The opening moments of Isaac Julien’s film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask* include a scene that finds the youthful Fanon seated in the living room of his family home in Martinique, one ear pressed to the speaker of a radio. Fanon’s mother appears, a disapproving look on her face, switches off the radio, and remonstrates with her child. Against his middle-class parents’ express wishes, Fanon has been listening to a Creole radio station rather than to the prescribed French fare. The scene, of course, rehearses Fanon’s biography in miniature. But it also allegorizes one of his most important writing strategies. As a practicing psychiatrist, Fanon spent much of his life as a professional listener. As a writer, he produced texts that frequently function as transcripts of his diverse acts of listening. Indeed, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon’s most celebrated work, is often less “Fanon’s” text than a compilation of those voices to which he has inclined his ear and a record of his responses to what he has been hearing. It is not simply that vast sections of *Black Skin, White Masks* are passages taken from books Fanon has read, poems he has heard, or conversations he has had, or listened in on, but that the sound of these voices is so carefully staged. Fanon quotes, certainly, but the idiom of citation in *Black Skin, White Masks* is frequently less one of quotation than one of dramatization.¹ “The Fact of Blackness,” perhaps the most influential chapter of Fanon’s text, exemplifies

¹ My thoughts on this subject have greatly benefited from conversations with Maurice Wallace.
this practice. The chapter begins not with expository prose but with a startling enunciation: "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a negro!'" (109). The paragraphs that follow do not in any standard sense interpret or offer commentary on these anonymous words. Instead, the chapter proceeds by circling back, time and again, to the moment in which they were spoken, to replay the moment, to reexperience it, to study the words by reenacting them. Fanon gradually expands the scene, adds new characters and new voices, and finally incorporates himself as an actor whose lines are all spoken as asides:

"'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. . . .

"'Look at the nigger! . . . Mama, a Negro! . . . Hell, he's getting mad. . . .

Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we. . . ."

(112–13)

In our reading of these passages, we cannot, of course, overlook the words themselves or fail to examine the way in which they facilitate Fanon's investigation of the optic economies of imperial discourse. But to read Fanon exclusively as the visual anatomist of imperialism is to render a very partial reading of his work. Post-colonial criticism is indebted to Fanon for revealing that imperialism works in large part by policing, regulating, and interpreting the visible. It needs now to consider what Fanon has to teach us about the audible.

If we return to "The Fact of Blackness" with this in mind, we cannot avoid noticing the compositional importance of the acoustic. As the chapter proceeds, Fanon supplements the shouting in the street with the sound of other voices that he offers to us as just that—voices, not snippets of text. Snatches of overheard conversation surface without introduction or attribution like the surprising packets of human speech we find deposited in our consciousness as we walk through our cities, sometimes filtering out the surrounding universe of sound but sometimes catching ourselves listening in, eavesdropping on the passing crowds. Fragments of dialogue from Jean-Paul Sartre's The Respectful Prostitute press on our ear as the ambulatory narrative pauses to look in at a theater and then moves on. And over and over the poetry of Aimé Césaire and
Léopold Senghor decorates the sound track of this text. The poetry, to reiterate, is not cited; it is heard. "Listen to our singer, Léopold Senghor," the narrative commands (122). "And now how my voice vibrates," Fanon remarks as he utters some lines from Césaire's Cahier (123). "At my ear there is a song," he subsequently informs us as his way of introducing his rendering of a lyric (126). "Listen," he reiterates (127). "Listen" (130). "Listen" (135). It is as if he is not offering us a text but a radio receiver, as if he is not writing but scanning the bands of an empire's broadcast stations, gathering these scattered voices for our belated acts of listening, tuning our ears to the pandemonium of the incommensurate, the aural meeting places of diaspora.

While Black Skin, White Masks is often, quite literally, a listening device, it is, of course, only metaphorically a radio. But by the time Fanon came to write the essays that make up A Dying Colonialism, he had become more than a little interested in the ways in which literal acts of radio-listening could contribute to a collective politics of anti-imperial nationalism. Proleptically present as a sort of figure for the book in Black Skin, White Masks, the radio was to emerge for Fanon as a crucial instrument of struggle and as an organizing metaphor in his solidarity poetics. But if Fanon was one of the first critics of imperialism to identify the politics and the narratives of anticolonial or postcolonial resistance with the workings of the radio, he has not been the only person to do so. The novels, films, plays, and histories of the postcolonial are littered with radios. And it is the repeated reappearance of the radio in such works, together with the radiophonic quality of Black Skin, White Masks and Fanon's own eventual analysis of radio-listening—an analysis which indicates not only that his earlier work may be typified as a sort of listening device, but that the "device" of listening is central to the collective politics of the postcolonial and the diasporic—which can help us understand what Fanon achieves by constructing Black Skin, White Masks as he does.

The "postcolonial moment" begins not once but serially, in large part because there is no singular form of experience that can be identified as the postcolonial experience, but a variety of histories gathered, for the sake of convenience, under an organizing interpretive framework. But to say that there is no single moment of
beginning does not mean that there are no moments of beginning, merely that there are many. And if one of those moments is the midnight hour of August 15, 1947, the hour at which India gained its independence, it is not only because that is when the Union Jack was lowered over Delhi, but because at that very moment Jawaharlal Nehru chose to inaugurate the moment of independence—the moment that was, for him, the birth of the postcolonial—with a radio address in which he called the scattered subjects of the subcontinent to gather themselves around the unifying cadences of his broadcast voice. For all its scattered energies, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* can in many respects be read as an attempt to dispute the unitary authority of that governmental voice by wiring the skull of protagonist Saleem Sinai with a receiving station—subsequently christened All India Radio—which he uses to collect the dispersed voices of the Indian children whose utterances have been filtered from the nation’s official programs of self-disclosure.

What is true of the politics and literature of India is, in this case, also true of the politics and literature of Ireland. As Luke Gibbons has shown, the successive governments of post-independence Ireland have relied on the broadcasts of Radio Eirann, since that station was established as one of the Republic’s earliest state institutions in 1926, to “[preserve] the native heritage” (73) of Ireland and to create for its listeners “the sense of belonging which comes from being a member of a mass audience experiencing a national . . . media event” (72). Brian Friel’s drama *Dancing at Lughnasa* responds to such policies much as Rushdie responds to Nehru, demonstrating not simply that Radio Eirann has served as a medium opening Ireland to its Gaelic past and to the global programming of the Anglo-American culture industry, but that even such “foreign” imports can be re-indigenized by the radio’s listeners. Neither Friel nor Rushdie is, of course, original in locating radio-listening at the heart of the narratives of postcolonial nationhood. James Joyce had already done so when in *Finnegans Wake* he transformed his unity-in-dispersity character H. C. Earwicker into a “Welter focussed” (324) radio receiver, “as modern as tomorrow afternoon and in appearance up to the minute” (309), and, like Rushdie some half century later, identified that transformation with “the birth of an otion.” Other examples, both literary and historical, abound. José
Ignacio López Vigil has documented the significance of pirate radio to the revolutionary movement in El Salvador in Rebel Radio: The Story of El Salvador's Radio Venceremos, a work which not only provides a history of Radio Venceremos but models its narrative practice on that fugitive radio “station” by constructing itself as a compilation of revolutionary voices. And, to name one last example before returning to Fanon’s account of Radio Venceremos’s Algerian predecessor, Isaac Julien’s film Young Soul Rebels, a cinematic narrative centered on the lives of a group of black Londoners running a pirate radio station, illustrates the enduring significance of the radio as a gathering mechanism for a diasporic community scattered through the neighborhoods of the post-imperial metropolis.

India, Ireland, Latin America, Great Britain—in all of these places the radio, as instrument or figure, has been put to the service of anticolonial nationalists, postcolonial antinationalists, and those, like Julien, seeking to elaborate the contours of a diasporic community that transcends the categories of the nation. But the same century that saw the radio enlisted in all these projects also saw it serving the interests of empire, and it is because the radio has also been an instrument of imperial control that Fanon, when he does come to address the ways in which the radio—and, more importantly, the act of listening to the radio—can serve an anti-imperial cause, does so with some caution.

Imperial discourse, as Fanon well knew, is frequently a discourse of nostalgia—oddly so, for the lost home that the colonizing subject tirelessly laments, and attempts to reproduce abroad, is one that has willfully been abandoned. Or perhaps not. As Gauri Viswanathan, Homi Bhabha, and other scholars have demonstrated, the “original” culture that colonialism finds so many ways to “reinscribe” is frequently as much the product of imperial melancholy as it is the source of its regret. The simulacral quality of their cultural inscriptions did not, however, prevent the architects of empire from attempting to rewrite the spaces of colonial rule as copies of some phantasmagoric metropolitan “original.” Across the surface of the globe in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth cen-
ries, colonists from France, Spain, England, and America set about disciplining their identities, and the identities of their subjects, by disposing about themselves the cultural architectures of their several ‘homes.’ The English—in Africa, India, and the Caribbean—laid cricket pitches, erected Gothic train stations, staged Shakespeare, and painted murals of foxhunts on the walls of their clubs. In Indochina, the French organized salons and feted themselves on the ocean liners of the Messageries Maritimes docked at the ports of the Saigon River (“As soon as they berthed, you were in France,” the narrator of Marguerite Duras’s The Lover notes [107]). And in Algeria, the French settlers listened to the radio.

The assiduousness with which the French colonists listened to Radio-Alger caught Fanon’s attention, and in “This Is the Voice of Algeria,” an essay published in A Dying Colonialism, Fanon devoted himself to thinking about why radio listening should have proven so important to the French and, in time, to their Algerian subjects. On the French, Fanon quickly comes to some firm but remarkably subtle conclusions (which will strike the contemporary ear as unexciting only if we forget that it has taken academic cultural criticism thirty years to say again the things Fanon first said here):

On the farms, the radio reminds the settler of the reality of colonial power and, by its very existence, dispenses safety, serenity. . . . The Paris music, extracts from the metropolitan press, the French government crises, constitute a coherent background from which colonial society draws its density and its justification. Radio-Alger sustains the occupant’s culture, marks it off from the non-culture, from the nature of the occupied. Radio-Alger, the voice of France in Algeria, constitutes the sole center of reference at the level of news. Radio-Alger, for the settler, is a daily invitation not to “go native,” not to forget the rightfulness of his culture.

Radio listening functions here as the daily ritual that permits the colonists imaginatively to identify themselves with France and with one another. Like newspaper reading in Benedict Anderson’s account of nationalism, radio listening links an anonymous body of settlers, marks off a territory of belonging, creates “the feeling that colonial society is a living and palpitating reality” (Fanon 71).
To listen to Radio-Alger, in other words, is to affiliate oneself with France, to claim an identity, and to express solidarity with all those others who have fabricated a self through an identical act of cultural consumption. If in Anderson’s work the nation is primarily a community of readers, Fanon’s essay indicates that for the French settlers in North Africa, the empire is preeminently a community of listeners.

It is little wonder then that many Algerians regarded the radio with profound suspicion. Before 1945, 95 percent of the radios in Algeria were owned by settlers. Eleven years later, however, Algerians began to acquire radios in vast numbers. By the end of the decade, Fanon suggests, virtually every Algerian either owned or had access to a radio. And it is this phenomenon, this sudden, massive appropriation of an instrument of imperial rule by the subjects of that rule, that Fanon spends most of his time analyzing in his essay. By the mid 1950s, the revolution was a continuous, daily determinant of Algerian life—and so was press censorship. The local newspapers carried little or no coverage of the war, and buying the Parisian papers which did report on the conflict had become, all too often, a request to be arrested. So, in 1956, the National Liberation Front (the FLN) established a radio station in Cairo and began broadcasting *The Voice of Fighting Algeria*. News of the station’s existence and details of its broadcast schedule and wavelengths were quietly distributed to Algeria’s native inhabitants, and, if Fanon’s account is accurate, Algerians rapidly began to purchase radios and to tune in to the *Voice*’s accounts of the countless battles of the revolution. The French authorities also quickly became aware of the *Voice* and began to jam its transmissions. A battle of the airwaves ensued, as the FLN broadcast its *Voice*; the French hurried to identify and to jam the transmission; the FLN, in turn, tuned in to its own messages, identified the moment in which they were scrambled, and switched to a different frequency; and the French hastened to disrupt this new broadcast. Fanon is aware of this “sound-wave warfare” in his essay on the rebel radio station, but, finally, he is less interested in the strategies of these combatants than in the actions of the Algerian “noncombatants” struggling to tune in to this multiply-interrupted, frequency-hopping, fugitive *Voice*. 
Indulging, once again, his penchant for dramaturgy, Fanon invites his readers to imagine a typical scene: we are in a village in the Algerian hinterland, a company has gathered in the home of a radio-owning family, the possessor of the radio squats before its speaker, one ear pressed to the instrument, one hand on the tuning dial, with his other hand beckoning for silence. What does he hear?

Imperfectly heard, obscured by an incessant jamming, forced to change wave lengths two or three times in the course of a broadcast, the Voice of Fighting Algeria could hardly ever be heard from beginning to end. It was a choppy, broken voice. . . .

This voice [was] often absent, physically inaudible. . . .

. . . At the end of the evening, not hearing the Voice, the listener would sometimes leave the needle on a jammed wave-length or one that simply produced static, and would announce that the voice of the combatants was here.

It is an eerie scene, the scene of a seance manqué. Why would anyone tune in? Because, Fanon insists, the conditions of the transmission's failure were precisely the conditions of the auditor's success. Hearing is not only an acoustic experience; it is the expression of a desire. Listening is not simply an act of consumption; it is also a productive activity. Fanon's villagers gather themselves less to acquire information than to gather themselves, to collectively expose themselves to a common experience, to fabricate a commonality of experience which (and this point must be stressed) is not a commonality of identity.

Fanon is a writer unafraid to talk about intentionality, and if he is thus out of tune with our times, he nevertheless has something to contribute to our suspicious interrogations of agency. For the intentions Fanon addresses in this essay are not the producer's but the consumer's. If we feel that we have at last dispensed with the shibboleths of authorial genius and creative autonomy, his essay suggests that we need to continue to examine the volitions of the audience. Why do we read what we read, watch what we watch, listen to what we listen to? Where Black Skin, White Masks indicates that we are never in control of our acts of listening, that we are constantly hearing more than we think, registering stray utterances
we had not set out to hear, "This Is the Voice of Algeria" wonders why an embattled, impoverished, subaltern class would choose to tune in to a voice that was alternately an inaudibility and "a piercing, excruciating din" (88).

Why would anyone choose to tune in to the absent cadences of The Voice of Fighting Algeria? For much the same reason that the settlers listened to Radio-Alger. Over and over, Fanon attributes the passion for listening to the Voice to a fundamental will to nationhood, "an inner need to be at one with the nation in its struggles" (86). Scattered across the vast territory of Algeria, diverse communities could imagine themselves to belong to a nation that was forming itself less on the field of battle than in the innumerable spaces in which others were gathering to listen. In formal terms, then, the Voice's audience was largely indistinguishable from its French counterpart. Both communities were participating in the type of sympathetic ritual that Anderson characterizes as fundamental to the origins of national consciousness. What distinguishes the Algerian audience of The Voice of Fighting Algeria from the settler audiences of Radio-Alger was, for Fanon, the content of the broadcasts they were consuming, and their responses to that content.

By content, however, I mean not ideological content but—to collapse the form/content binary—the formal quality of what they heard. The broken, fractured nature of the Voice's overheard broadcasts was not an obstacle to unity; it was its condition, for several reasons. Most immediately, the colonial decision to jam the Voice's broadcasts achieved the opposite of its desired effect. Rather than making reports of battle inaccessible, the jamming transformed the listeners into vicarious combatants and their living rooms into spaces of struggle:

The listener, enrolled in the battle of the waves, had to figure out the tactics of the enemy, and in an almost physical way circumvent the strategy of the adversary. . . .

. . . The war of the sound waves, in the gourbi, re-enacts for the benefit of the citizen the armed clash of his people and colonialism.

(85, 88)

Carried beyond itself, carried from the field of battle to the living quarters of the suddenly combative "noncombatants," the sound
of struggle intensifies the listener’s sense of participation by its very woundedness, as the shattered quality of the Voice echoes the shattering of bodies on the battlefield. But because these rumors of war need to be so carefully targeted, listening no longer functions as a simple act of consumption. It becomes a tactical activity, an act of guerrilla warfare in which the radio dial substitutes for the trigger.

The tactics of listening outlined in Fanon’s essay involve more, however, than a sympathetic identification of the listener with the fighter. Fanon’s auditors do sympathize with their allies in the field, but the politics of solidarity manufactured in their acts of listening does not end with sympathy. After their initial acts of listening to the fugitive broadcast, Fanon’s listeners transform themselves into broadcasters:

A real task of reconstruction would then begin. Everyone would participate, and the battles of yesterday and the day before would be re-fought in accordance with the deep aspirations and the unshakable faith of the group. The listener would compensate for the fragmentary nature of the news by an autonomous creation of information. . . .

. . . the whole nation would snatch fragments of sentences in the course of the broadcast and attach to them a decisive meaning. . . .

. . . Every Algerian, for his part, broadcast and transmitted the new language.

(86–87; emphasis added)

In these sentences Fanon once again insists on the vitally productive value of the Voice’s fragmentation. Here, however, the fragment accrues value not because it allegorizes the tearing of bodies on the field of battle but because the scattering of the Voice demands a subsequent act of gathering. Agency shifts from the speaker to the listener, who reproduces what she or he has heard. This act of reproduction is not, however, motivated by a desire to be faithful to the original, to represent exactly what has been lost. Rather, in their work of acoustic translation, the listeners refashion the broadcast in their own images, lend their voices to fill in the silences in the Voice. At this moment what has been a univocal address is polyvocalized. Willingly submitting themselves to the interpellative authority of the Voice, the listeners resist homogenization. United in their identity as listeners, they nevertheless preserve their differences. Gathered around what, in one sense, is an essen-
tial, unitary narrative of belonging, they yet succeed in scattering
the Voice that has collected them, in de-essentializing the Voice as
each individual retransmits what he or she has heard. Late in his
essay, Fanon asks his readers to conceive of the radio not as an
instrument but “as a technique” (95). This request emphasizes his
interest in the forms of agency more recently theorized in the dis-
courses of consumer reproduction.² But it also indicates that for
Fanon, the listening practices of everyday life permit the subject
not simply to resist massification but to construct a collective poli-
tics that manages to retain room for the individual’s uniqueness.
For when Fanon speaks of the techniques of listening, he is describ-
ing a complex labor in which subjects are at once gatherers and
scatterers of the narratives of identity to which their ears are tuned;
he is describing a process in which the collective identity of the
listening group cohabits with each interpreter’s difference. And
this, for Fanon, is one of the ways in which solidarities are fabri-
cated.

Let me be as clear as possible. In much left discourse, appeals
for solidarity tend to assume that solidarity is, to put it simply, a
good thing. At the same time, most contemporary left thought is
sufficiently suspicious of any form of totalization that while the
politics of coalition-building is necessarily valorized, the notion of
a univocal politics must be dismissed as little more than an apology
for normalization or Sameness. What we are left with is a desire
for solidarity that must be deferred in the interest of preserving
our differences, and a preservation of difference that must either
rule out collectivization or hand the politics of collective identities
over to the essentialists. All of this is of course complicated by our
unwillingness to speak of subjects, or agency, a negative conviction
that seems to make nonsense of any attempt to affiliate “ourselves”
with one another. If, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s terms,
“we are no longer ourselves” but “rhizomes” all, there simply can
be no such thing as intentional solidarity among subjects (3). Para-
doxically, what much anti-Enlightenment academic thought tends
then to produce, and to celebrate, are extremely “radical” versions

². I am thinking primarily of the work of Michel de Certeau; see his Practice of Everyday
Life.
of a decentered individualism, while secretly harboring a nostalgia for some version of the grand narrative of fraternity, which it nevertheless forbids itself to acknowledge, except when speaking to nonacademics of something like human rights—which we really no longer have any capacity to defend. In essence, by so fully dissociating identity and difference, we have not only tailored our address to our audiences—valorizing heterogeneity, uncertainty, and contingency among ourselves, while preserving various Enlightenment conceptions of rights and humanness when addressing a public whom, we can safely assume, have read neither Deleuze nor Donna Harraway—but we have also manufactured a model of interpretation that posits the ethics of reading as a matter of choosing either dispersal or unification, difference or identity, scattering or gathering. Eschewing binarisms, we have constructed an ethics of binary oppositions. Longing to render our critical labors politically effective, we find ourselves reproducing the politics of autonomous individualism as a politics of nonautonomous individualism which may yearn for solidarity but, if it is true to its post-identitarian convictions, can postulate solidarity only in the most impoverished of forms, as little more than a business of being in the same place at the same time. The fabrication of solidarities, to complete the trajectory, is thus replaced by the recognition of (provisional) likenesses if one is in Richard Rorty’s camp, or deferred to a better future if one is in Fredric Jameson’s.

Fanon’s essay, I am suggesting, provides another possibility. Most significantly, it suggests that we do not have to make a choice between the unified and the dispersed, that, in effect, we can choose neither by choosing both. It also indicates that solidarity involves neither the liberal ironist’s injunction that we recognize ourselves in one another nor the essentialist’s demand that we departicularize ourselves in the interest of becoming one another. For where both liberalism and essentialism operate on a dualist economy of the one and the other, the form of solidarity outlined in Fanon’s essay supplements this binary configuration with a third term that mediates the relationship of the one to the other. Fanon’s

3. See Rorty’s Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, esp. 189–98, and Jameson’s Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.
listeners do not directly affiliate themselves with one another, do not recognize or assume an Algerianness immanent in one another. Instead, they assemble themselves as Algerians through their common, but discrete, consumption of a narrative of Algerianness, which, on consuming, they differentially reproduce. Solidarity, here, is something similar to parallax, or triangulation. It is a technique rather than a condition, a tactic whereby individuals associate not by sympathizing with one another, or passing for one another, but by consenting to receive, scramble, and retransmit a common narrative.

In thus insisting that the listener enters into solidarity with a collective while simultaneously preserving a measure of difference manifest in his or her unique retransmissions of the filtered voice, Fanon elaborates a theory of agency and collectivity quite different from that outlined in contemporaneous analyses of radio listening. In his examination of radio listening and "collectives," in the Critique of Dialectical Reason (a volume published in 1960, the same year as A Dying Colonialism), Sartre insisted that an audience of radio listeners had anything but a productive relationship to the interpellative authority of the broadcast voice. Instead, Sartre argues, such audiences are characterized by their "passivity":

[The broadcaster's voice] is based on the reciprocity of discourse, and therefore on a human relation, but it is really a reifying relation in which the voice is given as praxis and constitutes the listener as the object of praxis; in short, it is a univocal relation of interiority, similar to that of the organism acting on the material environment, but one in which I, as an inert object, am subjected as inorganic matter to the human work of the voice.

(272)

The determining univocality of the voice, in Sartre's account, is largely a function of what Mark Poster describes as its apprehended "unilinearity."4 The flow of the voice, here, is understood as uninterruptedly, and uniquely, outward. It issues from a central broadcasting center and imprints its signature on a dispersed series of listeners, for whom collective identity is marked as interchange-

4. See Poster's insightful discussion of mid-century theories of "technological determinism" in The Second Media Age (3-23).
ability. For Sartre, the listener is thus a destination and not, as Fanon suggests, a relay, and the voice is uninterrupted and homogenizing. Helpless in their relationship to the univocal authority of that voice, Sartre's listeners are also "impotent" in their relationship to each other. The listener, who for Sartre always listens alone, apprehends the existence of his or her fellow listeners only as an absence, only as an invisible body of "Others." The listener, consequently, can only regard himself or herself as yet another member of the series, as an other acted upon and subordinated to the authority of the voice. As a member of a collective, then, the listener apprehends collectivization as an experience of radical alienation and disarticulation, as an entry into a totalizing and self-effacing bond of impotence.

Sartre's dour reading echoes the pessimism of Theodor Adorno's well-known analysis of modern listening. In his essay "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," Adorno equates radio listening with nothing less than the complete erasure of individual autonomy. This is, he insists, particularly, if paradoxically, true of the "radio ham," a listener whose relationship to the radio appears to be intensely active:

Of all fetishistic listeners, the radio ham is perhaps the most complete. It is irrelevant to him what he hears or even how he hears; he is only interested in the fact that he hears and succeeds in inserting himself, with his private equipment, into the public mechanism, without exerting the slightest influence on it. . . . He lies to himself about the completeness of his subordination to the rule of the reified mechanism.

(293–94)

Crucially, for Adorno agency vanishes in exactly that moment in which Fanon discovers it to reappear—the moment of the listener's insertion into "the public mechanism." The loss of the listener's autonomy (which, as Adorno makes clear earlier in the essay, translates into nothing less than the loss of the individual: "the liquidation of the individual is the real signature of the new musical situation" [276]) occurs at the moment of "insertion" because, for Adorno, that moment marks yet another triumph of the exchange principle. As capital systems of exchange confer an illusory value on the commodity and so draw the commodity into a gener-
alized system of equivalences, so the culture industry, Adorno suggests, inserts the individual within a network of collective identifications (of fellow consumers, fellow watchers, fellow listeners) which renders each individual equivalent, or exchangeable, with another:

The exchange principle, the reduction of human labor to its abstract universal concept of average labor time, has the same origin as the principles of identification. It has its social model in exchange and exchange would be nothing without identification. . . . The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world the obligation to become identical, to become total.

*(Negative Dialectics 152)*

Drawn into this generalized system of identity exchange, Adorno’s listeners submit to the reified and totalizing logic of the culture industry, in effect confusing the reality of massification with the illusion of fellowship. If the various operators of ham radios believe themselves to be in solidarity with one another, then, Adorno’s arguments suggest, that solidarity is of a thoroughly bankrupt, Rortian sort. It is a form of solidarity that can proceed no further than the recognition, or fabrication, of likeness. Solidarity, here, manifests itself as an act of mutual passing which strips the individual of any mark of particularity or difference. It is a pseudo-politics advancing itself under the Enlightenment banners of the Same.

And if the Fanonian listening practices I have been discussing represented no more than a process in which all of the radio’s listeners recognized one another as, and so became, the same, then this solidarity politics would indeed amount to another victory of the exchange principle. But for Fanon listening is not about passing. And it is not about becoming. It is, instead, about making—a *techne* rather than an ontology. Listening and hence solidarity are not about “being alike” or even “hearing alike,” but about differentially “hearing the like” or, indeed, mishearing the like. As a tactical practice of listening, Fanonian solidarity is an interpretive and misinterpretive procedure in which a common canon of referents (the “Voice”) provides the collective point of reference for a heterogeneous interpretive, and misinterpretive, community. If this implies that autonomy is not inimical to collectivity, or, perhaps more
simply, that it is possible to speak of a community of individuals, and hence that the “utopia” Adorno gestures toward in *Negative Dialectics* is potentially realizable (“Utopia would be above identity and above contradiction; it would be a togetherness in diversity” [150–51]), it also indicates that for Fanon the individual exists as something other than a lost concept and as something sturdier than the subject Adorno spent so much of his career mourning. For where Adorno’s “liquidated” individual is essentially a subject without a cultural immune system, a self that can only exist in an absolute cultural quarantine and succumbs the moment that quarantine is broken (in this case by the infiltrations of the radio broadcast), Fanon’s listeners exhibit a hardier selfhood. They do so, however, not by holding themselves apart from the transmissions of the culture industry, but by filtering and rechanneling those transmissions.

The liquidation of the Enlightenment subject, Fanon’s essay suggests, does not so much imply the death of the subject as it demands a reconceptualization of the self as the inserted, and of agency as insertion. Identity and agency, Fanon indicates, survive late-capitalist modernity not by withdrawal but by engagement. This does not mean that identity is unmarked or unaltered as the self is wired into the machinery of culture and history, only that there is something there to be marked and altered, and something there to translate the estranging input. Fanon’s listeners, in this sense, are like Michel de Certeau’s tacticians of the everyday, agents whose subjectivity survives by being perpetually in play, subjects who continuously reproduce what they consume (though, unlike Certeau’s solipsistic tacticians, Fanon’s listeners are playing a team game).

Ironically, Adorno’s own engagements with the radio reveal the existence of precisely these forms of tactical agency. Despite his published condemnations of radio broadcasting, Adorno frequently appeared on the radio (over 180 times between 1950 and 1969, by Henry Pickford’s count) to discuss music, literature, critical theory, education, and politics. And crucially, as Gerd Kadel-

5. Pickford writes: “Whereas he had averred that radio ‘turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same,’ incomplete documentation indicates that during the period between 1950 and 1969 alone Adorno participated in more than 180 radio programs, not including broad-
bach, one of his editors, recalls, in doing so Adorno worried as much about his reception and the attitude of his listeners as he did about the quality of the lectures he read for broadcast:

"I want to be understood by my listeners," was his answer. He thought that I, as "an expert," knew better how to achieve that. It was, surprisingly, of the utmost importance that he be understood even and especially in a medium of the "culture industry." The sound technicians who were responsible for recording him afterwards had to repeat spontaneously and in their own words what he had said, and often there ensued a discussion which was much better and more comprehensible than the lecture he had just read into the microphone. We had to take care that when he came to the radio station there were appropriate sound technicians who were able to justify their answers to him. It was preferable to postpone a session than Adorno having to forego the important discussion afterward with our assistants.

(qtd. in Pickford 250)

The irony of this scene is evident. For in his concern to be understood and his demand that the technicians obediently return the echoes of his discourse to him, Adorno here admits what he has disallowed in his writings: that the moment of transmission does not conclude the broadcast but produces subsequent moments of discussion, debate, and retransmission; that he might have been misunderstood; that his individual listeners might produce faulty interpretations of his address; and that his listeners are not, therefore, automatically subordinated to, and reconstituted as, the voice they have heard. There is a further irony of course. As Adorno's voice becomes The Voice of the radio, and his listeners identify themselves as a potentially misinterpretive community, it is Adorno who wishes to short-circuit the technicians' interpretive autonomy, Adorno who wishes to ensure that they repeat "what he had said," Adorno who now desires that his listeners enter a collective that in Sartre's terms is practico-inert, in Adorno's subject to the de-individuating "principle of exchange." But by acknowledg-

...
While Fanon’s essay describes an unusually clear example of this model of gathering the scattered and scattering the gathered, his listeners are not unique. In his marvelous study *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Kwame Anthony Appiah has taken the rather daring step of defending what he discerns to be an appeal to the “ethical universal” by a number of postcolonial African novelists and of linking this appeal to solidarity politics:

Postrealist writing; postnativist politics; a transnational rather than a national solidarity. . . . Postcoloniality is after all this: and its post, like postmodernism’s, is also a post that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of “more than thirty republics.” But it challenges them in the name of the ethical universal; in the name of humanism, “le gloire pour l’homme.” And on
that ground it is not an ally for Western postmodernism but an agonist, from which I believe postmodernism may have something to learn.

For what I am calling humanism can be provisional, historically contingent, antiessentialist (in other words, postmodern), and still be demanding.

Appiah’s complex argument defies easy summarization, but translated into the idioms of this essay, it seems to me that he is suggesting that writers such as V. Y. Mudimbe and Yambo Ouologuem discover an ethical project for their work by allying themselves neither with an anti-imperial (or neo-imperial) nationalism nor with an anti-occidental nativism but by transmitting the voices of African suffering. Their texts, then, function once more as broadcast centers. What Appiah further reveals is that to construe solidarity in such a way, to suggest that Mudimbe and Ouologuem have in some fashion allied themselves to one another by commonly tuning their voices to the continental echoes of African “suffering,” is to flirt with essentialism. Appiah prefers the words “humanism” and “the ethical universal” and pauses to insist that humanism, here, is in fact “provisional, historically contingent, antiessentialist,” but the very care with which he attempts to divorce this form of humanism from essentialism indicates that the two terms, if not identical, are certainly related. What he appears to be striving for is a politics of solidarity that grounds itself, to borrow a phrase from Paul Gilroy, in an “anti-anti-essentialism.” I think that Fanon’s work can be of some assistance here. For while Appiah is bold enough to admit that he is defending some return to some form of humanism, he desires also to destabilize that “ethical universal” but does not quite manage to indicate how this might be done. The solution, in Fanon’s terms, might be as simple as substituting the metaphors of scrambling and retransmission for the rhetoric of ventriloquizing. Mudimbe and Ouologuem do not merely speak the Voice of Africa; they estrange what they have heard, filter the echoes of suffering through the complex wiring of their narrative machinery, particularize this universal as they lend their voices to fill in the absences in its Voice. For if there is a voice of African
suffering, then surely this voice is as fragmented, dispersed, and fugitive as *The Voice of Fighting Algeria*.

Which is, perhaps, no more than another way of saying that in the work of these novelists, as in Fanon’s Algerian writings, solidarity is antiphony, a technique of call and response, of listening and retransmitting. It is a form of communication that oscillates between and encompasses both the individual and the collective, the particular and the same, the performative and the pedagogical, the scattered and the gathered. In speaking of solidarity as an antiphonic communicative practice, I am, of course, responding not only to Fanon and Appiah but to Paul Gilroy’s call. A scholar more than a little concerned with acts of listening, Gilroy has spent much time in recent years urging his readers to tune in to the sound systems of the black Atlantic. Like Appiah, Gilroy is interested in challenging the reigning orthodoxies of cultural criticism. Discontent with modes of reading that alternately fetishize black culture as essentially unitary or essentially dispersed, he has attempted to construct a model of analysis that simultaneously maps the eternally shifting and historically contingent particularities of black culture and charts the “cultural practices, motifs or political agendas that might connect the dispersed and divided blacks of the new world” (*Black Atlantic* 80). Gilroy identifies his endeavor as an “anti-anti-essentialism,” as a critique of the “changing same,” a mode of analysis devoted neither to “identity” nor “nonidentity” but to both at once. In offering this interpretation of the diasporic, Gilroy wishes not only to plot the links that connect the scattered subjects of the black Atlantic but to discover in those linkages the basis for a politics of affiliation. And above all else, what he discovers to gather the American, Caribbean, African, and British subjects of the black Atlantic, and to ground a “fractal” politics of diasporic solidarity, is a common system of sounds and a recurrent tactics of listening.

Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* is in this sense not so much an inheritor text to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and his writings on the radio as a work which maps at the level of the diasporic what Fanon charted at the level of the colonial and the national, a text, we might suggest, which seems both to have “listened” to Fanon and to have differentially rebroadcast his address. In thus listening
to and retransmitting, re-creating, an antecedent voice, Gilroy demonstrates that the modes of solidarity which can issue from such a tactics of listening are, at the very least, dual, that the forms of solidarity which are at stake in his work are both genealogically performative and analytically constative. The performative, genealogical solidarity is that between Gilroy and Fanon. And, crucially, it is a form of solidarity which does not insist that Gilroy say again what Fanon has said before. It is the discursive enactment of a solidarity which does not imply that intellectual solidarity demands a community of those who speak and think the "same." Rather, intellectual affiliation here constitutes itself in much the same fashion that Fanon indicates a subaltern collectivity produces itself—through listening and re-creating, paying attention and remaking. Solidarity, thus understood, demands both a "common" narrative, canon of experience, or object of attachment and a set of differentiated reproductions of that common thing; a common consent to listen and a collective dissent of interpretation; not so much an identity in difference as a differencing in identity. To my mind, this sort of performative solidarity provides a model (if an admittedly paradoxical "model") for the ways in which intellectual workers might construct their critical "solidarity" with one another.

Such performative intellectual solidarity is doubled in *The Black Atlantic* by the descriptions Gilroy provides of extant diaspora collectivities, collectivities fashioned once again as "listening" communities. Gilroy’s readers are widely conscious of the importance that music plays in his text. What they sometimes fail to recognize is that music is important to him, something that delineates "lines of affiliation and association which take the idea of diaspora beyond its symbolic status as the fragmentary opposite of some imputed racial essence" (95), something that enables "the idea of a diaspora composed of communities that are both similar *and* different" (87), something, that is, around which diaspora solidarities are constructed as differencings within identity, not when music is understood simply as recorded sound but when it is grasped as something realized in an act of listening. As the imperative "Listen!" is to Fanon, so "listening" is to Gilroy—the key act around which both *The Black Atlantic* (as a text) and the black Atlantic (as a diasporic ethnos) are constituted. The instances in which Gilroy
gives his text over to an analysis of the significance of listening are too numerous to cite in their entirety, but these few provide some sense of that significance:

[ Musical] narratives of loss, exile, and journeying . . . have constituted the black Atlantic as a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the manichean logic of binary coding. Even when the network used to communicate its volatile contents has been an adjunct to the sale of black popular music, there is a direct relationship between the community of listeners constructed in the course of using that musical culture and the constitution of a tradition that is redefined here as the living memory of the changing same.

(198)

It is most appropriate that music supplies the best illustrations of these complex dynamics because, in this vernacular, listening to music is not associated with passivity. . . . A relationship of identity is enacted in the way that the performer dissolves into the crowd. Together, they collaborate in a creative process governed by formal and informal, democratic rules. The performer takes on a communicative role comparable to the role of the storyteller which Walter Benjamin mourns because it has departed from a social order that organizes its remembrance in novel ways premised on the fact that the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners has disappeared.

(200)

[ Musical performance] establishes the priority of the personal, intimate, and non-work rhythm of everyday living and uses that focus to institute a community or constituency of active listeners. . . .

(203)

A dance mix, a radio mix, an a capella mix, a dub mix, a jazz mix, a bass mix, and so on. On the most elementary level, these plural forms make the abstract concept of a changing same a living, familiar, reality. . . . The relationship of the listener to the text is changed by the proliferation of different versions. Which one is the original? How does the memory of one version transform the way in which subsequent versions are heard and understood? The components of one mix separated and broken down can be more easily borrowed and blended to create further permutations of meaning.

(106)
I will refrain from going on. The lineaments of Gilroy's argument are clear enough, as is the model of diaspora collectivity that argument envisions, a model not so much similar to Fanon's as one which amplifies the interpretive possibilities fragmentarily present in Fanon's writings, one which seizes on that moment of "active listening" that caught Fanon's attention and makes it the basis for a postnational, anti-essential solidarity politics; a politics of collective, "collaborative," "creative" listening and remixing; a politics performatively realized for Gilroy in the dispersed dance halls of the diaspora, in those radiophonic gathering zones where, through their productive consumption of a common sound, the differentiated subjects of diaspora find an ecstatic way to affiliate themselves with one another without becoming one another.

Borrowing "the sound system culture of the Caribbean and the soul and hip hop styles of black America, as well as techniques like mixing, scratching and sampling," fusing "Punjabi music and language with reggae music and ragamuffin," dance-hall artists, Gilroy suggests, have tuned in to the scattered musics of a post-imperial diaspora, assembled and retransmitted what was of use to them, and, in the process, transformed a wandering series of "underground, alternative, public spaces" into the gathering houses of diaspora (82–83). In the places in which these musics are sampled, mixed, scratched, and danced to, a diasporic identity is constituted neither as a fixed essence nor as an utterly unbound performance but as a changing of the same, as a practice of listening and broadcasting, as a tactical solidarity in which identity mingles with difference. Like Fanon's listeners, these artists and dancers affiliate themselves with one another not by becoming or passing for one another but by commonly consuming and differentially reproducing the echoes of a sound "by both and each heard." To listen thus is, then, not to commit to worshipfulness or passivity but to listen actively, critically, tactically—to filter the heard through the complex system of relays that wire the hearer's particularity, and then, like Fanon's listeners, to transmit what has been heard, to scatter the sounds that have gathered a community of listeners in anticipation of a subsequent moment of gathering.

Lest we become too ecstatic, however, some cautions are warranted. The British sociologist Les Back has recently analyzed...
dance-hall culture very much in the terms of Gilroy’s arguments. He too discovers the dance floor to be “a space that links social collectivities, producing cultures of inter-being and mutual identification” (226). Borrowing a concept from Deleuze and Guattari, Back identifies these dance-hall cultures as “intermezzo cultures,” as cultures of a “connective supplementarity—ragga plus England plus Indian plus Kingston plus Birmingham” (227). This is appealing, but as Back reminds us, the literal meaning of “intermezzo” is “a short dramatic musical performance serving as a connecting link between the main divisions of a large musical work” (226). While Back is primarily interested in the ways in which the dance hall spatializes the intermezzo, the temporary quality of this connecting temporal link must also be recognized. Imperial and post-imperial narratives are littered with scenes in which, for one brief moment, apparent cultural antagonists affiliate themselves with one another. Fielding rises in the English club at Chandrapore to defend Dr. Aziz against charges of rape. Edward Thompson pens The Other Side of the Medal in a desperate attempt to convince his countrymen that England and India can be friends. Belfast, in Conrad’s The Nigger of the “Narcissus,” tends to James Wait in his dying. Jean Rhys’s Tia and Antoinette construct a brief community of girlish play. None of these intimacies, however, survive the moments of crisis which permit them. As the banalities of the everyday replace the momentariness of the critical, the echoing cadences of Aziz’s last words to Fielding insist that the exceptional is not the rule: “Not here, not yet.” The celebrants of dance-hall solidarities, intermezzo collectivities, and tactical affiliations—and my own arguments are certainly implicated here—must wonder whether on leaving the dance floor or switching off the radio such “fractal” sodalities can maintain their “collective supplementarity” as they reencounter the “main divisions” of the everyday.

Gilroy, to be sure, is well aware of the more than accidental link that connects the problem of solidarity to the nature of temporality, the tactics of listening to the imperatives of timing. Indeed, as much as the dispersed productions and reproductions of black Atlantic musical culture permit him to outline a spatial blueprint of diasporic connectivity, a diagram of a diaspora conceived as nothing so much as a transatlantic listening machine, that same devotion
to the sounded and the resounded underpins a reading of diaspora as a complex timing device, a thinking of solidarity as that which constructs itself not only across space but over, and through, time. Listening, he recognizes, is both production and reproduction, a simultaneity with what is heard and a belatedness toward it. If this is always so, if hearing is always at once contemporaneous with and subsequent to the heard, then, for Gilroy, this double time of the acoustic is particularly and specifically true of black Atlantic listening practices. In part this is true because these two, overlapping "moments" of listening dramatize the two, overlapping temporal axes that constitute the deep structure of his conception of a black Atlantic communitas, the synchronic and diachronic axes of similarity and difference that undergird his argument. When he treats the black Atlantic as a synchronic, cross-oceanic listening ensemble, as a collectivity coincident in time but scattered across space, Gilroy's stress is on the imperative of difference, the productive, vernacular, performative "differencings" through which the component elements of a diasporic totality articulate their antiessential nonidentity with one another. When he shifts his attention to a diachronic coding of totality, however, when he attends to the ways in which a black Atlantic listening community constructs itself through the repeated, serialized resoundings of a common narrative of "loss, exile, and journeying," Gilroy's stress is on the imperative of similarity, the recurrent, repetitive acts of "identification" through which a diasporic collectivity constructs its continuity with itself over time. The synchronic axis of difference and the diachronic axis of similarity are not, however, in any sense disjunct. They intersect in the complex temporality of listening, in that double time of "active listening" to the sound systems of the "changing same."

And it is this temporal hybridity of diasporic listening that contains the key to the answer to the problem raised above, the problem of the brevity or unsustainability of a solidarity discovered in the passing beat of the "intermezzo." Such intermezzo solidarities

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6. This "double time" of the diasporic is of course somewhat akin to that "double time" of the national, that split time of the pedagogical and the performative, central to Homi K. Bhabha's analysis of the temporality of the nation; see "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in The Location of Culture (139–70).
clearly play themselves out along a synchronic axis of differencing within identity and as such imply not only a dominant temporality (a temporality of the simultaneous, a temporality, indeed, rather like that “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence” which governs those “mass ceremonies” of simultaneous consumption central to Benedict Anderson’s account of national consciousness [31]) but a signature affect—an affect of ecstasy. But if ecstatic listening is to the cultivation of diasporic collectivity what newspaper reading is to national consciousness (or, more precisely, the analogue of the sublime pleasure the reader feels on becoming “aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others” [39]), then, like such reading practices, ecstatic listening articulates at best an episodic, intermittent consciousness of a cross-diasporic “connective supplementarity.” If that consciousness is to survive the fleeting moment of its happening, it demands both a more enduring temporality and a more sustained affect. And it is precisely that more prolonged temporality and that more enduring affect which emerge from the double time of diasporic listening as, for Gilroy, the synchronic time of ecstatic listening finds itself endlessly crosscut by the haunting diachronic temporality and the melancholy affect of traumatic listening.

The trauma that accompanies black Atlantic listening practices, the trauma to which Gilroy’s communities of listeners repeatedly attend, is at once specific and, in a very terrible sense, exemplary, something both particular to itself and, by the close of Gilroy’s text, something that gestures beyond itself to a larger structure by which it is encompassed and which it instantiates. It is the trauma of racial terror, the trauma of the transatlantic slave trade, the trauma of the middle passage, the trauma of a repeated history of coerced migration, violent unsettlement, cultural upheaval. And it is the trauma of modernity. Black Atlantic musical culture, Gilroy insists, is haunted by the echoes of that quite specific and paradigmatically modern trauma, sound-tracked by the echoes of a long “proximity to terror,” line-noted by the echoes of a terror that frequently leaves its trace as a wound or a gap in the musical register, an acoustic scar on the surface of a vocal text, a serial tearing of the fabric of sound as the terror of “what cannot be spoken” is spoken through
“the screams, wails, grunts, scatting, and wordless singing that appears in all these black cultures... [these modes of expression] indicative of a struggle to extend communication beyond words... [and to comment] on the inadequacy of language for expressing certain truths” (There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack 211–12). Gilroy’s diasporic sound system, no less than Fanon’s Voice of Fighting Algeria, is thus torn, fractured, broken, sutured together around silences, gaps of unspeakability, echoes of damage. Where for Fanon, however, the gaps in the transmission are what license the interpretive creativity of the listener, for Gilroy they are both that which enables this interpretive agency and, however counterintuitively, that which secures the survival of this recurrently rebroadcast sound as over and over again a dispersed array of diasporic listening communities find themselves gathered and interpellated by the enduring, haunting cadences of this traumatic record. It is for this reason, I believe, that it makes sense to think of Gilroy’s diaspora theory not only as a theory of cultural affiliation and exchange but as a trauma theory. And it is also for this reason that I want to conclude this essay by examining some of the ways in which the experience of trauma and the structures of traumatic listening can be said to sustain diasporic solidarities and to secure their endurance. For what links all these terms, what grounds the interarticulations of solidarity, trauma, diaspora, and endurance, is, once again, the practice of listening.

Contemporary trauma theory, like most modes of critical theorizing, has developed a canon of key texts, central among them Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Moses and Monotheism. In the hands of Cathy Caruth and Jacques Derrida (whose recent Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression demonstrates deconstruction’s relation to trauma theory rather more convincingly than Spectres of Marx establishes its fidelity to Marxism), Freud’s eccentric meditation on Moses has become perhaps the central text for trauma theory. Moses and Monotheism assumes that role not because of what Freud has to say in it about the historical Moses or the origins of monotheism, but because of the methodological shift upon which the latter portions of the book depend, the shift that permits Freud
to begin to read trauma not as an individual but as a collective phenomenon, not as a biographical but as a historical condition. The problem that occasions this maneuver is in many respects quite simple, at least in its formulation: how does memory, particularly repressed memory, survive across generations? What is the secret of its endurance, its persistence? How, most specifically, does the memory of some act of violence, some experience of wounding that cannot literally be remembered by a contemporary generation (because its members have neither personally witnessed nor experienced that traumatizing event), nevertheless imprint itself on a collective consciousness as something that cannot be forgotten? The traumatic event in question is, for Freud, the murder of Moses. But for Caruth and other trauma theorists, the specificity of that event is incidental to the general structure of memory Freud investigates, the structure of the unforgettability of that which cannot be remembered. Nor is it Freud’s way of accounting for the phenomenon of transgenerational memory that accounts for the importance of his text to trauma theory. For the argument which permits him to shift from the individual to the collective is essentially tautological. In either case, “trauma” is simply his word for that mode of remembrance that accompanies an event that cannot consciously be recollected, an event inaccessible as anything other than the unforgettability of the unremembered. To suggest, as Freud does, that the theory of individual trauma explains the persistence of unremembered memory within a collectivity is thus both to recapitulate for phylogeny what has already been asserted at the level of ontogeny and to confuse description for explanation, to offer the “fact” of a condition as the cause of its existence. “Trauma” is thus less the solution to the problem of the inherited memory of the unremembered than the word for that problem. Again, however, this does not lessen the value of Freud’s text for contemporary trauma theory, precisely because it is as a descriptive rather than as an explanatory theory, as a poetics rather than as a diagnostics of collective remembrance that, I believe, trauma theory validates itself. What this implies is that, as is so often the case with Freud, it is the interrelation of the dominant and subordinate terms, figures, and metaphors of his system that demands further attention, that it is as a network of tropes that Freud’s trauma theory has something to teach us.
That network of tropes, articulated in *Moses and Monotheism* and brilliantly rearticulated, developed, and refined in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, contains among it primary relays and links the definition and redefinition of trauma as repetition, persistence, survival, inheritance, tradition, belatedness, transmission, and endurance. And as Caruth in particular makes clear, it is the act of listening that activates this system of relays, listening that sets these terms in active relation to one another, listening that links the individual and the collectivity to a traumatic memory that is at once a memory of the unremembered, a repetition compulsion, a persistent return of the repressed, an experience of belatedness, a form of inheritance, an unchosen but unrefusable transmission, and the secret of endurance. The centrality of listening to traumatic memory emerges in at least two forms from Caruth's reading of Freud. The first of those forms, and the most obvious, is performative. For when they come to describe the traumatic moment, both Freud and Caruth figure that moment as a moment of listening: as the secret moments of Jewish listening to the repressed oral tradition of Moses' murder; as the moment in which, in one of his dreams, Freud encounters a sleeping man listening, in his sleep, to the voice of his dead son calling to him, "Father, don’t you see, I’m burning’; as the moment that Freud culls from Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* in which Tancred hears the voice of his beloved Clorinda—whom he has unwittingly slain—calling to him from a tree he has slashed with his sword, thus, unknowingly, wounding her again. That final scene, that scene of a voice speaking from a wound, is the first scene in Caruth’s text, the paradigmatic scene of her reading of trauma as an extended parable of “the wound and the voice.” Indeed, it is not so much her text’s paradigmatic “scene” as its own foundational moment of listening, the doubly overheard moment from which she develops her theory of trauma as a theory of ethical listening:

[T]he wound that speaks is not precisely Tancred’s own but the wound, the trauma, of another. . . . trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound. . . .

This listening to the address of another. . . . this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken . . . constitutes the new mode of reading and of listening
that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand.

(8–9)

As Caruth’s parable and Freud’s examples, particularly his allegory of the sleeping father, imply, the relation of trauma to listening is thus more than performatively contingent. It is not just that the nature of trauma can be conveniently dramatized through instances of traumatic listening. Rather, listening is for both Freud and Caruth constitutive of a traumatic mode of reproduction, at once foundational to that technology by which trauma is “transmitted” and central to its rearticulation as an ethical disposition or receptivity, a mode of solidarity. “Father, don’t you see, I’m burning,” the voice speaks, and speaks exactly. For the father can precisely not see, only hear. He cannot see because what distinguishes trauma from other modes of experience is exactly the unseen nature of the unforgettable but unremembered event, its invisibility, its inaccessibility to visual inspection. Trauma, Caruth and Freud indicate, communicates itself as something not seen but heard, something belatedly and misdirectionally transmitted to an ear which catches what the eye failed to see. The traumatic event thus secures, ensures, survives itself as something that should have been seen but was instead heard, or, indeed, overheard—as a belated echo, an unchosen transmission, a persistent rumor, a jammed tradition.

To speak of trauma as a tradition is, of course, to join Freud in examining its transgenerational persistence, but it is also to recover that definition of “tradition” latent within the etymology of the term—a definition of tradition not as an inert object, thing, or set of practices, but as the act of “handing over” or “relaying”—and to begin to address trauma not only as that which survives, endures, or persists but as that which enables the survival, endurance, and persistence of those to whom trauma is transmitted, those who, in turn, relay it, relate it to a community of inheritors who, in their turn, transmit what they have heard. It is thus, also, to begin to see the relation of Moses and Monotheism (a text which, by its close, is less an investigation of a murder than an examination of the mystery of Jewish survival) to Gilroy’s writings and the problems of diasporic listening, solidarity, and endurance.

“How have the Jews survived?” Freud asks with increasing ur-
gancy as his text grows, as it encounters itself over the course of its serial writing and rewriting and the drama of his 1938 flight from Vienna to London. “How have the Jews survived?” Moses and Monotheism demands to know, as it recurrently confronts the parallel mystery of its own persistence and the persistence of that science of psychoanalysis for which it becomes an emblem, even as the uncertainty of the text’s fate becomes Freud’s placeholder for the open question of the continued, post-Nazi survival of the Jews. “How have the Jews survived?” the text asks, asking with that question yet another, more pressing, question: And how will they continue to survive? (And linking that question to yet another: And psychoanalysis?)

The text contains three answers. How have the Jews survived? As a chosen people, assured of the fact of their own chosenness. As a people of the book and its interpretation. As a traumatized people. This last is Freud’s most original and most controversial answer. For by it Freud suggests that trauma, suffering, wounded-ness not only leave their persistent, repetitive trace upon the psyche and memory but secure the persistence of memory, and with memory, identity. It is in this sense that Moses and Monotheism’s most important successor texts can be said to include not only Caruth’s Unclaimed Experience and other works of contemporary trauma theory, but a novel such as Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and through Beloved, Gilroy’s Black Atlantic, a text which, in its concluding chapter, explicitly identifies its own “conception of time” and “historical memory” with that dramatized in Morrison’s novel (221–23). Walter Benn Michaels has recently discussed some of the ways in which Beloved and discourses on Jewish remembrance (particularly those attending to the remembrance of the Holocaust) inform a common theory of history, traumatic memory, and identity construction that he understands to be characteristic of the hauntological historicism of our contemporary moment. The phrase from Morrison’s novel that Michaels settles on as definitive of this haunted knowledge of history and identity—a phrase whose epistemological validity it is, to be sure, Michaels’s self-appointed task to dispute—seems, to me, equally central to Freud and Gilroy. In all three cases—for Morrison, Freud, and Gilroy alike—the essential problem is that of determining how the mem-
ory of a traumatic past survives and discloses itself, in Morrison’s phrase, to a “you who never was there,” a contemporary “you” noncontemporary with an event that nevertheless survives the moment of its “happening” as a traumatic inheritance, tradition, relay, transmission. How does that past survive and address itself to that belated you who never was there? If in no other way, then as a relayed, wounded, fractured sound, as I have been suggesting, as something overheard rather than seen, as a moment of traumatic listening. It survives as something like one of those repeated moments in which Morrison’s Denver, unable to witness the trauma of her in-flight-from-slavery birth, inherits that past as the story she presses from her mother’s lips, as something she can only hear, not see. Persisting in this way, the traumatic record, Freud, Morrison, and Gilroy would also seem to agree, is, paradoxically, the very thing that secures the persistence of its listening communities. How have and will the Jews survive, Freud demands to know? By tuning in to the echoes of this “distorted” “word of mouth” and marking themselves as its community of receivers, inheritors, and interpreters (86). How do Gilroy’s black Atlantic listening communities survive the fleeting, intermezzo moments of their antiphonal solidarity? By serially remarking the degree to which their active, ecstatic practices of listening are crosscut by the imperatives of traumatic listening. The traumatic, it must be stressed, does not thus foreclose the ecstatic. It is, indeed, that very thing upon which what I have been calling the ecstatic goes to work; that “piercing, excruciating” transmission whose very brokenness is the ground for a subsequent act of reinterpretation and retransmission; that unremitting, melancholy “same” endlessly and euphorically caught in the midst of its “changing.”

Let me close then with one last work, a work that seems in many respects to have modeled its knowledge of the melancholy and the survivability of diaspora, the trauma and the promise of solidarity latent within this entirely specific and utterly paradigmatic experience of modernity, on that tactics of listening I have been discussing. The work I have in mind is Caryl Phillips’s Crossing the River, a novel too complex to discuss here in its entirety and so one which I will do little more than cite, one, indeed, whose epilogue I will offer as this essay’s concluding parable of what it might mean
to conceive of the black Atlantic as a cross-Atlantic listening ensemble, a "sound system" gathering within itself the scattered acoustics of the diaspora:

For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. To voices in the streets of Charleston. . . . I have listened. To reggae rhythms of rebellion and revolution dipping through the hills and valleys of the Caribbean. I have listened. To the saxophone player on a wintry night in Stockholm. A long way from home. For two hundred and fifty years I have listened. . . . To the haunting voices. Singing: Mercy, Mercy Me. (The Ecology.) Insisting: Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong. Declaring: Brothers and Friends. I am Toussaint L'Ouverture, my name is perhaps known to you. Listened to: Papa Doc. Baby Doc. Listened to voices hoping for: Freedom. Democracy. Singing: Baby, baby. Where did our love go? Samba. Calypso. Jazz. Jazz. . . . I have listened to the voice that cried: I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have listened. . . .

(236–37)

Frantz Fanon's name and words do not make this list, this medley of voices, speeches, musics, this mix of soundings and resoundings. And perhaps that is unfortunate. Because, as I have suggested, Fanon was one of the first to teach us what might be at stake in such a long, varied history of listening, what kind of politics, what understanding of "brotherhood," what promise of survival might be predicated on just such a persistent, active practice of listening. But perhaps the absence of his name and his words is, after all, just right. For it is, as Fanon understood, in the gaps in the record, in the vacant place where something, perhaps, should have been but was not, that such a soundscript encounters the secret of its own vitality, in its fragmentation and incompleteness that it speaks its invitation to an audience for whom the real task of reconstruction will then begin.

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WORKS CITED


