The Soundscapes of Henry Mayhew

Urban Ethnography and Technologies of Transcription

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Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, a self-described 'Cyclopaedia of the conditions and earnings of those that *will* work, those that *cannot* work, and those that *will not* work', earnestly recorded the detailed phenomena of the everyday lives of London's 'street-folk' in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[1] The result was an extraordinary ever-evolving multimedia archive that moved back and forth between newspaper, performance and book formats, was poached by novelists, and recirculated in multiple review essays and periodical features. Voluminous and, aptly, unfinished, the collected volumes that began to appear in 1861 were comprised of engravings from daguerreotypes, as well as transcribed interviews, statistics and vividly described street scenes populated by a diverse array of 'outcast Londoners' ranging from loquacious costermongers, street performers, artisans, flower girls, chimney sweeps, street photographers, to street vendors of all kinds. Mayhew insisted that 'until it is seen and heard we have no sense of the scramble that is going on throughout London for a living'.[2] Accordingly, he reiterated the importance of transcribing sounds and capturing images with an

unprecedented photographic verisimilitude, reinforcing the centrality of techno-logical mediation to a heightened experience of communicative immediacy and authenticity.

What I want to suggest here is that Mayhew's prodigious commitment to the reproduction of real voices paralleled an emerging discursive nexus between noise and civilisation in this period. Drawing on the influential psychology of James Sully, who explicitly identified the nexus between 'Civilisation and Noise' in his essay of that name, this article explores an insoluble contradiction that shapes the production and circulation of Mayhew's work.[3] On the one hand Mayhew strives to literally embody his subjects, through the incorporation of daguerreotype portraits from the 1851 weekly series onwards, the transcription of voice using interview techniques, sound hand or phonographic writing, as well as mimetic description. But this endeavour to capture the traces of otherwise silenced voices—living traces preserved in type—inevitably dissociated the literal voice from its transcribed version. The printed page marks an absence and a corresponding alignment of reading with the struggle to hear or access a soundscape that the text transcribes, but can never literally take 'from the life'. Yet I think we can identify in Mayhew's work the emergence of a distinctively modern take on the struggle to hear what can no longer be heard, an intensification of desire amplified by the advent of a range of new media, which, in turn, produces new ways of thinking in, about and through the limits of print. Mayhew resists the muteness of print, while submitting to its logic, a struggle with the limits and paradoxes of representation driven by the goal of the immediate apprehension of the object described in the mind of the reader, to adapt his terms.[4] This simulation of voices and literal enactment of an ethics of hearing, I argue, evokes a profoundly material engagement with voice that diverges from the metaphysical sense of voice as something that always eludes representation, and parallels the new ontology of the image that photography inaugurates. Andre Bazin articulated something similar in his seminal essay on 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image': 'Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer.'[5]

It seems fairly clear that photography played a part in how Mayhew thought about the possibilities of mediating the voices and noises of the street. As Anne Humpherys notes: 'The photograph with its combination of verisimilitude and artistic selection and arrangement was what Mayhew aimed at in his extended interviews.'[6] Given Mayhew's commissioning of Richard Beard for the first series where he actually had editorial control—the 1851 weekly series—it is also not too much of a leap to suggest that Mayhew saw a continuity between the transcriptive powers of the daguerreotype and what he already understood as phonographic writing.[7] This is particularly likely given this was a common association at this time. Here is Samuel Bagster, the publisher of Isaac Pitman, effusing in this vein:

> Artists and scribes no more delight,
>
> Their arts imperfect found,
>
> Daguerre now draws by rays of Light,
>
> And Pitman writes by Sound.[8]

Pitman also made use of this analogy in his self-promotional introduction to the 1844 edition of his *Manual of Phonography or Writing By Sound*: 'Phonography is a system of writing by sound, or of *Daguerreotyping speech on paper* in so scientific a manner as to represent, with *infallible accuracy*, all the sounds of the *human voice*.'[9] 'Phonographing' voices, however, was only one element of Mayhew's engagement with noise and sound. Another was his extraordinary mimetic descriptions of the urban soundscape of nineteenth-century London, which again aligned reading with heightened forms of critical receptivity or rational listening to sounds and voices that readers would have previously filtered out as unwanted noise—a form of aural vigilance or ear witnessing. In this sense Mayhew, is part of what Jonathan Sterne has neoligistically dubbed as the 'Ensoniment'—which Sterne argues paralleled the optical fetishism of the Enlightenment. To quote Sterne:

> Between about 1750 and 1925, sound itself became an object and a domain of thought and practice … Hearing was reconstructed as a physiological process, a kind of receptivity and capacity based on physics, biology and mechanics. Through techniques of listening, people harnessed, modified and shaped their powers of auditory perception in the service of rationality.[10]

The concept of the soundscape has also been theoretically tethered to training the ear to hear. Seminally, the composer and environmentalist R. Murray Schafer invoked the term in the 1970s as part of a call to arms against the onslaught of noise pollution: 'We must seek a way to make environmental acoustics a *positive* study program. Which sounds do we want to preserve, encourage, multiply? When we know this, the boring or destructive sounds will be conspicuous enough and we will know why we must eliminate them.'[11] Implicit, although un-nuanced, in Schafer's rhetoric is the twofold nature of the soundscape, as I will be invoking it here; that is, as both a physical or material environment and a historically particular set of receptive processes and behaviours for perceiving that environment. As Emily Thompson puts it—a soundscape 'is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world'.[12]

John Picker further nuances this distinction in a Victorian context, rightly observing 'the development of Victorian's self awareness was contingent on awareness of sonic environments'.[13] Steven Connor likewise speaks of the emergence of an 'auditory self', that is, 'an attentive and investigatory self, which takes part in the world rather than taking aim at it'.[14] Where my approach to the dynamics of ear-witnessing differs from these important precursors is in the shift of emphasis from self to system, individual consciousness to the noise induced by the circulatory and communicative mechanisms of the Victorian media and the consequent transformation of the potential and limits of print that Mayhew's ambitious project literally materialises. The stress here will be on inscription systems, to use Friedrich Kittler's terminology, and the ways in which mid-nineteenth century 'networks of technologies and institutions' conspired to 'select, store and process relevant data'.[15]

This pressure to select, store and process drives Mayhew's assurance to his readers in one of his early letters to the *Morning Chronicle* that 'hardly a line will be written but what a note of the matter recorded has been taken on the spot'.[16] Like so many of his contemporaries, Mayhew's work was generated by an ambient climate of heightened media engagement that would ultimately render inventions such as Edison's phonograph legible, and generate projects that continued to engage with the transcriptive techniques Mayhew had pioneered—such as John Thompson's *Street Life in London* (1881). Edison shared Mayhew's preoccupation with capturing

the rhythms of everyday speech, noting in one of his experimental handbooks while working on improvements for Alexander Graham Bell's telephone that there was 'no doubt that I shall be able to store up & reproduce automatically at any future time the human voice perfectly'.[17] These parallels are hardly surprising. Indeed, they exemplify the generative interpenetration of new and old media, and complicate familiar narrations of media technologies as causal agents of change by revealing their reciprocal production from within existing networks of textual and cultural practices.[18]

Mayhew's work also reinforces the historically constitutive presence of noise—as the ultimately unsignifiable dimension of modern textuality—to adapt and chronologically extend Juan Suarez's argument regarding noise and modernism. Suarez argues that the more modernism tackled the everyday the more intrusive the presence of noise became. 'After the machine was there to register it, and after cultural production was done exclusively with or alongside machines, it was harder to keep out the racket.'[19] What I want to suggest here, following Lisa Gitelman and others, is that even before the machines existed, writers such as Mayhew wrote as if they did, in the midst of the racket, tantalised by the prospect of the automatic registration of the real, and the instantaneous 'conveyance of thought', as Alfred Russel Wallace would later observe of the wonders of the telephone and wireless.[20]

The following sections explore the multiple and complex ways Mayhew's work challenged contemporary conventions of attuning one's ear to the rich vocal texture of the urban soundscape. The first examines the Victorian media's relish for novelty, hybrid formations and fetishising of both information and immediacy. Mayhew was very much a creature of this media ecology—writing between modes, blurring genres, as well as being an avid consumer of new media. The second section narrows the focus to consider Mayhew's interest in training his readers to hear voices that they would have usually dismissed as noise with a new aesthetic concentration, the paradox being—to adapt Mladen Dolar's useful distinction—that this 'aesthetic concentration on the voice loses the voice precisely by turning it into a fetish object'.[21] This loss of the voice in Mayhew is registered in contemporary critical responses that took Mayhew to task for privileging meaning and character at the expense of capturing the living presence of the voices of his interviewees—in contrast to the uncontestable authenticity of the engraved woodcuts of Beard's

daguerreotypes.[22] This section concludes with an analysis of Mayhew's privileging of ear-witnessing read alongside James Sully's slightly later argument that noise sensitivity was a measure of civilisation.

The final section then focuses on the specific ways in which competing media disrupt the Victorian soundscape and problematise Mayhew's ideal of recording the competing voices that populate *London Labour and the London Poor*—drawing out the parallels and differences between Mayhew's interview techniques and Richard Beard's daguerreotypes in the ultimate form of Mayhew's text in 1861–62, published after over a decade of circulation in various forms of print media and performance spaces. Richard Menke has recently observed that 'the phonograph and the photograph bespeak a presence at their origins, a physical contiguity between the recorded object and the medium of representation'.[23] This final section examines the ambiguous nature of this physical contiguity for Mayhew and his readers, which in turn reinforces the saliency of Ivan Krielkamp's recent argument that in order to understand the nineteenth-century print culture that created and frustrated the ambitious desire of a writer such as Mayhew to use writing as a medium to record the multiple voices of London's working poor, it is important to challenge the familiar narratives of theorists from Walter Benjamin to Benedict Anderson that modern print cultures spell the demise of speech-based communities.[24]

While Ivan Krielkamp does not mention Mayhew, his argument for the novels of Dickens, Gaskell and Bronte as exemplary instances of the persistence of the voice in the discourse of print culture, seems even more pertinent to the struggle between 'multiple and complex forms of speech and writing' in *London Labour and the London Poor*.[25] Caught between critics who accused him of storytelling and the increasingly demystified intellectual labour of modern journalism that fetishised the accurate transcription of data, Mayhew's writing oscillated between two increasingly self-differentiated, yet interpenetrating social systems—the literary system which privileged communication and the increasingly complex network of new media that promised unprecedented access and storage of real objects, people and events. On the one hand Mayhew was accused by his critics of being too literary in his representation of the authentic voices of his subjects, and on the other he was praised for providing an authentic transcription of a previously silenced and invisible underworld.

Mayhew began his career in the world of popular publishing. His early journalism was informed by the political radicalism that still dominated the profession in the 1830s, as well as the satirical polemics of William Hone and George Cruikshank. He co-founded and edited the popular weekly *Figaro in London* in the 1820s and contemplated a career writing for the theatre before co-founding *Punch* in 1841. By the late 1840s when he began publishing the first of many incarnations of *London Labour and the London Poor*—'Labour and the Poor' in the *Morning Chronicle*, a liberal newspaper synonymous with the depiction of everyday life, including Dickens' *Sketches By Boz*—Mayhew's politics had become decidedly enigmatic, as E.P. Thompson once observed.[26] While clearly critical of the intrinsic inhumanity of the industrialisation of traditional work practices, he disliked the self-serving bourgeois philanthropic response that exploited his reports to justify the mass-migration to the colonies of the destitute and exploited. Mayhew was equally uneasy about urban reforms that increased surveillance at the expense of traditional ways of making a living on the streets, while, at the same time, invoking Malthusian terminology to describe the deleterious parasitism of a rapidly expanding itinerant class on the English social body.

Repulsed and drawn to the exigencies of life in London's teeming slums, Mayhew quickly struck a chord with a liberal readership well used to urban portraiture.[27] The opening passage of the first number of the series published in 1848 in the *Morning Chronicle* described a visit to the 'very capital of cholera', Jacob's Island, and played to a similar mix of emotions in his audience:

> We crossed the bridge, and spoke with one of the inmates. In answer to our questions, she told us she was never well. Indeed, the signs of the deadly influence were painted in the earthy complexion of the poor woman. 'Neither I nor my children know what health is,' said she. 'But what is one to do? We must live where our bread is. I've tried to let the house, and put a bill up, but cannot get any one to take it.' From this spot we were led to narrow close courts, where the sun never shone, and the air seemed almost as stagnant and putrid as the ditch we had left. The blanched cheeks of the people that now came out to stare at us, were white as vegetables grown in the dark, and as we stopped to look down the alley,

our informant told us that the place teemed with children, and that if a

horn was blown they would swarm like bees at the sound of a gong.[28]

Representations of Jacob's Island were familiar, with Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) being one of the more popular, but Mayhew's typically aural description communicates a visceral portrait of the voiceless swarm of suffering poor, although this impression of authenticity is undone to some extent by the obvious artifice of the woman's speech.[29] Mayhew was less interested in the question of class that had previously dominated urban description than in dealing 'with human nature as a natural philosopher or a chemist deals with any material object'.[30] This descriptive shift was not lost on Mayhew's contemporaries, such as Charles Mackay, the author of *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, who explicitly and positively aligned Mayhew's transcription techniques with the then revelatory powers of photography. 'It was, in one sense, as if a mighty microscope were applied to the festers, social sores, and diseases of humanity; and in another, as if some unparalleled photographic apparatus was brought to portray fresh from life the very minds, rather than the bodies of the people.'[31] It should be stressed that such praise was quickly countered by equally disparaging references to Mayhew's theatrical past, to quote a reviewer of the 1851 iteration of Mayhew's series: 'The nature of the author's previous writings lent a certain air of probability to this suspicion. Many of his sketches were highly effective—and some of them looked as if they had been drawn for the mere sake of effect.'[32] Tellingly here, the implicitly diminishing stress is on old media—sketching, and implicitly, theatre—in contrast to Mackay's relish for the modern technological aspects of Mayhew.

As the latter review observes, Mayhew could not resist the allure of metaphor or theatrical gesture, a literary proclivity that attracted an equal measure of praise and criticism. William Makepeace Thackeray effusively likened the affective experience of reading Mayhew to that of an urban adventure one might find in a popular romance, 'a picture of human life so wonderful, so awful, so piteous and pathetic, so exciting and terrible, that readers of romances own they never read anything like it; and the griefs, struggles, strange adventures here depicted exceed anything that any of us could imagine'.[33] Always keen to turn a professional situation to his advantage, Mayhew reinforced these literary and theatrical associations by giving a *viva voce* performance of a selection of 'Curious Characters' from *London*

Labour and the London Poor at St Martin's Hall in August 1857, to quote a contemporary review from the *Musical Gazette*:

> The first character presented was a costermonger! (Previous to his appearance in this uncouth costume, Mr Mayhew delivered a short lecture describing the characters which he intended to represent.) The audience was highly entertained with the assumption, and laughed heartily at the remarks about the trade, the wife-beating (described as highly beneficial), the slang expressions, and the description of the light weights, with which the lecturer adroitly compared the defalcations and cheateries of parties in higher walks (bank directors and Co.) Next came 'Ol elo', old elo'.' The Jew brought forward his old bag of articles for which he had given flowers in exchange, at an awful sacrifice to himself (of course), and remarked upon 'the unaccountable difference between the wear of ordinary clerks' clothes' and those of government clerks, the latter being never worn out at the elbows! Other garments, of an unmentionable nature, were brought out of the bag, and made satirical and pungent.[34]

Aside from Mayhew's blatant substitution of the supposedly 'authentic' voices of his interviewees with a series of repellent stereotypes of wife-beating costermongers, mercenary Jews and unscrupulous bankers of various kinds, this cabinet of 'curious characters' also testifies to the contradictory mix of registers that shapes its print source. This is also where Mayhew enters the distinctively Victorian sphere of instructive entertainment, which includes the more sensational end of journalistic practice, such as James Greenwood's roughly contemporaneous 'A Night in a Workhouse', which Seth Koven analyses so compellingly in his study of Victorian slumming as a form of 'cross-class masquerade'.[35]

This mix of registers is equally apparent in the disjunction between the lack of moral judgment and data presented in Mayhew's extensive free-ranging interviews and his ill-conceived efforts to provide an anthropological and political economical rationale in the preface to first volume of the book edition of *London Labour and the London Poor* commissioned by the publisher David Bogue in 1856.[36] Notably, Mayhew's Malthusian equation of the vigorous parasitism of the nomad on the enfeebled productivity of the English working class 'moving from place to place preying upon the earnings of the more industrious portions of the community, so

will the attributes of the nomade [*sic*] tribes be more or less marked in them', barely registered with readers.[37] Positively disposed reviewers and readers of each iteration of *London Labour* seized on the interviews with alacrity, praising them as unprecedented communications of unheard biographies, spoken in the actual words of the subjects. Responding to this reaction, as well as indulging in his own proclivity for detail, Mayhew progressively expanded the length and scope of the interviews, an obsession with transcribing every digression no matter how idiosyncratic and obscure that verges on chaotic cacophany in the poorly edited later incarnations of *London Labour and the London Poor*—particularly the third and fourth volumes of the 1861 edition intermittently prepared for publication over a five-year period beginning in 1856.

Yet despite this intense public interest and the evident expansion of the interviews as the series developed, Mayhew's interview methods remain obscure. No notebooks survive, nor does the questionnaire that Mayhew is said to have used to frame his interviews. Some questioned whether Mayhew ever wandered further than his offices at the *Morning Chronicle*, to quote one sceptical contemporary and erstwhile competitor, Henry Sutherland Edwards:

> He was largely paid, and the greatest joy of all, had an army of assistant writers, stenographers, and hansom cabmen constantly at his call. London labourers … were brought to the *Chronicle* offices, where they told their tales to Mayhew, who redictated them, with an added colour of his own, to the shorthand writer.[38]

Although Edwards' portrayal of Mayhew as the cynical falsifier of voices mediated from afar is distorted by malice, the image of frenetic transcription, collection and publication is revealing. Edwards provides a window into the accelerated rhythms of mid-nineteenth-century media practices. Typifying the successful modern journalist, Mayhew enlists cabs, interviews likely subjects, deploys teams of assistants and stenographers to synthesise and transform the numerous voices collected into the linear syntax of newspaper copy.

The reference to stenography is particularly telling here, as Isaac Pitman's *Stenographic Soundhand* (1837) had only recently begun the professional standardisation of shorthand. Pitman advocated the revolutionary potential of shorthand, a belief he tried unsuccessfully to materialise through forming the

'Phonographic Corresponding Society' in 1843. James Montgomery picked up on this technological utopianism in a contemporary piece of doggerel that celebrated stenography as a prelude to a universal network of sympathetic thought transference that would eventually obviate the need for mediation of any kind:

> Mind is invisible, yet when we write,
>
> That world of mystery comes forth to sight;
>
> In vocal speech, the idle air breathes sense,
>
> And empty sound becomes intelligence.
>
> PHONETIC ART hath both these modes outdone,
>
> By blending sounds and symbols into one.
>
> Take one step more, and science may define
>
> How spirits discourse without word or sign;
>
> And teach mankind their feelings to impart,
>
> Unseen, unheard, by pulses of the heart;
>
> With souls by sympathy the world embrace,
>
> And hold communion, free of time and place;[39]

Aligning spiritual and technological mediation, these lines imagine a distinctively nineteenth-century extension of the possibilities of communication from an individual to a global exchange of information.

While Mayhew's transcriptive methods remain as mysterious as James Montgomery's vision of the transcendent powers of phonographic writing, the residue of the interview process in the respondents' answers attunes the reader's ears to the presence of an ear-witness, such as in the following testimony from a costermonger enlisted to exemplify the uneducated state of costermongers:

> I've worked the streets and the courts at all times. I've worked them by moonlight, but you couldn't see the moonlight where it was busy. I can't say how far the moon's off us. It's nothing to me, but I've seen it a good bit higher than St Paul's. I don't know nothing about the sun. Why do you ask? It must be nearer than the moon for it's warmer,—and if they're both fire, that shows it. It's like the tap-room grate and that bit of a gas-light; to compare the two is. What was St Paul's that the moon was above? A church, sir; so I've heard. I never was in a church. O, yes, I've heard of God; he made heaven and earth; I've never heard of his making the sea; … Jesus

> Christ? Yes. I've heard of him. Our Redeemer? Well, I only wish I could
> redeem my Sunday togs from my uncle's.[40]

What is striking here is the way Mayhew builds trust in the interviewee, while cuing the reader to listen closely as the portrait of the costermonger emerges through the digressive movements of the conversation. It is intimate and free-flowing, rather than a mechanical sequence of leading questions driven solely by the logic of data-collection; the literal trace of the subject appears on the page—no matter how illusory that impression may be.

—AN EAR FOR VOICES

Mixed praise for Mayhew's ear for voices and eye for detail extends into the twentieth century. Auden praised his 'passion for idiosyncrasies of character and speech such as only the very greatest novelists have exhibited'.[41] Raymond Williams likewise notes 'Mayhew's incomparable record of conversations'.[42] But many of Mayhew's contemporaries remained unconvinced. This is particularly evident in reviews that comment on the relative accuracy of Richard Beard's daguerreotypes and Mayhew's transcription of the speech of his subjects. A review of the 1861 three-volume edition of *London Labour and the London Poor* in the literary magazine *The Critic* explicitly opposed the authenticity of Beard's images to the theatricality of Mayhew's prose:

> Clever and even brilliant it was sure to be: as certainly dramatic and unreliable. Mr Mayhew went to work on a magnificent scale. He had photographs taken of many of the characters and places referred to in his book, and gave page after page of dialogues which were said to have taken place between himself and those characters. The photographs no doubt are accurate enough, but those dialogues smell of the footlights. It may be very amusing to look at a picture of 'The London Costermonger', from a daguerreotype by Beard, with the characteristic inscription appended—
> 'Here, Pertaters! Kearots and Turnups! Fine Brockello-o-o!' but when we turn to the account which the said costermonger gives of himself to Mr Mayhew, we are reminded strongly of the celebrated *Jim Boggs*, and the language which Mr Robson so admirably delivers. Of course, it is not necessary that a book need be dull in order to be accurate; but when we

find page after page covered with what professes to be dialogues accurately transcribed, and perceive that these dialogues bear a strong family resemblance to each other—that they are all highly dramatic, and spiced and seasoned so as to bring out the 'high lights' of the picture intended to be produced—we certainly do feel that the amusement overbalances the instruction that we have derived from the perusal of them.[43]

It is the idea of the daguerreotype or photograph as 'faithful mimesis', according to this review, that exposes Mayhew's selective repetition of edited highlights as inauthentic reproductions of the everyday speech and characteristics of London's wandering tribes.[44]

As this reviewer also notes, sound bites of characteristic speech serve as titles for many of the engraved reproductions of Beard's daguerreotypes reinforcing the analogy between transcriptive modes. Mayhew correspondingly describes his writing as the 'unvarnished language' of personal observation.[45] Yet he is equally keen to dramatise the process of communicating the dissonant acoustics of street life as a form of civilising filtration in which his acute sensibility suffers for the cause of instructive revelation. The following well-known description of the New Cut markets on a Saturday night dramatises these competing impulses:

Then the sights, as you elbow your way through the crowd, are equally multifarious. Here is a stall glittering with new tin saucepans; there another, bright with its blue and yellow crockery, and sparkling with white glass. Now you come to a row of old shoes arranged along the pavement; now a stand of gaudy tea-trays; … One minute you pass a man with an umbrella turned inside up and full of prints; the next you hear one with a peepshow of Mazzeppa, and Paul Jones the pirate, describing the pictures to the boys looking in at the little round windows … Such, indeed, is the riot, the struggle, and the scramble for a living, that the confusion and uproar of the New-cut on Saturday night have a bewildering and saddening effect upon the thoughtful mind.[46]

Driving this scene is a desire, as Patrick Brantlinger suggests, 'to slow, to stabilize, and to render totally visible and comprehensible a social realm whose most constant features are flux and inconstancy'.[47] But this decelerating description only

intensifies the overriding Darwinism of such scenes of 'riot and struggle,' and the melancholy they inspire in Mayhew's 'thoughtful mind'. Inherent throughout is a developmental typology that opposes the contemplative civilised mind of the urban ethnographer to the surrounding unreflective barbarism that he is channelling.

Mayhew's heightened sensitivity to noise, to invoke James Sully, literally embodies a higher degree of civilisation. The more primitive the sensibility on the developmental scale, Sully argued, the less distracted or disturbed by noise:

> Now it is obvious that culture means, among other things, a disposition of mind to continuous and concentrated thought. Both in external perception and in internal mediation the civilized man differs from the uncivilized through his impulse to prolonged attention over a large area of impressions and ideas. Hence distraction hardly has a meaning for the savage, whereas it may be a palpable evil in the case of the meditative student.[48]

Mayhew and Sully are further aligned in their interest in navigating the ways in which noise was shaping everyday life in the new and often overwhelming material environment inhabited by a readership invested as never before in the struggle to filter out the hubbub of other people's lives. Both invoke a rhetoric of sensual assault, of porous bodies, in the process of formulating a new set of co-ordinates for modern urban living, foremost being a civilised recognition of the aural sensibilities of one's neighbours. For unlike the eye that can shut out sensory stimulation, the 'pains inflicted through the ear are deep and pervading', to quote Sully, 'analogous to bodily hurts, and wholly incommensurable with the momentary discomforts caused by the visual impression of ugly objects'.[49] What hurts are the abrasive incursions of noise as 'non signifying matter,' the painful assault of the acoustic debris of modernity that jars and paralyses the senses.[50]

The following, final section examines Mayhew's gradual shift away from the model of ear-witnessing, or self-conscious extraction of individual voices from the noise of the street that he had promoted so earnestly in *London Labour and the London Poor*. Mayhew increasingly struggled to channel what Steven Connor has described as the 'force of *vocality*'—which Connor defines as 'the ensemble of values and powers invested in the voice—including the power of testimony, the power of being an event of speech, of proximity'.[51] Instead, I would suggest, what one finds in

texts such as *The Great World of London* (1858) is a more avowed disassociated rendering of voice—split from its source, and mediated from afar. The concentrated drama of voice and noise that animates *London Labour and the London Poor*, which was intended to surprise, engage and make readers feel, is replaced by a more dispersive overview that is literally enacted in Mayhew's portrayal of himself adrift in a balloon in *The Great World of London*, to which I return at the conclusion of this section. Far above the streets that plagued his senses and intruded upon his thoughts, Mayhew envisaged a new descriptive method that could harmonise the hubbub and dissolve the cacophany of individual voices competing to be heard into a more controlled soundscape.[52]

—Dissonant media

The presence of Beard's daguerreotypes in the various editions of *London Labour and the London Poor* published from 1851 on materialise the flawed illusion of immediacy that Mayhew tries to generate through the mess of media that he enlists.[53] Reproduced as engravings, they suggest but fail to deliver a precise facsimile of their subjects. Or at least, they fail according to twenty-first-century standards. In contrast to our expectations of photographic verisimilitude, nineteenth-century critics commonly compared daguerreotypes to engravings owing to their limited tonal variations of black, gray and white. Indicatively, the American painter and inventor Samuel Morse wrote of his first encounter with a daguerreotype:

> They are produced on a metallic surface, the principal pieces, about seven inches by five, and they resemble acquatint engravings, for they are in simple chiaroscuro and not in colours. But the exquisite minuteness of the delineation cannot be conceived. No painting or engraving ever approached it. For example: in a view up the street a distant sign would be perceived, and the eye could just discern that there were letters upon it, but so minute as not to be read with the naked eye. By the assistance of a powerful lens, which magnified fifty times, applied to the delineation, every letter was clearly and distinctly legible, and so also were the minutest breaks and lines in the walls of the buildings and the pavements

of the streets. The effect of the lens upon the picture was to a great degree

like that of the telescope in nature…[54]

For Morse, the act of looking at a daguerreotype prompts a heightened awareness of the machinery of vision that balances the aesthetic and scientific potential of the image. Morse literally reads the daguerreotyped street scene. He revels in the unprecedented minuteness of the delineation of the smallest letters on a street sign. Being able to read the signs as if he was there signals the emergence of a new form of notation with the power to document the world with unprecedented accuracy.

Mayhew's exposure of the ruses and swindles of street photographers in the third volume of the 1861 edition also reveals his particular investment in the precision of the daguerreotype. Mayhew clearly made a distinction between 'ne'er do well' street photographers and the expertise of Richard Beard, which he aligned with his own transcriptive techniques. There is also an important technical distinction to be made between the uncanny clarity that Morse celebrates and the indistinct images generated by early forms of the wet collodion process that the unscrupulous photographers Mayhew interviewed clearly exploited to their own advantage. It is worth noting as well that these interviews with various street photographers lack the animating force of his earlier interviews from the 1851 series, which predate the invention of the collodion process, suggesting they were undertaken during the mid 1850s when Mayhew was disengaging from the enterprise as a whole. This more distant interviewing style is also aptly materialised by the use of a sketch of the East End photographer's saloon to illustrate the interview, rather than an engraving from Beard—also another sign of the later provenance of this sequence.

And yet, while Mayhew clearly shared Morse's interest in the daguerreotype as an uncannily precise form of notation, daguerreotypes function ambiguously in *London Labour and the London Poor*. Given how removed the engraved reproductions are from Beard's daguerreotypes, the reader would not have readily identified them as daguerreotypes without the parenthetical reminder '[From a Daguerreotype by BEARD]'. So why use the technology at all? Beard's daguerreotypes rarely correspond with the transcribed interviews they illustrate. Sometimes Mayhew refers the reader to a particular image, but this is the exception not the rule. In the case of Beard's image of 'The Crippled Bird Seller', which

appeared in the second volume of the 1861 edition, the transcribed interview appears a dozen pages later with no reference to Beard's image.[55] There is also a striking dissonance between the arresting silence of Beard's engraved images and the conjuring power of Mayhew's subsequent interview, which includes the following cued digression into the Crippled Bird-Seller's dream-life:

> 'I dream sometimes, sir,' the cripple resumed in answer to my question, 'but not often. I often have more than once dreamed I was starving and dying of hunger. I remember that, for I woke in a tremble. But most of my dreams is soon forgot. I never seemed to myself to be a cripple in my dreams. Well, I can't explain how, but I feel as if my limbs was all free like—so beautiful. I dream most about starving I think, than about anything else. Perhaps that's when I have to go to sleep hungry.'[56]

Mayhew's earlier writing on the relationship between surprise and suggestibility offers one possible rationale for the intended interplay between Beard's daguerreotypes and Mayhew's transcribed voices. Surprise, according to Mayhew, is 'that emotion which arises in the mind immediately upon the occurrence of an event which is wholly disconnected with our previous thoughts'.[57] Correspondingly, he argues in *London Labour and the London Poor* that strongly felt emotion trains the mind and jars the body into a more receptive state—ideally one that focuses both ears and eyes on the interplay between Beard's arresting portraits and Mayhew's simulated voices. As Mayhew observes: 'The heart is the mainspring of the intellect, and the feelings the real educers [sic] and educators of the thoughts.'[58] Encountering the traces of the no longer present, regardless of their remediated form, takes on the affective potency of an event that exceeds the two dimensionality of the printed page, uncannily realising Mayhew's ultimately melancholic message that this confluence of images and words constitute the material traces of dead or dying ways of life. As Mayhew informs the reader in his account of 'Long Song Sellers': 'I have this week given a daguerreotype of a well-known long-song seller, and have preferred to give it as the trade, especially as regards London, has all but disappeared'.[59]

Civilising the senses, to return to Sully's reflections on 'noise and civilisation', seems to require a necessary balance of sensitive attunement and self-protective filtration that ultimately depends on the individual system's capacity to manage the

hubbub of information. To return to Mayhew's account of drifting far above the hubbub of London in a balloon in *The Great World of London* from 1856, this interlude captures the idealising drift of this model of hearing and looking at a distance. Looking down at London, Mayhew remarks on the 'special delight' the intellect experiences at comprehending 'all the minute particulars of a subject under one associate whole'.[60] Mayhew revels in the combination of usually disjointed parts into a unified visual effect. Casting around for an alternative optical metaphor to describe the respite offered by visual abstraction, Mayhew aptly selects the rhythmically harmonising dispersions of the kaleidoscope: 'so does the eye love to see the country, or the town, which it usually knows only as a series of disjointed parts—as abstract fields, hills, rivers, parks, streets, gardens, or churches—become all combined, like the coloured fragments of the kaleidoscope, into one harmonious and varied scene'.[61] It was simply becoming too hard to hear 'up close' by the mid 1850s when Mayhew's passion for interviewing was on the wane, a dissipation of his once formidable energy which was more a testament to his own bohemian proclivities than an indication of a more pervasive trend in the techniques of urban description to which his work had so seminally contributed.

Flawed and incomplete as it was, Mayhew's enterprise dramatises the constitutive tension between aural and print culture that presages the advent of the mechanical reproduction of the voice and undermines conventional narrations of the 'devocalisation of the universe', typically associated with writing in the age of mechanical reproduction.[62] Mayhew's historical interest lies in his concern with the materiality of writing as communication and his mediation of individual voices as a counter to the standardising mechanisms of Victorian sentimental description, typified for him by Dickens, which he argued suppressed the complex sociality of London's outcasts. Mayhew's grasp of political and economic theory may have been inadequate when read alongside Engels' masterful contemporary account of *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, but his skills as an interviewer were incomparable. While we may not have the standardised interpretative script that Mayhew used in individual and group interviews, the residual randomness of individual voices recorded for posterity materialise the phonographic drive of Mayhew's writing, as well as its transitional formation amidst the competing transcriptive technologies of novelistic description, stenography, and photography.

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1 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor; A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 volumes, Griffin Bohn, London, 1861. Further references will be to this edition unless specified.

2 Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 10.

3 James Sully, 'Civilisation and Noise', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 24, no. 143, November 1878, pp. 704–20.

4 Anne Humpherys, *Travels into the Poor Man's Country: The Work of Henry Mayhew*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1977, p. 138.

5 Andre Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1967, p. 14.

6 Humpherys, p. 62.

7 Michael North, *Camera Works. Photography and the Twentieth Century Word*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 4.

8 Samuel Bagster cited in Alfred Baker, *The Life of Isaac Pitman (Inventor of Phonography)*, Isaac Pitman & Co, London, 1919, p. 52.

9 Isaac Pitman, *Manual of Phonography or Writing By Sound*, John Donlevy, New York, 1844, p. 3.

10 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past. Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2003, p. 2.

11 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, 1994, pp. 3–12, p. 3.

12 Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, p. 1.

13 John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 11.

[14] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck. A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 11.

[15] Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990, p. 369.

[16] Letter II, 23 October 1849, cited in Humpherys, p. 40.

[17] Edison cited in Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, p. 4.

[18] Lisa Gitelman argues along these lines in *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, p. 4.

[19] Juan A. Suarez, *Pop-Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*, University Of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2007, p. 10.

[20] Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and Its Failures*, Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1898, p. 16.

[21] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2006, p. 4.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2008, p. 10–11.

[24] Ivan Krielkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 2.

[25] Ibid., p. 3.

[26] E.P. Thompson describes Mayhew's politics as enigmatic and the politics of migration that shaped the reception of his series in the *Morning Chronicle* in 'The Political Education of Henry Mayhew', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1967, pp. 41–62, p. 51.

[27] The tradition of visual evocations of the 'Cries of London' was well established by the middle of the nineteenth century. A well-received example of this genre is Francis Wheatley's series of oil paintings titled 'Cries of London' exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1792 and 1795. Engraved prints of this series were very popular throughout the nineteenth century and still in print in the early twentieth century.

[28] Henry Mayhew's accounts of a visit to the cholera districts of Bermondsey, published Monday 24 September 1849 in the *Morning Chronicle*, cited in Peter Razzell, Introduction, *The Morning Chronicle Survey of Labour and the Poor: The Metropolitan Districts*, 6 volumes, Caliban Books, Sussex, 1980, pp. 1–29, p. 1.

[29] There were other contemporary endeavours to describe the urban poor such as Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Engels' analysis of poverty was more theoretical than Mayhew's and focused on Manchester's working poor.

[30] Letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, quoted in Razzell, vol. 1, p. 5.

[31] Charles Mackay, *Forty Years' Recollections of Life, Literature, and Public Affairs*, 2 volumes, Chapman and Hall, London, 1877, vol 2, p. 152.

[32] Review of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, *Athenaeum*, no. 1255, 15 November 1851, p. 1199.

[33] William Makepeace Thackeray, 'Waiting at the Station' (1850), repr. in *Miscellanies: Prose and Verse*, Bradbury and Evans, London 1856, pp. 44–50.

[34] Anon., 'Mr Henry Mayhew's Curious Characters', *Musical Gazette*, 1 August 1857, pp. 364–5, p. 364.

[35] Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004, pp. 23–74.

[36] According to Anne Humpherys these theories drew on the work of Dr Andrew Smith, 'a recognised expert on South Africa'; see Humpherys, p. 71.

[37] (1:5) Catherine Gallagher elaborates on the parallels between Mayhew and Malthus in 'The Body Versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew', *Representations*, vol. 14, Spring, 1986, pp. 83–106.

[38] Henry Sutherland Edwards, *Personal Recollections,* Cassell & Co, London, 1900, p. 60. Edwards had a complicated relationship with the Mayhews. He collaborated with Augustus on various theatrical ventures, but was predominantly a journalist writing extensively on Russia, where he lived for some time as a correspondent for *The Times*.

[39] James Montgomery cited in Baker, pp. 90–1.

[40] Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 22.

[41] W.H. Auden, 'A Very Inquisitive Old Party', *Forewords and Afterwords*, Vintage, New York, 1973, pp. 233–4.

[42] Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City*, Routledge, New York, 1973, p. 218.

[43] 'Review of Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: a Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that Will Work, Those that Cannot Work, and those that Will Not Work*. 3 vols. (London: Griffin, Bohn, and Co, 1861)', *The Critic*, 20 July 1861, pp. 77–9. The reference to Mr Robson is to the theatre manager of the Royal Olympic Theatre, Drury Lane, known for staging comic melodramas in the early 1860s.

[44] Michael North argues that the idea of photography as 'faithful mimesis' profoundly shaped not only modern forms of writing, but was also understood as a form of writing; North, pp. 3–4.

[45] Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) vol. 1, p. iii.

[46] Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 10.

[47] Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson. The Threat of Mass-Literacy in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1998, p. 87.

[48] James Sully, 'Civilisation and Noise', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 24, no. 143, November 1878, pp. 704–20, p. 709.

[49] Ibid., p. 717.

[50] Suarez, p. 8.

[51] Steven Connor, 'Panaphonia', talk given at the Pompidou Centre, 22 February 2012, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/panophonia/panophonia.pdf>.

[52] Henry Mayhew, *The Great World of London*, Bogue, London, 1858, p. 7.

[53] Leah Price describes the swelling out of 'a messy series of media' in 'Getting the Reading Out of It: Paper Recycling in Mayhew's London', in *Bookish Histories*, ed. Ina Ferris and Paul Keen, Palgrave, London, 2009, pp. 148–68, p. 149.

[54] Samuel Morse in a letter dated 9 March 1839 cited in Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L.J.M. Daguerre*, Dover, London, 1969, pp. 89.

[55] Beard's daguerreotype of 'The Crippled Bird Seller' appears in the second volume of the 1861 edition between pages 54 and 55.

[56] Mayhew, *London Labour*, vol. 2, pp. 68–9.

[57] Henry Mayhew, 'What is the Cause of Surprise? And what connection has it with the law of Suggestion?', *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, vol. VI, 1847, pp. 56–64, p. 56.

[58] Mayhew, *London Labour*, p. 42.

[59] Ibid., p. 221.

[60] Ibid., p. 7.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Routledge, London, 1982, p. 15.