Sonic Bubble as Immune Mechanism in the Age of Electronic Media: Arthur Conan Doyle and the Phonograph

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ABSTRACT

In the late nineteenth century, the new technology of sound raised public awareness about people's constant exposure to sound, audible or inaudible to the human ear. Hence, the self has to fight immuno-wars defending itself from potential damages caused by sound, a warfare which also gives rise to the idea of "noise." The social/cultural construction of noise and the need to ward against it in modern society echo Roberto Esposito's idea of immunology. This study deals with short stories about the phonograph written by Arthur Conan Doyle at the turn of the twentieth century. By contextualizing these stories in the history of technology, I discuss how new sounds reformed human hearing and the practice of listening. Also, I argue that a new immune mechanism has evolved in response to the modern man's war to protect the self. I will thus engage with Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the listening subject and Peter Sloterdijk's microspheric immunology in order to shape the notion of the "sonic bubble" as a new immunological strategy that does not operate via violence but tolerance.

KEYWORDS phonograph, noise, Arthur Conan Doyle, Jean-Luc Nancy, Peter Sloterdijk, immunology

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Introduction

In *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, R. Murray Schafer studies the ambient sounds of our living environments. Addressing the "electric revolution" brought about by electronic sound media, he conceptualizes "schizophonia" as the "split between an original sound and its electroacoustic transmission or reproduction" (90). While the age of mechanical reproduction witnessed the birth of the photograph in the mid-nineteenth century, modern electricity paved the way for the mass reproduction and transmission of sound in 1877. As a byproduct of the telephone, Thomas Edison's patented tinfoil phonograph originally aimed to record the sound transmitted by telephone (8-10).[1] This model of sound reproduction ushered the advancement of electronic media in mass communication.

Technology also changed our worldview. As Don Ihde states in *Listening and Voice*, the "electronic communication revolution" has widely expanded our hearing range and thus transformed the experience and practice of listening. More importantly, it has made us "aware that once silent realms are realms of sound and noise" (5). Ihde suggests here that the western world had once been dominated by ocularcentric cultures, which reduce the living world to visions, on the one hand, and silence the universe, on the other. Along with the development of the modern technology of electricity, not only are electronics used in mass communication, but our bodily senses are also "electrified." Take the example of aurality, the hearing range of the human ear is now determined by frequency, the number of vibrations in a period of time measured by electromagnetic devices. Victorians thus became aware that, with our ears capable of receiving sounds between frequencies of twenty to twenty thousand hertz, we live in a world abounding with audible and inaudible electric signals.

[1] More widely known by the name of "gramophone," "phonograph," meaning "inscription of sound," refers to the cylinder model patented by Edison's company. Since there were various experiments on how to record sounds, or "inscribe sound," in the nineteenth century (Sterne 31-86), it is yet disputable whether Edison invented the phonograph. Although experiments before Edison may have relied on mechanical means to visualize sound, it is generally acknowledged that Edison's tinfoil cylinder in 1877 was the first to accomplish playback successfully. Ten years later, he announced a wax-cylinder phonograph with an electric motor (Morton 1-20). In 1888, Emile Berliner made public the first model to use a "rotating flat disk" instead of a cylinder, renaming it the gramophone. The mass production of sound has thenceforth become possible through the electromagnetic technique of reproducing discs by stamping on zinc plates (Sterne 203-04). My argument in this essay is based on what Don Ihde maintains in *Listening and Voice*. Ihde points out that the transformation of the listening experience is rooted in the "electronic communication revolution," which significantly expanded the human experience of listening to different sounds (5). Hence, I will address the phonograph as a machine whose operation relies on electricity in order to reproduce sound.

In this essay, I will address the imagination that electromagnetic waves fluctuated in the world we live in. At the turn of the twentieth century, new media, which propagated information, aroused anxiety. Since electromagnetic waves could penetrate everything, there was a concern about their omnipresence threatening our mental and/or physical health. From the perspective of sound, I will deal with how "noise" is constructed in different scenarios. Generally speaking, unpleasant sounds audible to human ears are categorized as noise. However, with the development of modern technology, "inaudible" noises transmitted by new media were also demonized as powers that exercise mind-control over the public. In other words, people at the turn of the twentieth century feared being exposed to too much sound. How do we control sound? How do we protect ourselves from unwanted messages floating in the air? Cued by Walter Benjamin's description of modern life as a shock, I will argue that the anxiety of exposure is a trauma for those who lived through the electronic communication revolution. In response to this paranoid anxiety, a certain practice of listening is cultivated. By voluntarily listening to chosen sounds, voices, or music, people build a sonic bubble of immunity to ward off the "pollution" from the outside. In the three sections of this essay, I will discuss: (1) how modern soundscapes have given birth to the notion of noise, and how the defense mechanism against noise relates to the immunological warfare taking place in modern society; (2) how the idea of a sonic bubble as an immune mechanism can be developed through a dialogue between Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk, which also links to Roberto Esposito's envisioning of "positive immunity"; (3) how Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories about the phonograph illustrate the sonic bubble of immunity in the early age of sound reproductivity.

Modern Soundscape, Noise, Immunology

Although *The Soundscape* was published in 1977, Schafer's ideas on schizophonia and soundscapes have been taken up by scholars of sound studies in recent decades. For instance, in *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Steven Connor traces how voice has gained its "autonomy" in the course of history; that is, how it has gradually detached itself from the body which enunciates it (22). Although modern audiences tend to think of ventriloquism as a performance art, Connor investigates its practices from ancient Greek oracles given by prophetesses to modern media such as radio, showing the complicated relationships between voices and their sources. He suggests that, after losing its sacred implications, the source-less voice has become a "powerful presence" which needs to be brought

under control (24).[2] Therefore, the liberation of the voice showcases a "desire to believe in . . . the power of the voice detached not only from its source, but also from its subordination to sight" (22). More importantly, ventriloquism in the late Victorian period was adopted by spiritual mediums who also embodied the roles of modern sound media, such as the telephone, the gramophone, and the radio. Connor observes how spiritualism "draws deeply on the experiences of modern acoustic technologies, both telephonic (transmissive) and phonographic (reproductive)," thus "attest[ing] and contribut[ing] to the ghostliness of these new technologies" (392). In other words, spiritual mediums let us hear "the workings of the machine in the ghost" (393).

The collaboration of spiritual mediums with modern sound media illustrates the "mediumship" of sound technology. The term "mediumship" stresses the in-betweenness not only of sound technology but also of the phenomenon of sound. As a form of energy, sound is transmitted between different materials and is always transforming. In a similar vein, Stefan Helmreich points out that the basic principle for the modern technology of sound reproduction is "transduction"—"*trans-*" meaning "across" or "beyond," and "*ducere*" standing for "to lead." In Helmerich's words, "transduction names how sound changes as it traverses media, as it undergoes transformation, in its energetic substrate . . . as it goes through transubstantiations that modulate both its matter and meaning" (222). It is worth mentioning that, in modern sound technology, "transduction" depends mostly on the application of electricity. The vibrations caused by sound waves are captured by diaphragms on a machine and transformed into electrical signals or vice versa.[3] Scholars of sound studies have noted that the dependence on electrical means to reproduce sound induced a change in human perception. They also have noted that modernist literature and art were especially keen to hear new sounds and suggest that the studies of modernist works should be adjusted to focus on how sound technology has remediated literature and art (Kahn; Erlmann; Murphet, Groth, and Hone). Modern society thus gained a new experience of its exposure to sound.

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[2] Here I thank the copy-editor's kind reminder that the usage of "modern" may cause confusion. In this essay, I use "modern" to designate the historical period of the turn of the twentieth century when the new technology of sound started to change the way human hears. The changes, however, may continue to influence our contemporary world. Hence, I don't make distinction between the "modern" and the "contemporary."

[3] In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne regards the "tympanic mechanism" as the dominant feature of modern sound reproduction (31-35). In this seminal study of modern sound technology, Sterne maintains that the primitive model of phonoautograph to which a human ear was attached prefigured the development of sound reproduction in the twentieth century. The transmission of sound is accomplished by "turn[ing] sound into something else (usually electric current) and . . . [by] turn[ing] something else into sound" (34). The key to sound transmission and reproduction, hence, is an ongoing transduction.

Our eyes can shift away our gaze. We can also close them to keep a voluntary distance from what we see, but our ears cannot choose what to hear. To consider the soundscape, therefore, is a move away from an ocularcentric culture in which images are posed in silent and static manners for the distanced viewer. The experience of listening makes us aware that our body is co-present with the sonorous world. If the sound is "electrified," so is our nerve, because when listening, our "ear drum instigates a chain of vibrations (through bones, fluid, hairs) before the mechanical becomes electrical signals sent along the auditory nerve to the brain" (Snaith 2). Inside and outside our bodies, transduction goes on. Modern audiences, hence, has entered an energetic field with which their bodies vibrate. As Anna Snaith suggests, "hearing conjures up a world of moving and colliding objects and their radiant impact" (2).

Immersion in sounds may not be new to human experience, but exposure to too much sound could frustrate city dwellers. In *Victorian Soundscapes*, John M. Picker describes how Londoners launched a campaign to eliminate noise from street musicians in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Picker, brainworkers such as Charles Dickens, John Leech, Charles Babbage, and Thomas Carlyle started to complain about the noise caused by organ grinders on the streets of London. In order to have a space where he could think and write in silence, Carlyle designed and constructed a sound-proof study. Anti-noise activities reached a peak when, in 1864, Michael T. Bass, a brewer and Parliament member, compiled petition letters into a book—*Street Music in the Metropolis*—aiming to bring in the "Act for the Better Regulation of Street Music in the Metropolis." This campaign against noise, as Picker observes, was a territorial struggle through which middle-class brainworkers endeavored to retain their identity against foreign street musicians, who were thought to jeopardize native Londoners' integrity. Although Londoners' petitions against urban noise took place before the introduction of electronic sound media, what Picker suggests here helps us view noise as a cultural construction. In this case, the music from foreign organ grinders was regarded as a threat to the purity of British culture and the identities of middle-class professional workers (41-81).

If the Victorian campaign against city noise was a turf war, noise in the early twentieth century has become an adverse factor that has to be taken under control from the viewpoint of biopolitics. In *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Emily Thompson studies the soundscapes of American urban areas in the early twentieth century. She observes that there were two tracks through which sounds were modernized: the construction of music halls, designed specifically for sound effects, and the application of electroacoustic devices to the conversion of sound into electrical

signals. New "good" sound was thus defined as "clear, direct, and nonreferent" signals floating in the air (3). Moreover, the desire for sound control bred the anxiety about noise. Thompson's study also describes how residents of New York City fought a war against noise during the turn of the twentieth century. Noise threatened public health. It had to be tackled by mobilizing a policing system and medical institutions (120-23). In brief, since the mid-nineteenth century, "noise" has been gradually constructed as a toxin that pollutes the purity of national identity and the intactness of bodily boundaries.

The sociocultural construction of noise and the need to ward ourselves against it echo Roberto Esposito's idea of immunology. Although human beings have been engaged in long battles against diseases and death, the tactics of immunology, for Esposito, are deployed specifically in scenarios in which imaginary bodily borders are under attack, "whether the danger that lies in wait is a disease threatening the individual body, a violent intrusion into the body politics, or a *deviant message entering the body electronic*" (2; emphasis added). In other words, the modern concept of "self" has to do with the "location" of immunological battlefields. Although sound is not the main concern of Esposito's philosophy, the warfare of immunology concurs with the formation of noise as something threatening "the border between inside and outside, between the self and other, the individual and the common" (Esposito 2). This was especially true when the conversion of sound into electrical signals gave birth to a new meaning of noise: unwanted sound inaudible to human ear. Here I suggest to understand the implications of noise through Michel Serres's *The Parasite*. Interweaving threads of mythological, informational, and biological discourses in this book, Serres elaborates on the triple meanings of parasite in French: biological parasite, social parasite, and static or interference" (Schehr vii).[4] As Cary Wolfe points out in his introduction to *Parasite*, although noise in classical information theory is typically regarded as "the extraneous background against which a given message or signal was transmitted from a sender to receiver," for Serres, who echoes information theorists such as Gregory Bateson and Niklas Luhmann, noise "is [also] *productive* and creative" because of its potential to give birth to a new system (xiii). That is, noise can be the milieux from which intended messages emerge, while it also opens possibilities for a new system. Following this line of thought, I argue that, whether the potential to create a new system is realized or not, noise itself can arouse tremendous anxiety, forcing individuals to evolve a new immune system to protect their "selves,"[5] a topic I will

[4] The third one is also understood as "noise" in information technology.

[5] I use "ego" in allusion to its popular meaning, that is, the part of the personality consciously experienced as an "I" in contact with the external world. Hence, "self" and "ego" will be used interchangeably.

elaborate on in the next section. In the following paragraphs, I would like to discuss the third meaning of noise—parasitic messages that accompany the intended ones and are regarded as unnecessary, even malicious.

Here I extend Schafer's notion of "schizophonia" and suggest that the "split of sound" could cause listeners' irrational fear. As the fable of the Satyre's meal appropriated by Serres suggests, the guest traveler blew on the soup with his breath: "The host, the guest, breathes twice, speaks twice, *speaks with forked tongue*, as it were" (Serres 16; emphasis added). In the original version by La Fontaine, the Satyre was appalled by the ambiguity uttered by "forked tongue," so it drove the traveler away. For the ear of the listener, the hissing sound of the breathes is the "non-zero sum of two things with opposite signs but the same value" (Serres 16). Serres's version of "Satyre and Traveler" evokes the hissing sound of static in electronic media. It is, in a way, "parasitic." As Serres states, "the prefix *para-* means 'near,' 'next to,' measures a distance. The *sitos* is the food. In this open mouth that speaks and eats, what is next to eating, its neighboring function, is *what emits sound*" (144; emphasis added). What else could drive the guest/host insane but the "unnecessary noise" that is emitted when the mouth speaks/eats? What else comes along the electrical signals but the hissing static noise, or even the sound that is out of the range of human hearing? Also, the noise can be inaudible, because it could be "extraneous background" noise against which a given message is transmitted. Hence, when a message/signal is delivered, it is uttered through the "forked tongue." Here I would like to argue, the awareness of the possible inaudible sound itself is enough to drive people crazy, with or without audible hissing. Schizophonia may contribute to schizophrenia, the split of mind. Jeffrey Sconce, in *The Technical Delusion*, investigates a strong bond between the development of psychiatry, especially the identification and categorization of schizophrenia, and the advancement of electronic media from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Even for those who do not suffer from schizophrenia, the influence of electronic media may cause an irrational fear of exposure. Electrical signals can penetrate virtually everything: walls, fabrics, and even the human brain. For some, their omnipresence, invisible and inaudible, may become overwhelming, thus paranoid abounded. Stefan Andriopoulos traces an interesting history in which hypnosis, the legal status of corporations, and modern media were entangled in the late nineteenth century. In brief, the fear of voices and images floating in the air has caused concerns about our vulnerability to contagious, unwanted messages. It also has induced paranoid imaginations about overexposure damaging the integrity of the self.

The new technology of electronic communication has brought about the experience of shock for those who live in modern society. Although Benjamin

described the notion of shock from the perspective of modernist aesthetics, it is difficult not to associate the idea with electric shock. As Will Slocombe maintains, from the perspective of media studies, shock can be understood as the overstimulation of the body when it takes in too much information. He also notes that Benjamin employed the idea of shock in the context of psychoanalysis, where a "protect shield" is called upon for the ego to block out overwhelming stimulations from the external world. In the next section, I develop the concept of sonic bubble as an immunity mechanism for people living in the modern world where too much sound floats in the air. I do so first by engaging Nancy and Sloterdijk into dialogue, and then mapping out the "positive immunity" suggested by Esposito.

Sonic Bubble

In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne observes that technologies for reproducing sound have changed our practice of listening and, as a result, restructured our sense of community. Along with the commodification of sound, "private acoustic space[s]" (87) were created for middle-class listeners. New technologies of sound also accentuated a sense of interconnectedness, even when they helped create privacy. Before it became possible for music disks to be mass produced, the primary model of the phonograph served the purpose of playing back voices of family members or words spoken by distinguished people. Thus, the dissemination of voices, however limited, has contributed to not only the liquidation of time and space, but to connecting private and public spheres (206). The sound that used to be constrained within a specific soundscape was now freed. Those who listened, or had the privilege to listen, to sounds prerecorded for them on a disk or cylinder formed a strong bond of loyalty, a fundamental sentiment of community across local and temporal limitations. Even though the gramophone playing mass-produced disks later became a form of public entertainment, its consumeristic purpose could not outshine its original function of strengthening "cultural integration and consolidat[ing] authority" (Sterne 206). As Sterne affirms, the sense of belonging fostered by radio broadcasting is very much in common with how expatriates feel when they play music disks from their distant home cultures or with the feelings of those who listen to world music in their home studio (209).

By connecting the private and the public, the individual and the communal, new sound technologies may contribute to a "positive immunity" that Esposito projects but does not affirm in *Immunitas*. In what follows, I propose a theory of the "sonic bubble." The "bubble" of sound serves as an immune mechanism for an individual to ward off noise. In the age of electronic communication, as new

technologies turn the universe into a sonorous, loud place, the warfare against noise, audible and inaudible, becomes an imperative task. In this context, choosing something to listen to means creating a sonorous space which becomes the self.

In *Listening*, Nancy invites the reader to ponder the possibility of a "listening subject." Conceptualized in western ocularcentric cultures, the subject is usually established by vision, a proposition which many scholars of media studies have been trying to undermine through investigating other senses.[6] Their efforts diverge, but they share a common ground that the gap ripped open by the viewing subject overlooking the material world from a distance needs to be amended. Hence, by pondering over the phenomenon of sound, one could envision a subject resonant with its living environment. In *Listening*, Nancy suggests distinguishing listening from hearing: to hear is to register a sound in the symbolic system, such as recognizing the bird's chirping or the clock's ticking; conversely, to listen is straining to approach something beyond its apparent meaning. To listen means a combination of using the ear and paying attention. It is thus "to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (Nancy 6). By stressing the difference between hearing and listening, Nancy tries to develop an acoustemology, that is, an epistemology based on sound. Combining acoustics and epistemology, acoustemology entails knowing with the ear. What does it mean to "know" with the ear when traditional epistemology privileges the eye in obtaining knowledge? Auditory experience elicits a sense of immersion. We are not investigating a distant object with our eyes, but are involved in a field of energy where the process of transduction goes on inside and outside our bodies. Thus, to know through the ear is to know *through* relations. As Steven Feld contends, "[k]nowing through relations insists that one does not simply 'acquire' knowledge but, rather, that one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection" (13).

Nancy goes on to draw our attention to the connection between sound and space: "The sonorous present is the result of space-time: it spreads through space, or rather it opens a space that is its own, the very spreading out of its resonance, its expansion and its reverberation" (13). In other words, sound not only has a temporal dimension, it also *creates space*. That is, when it *takes place*, it opens its own space through resonance and reverberation. More importantly, the self *is* the space. Nancy proposes a "diapason subject" as "the sonorous place . . . a place-of-its-own-self, a place *as* relation to self, as the taking-place of a self, a vibrant place

[6] For example, efforts have been put forth to address the tactility of cinema. See the idea of "haptic visuality" in *Touch* by Laura Marks, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's discussion of cinema as skin (108-28), or the visceral connection between film and its audience in Jennifer M. Barker's *The Tactile Eye*.

as the diapason of a subject, or, better, as diapason-subject" (16). The linkage between self and space is established via sound. The self is the place where a sound sounds. By evoking the images of the diapason and the organ pipe, Nancy distinguishes the traditional idea of subject from a listening subject. He states, it is not "a place where the subject comes to make himself heard (like the concert hall or the studio into which the singer or instrumentalist enters); on the contrary, it is a place that becomes the subject insofar as sound resounds there" (17). The notion of a disembodied subject expressing itself by means of a sounding instrument in an empty space is thus challenged. The subject, like the sound, takes place as the space is resonant with its voice. In other words, only when the sound vibrates in the place does the subject come into being. Hence, a sounding space is where a listening subject emerges. Nancy states,

> [H]e is perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment—by which a voice is modulated in which the singular of a cry, a call, or a song vibrates by retreating from it. (21)

Specifically, for Nancy, a subject is not he or she who utters a sound but the one listening—a listening subject.

Although Nancy mentions "architectural configuration" and "concert hall" (17), these actual contours cannot give a precise description of the sounding space because the space is created by the expansion of sound. However, if one wants to approximate it by shape, one could imagine the contours of sonorous waves. As Nancy states, "it is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is a time that opens up, that is hollowed out, that is enlarged or ramified, that envelops or separates, that becomes or is turned into a loop, that stretches out or contracts, and so on" (12). What else could resemble the shape of sound but a bubble? What else can envelop and separate the listener and then turn into a loop if it is not a sphere-like structure? Toward the end of *Listening,* Nancy even compares the sphere of sound to the womb:

> The womb[*matrice*]-like constitution of resonance, and the resonant constitution of the womb: What is the belly of a pregnant woman, if not the space or the antrum where a new instrument comes to resound, a new *organon*, which comes to fold in on itself, then to move, receiving from outside only sounds, which, when the day comes, it will begin to echo through its cry? But, more generally, more womblike, it is always in the belly that we—man or woman—

end up listening, or start listening. The ear opens onto the sonorous cave that we then become. (37)

Nancy's allusion to the womb is echoed in his discussion of Titian's *Venus with an Organist and Cupid* in "Coda," in which an organ player stares at the swelling belly of Venus. The belly, or the drumhead, that might harbor a new life or a new instrument, reminds us that it is the reverberation of space that gives birth to a listening subject. Moreover, the two figures mentioned above are surrounded by curtains overhanging two ranks of trees on the background, with one rank connecting, as if transforming into, a rank of organ pipes. The sounding sphere is thus a complicated structure whose interior and exterior are intricately involved, like the anatomical structure of the ear, where sound is transduced and amplified in a labyrinth-like cave. As Nancy remarks, "[the] formation of a subject first of all as the rhythmic reployment/deployment of an enveloping between 'inside' and 'outside,' or else folding the 'outside' into the 'inside,' invaginating, forming a hollow, an echo chamber or column, a resonance chamber" (38).

Even though *Listening* is a short book, it would be fruitful to elaborate on Nancy's idea of the listening subject as a sonorous place by discussing the spheric immune structure proposed by Sloterdijk in *Bubbles*. The first volume of his extensive trilogy *Spheres*, *Bubbles* deals with the primary level of the immune system in which human beings live. The second and third volumes are *Globes* and *Foams*, respectively. In this trilogy, Sloterdijk lays out an ambitious project that envisions how human beings living in the modern world have evolved from a womb-like sphere (the individual-level of an immune structure) to a national-political globe, which aims to fascinate people with nationalistic myths and imperialist propaganda. During modern times, individual bubbles are not "absorbed into a single, integrative hyper-orb" but become heaps of foams. An amorphous structure, such as clouds or vortices, becomes the metaphor of immunity in the age of globalization (Sloterdijk 66-71). In this essay, I focus only on the formation of the bubble as an individual layer of immunity. According to Sloterdijk, the collapse of the theocentric world has shattered the shell forged by God and thus left human beings cold and vulnerable. Shell-less human beings need to build their own shelters, which resemble bubbles (23). Sloterdijk suggests that to live means to build "spheres." Large or small, the spheres are "immune-systemically effective space creations for ecstatic beings that are operated upon by the outside" (28). While the large ones are hyper-orbs constructed to form nationalist or imperialist myths, the microspheric units or "bubbles" provide an individualized level of protection. The practice of listening in a private space arising along with new sound

technologies can be regarded as a sphere-building mechanism through which the immunity of the individual is formed. Nancy's idea of the listening subject as a resonant place resembling a womb is echoed in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*; therefore, I will advance the idea of the sonic bubble to describe how individuals living in modern society establish their own spheres of immunity through the practice of listening in private.

In *Bubbles*, Sloterdijk suggests that the prototype of modern man's immune mechanism is the womb in which the fetus develops. Floating in amniotic fluid, the fetus lives in an "auratic universe unfold[ing] like a map in sound, woven entirely from resonances and suspended matter" (63). In other words, since human beings were deprived of the protective shell given by God, they have arranged for themselves bubbles that protect and sustain their selves. The image of a fetus becomes Sloterdijk's most important trope to describe the bubble as immune mechanism. First of all, the outer ring of the bubble is a piece of skin, or membrane, which serves as a "medium" through which exchanges between inside and outside take place. It is because of the membrane that the subject is always conditioned in an intermediary status. Together with the membrane, or skin of the belly, the fetus forms a "biunity," a term coined by Sloterdijk to describe a unity consisting in a pair—whether it is a mother-fetus, lover-beloved, magnetizer-magnetized, or teacher-listener (256). The emphasis on biunity, or bipolar spheres, paves the way for the notion of ecstasy, which Sloterdijk appropriates from Heidegger. Finally, a fetus inside the womb indicates that the bubble of an individual immune structure is a sonorous place, an idea which accords with Nancy's listening subject.

Borrowing Thomas Macho's critique of the object theory of psychoanalysis, Sloterdijk reconsiders the subject-object relationship in order to develop the womb-like prototype of an individual immune sphere. He contends that the model of object relationships based on "developmental stage theory"[7] should be reformulated from the perspective of the fetus-womb. Since it is impossible to demarcate the boundary between the fetus and the womb, it is the "nobject" that is at stake.[8] For Sloterdijk, nobjects are "spherically surrounding mini-conditions envisaged by a non-facing self, namely the fetal pre-subject, in the mode of non-confrontational presence as original creatures of closeness in the literal sense" (294).

[7] Derived from Melanie Klein's development theory, this model of object relations sees the early relations between child and mother as the foundation for the subject's formation. There are obvious correspondences between partial objects and child's organs such as the gaze to the eye, the voice to the ear, the breast to the mouth, and the feces to the anus. Klein's model was later taken on by Lacan to develop the idea of *objet a*, or the "object cause of desire."

[8] Appropriating the theory of psychoanalysis, some scholars treat the voice as an *objet a*. For instance, see Mladen Dolar's *A Voice and Nothing More*.

He identifies the nobjects that coexist with the pre-subject fetus as the umbilical cord and the placenta,[9] and suggests that their eventual loss, which is unavoidable, pre-determines the subject to be in a sempiternal state of ecstasy, or being "outside itself," in Heideggerian terms. According to Sloterdijk, in the later stage of life, the subject will try to find substitutions for the lost nobjects, a condition that situates him or her in a media world. For instance, the prenatal condition in which the fetus exchanges nutrients and wastes with the mother through the umbilical cord foretells their future as someone "who speaks on the telephone" (295). Moreover, instead of the voice of the mother, the newborn baby will use his or her own voice to replace the lost umbilical cord. By hearing his or her own voice, "the incipient subject's lifelong history of mediations with itself and its vocal extensions begins in crying, crowing, babbling and word-making" (297). This, Sloterdijk contends, is the primitive mode of the subject's self-utterance through language or music. This point is also where Sloterdijk contradicts psychoanalysis in that he, following Macho, refutes the objecthood of voice. He argues: "Voices produce acoustic coverings of spheric-presentist expansion, and the only mode of participation in vocal presences can be described as being-in within the current *sonospheres*" (297; emphasis added).

Emphasizing the aurality of the pre-natal space, Sloterdijk redefines the auto-erotic condition of human beings. Because the fetus within the womb is floating in a bubble of blood, amniotic fluid, voices, and sounds, such a milieu configures a "pre-visual universe" in which the concept of the mirror-stage is out of the question (320). If, in psychoanalysis, the mirror stage implies the way the subject is related to the big Other, as the child responds to the imago consisting of himself and his mother, Sloterdijk suggests that the earliest auto-eroticism is based on "games of resonance" (320). Hence, the maturity of the subject depends not on its relations, however mistaken, with the big Other, but on how well it can mediate the inner and outer layer of the sphere through listening. For Sloterdijk, the model of prenatal "sonic bubble" privileging sound over vision anticipates the being in a state of ecstasy. Since the ear "is the organ that connects the intimate and the public" (520), subjectivity is established by the resonance between two parties, the inner sphere of the individual and outer sphere of the community. In other words, a subject is a listening subject paying attention to the "bell" of the group he or she belongs to. A well-adapted individual could tune in the sonosphere of the big Other. Hence, "[i]n the wall-less house of sounds, humans became the animals

[9] Sloterdijk is more elusive about the lost placenta. He suggests that it becomes the anonymous twin or doppelganger of the incipient subject. The loss of placenta, for Sloterdijk, is less explicit than that of the umbilical cord, so it is related to the development of melancholia.

that come together by listening. Whatever else they might be, they are sonospheric communards" (520).

Thus, the birth of a child can be understood as the initiation of the listening subject into a sonorous universe. What is at stake here is that, by trying to tune in the bells, the subject does not strive to attain an imaginary telos as much as to approach those orbs that strike the right chord. This, I want to stress, is where Sloterdijk agrees with Nancy. In *Listening*, Nancy maintains that to listen is always to listen to an echo: "All sonorous presence is thus made of a complex of returns . . . whose binding is the resonance or 'sonance' of sound" (15). The identity of a sound is actually the co-presence of infinite reverberations in the same sonorous place. Not only that, the accord between the inner and outer spheres of the listener has to be attained. Nancy thus mentions "acoustic otoemissions,"[10] a sound generated in the inner ear that mingles with the sound listened to. Nancy thus acknowledges that there are always infinitesimal differences constituting the intimacy between the two parties enfolding each other by sound. He describes this intimacy in terms of a "*discordant harmony that regulates the intimate as such*" (15).

I thus argue that the notion of sonic bubble distilled from the dialogue between Nancy and Sloterdijk corresponds with the immune mechanism Esposito explores in *Immunitas*. Immunity is more about reaction and repercussion than action and force (7). A listening subject is one who resonates with the outer spheres. When encountering the orb that strikes the right chord, the subject responds with a sound emitted from his or her interior. The joining of chords also amounts to participating in a community, which serves as the "backdrop" of immunity (Esposito 5). In *Immunitas*, Esposito contends that immunity is "an essentially comparative concept," which opposes im-munity, not with *munus*, but with com-munity. This may sound counterintuitive, if we think of immunity as a defense against potential enemies. He explains how *im-*, the negative prefix, is attached to *munus*, meaning obligation or gift giving, immunity refers to the condition by which an individual is "exempt" from the responsibility of gift giving. On the other hand, *communitas* supposes a reciprocal give-and-take. Immunity, therefore, implies an individual's privilege of being immune from common obligations in a community (6-7). However, Esposito alerts us of the danger of intertwining law and force in modern biopolitics. Because law always harbors violence, the deployment of law as immune mechanism may lead to violence against the self, as the diseases of autoimmunization show. In his words, "violence is incorporated

[10] These are usually referred to as "otoacoustic emissions" in medical contexts. According to American Speech-Language-Hearing Associations, when a sound is heard, our inner ear will emit another sound through the vibration of the hair cells to respond to it ("Otoacoustic Emissions").

into the apparatus it is intended to repress—once again, violently" (10). The metaphor of "war games," therefore, pervades the discourse of immunology (153-59). Even so, Esposito is willing to envision a possibility in which immunity could operate in certain nonviolent ways that allow "heterogeneous entities" to become conceivable. In "The Implant," the final chapter of *Immunitas*, he tries to draw a blueprint for a "positive immunity" through the discussion of "immune tolerance" enacted in the mother-fetus relation. In pregnancy, the body of the mother does not reject the fetus as a foreign body; instead, it receives the fetus by recognizing its foreignness. This, according to Esposito, is the ultimate example of an immune paradigm in which immunity becomes indistinguishable from "community." The "fight" between mother and fetus does not lead to death but to "the spark of life" (171).

How, then, do we rethink immunity in terms of the sonic bubble? Although Esposito does not provide any concrete example, his projection evokes aurality. For instance, when describing common immunity, he opts for the term "sounding board" as the substitution of "barrier" (169). He even maintains that "the immune system must be interpreted as an *internal resonance chamber*, like the *diaphragm* through which difference, as such, engages and traverses us" (18; emphasis added). Following this line of thought, by creating a sonosphere, one activates his or her own immune mechanism, at least on the auditory level. With the advancement of new sound technologies, individual listeners are allowed to ward off unwanted sounds in surrounding soundscapes. However, it is worthwhile to note that immunity does not operate though isolation, but through negotiation and mediation. The womb-fetus image the three philosophers choose gives us a clue. According to Sloterdijk, our preference for a certain sound or voice has been fostered even before we are born. He goes further to suggest that humanity's fascination with music can be traced back to ancient cultures, or "the nurseries of advanced civilization," when music was an integral part of religious rituals. In oral cultures, he states, the "ego is formed in a promise of song: a future of notes is sent ahead of the ego's own experience. I am a sound image . . . compressed into a form of address that already sings to me in my infancy who I can be" (491). When we are fascinated by a song that strikes our inner chord, we are actually listening to the resonance of the song we heard in our infancy. Hence, the future of a being, or the "promise of song," is a re-sound of its past—the song that was heard in the womb. With this in mind, does not the mother-fetus relation exemplify the unity of individual-community, private-public, if we understand it as com-munity, the mutual give-and-take and double immunity? In a similar vein, Sloterdijk compares the spiritual experience of listening to the voice of God with the fascination of the hit song:

"Being on the way to the rhapsodic moment gives one's existence the feeling for its forward and upward motion" (491). Good singers cannot make the whole concert hall tremble with their songs, unless they offer "touching projections of old powers which lead to ego formation via the ears" (492). Hence, listening to a certain song can be an "enlivening" experience (506), as the subject finds itself reverberating with it. In other words, if the choice of music is comparable to the mysterious experience of religious occultism, the community formed by listening knits its members strongly without the efforts of barrier erecting or destroying alleged enemies. As the chosen music plays, the listener is enfolded in a sonic bubble that connects him or her with a larger collectivity. The bubble, however, is permeable to various sounds and voices, as the listening subject strains his or her ears to resonate with the song that sings *only* to him or her.[11]

Therefore, I argue that the practice of listening to a certain sound in private is a way to activate the immune mechanism for modern man. With the introduction of the gramophone or phonograph, alternatives to create one's private soundscape by choosing the sound one wants to listen to arose. Mass-produced sound discs have not only widened the human hearing range but also created possibilities for modern listeners to find themselves by listening to the sounds that harmonize with their heart's chords. In this process, a site of resonance is created. It is worth mentioning here that the sonic bubble can be an actual space, such as an audio room, or a private sphere encircled by sound. Also, listeners can immerse themselves in the halo created by music they listen to simply by plugging in an earphone. The experience of attentive listening amounts to a state of ecstasy as our ear is open to the outer spheres with which our inner sphere vibrates. In my final section, I discuss several short stories about the phonograph written by Arthur Conan Doyle to investigate how the new practice of listening induced by new sound technologies began to assist people in creating immune microspheres against the noise of their living surroundings.

[11] Special thanks to Dr. Wan-Xuan Lin for her response to my paper presented at the annual conference of Taiwan Humanities Society (October 2022). She suggested that, because up-to-date sound technology applied to earphones eliminates unwanted sounds almost entirely, more complicated mediations are taking place around the sonosphere. In a similar vein, one of the reviewers reminded me that the idea of boundary for a bubble should be more carefully dealt with. Here I maintain that either Benjamin's use of the "protective shield," or Sloterdijk's description of the "shell," is metaphorical. "Shell" and "shield" are understood as the means for people to maintain an imaginary boundary of the self, which is itself a fictive configuration. The "boundary" of the bubble, if one needs a specific term, should be viewed as membrane, which mediates between inside and outside and is ever permeable. Moreover, the focus of this paper is the technology of sound reproductivity in its inchoate stage, when the construction of private sonosphere is comparatively fragile. That is, the boundary of the sonic bubble is more permeable than what latest technology could provide.

Doyle in the Age of Sound Reproductivity

In "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone," published in 1921, Sherlock Holmes uses "the long-drawn, wailing notes of that most *haunting* of tunes" (emphasis added) to mislead his opponents in order to extract information from them. While playing prerecorded music via a gramophone in the bedroom, he hides himself behind the waxwork of his own face, a dummy, to fool his opponents about his real position. In response to the surprised exclamations from the opponent, Holmes replies, "Let it play! These modern gramophones are a remarkable invention." This episode of Sherlock Holmes, I contend, shows that Doyle was sensitive about how the new technology could reproduce sound. The dislocation of sound exemplifies a modern ventriloquism in that the source of sound has been turned into a literal "dummy." The wailing, haunting tunes of the fiddle mistaken as Holmes's corporeal existence are played by a machine.

Doyle's fascination with new sound technologies is best illustrated by "The Voice of Science," a short story published in 1891, not long after the invention of Edison's phonograph in 1877.[12] In this story, the trick done by the exchange of sound discs indicates that the new practice of listening attentively to recorded sound had elevated the status of sound. The story is about Mrs. Esdaile, a lady of remarkable knowledge and hospitality, organizing a scientific *conversazione* for the local Eclectic Society. A renowned Darwinian scientist's remark about "Medusiform Gonophore" is scheduled to be played in a phonograph that evening. However, behind the bustle of the house a dispute had arisen among Esdaile family members over the man with whom Rose, Esdaile's daughter, was in love. Rose's brother, Rupert, distrusts Captain Beesly and wants to reveal what he has heard about this man but is disappointedly interrupted. As he views "the phonograph [on the table], with wires, batteries . . . [which] stood ready for the guests whom it was to amuse," , a sudden thought dawns on him. Rupert removes the plates bearing the voice of the scientist and replaces them with "virgin plates . . . [which were] all ready to receive an impression," with the intention to record the hearsay he had heard and thus reveal Beesly's infamous history. When the audience forms an expectant circle, the phonograph starts to play, not Professor Standerton's lecture but

[12] Doyle does not specify the details of the models mentioned in "Mazarin Stone" and "Voice of Science." A "shift" from Edison's cylinder model to Berliner's disc model took place around 1894-1913. Edison's model was meant for users to record sound; the flat-disc model anticipated the mass production of music (Teague 37-38). Since "Mazarin Stone" was written in 1921, the tune of Doyle's fiddle was probably reproduced through the disc model, since this model is more suitable for music playing. I am not sure about the one used in "The Voice of Science" because the work was published before this transition.

names of women who had affairs with Beesly. With Rupert's mischief accomplished, Beesly runs away.

Professor Standerton's prerecorded speech connects the local Eclectic Society to a larger, more authoritative scientific community. The members regard the reproduced sound played by the phonograph more highly than the sound emitted from its origin, the organic mouth. Although Mrs. Esdaile is a well-learned woman, her words are still slighted by her neighbors in secluded Lindens, the fictive town where the story is set. Bitter whispers about her cramming from text-books before the meeting or trying to memorize speeches "written out in some masculine hand," had been spread. A comparison between Mrs. Esdaile and an ill-functioned machine was also made: "little blocks of information got jumbled up occasionally in their bearer's mind, so that after an entomological lecture she would burst into a geological harangue, or vice versa, to the great confusion of her audience." It does not seem surprising that women of learning in late Victorian society were looked down upon. What is worth noticing here is that, while people doubted the words uttered from Mrs. Esdaile's mouth, they looked forward to listening to the machine. "How funny it seems," Rose exclaims, "to think that this wood and metal will begin to speak just like a human being." More ironically, as Rupert's warning is waved off, the words reproduced by the phonograph prove more potent than the ones emitted from his own mouth.

In *A Spiral Way,* a study of how the introduction of the phonograph changed modern ethnographical studies, Erika Brady maintains that Edison's invention was designed for businessmen to heighten their efficiency by exchanging correspondence through wax cylinders (1). In other words, unlike telegraphs, which were designed to send discrete digits, phonographs were used to transmit analogue messages later to be transcribed by a typist-secretary into business letters. Edison's cylinder model, thus, contributes to an increasingly complex network of telecommunications. Edison expresses the recording of sound as capturing the "*fugitive* sound waves" (1; emphasis added). The mission of the phonograph to record and reproduce free-roaming sound was soon consummated. In the 1890s, Edison's model has been widely used by anthropologists to preserve "religious and aesthetic expressions" of cultures unfamiliar to the western world (Brady 1). However, with the cylinder model, it proved difficult to reproduce sound on a large scale. On the contrary, Berliner's disc model made the mass-produced pre-recording music discs accessible to wide audiences, thus transforming the "function" of sound machines from work to entertainment (Brady 11-25).

Furthermore, the capture of "fugitive sound waves" implemented by folklorists helped heighten the status of new sound in that it was a reproduction of religious

expressions remote from one's immediate surroundings. According to Brady, late Victorians were filled with wonder when they heard these recordings: "sound separated from source represented a kind of wizardry difficult for a secular society to assimilate in any but poetic terms" (17). Listeners of this new sound were fascinated and awestruck, I argue, not only because they were unfamiliar with the new technology, but also because the dislocated sound itself was prone to evoke spiritual meaning. Inspired by Walter Ong's study of oral cultures, Connor suggests that the source-less voice "emphasize[s] the power of voice as utterance and effect over against its associations with presence and intention" (24). More specifically, voices, especially those associated with "divine annunciation, oracular utterance," or even those heard by schizophrenic patients are not really source-less, but a presence whose apparent origins are overshadowed by the voices themselves (Connor 23-24). In the instance of ancient religious rites, the voice loomed large and eclipsed the corporeal presence of the immediate source, be it the prophetess or an icon. As Ong maintains, "[the voice] itself is the manifestation of presence" (qtd. in Connor 24). Therefore, even though the late Victorians understood that it was the box made of wood and metal that spoke, they were easily transported to realms beyond their material environment. The new practice of listening to sound reproduced by a phonograph or gramophone, hence, paved the way for the creation of microspheric immune bubbles connecting individual listeners to a greater whole, despite the function of entertainment assigned to mass-produced music discs. In the remaining paragraphs, I want to discuss the practice of private listening as a self-formation strategy for warding off the "pollution" of the outside world. I will do so through an examination of Doyle's *The Parasite* and "The Story of the Japanned Box."

Published in 1894 and narrated from the single viewpoint of Austin Gilroy, a scientist who claims to be a hardcore materialist, *The Parasite* is about how Gilroy confronts a mesmerist, Miss Penclosa.[13] According to Andriopoulos, tales of hypnosis crime, a particular category in which forensic science and crime fiction converge, were popular in the late nineteenth century (30-41). *The Parasite*, therefore, can be viewed as an example of this subgenre. However, judging from Doyle's literary career, *The Parasite* also constitutes an experimental, proto-modernist work. The novella is presented in the form of scientific journals in which the young professor records how he, observing Miss Penclosa's ability as a mesmerizer, falls under the spell of her bewitching powers to make him fall crazily in love with her

[13] "Mesmerism" and "hypnosis" are sometimes used interchangeably nowadays. However, the words are rooted in different contexts, as I will note soon.

and tries to resist her by casting a counter spell. Following Gilroy's lopsided narrative, the reader is led into an unknown world in which "truth" is never stable, despite the scientist's assurances of authentic sources of meaning. Apparently, Penclosa, a middle-aged woman with a crippled leg, is not attractive in the eyes of Gilroy, who is already engaged to young and beautiful Agatha. Gilroy's first impression of Penclosa revealed his aversion: "In any group of ten women she would have been the last whom one would have picked out." When he comes to realize that he is caressing Penclosa in her apartment, Gilroy feels revolted and alleges that she must have exerted her power of mind-control over him. At the same time, Gilroy is portrayed as one endowed with strong potential to act as a spiritual medium: "by nature I am, unless I deceive myself, a highly psychic man. I was a nervous, sensitive boy, a dreamer, a somnambulist, full of impressions and intuitions."[14] The seemingly simple narration of a hypnosis crime is thus complicated both by the mystic nature of love and by Gilroy's psychic potentials. Could Gilroy's love of Penclosa be a scheme set up by her? Or is he in love with her only because love is blind? There seems to be an exchange of warnings before the last duel when Gilroy taunts Miss Penclosa about her suggestion to lay her hand on Agatha, but the real cause of Miss Penclosa's death is unknown. Gilroy wakes up in Agatha's apartment with a bottle of poison in his hand. The clock shows half past three in the afternoon. When Gilroy rushes to Penclosa's apartment to reproach her, he finds out that she died the same moment he awoke. The choice of first-person narrative leads the reader into a world where meaning is uncertain and the structure of the story lies on the brink of collapse.

Reading the story against the background of media history reveals prevailing anxieties toward noise in the late Victorian era. Doyle's choice of the word "mesmerism" instead of "hypnosis" in *The Parasite* suggests Doyle's stance in an ongoing medical debate during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The word "mesmerism" came from Franz Anton Mesmer, a practitioner of animal magnetism in the late eighteenth century. Believing that the universe was filled with magnetic fluid invisible to the eye, Mesmer proposed to cure certain diseases by redirecting

[14] It was believed that sensitive people are more likely to possess psychic power, regardless of their sex. As a follower and strong defender of spiritualism, Doyle may not have agreed with Gilroy that mesmerism was a merely sleight of hand done by those who claimed to have psychic power but performed magic trick on the sly. Gilroy's investigation of Miss Penclosa's case exemplifies the protocols followed by the members of the Society of Psychical Research when examining the spiritual mediums in the turn of the century. Hence, *The Parasite* is quite different from other tales of hypnotic crimes mentioned in Andriopoulos's study in that it reveals more about Doyle's fascination with spiritualism than the forensic explications of mesmerism, which Doyle was capable of conveying, thanks to his medical background. I thus argue that it is more reasonable to read the story as a confrontation between two characters with psychic power. Nevertheless, the large blank areas in the narrative are meant to arouse unsettling feelings and drive readers to the brink of paranoia.

this fluid. Given Mesmer's flamboyant performances, mesmerism became popular and was augmented by followers who added new elements such as exorcism and spiritualism (Pintar and Lynn 12-30). Conversely, some practitioners refuted the theory of magnetic fluid but maintained that the induced sleeping condition was necessary for the cure; hence, the new term "hypnosis"—meaning "to put to sleep" in Greek—was introduced. For this new school, psychological and physical explanations were emphasized over occultist associations. In *The Parasite* as well as most of Doyle's works on spiritualism, the term "mesmerism" is used, indicating that Doyle was siding with the old school of fluidism.

On the first evening, when Penclosa is introduced to Gilroy and Agatha, Agatha is wearing "glittering wheat-ears in her hair." Later, when guests invite Penclosa to try her hypnotic power over Agatha, Gilroy observes "a vibration of the wheat-ears." There is also a change in Penclosa. She seems younger and more vigorous. Her eyes, which appeared dull and "furtive" a moment ago, become keen and sharp, looking down at Agatha as if "a Roman empress might have looked down at her kneeling slave." The description of the practice of mesmerism adheres to the old school, which suggests one's thoughts and feelings may be controlled by magnetic power. Agatha's first hypnosis seems to work well, as she calls off her engagement to Gilroy the next morning, under the influence of Penclosa. However, what happens then, according to Gilroy, is out of his control. From his point of view, Penclosa must have secretly made some suggestions to him without him noticing.

As I have already discussed, the fear of the hypnotic power of mass communication may be understood as a symptom of modernity, as citizens try to cope with omnipresent electrical signals. In *Possessed*, Andriopoulos indicates that authors and physicians were worried about the "photoplay" of cinema having suggestive power over the audience in the era of silent film (116). Introduction of sound in film in the 1920s aggravated this fear when people started to associate not only vision but sound with the sinister, hypnotic power of cinema (119). Films about hypnosis, he shows, would highlight the gaze or voice of the hypnotizer exerting power over the victim/audience (103-23). In *The Parasite*, however, there are no visual or auditory imageries implicitly depicting hypnotic power except for the first encounter between Gilroy and Penclosa. Although the reader might expect the first-person narrator to confront a penetrating gaze or certain suggestive words, as Penclosa has done to Agatha, none of these are observed by Gilroy. One may suppose that his scientist's pride has obscured his senses. However, he does have doubts about Miss Penclosa's power secretly saturating his system in parasitic fashion: "She has a parasite soul; yes, she is a parasite, a monstrous parasite. She creeps into my frame as the hermit crab does into the whelk's shell. I am powerless What

can I do? *I am dealing with forces of which I know nothing*" (emphasis added). A war is waged here between the self and new forms of electronic communication whose unknown power seems capable of colonizing the host without the host becoming aware of it. It is, therefore, a War of Self. Since the hypnotizer is believed to be able to implant thoughts in the hypnotized, the volition of the self is endangered.

The combat between Penclosa and Gilroy can be read against the background of modern biopolitics. As Doyle suggests, Gilroy's psychic nature mirrors Penclosa's. Their clash, which is unbeknown to Gilroy, can be comparable to the war of immunology that defends one's individuality "against the risk of 'fusion' with heterogeneous entities" (Esposito 155-56). Whereas the best defense lies in attacking the "non-self," Gilroy's psychic "self" is recognized as Penclosa's image looms as the most repelling invader. What remains certain when we are all immersed in an energy field where sound unravels and operates beyond the range of human hearing? What if unnecessary, or even sinister, messages are sizzling in when we listen? It is not without reason that the paranoia of failing to detect whether one has full control of one's own mind prevailed in the age of electronic revolution. In order to counter this paranoid fear, one has to build a microsphere of immunity.

In addition, Doyle's "The Story of the Japanned Box" (1899) illustrates modern man's self-formation: to create a sonic bubble by listening to sounds of one's choice. "The Story of the Japanned Box" takes place in the ancient house of Thorpe Place, the residence of Sir John Bollamore. Frank Colmore, the tutor of Bollamore's two kids, relates that Sir John has a secret black box so endeared to him that he forbids anyone to touch it. Because his wife died three years earlier, people surmise that letters of hers are inside the box. As a melancholic widower, Sir John often isolates himself in a circular room where he stores the box, keeping distance from everyone, even his own children. What arouses suspicions is that a woman's voice is frequently heard floating in the night air. Because Thorpe Place is an ancient building, probably built before the Norman Conquest, Colmore guesses that there could be mysterious passages leading to neighboring villages. The woman's voice elicits gossip, as servants of the Bollamore household cast doubt about the host's morality. After gaining Bollamore's trust by rescuing one of his children from drowning, Colmore has the privilege of helping his master index the books in his library, located in the new wing of the house. One evening, after dropping unconscious because of the medicine he took to alleviate his neuralgia, he wakes to find Sir John's secret. The black Japanned box is actually a phonograph that has been moved from the circular room to the new library because the old house has collapsed. The woman's voice, which has long been the source of

neighbors' whispers, is actually the voice of Sir John's wife. Fearing that Sir John would return to his old drinking habit, she had recorded her caring words for him before she died.

In order to sustain a self that would meet the moral standards of the Victorian age as well as his wife's expectations, Sir John creates a sonorous place which he frequents. The circular room in an ancient house built by stones provides an excellent environment for the sound to reverberate. With a "low ceiling," a narrow window covered with ivy, simple furniture and an "old carpet," its interior gives an atmosphere of intimacy reminiscent of the womb. According to Colmore, Sir John is "six feet three inches in height," with back "rounded with study." One can imagine that, whenever he is inside the room listening to his wife, he needs to crouch. This fetus-in-womb image corresponds to the prototype of the immune bubble, or a sonorous place where Nancy's "listening subject" is formed. Moreover, against what others speculate, the content of the box is not letters but his wife's preserved vocal sounds. Sound entails a magic more potent than written words. According to Colmore's description, what he hears is a low woman's voice: "hushed it was, there was no mistaking its feminine *timbre*" (emphasis added). She speaks rapidly and imploringly, as the constant replaying of the sound composes its rhythm: "I am not really gone, John. . . . I am here at your very elbow, and shall be until we meet once more. I die happy to think that morning and night you will hear my voice. Oh, John, be strong, be strong, until we meet again." In *Listening*, Nancy discusses how speaking itself creates musicality through timbre and rhythm, which "outline, in a way, the *matrixlike* constitution of resonance when it is placed in the condition of the phrasing or of the musical sense, that is to say, when it is offered to listening" (36; emphasis added). Therefore, the circular room can be regarded as a sonorous place, a matrix woven by the timbre and rhythm of Clare's voice, a site where Sir John, regressing into a baby-like state, is rocked to hypnotic slumber. Moreover, as the old circular room collapsed with the old wing, the phonograph is now playing in the library. The sonic bubble continues to balloon by playing back Clare's voice through the phonograph.

If, according to Sloterdijk, the fulfillment of the "promise of song" depends on how the future and past of the self tune to each other, Sir John's choice of sound (Claire's chanting) can be regarded as his efforts to achieve this promised self. Moreover, since every sound that strikes one's heart chord is an echo, the once dissolute Sir John must have been enamored of his wife's voice, otherwise she could not have possibly "brought him back to manhood and decency" when they were together. The affection between the two souls is so strong that both agree to let the resonance keep on ringing by preserving her voice via mechanical means.

Doyle wrote "The Story of the Japanned Box" at a time when Victorian gentlemen struggled against the noise of modern society while encroaching foreign cultures threatened British identity. The setting of the story in the Midlands is not without reason, for Doyle makes it clear that this is "the most English part of England": "Shakespeare, the flower of the whole race, was born in the middle of it." However, Doyle was also keen to observe that the "invasion" of modern, heterogeneous cultures was inevitable. The integrity of the British gentleman class may have a chance to be preserved with the voice of the Victorian Angel in the House. Although the ancient tower where the circular room is built could not resist being rotten by age, Sir John can still carry the precious box to the new wing. Despite the damage of the original room, the sonic bubble can still function without any concrete shell, as Colmore continues to hear "a voice so charged with entreaty and with yearning love" following "a strange, crisp, metallic clicking." And so, the sound waves swelling melodically, propelled by the sound machine, lap on, cradling Sir John into deep magnetic sleep.

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