THE SCHOOLING OF GESTURAL LISTENING

Laura Feibush Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg

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The pianist Glenn Gould was known throughout his career as a brilliant interpreter of Johann Sebastian Bach and as an innovative recording artist, but also for his unusual behaviors during performances. Instead of performing the repertoire and otherwise remaining contained and silent, as classical pianists are generally expected to do, Gould was famous for gesturing with one hand while playing with the other, and even humming along with the music as he played. Often attributed to eccentricity or isolation, Gould's singing and gesturing can also be thought of as a deep, multisensory involvement in the act of listening. Gould's listening is not still and silent, as listening is often thought to be; rather, it is lively and engaged. At times, Gould's movements and vocalizations seem not just to follow along with the musical phrases, but actually to draw them forth. His voluble, fully embodied listening does not just receive or follow alongside the music but seems to generate it, allow for it, make space for it.

While they may be much more subtle than Gould, people engage in responsive and visible listening in many parts of their everyday lives, especially in communicative situations where they are in conversation with others or forming part of an audience. I call this phenomenon "gestural listening," which I define as all of listening's embodied manifestations: from nodding and non-verbal backchanneling to note-taking and motions of the hands and body, including posture and choices about where to sit. Gestural listening resists the notion that listening is invisible, playing out only internally. Often assumed to be a silent activity, Gould's listening shows us that this is not really the case: instead, his listening is audible and visible, accompanied by vocalizing and embodied responsiveness. In fact, readers may share the sense that the gestural listening of a conversation partner, or of an audience, may have profound effects on what gets said and how; that is, gestural listening can shape rhetorical possibilities and outcomes. I have argued elsewhere that gestural listening should be understood as a bona fide rhetorical force, flipping a traditional rhetorical orientation from the impact of speakers upon audiences towards the ways in which listeners themselves exert influence and shape the conditions of discourse (Feibush).

In this article, I attend to gestural listening's early development in the lives of students: how it is used, shaped, and then evaluated by schooling. I aim to show how gestural listening is first leveraged to help students gain literacy, then disciplined into overly restrained embodied norms, eventually fusing with notions of classroom management and student attitude. To illustrate this trajectory, I

draw upon a 2002 film called *Être et Avoir* directed by Nicolas Philibert, as well as the work of early literacy figures such as Marie Clay and Megan Watkins. Throughout, I argue that gestural listening's relegation to an amalgamated landscape of "good" or "correct" conduct in school inordinately affects students who bring elements of neurodiversity to the classroom. I investigate this phenomenon by highlighting—with permission—the writing of two students with self-disclosed ADHD diagnoses, and by engaging with scholars of neurodiversity and disability such as M. Remi Yergeau, Shannon Walters, and Thomas Brown. By reminding readers of gestural listening's affordances in early literacy acquisition, and its subsequent flattening by the process of schooling, I ultimately aim to render it visible to educators once again, especially to those working in secondary and college environments where listening's rich gestural register is often paved over, smoothed into limited perceptions of "correct" conduct.

A LITANY FOR GESTURAL LISTENING

Acts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening happen through deeply intertwined sensory channels. The role of listening, however, emerges as uniquely important, especially in early literacy acquisition, in the way that it bridges the auditory and the verbal, helping children move from speech to reading and writing. And yet, of the four literacy skills, it is listening that suffers the most under cultural perceptions, languishing under prevailing assumptions about its passiveness, invisibility, and silence.

My research into gestural listening has given me reason to challenge perceptions of listening as passive, invisible, or silent. Here, I offer my findings in the form of a "litany" for gestural listening, by which I mean not a lengthy or repetitive list, but a set of petitions, ideas that have emerged time and again from my investigation into gestural listening that push us to conceptualize listening in different ways—a new set of listening assumptions. Through this litany, I also aim to sketch out how gestural listening fits within strains of rhetoric and composition scholarship that deal mainly with sound and listening, embodiment and gesture, and disability, as well as adjacent fields like communication and sound studies, among others. The concepts here set the stage for a fuller understanding of gestural listening in school settings, which I later examine in more detail.

"Acts of reading, writing, speaking, and listening happen through deeply intertwined sensory channels."

Let the litany begin: *Gestural listening captures listening's dual material and metaphorical qualities.* Listening is often contrasted against hearing—the latter a simple reception, while the former denotes a deeper understanding or interpretation. In the same vein, listening is often invoked to carry a metaphorical meaning—as in the case of a National Wildlife Foundation headline that asks: "Animals are Talking—Are You Listening? (McNamara)." But positioning hearing and listening as opposites, or as separate, oversimplifies the act of listening, giving hearing over to the physical reception of sound while listening associates mainly with meaning and interpretation. In *Sonic Warfare*, however, Steve Goodman teaches readers that listening is always a physical experience in addition to being an

act of cognition, decipherment, or interpretation: "Before the activation of causal or semantic, that is, cognitive listening," Goodman writes, "the sonic is a phenomenon of contact and displays, through an array of autonomic responses, a whole spectrum of affective powers" (10). "Sound," he continues, is able to "caress the skin, to immerse, to soothe, beckon, and heal, to modulate brain waves" (10). Invoking this "array" of autonomic and affective responses the body has to sound, Goodman asserts that there may in fact be no hard line between hearing and listening, and that listening recruits the whole body immediately. Gestural listening acknowledges the dual physical and cognitive nature of listening, its joint material and metaphorical dimensions. This conceptual blur between hearing and listening lends itself to the next item in the litany.

Gestural listening affirms sensorial fluidity. Recent scholarship in rhetoric and composition, as well as adjacent fields like cultural studies, bespeaks an interest in a fulsome understanding of the sensorium as it pertains to rhetorical praxis. Steph Ceraso argues in *College English* for a multi-sensory understanding of listening, coining the term "multimodal listening," which refers to listening that engages the whole body kinesthetically, not just the ears. "Thoughtfully engaging and composing with sound," Ceraso writes, "requires listeners to attend to how sound works with and against other sensory modes to shape their embodied experiences" (103). In *The Ethical Soundscape*, Charles Hirschkind examines the practice of listening to cassette-recorded sermons in Cairo, and in doing so, finds similarly that acts of listening in this context are fully embodied across a sensorium that is not rigidly differentiated. Hirschkind notes that in his study of sermon audition, he "view[s] the body as a kind of fluid medium, one animated and traversed by an ensemble of interlinking movements: the gestures of the hands, the face and eyes, the nerves, muscles, and breath that . . . form the sensitive heart of an ethical listener" (103). My formulation of gestural listening embraces the idea of the body as "fluid medium," and of listening as happening across an "ensemble" of senses. Thinking of listening not as "merely" receptive and internal but as an act expressed through the body likely makes the next petition in this litany feel like a natural next step.

Gestural listening resonates with understandings of listening that acknowledge its active and generative aspects. While it may have been Carl Rogers's 1987 formulation of "active listening" that put listening on the map of scholarly attention, it was Krista Ratcliffe's 2006 *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* that definitively repositioned listening as a vital dimension of rhetorical production. There, Ratcliffe conceptualizes rhetorical listening as a capacity that can be intentionally enacted: "As a trope for interpretive invention," she writes, "rhetorical listening signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (17). Listening, for Ratcliffe, is a practice that creates rhetorical possibilities. In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Cheryl Glenn, too, highlights the rhetorical generativity of listening as she explains how invitational rhetoric, an idea first put forward by Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin in 1995, "asks only that a listener listen, and in response that the rhetor listen—both sides taking turns at being productively silent" (156). In Glenn's turn of phrase here, when listeners listen, they are not passive but rather productive. The productive silence on each side "transforms the rhetorical discipline from one of persuasion, control, and discipline . . . to a moment of inherent worth, equality, and empowered action" (Glenn 156). Listening's energies can be felt in these re-readings of listening in the rhetorical

tradition, but they are not always cooperative in nature, as the next litany item shows.

Gestural listening is often associated with performances of obedience or respectfulness, but those are not its only manifestations. Investigating the role of auditory experience in Enlightenment America, Leigh Eric Schmidt notes how the gestural listening of congregants in early American congregations signaled respect on various levels: "Being a good hearer (by Anglican and Reformed standard) involved the whole body in a series of '*reverent Postures*' of humility that signified deference to God and, necessarily, to ministers as well" (74). Ministers knew that "the routine deferences of their auditories—the bodily habits of silent attention, the '*well-composed Countenances*, and *becoming Gestures*' of reverent concentration—were a constitutive part of their own standing" (Schmidt 74). Congregants in early American churches performed respectful listening in the form of "well-composed countenances" and the body language of humility, but as Glenn Gould demonstrates, the act of listening is not always silent or still; nor is it always acquiescent. Indeed, I have previously written about how resistant gestural listening can be found in the body language of protest or even the sulking of disgruntled students in class (Feibush). Megan Laverty illustrates one such resistantly listening student: "A student who refrains from 'speaking her mind' may indict her more powerful teachers by comporting herself in a condemnatory manner with raised eyebrows, offhand asides, and curt speech" (70).

Laverty's student makes a "statement" with her gestural listening, although she might not be described as a "good" listener by her teacher. That leads us to the next petition in the litany: *What constitutes "good" gestural listening in any environment is culturally and historically situated, not a natural "given," but something taught and learned.* While gestural listening carries strong associations with quiet obedience or acquiescence, "right" listening is context-specific and can be seen to change over time. This variability suggests that "good" listening is not an innate or given, but rather taught and learned through a process of socialization. Of the Muslim sermon listeners that he studies, Hirschkind emphasizes a process of learning to become the right kind of listener, "properly tuned": "For such a person (properly tuned, body and soul), auditory reception involves the flesh, back, chest, and heart—in short the entire moral person as a unity of body and soul. To listen properly . . . is to engage in a performance, the articulated gestures of a dance" (76). In a vision of "good" listening with a different interplay of reception and response, Cheryl Genn's *Unspoken* quotes an interview with Todd Epaloose, who discusses norms of interaction among the Zuni Pueblo. Epaloose notes: "As far as conversations go, we tend to listen more first and tend to be silent until we totally understand that the person talking to you is done" (Glenn 119). With a range of "good" gestural listening behaviors in mind, what counts as correct listening in school can be seen not as naturally "right" but as a set of learned preferences that affords students membership in the classroom if they can perform them.

So who is willing and able to perform "correct" gestural listening in the classroom? This question becomes particularly important when we learn that *gestural listening varies across dimensions of identity.* Given that gestural listening can take a variety of forms depending on where it is performed, it should come as no surprise that gestural listening differs across people. To illustrate this, Krista Ratcliffe turns to the linguist Deborah Tannen, who describes how men and women often perform listening in different ways. Tannen argues that "U.S. culture socializes men and women to listen

differently: Men often listen by challenging speakers to a verbal duel to determine who knows more and who is quicker on his feet; women often listen by smiling, nodding, asking questions, and providing encouraging verbal cues (yes, uh huh, is that right?, hmmm)" (qtd in Glenn 21). Gestural listening indexes gendered cultural preferences regarding likeability, warmth, and competitiveness, among others. Its variability is not limited to gender; it also extends to aspects of identity such as ability and neurodiversity. Referring to herself as a "deaf/hard-of-hearing" person, Brenda Jo Brueggemann describes the difficulty she experiences with appearing to listen the "right" way:

> I tend to control conversations . . . I ramble, chatter . . . It is safer this way: if I don't shut up, if I keep talking, then voila, I don't have to listen. And if I don't have to listen, I don't have to struggle, don't have to ask for repeats, don't have to assume any of the various appearances that I and other deaf/hard-of-hearing people often appear as—stupid, aloof, disapproving, suspicious. (93)

Here, Brueggemann points out how appearing to listen in the "right" way is an important social ability, with real social stakes. An easy performance of "correct" listening is not available to Brueggemann due to her hearing impairment; rather than trying to listen and risk appearing as "stupid, aloof, disapproving, [or] suspicious," she avoids the listening role by "controlling conversations," an approach she describes as feeling "safer." A gestural listening performance that is outside a normative bracket, it seems, renders Brueggemann socially vulnerable. In what follows, I will engage more deeply with the work of M. Remi Yergeau, among others, as I explore how gestural listening varies across ability.

The way non-normative gestural listening is often penalized in social and academic settings should increase our curiosity about how it tends to be taught and learned in school environments. With gestural listening's litany hanging in the air, I move in the next section to how I will approach my study of gestural listening in school.

WAYS OF KNOWING ABOUT GESTURAL LISTENING IN SCHOOL

As a college professor, my work provides me with ample opportunities to observe and interact with college students. As education goes, the college environment is just the tip of the iceberg, however; students arrive on campus with a lifetime of prior experiences in classroom settings. In order to enrich my discussion of gestural listening in prior years of schooling, I turn to literature about early literacy and grade school. In early literacy studies, the 1970's and 80's saw a wave of new scholarship that redefined prevailing ideas about how children come into literacy (Teale; Sulzby, Barnhart, and Hiesima; Harste, Woodword, and Burke). Most prominent among these voices is Marie Clay, the New Zealand literacy researcher and psychologist, who developed the Reading Recovery program, widely adopted in the second half of the 20th century in schools across New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Canada, and Britain. The legacy of Clay's Reading Recovery program is a troubled one, with critics particularly noting Clay's emphasis on having children focus on "decoding" text to the exclusion of a phonics, or a "sounding-it-out" approach (Hanford). Nevertheless, one of Clay's other

legacies consists of moving the field from the idea of "reading readiness" in youngsters—the view that reading instruction should only begin when a child reaches a particular maturation point—to the framework of "emergent literacy," which holds that children begin acquiring the preliminary skills that enable reading in a continuous, organic way in early childhood, even before entering school (Morrow, Morrow and Strickland). More recently, Australian educator and researcher Megan Watkins also focuses on the juncture of early schooling and embodiment, bringing readers' attention to the way primary education shapes body and mind in tandem. Watkins, writing *Discipline and Learn* in 2012, furthers a "post-progressive" pedagogical approach, aimed at cultivating a kind of positive discipline in young learners that cultivates their capacity for literate practices like reading and writing. Both writers invite a reconceptualization of categories like active and passive in classroom settings, which lends itself to reconceptualizing listening.

At the beginning of the next two sections, I draw on scenes from Nicolas Philibert's 2002 film, *Être et Avoir*, which takes place over the course of a year at a rural elementary school in the French countryside. There, a small class of students, ranging in age from four to eleven, are led by a gentle, bespectacled teacher named Georges Lopez. *Être et Avoir* is documentary-like, focusing not on actors, but on Lopez, his local students, and their families. The film's "slice of life" approach foregrounds the small, daily efforts at discipline and direction that comprise elementary schooling for the minds and bodies of children. I include moments from the film at the beginning of sections to provide living, idiosyncratic examples of ideas that the article handles, invitations to explore how school shapes the language activities of students.

In a later section of this article, I draw on an aspect of composition studies that has a special history at the University of Pittsburgh: the analysis of student writing. Most closely associated with the work of David Bartholomae, this approach centers the voices of students not just as novice, not-presentable-yet writers, but as producers of intellectually rich texts that reflect the special dynamics and challenges of student writing, like developing a written voice and claiming the authority to make an argument. Contemporary research on ADHD and disability, especially from Thomas Brown and Shannon Walters, provides scholarly perspectives on neuroatypical and non-normatively-abled individuals. The inclusion of student essays, however, uniquely enriches our understanding of our students' lived experiences of schooling in their own words. The students whose work I include here can be seen to navigate their roles as student writers with skill and courage: in writing about their early schooling experiences, they change the dynamic of their classroom environment in our own course together, challenging me to see them as learners in new and different ways. I have received written permission from both writers whose essays I include in this article, and the names of these two former students have been changed to protect their anonymity.

GESTURAL LISTENING AS RESOURCE FOR LITERACY ACQUISITION

In a scene from Être et Avoir*, a boy of four or five named Axel is seated at a low table, reading aloud. His teacher, Mr. Lopez, sits beside him. The boy reads a few words before something catches his*

interest across the room. Lopez gently prompts: "Where's our book?" Axel smiles sheepishly. "Here," he replies, tapping the workbook. "So look here," Lopez says. Axel sounds out the words he doesn't recognize. Lopez supplies a word from time to time, but only after Axel has tried the first syllable, testing the word aloud with his ear. As he reads, Axel touches the text with both hands, alternately tracing the lines of text and holding the page in place.

In this scene, viewers get the sense of how Axel reads with his whole sensorium: his eyes, ears, and even his hands. The sensory channels of hearing, seeing, and touching are all fully in use and generously overlap as he directs his eyes to the book, touches the words with his hands, and sounds out the beginning of each new word, listening for sounds he recognizes from his own daily vocabulary. Axel's listening, here, is gestural: it is not an act that is rigidly separated from speaking, seeing, and touching—rather, it is richly embodied and multimodal. A sensorially-fluid approach to reading helps Axel match combinations of letters with meaningful sounds that he recognizes from speech. In a later scene, a student of nine or ten works to write down the words of a dictation. During a pause, he mouths the words of a sentence read aloud a moment before, using his mouth and ear to help him arrive at correct spelling and grammar. Both students in the descriptions above are developing phonological awareness, an important skill in learning to read. Already, we can see how gestural listening is often leveraged, even celebrated, as a means for helping children acquire literacy.

In her late-career book, *By Different Paths to Common Outcomes*, psychologist and researcher Marie Clay describes phonological awareness in a way that highlights its entwined, multichannel nature: the intermingled listening, sounding out, reading, and writing that we see at work in the young students above. Nevertheless, it is really the role of listening that emerges as particularly important. Clay writes: "Writing forces learners to search their speech for the acoustic units that count in printed language so that they can represent them in writing" (146). In "searching their speech," children essentially listen to their own speech in order to help them recognize "acoustic units," thus gaining a foothold into reading and writing. Clay continues in a way that emphasizes listening, writing: "A child trying to write an unknown word, or literate adults trying to write down names they have never seen in writing *find ways of analyzing the flow of sounds* in words" (146, italics mine). When children or adults "find ways" to "analyze the flow of sounds," they listen in an embodied, gestural way, in a way that recruits the mouth, the voice, and even the hand in acts of writing. Gestural listening, then, takes on a crucial function in facilitating the movement from speech to writing and reading. Accordingly, early educators regularly make use of its sensorial and cognitive richness.

Gestural listening, then, is leveraged to help young children come into literacy. Axel and his classmates demonstrate how certain types of listening, like his "listening-while-reading aloud," can be quite active and generative, undertaken with a certain amount of intentionality and effort. Further, Axel's listening has not yet been molded into certain performed behaviors, like the behaviors of stillness and quietness. The sensorium of literacy has not been partitioned off quite yet—it still exists as a perceptual field that is only vaguely differentiated, an idea that Charles Hirschkind and Steph Ceraso take up in the works I cite earlier. Springing as well from ideas in my litany, above, gestural listening emerges here as effortful, generative, multisensory; it is not just a "given" but something that

is learned, practiced.

And yet, as I mention above, listening is often conceptualized as a quiet, passive counterpart to the more productive, tangible skills of writing and speaking. We can see that, for example, in the way Marie Clay argues, elsewhere in the same book, against the tendency to position reading as a prerequisite to writing. She suggests instead that writing, even before its motor components are fully mastered, has much to offer the development of reading skills in youngsters. There is nothing essentially wrong with this claim, continuing as it does to acknowledge the rich sensory interconnections between the literacy skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It does, however, show how easy and habitual it is to perpetuate the cultural constructions of listening that I outline above, including the idea that listening is silent, invisible, or only internal. "Writing," she claims, "is easier to attend to than reading when you are little" (Clay 104). She continues: "In the act of writing, somehow, what you look at, and how you do it, and what people around you do, are more apparent to preschoolers than the more mystical act of reading, silently or even reading aloud from a book" (104). Attending to the material and embodied differences between writing and reading, Clay observes that the act of writing tends to be a more overtly embodied activity, one with more readily observable movements of hand and arm, and more palpable results—a written text, a visible and touchable artifact. While listening does not leave a permanent mark in the way that writing does, to be sure, the pervasive tendency to understand listening as invisible, internal, or inactive is a perspective that forgets about how Axel—and how many children—learned to read. In fact, throughout years of schooling, gestural listening appears to move from a rich resource that helps children acquire literacy into a limited set of norms for classroom behavior, part of what might be called a hidden curriculum, which I explore in the next section.

GESTURAL LISTENING'S NATURALIZATION

In another scene from Être et Avoir*, Mr. Lopez prompts Axel to speak about nightmares, but another child excitedly responds instead. Lopez gently shushes the interrupting student, shaking his head at her. When she continues to interrupt, Lopez intervenes, saying, "Axel's telling me about his nightmares. Shall we let him?" With eyebrows sternly raised, he asks again: "Will we let him tell us?" The other student, offscreen, falls quiet while her classmate speaks.*

Here, Lopez teaches his students about how appropriately interact in the classroom. In doing so, he teaches the children to enact a type of "correct" listening. "Good" listening, in this setting, means holding oneself still and directing one's gaze towards the speaker; it means refraining from speaking when someone else is already speaking. This is another moment that shows how the gestural listening that is "correct" in school, rather than being a natural or innate behavior, is in fact taught and learned.

Somehow, however, a kind of amnesia seems to set in as years of schooling progress. The idea of listening as a generative, active capacity fades away, and a performance of gestural listening that conveys obedience and respect becomes required of all students. The schooling of gestural listening moves from explicit, like Mr. Lopez's guidance of his young students, above, to something implicit—so implicit, in fact, that gestural listening melds ultimately into a broader category of classroom

conduct, collected under terms like "attitude," or "classroom management," among others.

In *Discipline and Learn*, Australian educator and researcher Megan Watkins provides an example of how gestural listening instruction in primary and secondary education is often elided with classroom management, or thought of as part of something much more nebulous, like a "disposition." In doing so, Watkins navigates a sometimes-uncomfortable balance between discipline that flattens students' gestural ways of being and discipline that "invests" them with capacities for schoolwork. When beginning to teach at the middle-school level, her students aged 12-14, Watkins notices that some of her students seem to have work habits, or what she calls "dispositions" that characterize their approach to learning. She calls them "as much corporeal as they are cognitive" (Watkins 2). Furthermore, these "dispositions" already appear to be deeply engrained as a result of their earlier years of schooling. Throughout her book, Watkins develops the idea of "pedagogic embodiment," or "scholarly postures" that lend themselves to the tasks of academic work. She writes:

> In class, students are constantly told to 'sit still,' 'put up your hand,' 'don't call out,' and in the playground, 'don't run,' 'line up properly' and 'don't litter.' The myriad of instructions given to children are designed to elicit a particular behaviour which when habituated constitutes a discipline that invests their bodies with the capacity to act in a manner both effective and efficient for schooling. (Watkins 23)

Some of the instructions that Watkins enumerates here are instructions for general comportment, like "don't run" and "line up properly." Others, however, are really directions for how students should show their listening according to the rubric of classroom correctness, like "sit still," "put up your hand," and "don't call out." What Watkins calls "dispositions," I identify more specifically as gestural listening behaviors, perceived as more or less "correct" according to a classroom rubric. After all, "good" or "correct" listening is context-specific, as I mention in my litany, above. By fusing listening behaviors with an overall "manner" that is "effective and efficient" for schooling, Watkins also risks eliding students' gestural listening tendencies with judgments about their capacity for learning or their belonging in the classroom (23).

Watkins takes a positive stance on what it means, ultimately, for students to enact the "myriad instructions" of schooling. At first, the list of instructions Watkins enumerates here has the pedantry of early schooling: do this; don't do that. The phrasing in the last sentence takes a different turn, however: Watkins writes that the habituated disciplines of school "invests" students' bodies with the "capacity" to do well in schooling. Taking seriously Watkins's perspective, it is important to note that the corporeal discipline of schooling is not necessarily, or always, a bad thing. Watkins believes that, in fact, the physical training of the classroom is an important form of enabling students to succeed in the world. On handwriting, for instance, Watkins writes: "Bodies need to be invested with the discipline to sit still and work at a desk for sustained periods of time to complete the often tedious process of mastering the mechanics of handwriting: a skill habituated through repetition" (98). Although she describes handwriting acquisition as "tedious" here, Watkins is careful not to overemphasize the negative connotations of school's forms of physical and mental discipline. In fact, she uses the same wording as above: from her perspective, bodies are "invested" with discipline, a process which culminates inreliable, legible handwriting produced with minimal conscious effort.

It is no accident that handwriting is the comparative example that Watkins turns to as paradigmatic of the global bodily control needed for success in school. Handwriting, after all, produces a tangible trace, an artifact that can be later evaluated against a standard. Listening, on the other hand, is often thought of as intangible and fleeting, as I described in the litany. If the "often tedious process of mastering the mechanics of handwriting" requires time and repetition, it should follow that the process of learning how to gesturally listen correctly in classroom environments also takes time, attention, and repetition. And indeed, it does, illustrated in the scene from *Être et Avoir* I recount at the beginning of this section. But because gestural listening is often thought of as invisible and passive, the schooling of gestural listening takes on a different character. The moment in Watkins's book, above, showcases the type of repetitive directions that, over time, shape students' listening behaviors. When she notes the familiar commands to "'sit still,' 'put up your hand,' and 'don't call out,'" readers glimpse, and perhaps remember from their own schooling, how directions for how to behave are often simply "in the environment," given unilaterally by any adult in the vicinity. Watkins demonstrates how rules that guide listening behaviors are often barked like commands, underscoring the authority of those giving them. They come to form a kind of generalized corporeal regime: palpable, yet so fully naturalized as to become unremarkable. Without a tangible artifact to assess after the fact, gestural listening resists documentation. So while the late 19th- and early 20th centuries saw a "golden age" of handwriting textbooks, no similar archive of "listening textbooks" exists. Penmanship textbooks helped enable the development of a range of handwriting styles, from elegant Spencerian script to the more workaday Palmer hand. Gestural listening's instruction, in contrast, happens through the school environment more generally, with no analogous manuals illustrating or propounding various styles. This may be why listening instruction and its resultant "correct" gestural listening behaviors tend to be more rigid and uniform than their handwriting equivalents. "Correct" listening largely looks like one thing in many educational settings: quiet, obedient stillness. If a student's listening looks different, it may be interpreted by their teacher as defiant, lazy, or spacey, and with Watkins's "dispositional" approach in mind, those characteristics are likely to be ascribed to the student's self, to their overall fitness for the classroom.

Stillness is a major part of preferred gestural listening in schools, yet it too battles negative connotations of passiveness. In Watkins's writing about the development of scholarly "dispositions," "active" and "passive" emerge as value-laden terms; we see her work hard to disentangle the ways that the stillness of listening is habitually associated with passiveness. She writes: "this discipline predisposes students to the regimen of academic work, listening and watching attentively and completing tasks in line with the teacher's instructions" (Watkins 24). The inclusion of the word "attentively" helps Watkins express that she sees listening and watching as effortful activities. She feels compelled, on multiple occasions, to forcefully reject the idea that stillness and physical control translate to mental passivity. For instance, she writes: "This formative period for the embodiment of scholarly posture

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does not signal the beginnings of a passive approach to learning. It is the necessary precursor to the self-discipline required for independent learning and academic work" (27). Later, she writes: "The so-called passivity of students' bodies within more traditional pedagogies is generally considered representative of a passive mind, yet it may actually be indicative of a disciplined body in which corporeal governance allows for a highly engaged and therefore 'active' rather than passive mind" (99). Watkins seems to be reaching conceptually for a sort of "active-stillness," stillness that she feels enables students to succeed with classroom tasks. And it is a useful shift in perspective to think of students not as automatically still, but as actively *holding themselves still* in class, as Axel's classmate above, for example, is learning to do. Stillness takes on different significance if educators see it as a learned skill, rather than as the absence of movement, or returning to a default state. Nevertheless, as stillness coalesces as part of "preferred" gestural listening performances, a question nags about the "corporeal governance" that Watkins mentions, above.

The widespread preference for a still, quiet listening is perhaps no better demonstrated than in recent research suggesting that the opposite may in fact be better. An abundance of research in recent decades suggests that forms of movement may be connected to better focus and better performance in both work and school (De La Cruz). Cursory research into this area turns up the rise of education movements aimed at incorporating more motion into the school day (i.e., activity breaks), trends in some schools to have student sit on large exercise balls instead of chairs, and movements to support or even encourage the use of "fidgets" to improve focus during class (Carlson, et al; Rotz and Wright).[1] Fidgeting, a term most often associated negatively with an "inability" to sit still, refers in new studies to small movements with certain objects to help prevent distraction and keep the mind on task. Some research points to evidence that listening to music, in distracting the brain somewhat, may even help some individuals focus on a main task (Rotz and Wright). All of these pieces of new research challenge the idea that still, quiet listening is the best or most effective kind.

The way gestural listening behaviors are collapsed into more generalized categories of classroom management, or "disposition," as Watkins put it, is especially important when it comes to groups that have been historically marginalized in classroom settings. Earlier, I state that gestural listening varies across categories of identity, and I mention Brenda Jo Brueggemann's discussion of how deafness has affected perceptions of her gestural listening behaviors, for example. Not appearing to gesturally listen according to a certain rubric places a similar burden onto people with other types of disabilities, too. In "Occupying Autism: Rhetoric, Involuntarity, and the Meaning of Autistic Lives," M. Remi Yergeau writes about how an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis imposes particular narratives onto her embodied way of being—especially narratives of "involuntarity" with regards to her gestural presentation, noting: "the construct of involuntarity is culturally inscribed into autism as a condition" (86). When she goes on to highlight gestural dimensions of autism, she rehearses commonplaces about the condition in a way that ultimately challenges her readers to question them, as she does: "My flapping fingers and facial tics signify an anti-discourse of sorts: Where is my control? Where is my communicability? Would anyone choose a life of ticcing? How can an involuntary movement, an involuntary neurology…how can these things be rhetorical?" (Yergeau 87). Yergeau illustrates how she does not conform to a constrained rubric of "correct" gestural

listening, and further, calls into question the assumptions that are often made about "control" and "communicability" in gestural behavior. She rejects the blanket statement, found often in literature about autism, that her gestures cannot be meaningful: the significance of her gestures cannot be dismissed on the basis of their involuntarity or on the basis of their non-normative shapes and rhythms. In "Cripping Neutrality," Ai Binh T. Ho, Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, and Rebecca Sanchez, in conjunction with M. Remi Yergeau, similarly call out how "demands for neutrality," in college classrooms in particular, magnify the scrutiny disabled faculty find themselves under in professional environments (138). Invoking the term "bodyminds"—coined by Margaret Price to emphasize how "minds and bodies are always mutually imbricated"—they write that, rather than appearing within a bracket of "neutrality," their "bodyminds themselves are accented; they move, gaze, tic, and interact in ways that may be unexpected or surprising" (127). Referring to bodyminds that "move, gaze, tic, and interact," the writers imply that their gestural listening behaviors may at times exceed a constrained normative limit, a limit that comes to mean "neutrality." Writers like Yergeau and others call into question the conceptions of the active and passive, and of the global bodily control that has long been associated with "good" classroom comportment. Gestural listening that is considered "correct," or even "neutral," in any given context takes on outsized importance when we consider who it excludes.

At this point, readers have a sense of the second and longer chapter of gestural listening's story in school environments: from a sensorially-generous resource for acquiring literacy to a physical way of being in the classroom characterized by remarkably stringent norms that at times serve to marginalize those who do not perform them effectively enough. But in fact, it would be more accurate to say that even in early literacy education, gestural listening is simultaneously leveraged and shaped, as we can see in the scene where Lopez begins to teach his young pupil how to listen politely when another student is speaking. Watkins reminds us that discipline is not essentially a bad thing and often allows for new capacities and freedoms. But educators should remain cautious of discipline that calls for a unilateral flattening of students' gestural ways of being in class, and of a naturalized collapse of gestural listening behaviors with judgments about students' belonging in the classroom. In the next section, I illustrate the consequences of that flattening and collapse for two first-year college students, both enrolled in my section of a general education first-year writing class.

THE COSTS OF "INCORRECT" GESTURAL LISTENING

One semester, I have a student I will call Dylan. Dylan sits in the back corner of the classroom, as far away as he can get. During class, I rarely see him looking up to the front of the room; he contributes a comment to class discussion occasionally. He's often the first to pack up his things at the end of class, poised to leave. On a few occasions, he approaches me after class with a question that I've answered already—sometimes multiple times—during class. He seems somehow industrious in his back-row seat, though, with his head down and his hands busy on his desk. I find myself assuming that he doesn't care much about our mandatory writing course, that he's busy doing homework for other classes. I tell myself: don't take it personally. His writing assignments are thoughtful and turned

in on time.

During group work, Dylan works with two other students seated in the same back corner. They are often the group that moves the fastest through the tasks I give them—too fast. On one of these occasions, I approach their group to check in. "I'm finished, so I'm drawing a house," Dylan says, showing me a doodle in pencil on a sheet of paper. He says it like he's bored, but dealing with it, and I suddenly get the sense that he's pulling from a repertoire of ways to "keep himself busy" in class that he's been encouraged to develop in the past. I imagine a previous teacher saying to a younger Dylan: "Okay, if you're already done, just sit and draw a picture."

The preferences that instructors harbor for gestural listening behaviors are no more obvious than when they are broken by students who can't or won't perform them. In the paragraphs above, my assumptions about what "correct" gestural listening behaviors in the classroom look like cause me to view Dylan negatively, as checked out, defiant, resistant. Only when I gain more insight into his embodied and mental experience in academic spaces do I check my own knee-jerk reactions to the way he appears in class. In this section, I focus on two students who self-identify as having ADHD in an effort to illustrate how expectations for schooled listening behaviors can disadvantage students who deviate from those expectations.

"The preferences that instructors harbor for gestural listening behaviors are no more obvious than when they are broken by students who can't or won't perform them."

In class, we read an excerpt from Susan Griffin's *A Chorus of Stones,* which uses a segmented, collage-like style, juxtaposing different elements that may not seem to harmonize at first. As a writing assignment, I ask students to produce a collage of their own. In his essay, Dylan juxtaposes sections of narration from his experiences in school with quotations: inspiring ones, but also quotes that appear to have shaped him in other ways, like the words of parents and friends. He begins:

> I remember almost every desk and classroom I've had to sit in. I remember the walls, the decorations, the teacher's desks. I memorize them not on purpose, but because they are there. "Dylan? What are you looking at?" "Nothing I just got distracted" I must have had this exchange hundreds of times now. The only reason it doesn't happen anymore is as I got older people became expected to be able to control their own thoughts. So now it's no one's job to keep me on the subject. (Anonymous Student A)

Here, Dylan recounts classroom memories that demonstrate an idiosyncratic attention—he remembers clearly, but not what may seem like the right things to remember. He attends to details, but of things seemingly tangential to the stated aims of the curriculum. He then gives an example of a common interaction for him in school, in which he is singled out for not paying attention to class content. But what this type of interaction reinforces—"What are you looking at?"—is the expected performance of what attention looks like, how it manifests in the body (Anonymous Student A). Specifically, in the passage above, Dylan is looking at the "wrong thing," his gaze tipping the instructor off to his distraction. Dylan notes that as he "got older," he was expected to "control his thoughts" (Anonymous Student A). But in fact, what this interaction highlights is really more of a visual and

embodied regime. What's truly mandatory, it seems, is to control one's physical comportment, to look as though one's thoughts are where they should be.

Going forward, Dylan's writing often deals with attentional problems not just as a question of neurological attentional abilities, but additionally, as a social phenomenon that requires students' bodies to behave in certain ways. "Everyone falls in line eventually," Dylan writes:

> Kids raise their hands, they write when asked to write and generally as time goes by they become extremely obedient. There are however the ones that don't fit in. Those who don't seem to grasp this mentality like all the others, the ones that just don't seem to want to listen. (Anonymous Student A)

This moment illustrates a keen awareness of the physical regime of school, to which Dylan struggles to adhere. What's interesting, furthermore, is the connection Dylan creates between writing "when asked to write" and just not seeming to "want to listen" (Anonymous Student A). Both writing and listening are formulated as actions done out of subservience, actions that "as time goes by" cause students to become "extremely obedient" (Anonymous Student A). Dylan portrays listening as something he's subjected to, the obedience of a subordinate.

To further understand Dylan's situation, it is illuminating to look at some of the major debates in the conversation around attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and its earlier relative, attention deficit disorder, or ADD. For instance, one strain of conversation about ADHD is a debate around whether attentional disorders are "real" or if we, as a society, are in fact just "taming" our children. Why is it that vastly more boys than girls are diagnosed, for example? What accounts for the dramatic rise in diagnoses over the last decade (Schwartz and Cohen)? While it does not deny the existence of a true disorder that some people really have, a *New York Times Magazine* article in 2017 argues that "the rapid increase in people with A.D.H.D. probably has more to do with sociological factors — changes in the way we school our children, in the way we interact with doctors and in what we expect from our kids" (Koerth-Baker). Another theory has it that diagnoses of ADHD ultimately help fund schools by increasing a calculated average of test scores that takes into account students performing with an attentional disorder (Novotney). This confusion about what is neurologically "real" in terms of diagnosing attentional disorders reflects an underlying concern with the control of students' bodies in the classroom, and their conformity to its corporeal demands. Many individuals who are later diagnosed with ADHD often encounter the exasperation of their parents and teachers, who voice concerns about whether their children really "can't" or just "won't" perform the corporeal idiom of the classroom. Dylan's language blends the distinction between can't and won't when he writes that there are "those who don't seem to grasp this mentality like all the others," whom he also calls the ones that "just don't seem to *want* to listen" (Anonymous Student A, italics mine). For Dylan, difficulties attending to the right thing for the right amount of time are entwined with, but not always the same as, resistance to enacting the preferred embodiment of school. For Dylan, listening may chafe both because of the challenges he has in sustaining attention to the "right" things, but also because of how it has been presented to him and his classmates as still, quiet obedience, as docility.

Dylan's experiences are only one of the ways in which ADHD can manifest in classroom environments, and in which students' schooled lives can be shaped by the condition. Another

student in my class, Sarah, is present every day, on time and prepared. Always quite still, facing forward, she makes comments in discussion on a regular basis, even at times when that hard-to-break quietness has crept over the room. She nods, takes notes—she is diligent about a certain enactment of studenthood, what Dylan might call "falling in line," but which Megan Watkins might refer to as being "invested with capacity." When Sarah writes about ADHD, her essay focuses on a different struggle: for credibility and respect. "Some people thought I was a bad kid," she begins, writing:

> I ran around, yelled, screamed, sang, I just couldn't sit still. As I grew as a student I realized people looked at me different, I wasn't given the same opportunities as everyone else… ADHD clouded how I was viewed as an intellectual and respected classmate. (Anonymous Student B)

Interestingly, Sarah never writes about struggling to pay attention in class. In fact, she writes:

> On paper, I did well; I did my homework, I did what I was supposed to do. But socially it was quite the opposite. I was constantly scolded for acting out in class, I didn't fit in with all the other kids. I was looked at as unusual, a problem, a pain in the neck. I lost respect from my peers. (Anonymous Student B)

Evidently, Sarah did fine in her academics, meaning she found ways to listen or otherwise learn the material even without being able to sit still or stay quiet. Nevertheless, her inability to comport herself physically according to the embodied expectations of the classroom resulted in her sense of not being respected by teachers and peers. She continues: "When thinking about my personal experience, I felt bias in the way I was evaluated by my teachers. It was a subtle difference; but they didn't treat me the same. Due to my behavioral problems, I lost credibility in my efforts as a student" (Anonymous Student B). At one point, Sarah even muses about whether it's wise to reveal her attentional disorder to me, her instructor, in her essay. Sarah's experiences align with the thinking of Shannon Walters, whose work on disability focuses on how those with disabilities often do not have the same access to traditionally-recognized ways of establishing rhetorical agency. Walters argues that people with disabilities sometimes cultivate rhetorical agency through means often ignored by the discipline of rhetoric, especially through the sense of touch. Sarah's description of herself in primary school, yelling, screaming, and singing, may reflect an individual locating herself rhetorically in the world through voice and movement rather than through "correct" school comportment.

It is notable that Sarah expresses concern about whether to reveal her own educational history and diagnoses with me, her professor, in the way it aligns with Walters's analysis of how disabled rhetors often navigate the need to establish and maintain credibility. In one chapter of *Rhetorical Touch: Disability, Identification, Haptics*, for instance, Walters traces how during her life, Helen Keller's unusual writing processes, involving the assistance of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, were periodically doubted by outside authorities. Her authorship was variously called into question, whether through accusations of plagiarism or through skepticism about whether her writings could really be called single-authored. Walters describes how "by doubting and disbelieving Keller and her rhetorical productions, audiences separate themselves from her, drawing 'a line in the sand' that prevents rhetorical identification between audience and rhetor" (27). Sarah, similarly, may have been concerned that if I, as the authority in her classroom, knew about her diagnosis or prior classroom

experiences, I might begin to question aspects of her rhetorical production such as her writing and her classroom presence, to foreclose identification between us. After all, as Yergeau explains earlier, a diagnosis often imposes narratives upon a person from outside that are hard to escape. In addition to rejecting the idea that her gestures cannot be meaningful, Yergeau decries the way her behaviors are often chalked up to her diagnosis in a way that negates any other possible intentionality or cause: "When my fingers twirl in the air, fidgety and tangled in series of rubber bands, it is because I am autistic. When my eyes dart away or when my sentences grow long, it is because I am autistic" (Yergeau 87). Especially because she now presents gesturally in class within a normative range, or in the words of Brueggemann, because she can now "pass," Sarah may have been concerned about allowing an ADHD narrative back into a teacher's perception of her, even as she chose to explore the issue in her essay for our class.

It can once again be helpful to look at ADHD discourse to contextualize the apparent divide between Sarah's academics and her comportment. For decades, ADD and ADHD were seen as primarily behavioral problems—failure to "fall in line," as Dylan might say, or of being a "pain in the neck," as Sarah writes. Consciousness has arisen more recently, however, about ADHD as a set of chemical impairments to the brain, especially its "management system," or executive functioning. In a major recent book on attentional disorders, *Attention Deficit Disorder: The Unfocused Mind in Children and Adults*, Thomas Brown writes: "ADHD children often have combined problems in listening, speaking, and pragmatics," each of which, he states, involves executive functions (102). "Listening," he continues, in what we should now recognize as a familiar move from the litany, "is not a simple or passive skill . . . [rather] it involves actively receiving and organizing verbal and nonverbal information: words spoken, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures presented by the speaker" (102). Brown goes on to further elaborate on what listening entails cognitively, which evidently amounts to a heavy mental lift:

> Listening also involves grasping elements of the other's message that are implicit, or that refer to facts or experiences linked only indirectly to the present moment or topic. Also involved are processes of 'putting the pieces together' to understand what the other person is saying, sorting out the important facts, ideas, and feelings, as well as monitoring the interpersonal interaction. (102)

Here, Brown describes listening as nuanced, and as containing many, simultaneous demands: grasping, putting together, sorting, monitoring. "Monitoring interpersonal interaction," in particular, strikes me as a manifestation of gestural listening. When monitoring social interactions in the classroom, students need to take in social information and adjust their gestural listening performances accordingly. For students with compromised executive functioning, like Sarah, however, the added layer of making sure to perform an acceptable form of gestural listening for school is no small feat. The way she listens to take in the information she needs to do well on her academics may preclude the functions of listening that enable her to gesturally listen according to expectations for classroom behavior. With that in mind, as educators, it is important to remember the diversity of what listening can look like and how limiting it might be to some students to restrain the "correct" performance of listening in school to a narrow—and deceptively "neutral"—margin of behaviors.

WAYS OF LISTENING, WAYS OF ATTENDING

Dylan's paper concludes as follows:

> Although there is a shared desire to "just focus for once in your life" …I can assure you that it's not all bad. Talk to anyone with an attention deficit disorder and they will see the world for so much more . . . People with these types of brains are able not to process but to acknowledge much more than their counterparts. (Anonymous Student A)

In this passage, Dylan once again confronts strains of the dominant contemporary rhetoric and research on attentional disorders, with its "just focus for once in your life" exasperation on the one hand, and on the other, its neuroscientifically-informed discourse that produces the phrase "people with these types of brains." Even as he confronts both of these dominant discourses, Dylan also pushes back against them, and the implication that having different attentional abilities is inherently negative. When he writes "they will see the world for so much more," Dylan implies that the ADHD brain functions, and well, in its own way. In doing so, Dylan points towards forms of attention that may have as-yet-unexplored capacities, but which require an expanded range of acceptable listening behaviors in order to be recognized.

"What constitutes 'good' gestural listening in any environment is culturally and historically situated, not a natural 'given,' but something taught and learned."

It remains to consider: what might different ways of listening—and different forms of attention—look like, if students, parents, and instructors widen their vision of what constitutes "good" gestural listening and attentive behavior? Malcolm McCullough, *in Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information,* suggests one possibility. McCullough encourages readers to notice "the distinction between attention as something that you pay and attention as something that flows," which he goes on to write is "a distinction subtler than the distinction between voluntary and involuntary" (85). This subtle distinction between "paying" and "flowing" begins to build a vocabulary for acknowledging diverse forms of attention that should include the "intentionality, sensitivity, conditioning, and contextual clues," McCullough writes, that "usually enter the process of attention" (85). Taking a cue from McCullough, the ongoing task of educators will be to develop pedagogies that acknowledge, and even harness, the possibilities of listening and attention in their many forms.

NOTES

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