral and volatile as a phenomenon and as a subject of theory. Once sounded, voice leaves an elusive trail hovering in the air: what remains after the act of voicing are impressions of the said and the unsaid, of vocal tone and timbre, of textured sound and living presence, as well as an anticipation of some kind of resonance by both speaker and listener. This lack of tangibility shows itself in cultural discourses about voice. Particularly in literature, the predominance of language and the soundlessness of textuality threaten to draw the curtain over the sonority that imparts voice with its characteristic, multi-layered wealth of signification.

More often than not, voice in the novel appears to be an abstract issue for literary studies, devoid of a conceptualization of its sounding dimensions. In the twentieth century, probably the most prominent definitions of fictional voice consider it to be either a set of mute, linguistic markers for the characteristic features of a single narrator or protagonist; a metaphor for an imaginary consciousness that offers a subjective perspective on the storyworld while attempting to come to terms with the fragmentations of modern life; or an unreliable, textual construct that postmodernism seeks to expose for the artifice it is. Without doubt, these literary and theoretical discourses offer important insights into the changing states of cultural, historical, and social configurations. However, the question that arises in the process is whether literary criticism predominantly calls on the notion of voice—as with the term *narrative voice*, for example—to refer to the disembodied human mind presupposed behind particular clusters of linguistic expressions conventionally identified with a single fictional entity. Is such an approach not partial to the overlap between mind, language, and voice at the expense of considerations about the acoustic body of voice and sensory perception?

From a listening perspective, the symbolic conceptualization of voice in fiction directs critical attention away from any literary engagement with its full resonant range. Writing displaces the sonorous voice all too

easily. The ostensible mediation of speech on the level of narration or character dialogues—i.e. the two instances in the novel where one would most likely expect voice to play a role—appears to mute vocal elements and nuances otherwise accessible through sensory perception. Yet, voice as sound is not entirely congruent with narrative voice or character speech, even though an auditory conceptualization of voice in the novel will necessarily exhibit an interest in these fundamental fictional elements as they overlap with the representations of literary soundscapes or the textual negotiations of intermediality. Although textuality has its limits as a medium with regard to the representation of the auditory (and to all other sensory perceptions of the human body such as visuality, smell, or touch, after all), the use and effectiveness of voice as a literary term prove that literature takes an interest in perceptual dimensions that go beyond its textuality. In order to carve out a reflective space for the sound of voice in writing, it is therefore necessary to shift the focus of attention to literary discourses on sound and auditory imagination and their contributions to defining the cultural and social significance of the audible voice.

The recognition of auditory culture in literary studies sheds light on the formal diversity of vocal expression. Listening as literary practice opens up alternative pathways for thinking about voice in the novel taking into account defining aspects of embodiment, mediality, and performance. When twenty-first century fiction addresses the topic of the acoustic body of voice, these issues take center stage. The sounding voice is a manifestation of human cognition as well as of its failures or boundaries. Contemporary novels that engage with the relationship between body, mind, and the senses reflect on the acoustic manifestation and sensory impact of voice. Paralinguistic phenomena such as laughter, screams, or stuttering add their own sonic layers of meaning to storyworlds, sometimes even exposing involuntary disclosures or unspeakable experiences. Mark Z. Danielewski, for example, dramatizes oral qualities in *The 50 Year Sword* (2005) by telling its story through a chorus of five voices that belong to children listening to a storyteller at a party. Stuttering and erroneous pronunciation reveal the excitement of the young protagonists as the story becomes exceedingly eerie and their hesitant utterances change the dynamics of the fictional world. Elsewhere, novelistic interest in voice coincides with the contemporary ecocritical turn and a heightened awareness of living in the Anthropocene. In the 2012 novel *The Flame Alphabet*, Ben Marcus conceives of an apocalyptic world

where the shouting, laughter, or murmur of children emits a deadly toxin and adults only have a slight chance to survive by fleeing into the woods. In Jesmyn Ward's 2011 post-Katrina novel *Salvage the Bones*, humans in fictional Bois Sauvage establish close ties with their dogs in a climate of social indifference and their sometimes whispering, sometimes commanding voices accompany the sounds of the hurricane that approaches relentlessly.

Vocal mediality and the performance of voice raise questions about the relation between subject and world as well as an individual's digression from or congruence with social norms. The mediality of the sounded voice comes to the fore as a formative element of the subject in novels. Voice acts on individual perceptions of the world as much as it influences the socio-cultural emplacement of the subject. In the process, the position as an intermediary between body and world casts voice as a crucial means for the individual subject to affirm its existence. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) explores the role of voice with regard to intersubjective exchange in post-9/11 New York from the perspective of a listening narrator. Karen Tei Yamashita's polyphonic soundscapes in her 2011 novel *I Hotel* feature the sounding voice as a performative expression of the body and as a medium amidst a range of political and aesthetic media. These two novels emphasize the inextricable affinity between voice and listening and thus encourage taking a closer look at the relation between these interrelated discourses (as outlined in chapter 5).

Concerning the act of voicing itself, Richard Powers's body of work is particularly suitable for an extended case study. Powers tackles the big issues of human life by combining philosophy with natural sciences and the arts in all of his fiction. In the process, he repeatedly returns to auditory themes like music, sound, and voice in novels such as *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Galatea 2.2*, *The Time of Our Singing*, *The Echo Maker*, and *Orfeo*. While *Galatea 2.2*—one of his earlier novels, published in 1995—reflects on what it means to be human against the backdrop of the narrative on a speaking artificial intelligence, his 2006 novel *The Echo Maker* pursues the embodiment and mediality of voice and unites cognitive, paralinguistic, human and nonhuman vocal aspects in one story. *The Time of Our Singing* from 2003 complements Powers's literary discourse on voice with the fictional unfolding of vocal performance. His exploration of American history in *The Time of Our Singing* through the