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Sea Rescue with Listener[1]: Migration and the Philosophy of Hearkening[2]

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Abstract

This paper examines the encounter between so-called 'locals' and 'migrants' or individuals with a migration background through the two intellectual senses of perception: seeing and hearing. It argues that this encounter is predominantly structured by a regime of seeing, which is not neutral but deeply embedded in socio-historical power dynamics. This visual regime is characterized by objectification, fixation, and distancing – modes of perception that distort social interaction and reduce the 'migrant' to a visible marker of otherness. As a result, the migration background moves from a contextual detail to a defining feature of identity, a process called 'migrantification'. In other words, the migration background becomes a foreground. To critically investigate this process, the paper employs a critical phenomenological approach, beginning with lived experience and moving beyond the classical Sartrean emphasis on the gaze. Instead, it reveals how the 'migrant' condition is shaped not only by being seen but by being seen in a particular way. Given the limitations of liberal discourses that aim merely to include 'migrant' voices, I propose an alternative orientation – one that centers the primacy of listening, or more precisely, hearkening. This auditory openness introduces a relational ethic, emphasizing receptivity, mutuality, and conceptual transformation in intercultural encounters.

Key Words:

Migration, seeing, listening, hearkening, phenomenology

How does it feel to be a problem?
W. E. B. Du Bois

1 Introduction: Philosophizing from the Boat

How can we philosophize about migration? The most common response is: "normatively". Normativity, after all, suggests a supposedly objective distance, a neutral gaze. It promises control, much like the quantification of an upper limit. The universal need not, or only minimally, engage with the particular. The Other remains a necessary abstraction, a problem reduced to a moral measure (Di Cesare, 2020: 19).

[1] This title and its recurring theme allude to Blumenberg (1996).
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In other words, one remains a spectator to the shipwreck.

If it is argued that philosophy, in order to be credible and relevant, should not merely "observe the storms of the times from its safe harbor" (Schellhammer, 2020), but rather venture out into the in-between, does this not apply especially to questions of migration? Could this not, in concrete terms, mean: "A philosophy of the migrant requires a spectator who is capable of moving from the internal to the external, and vice versa; able not only to recount and redeem the shipwreck, but also to pass judgement on it" (Di Cesare, 2020: 22-23).

In the following, we will dare to philosophize from the boat. Our concern will not only be to reconsider the role of the spectators but also to question the act of observing itself. Specifically, we will examine how encounters between 'locals' and people who have a migration background are dominated by a particular gaze and what this implies for the interactions between those involved (2). Subsequently, the position of the spectators will be contrasted with that of the attentive listeners to explore how encounters might be transformed as a result (3). I will argue that the interaction is shaped by a visual regime rooted in socio-historical power structures – marked by objectification, fixation, and distance – which reduces the 'migrant' to a visible sign of otherness. This shifts the migration background from a minor detail to a defining identity trait, a process termed *migrantification*. As an alternative, I propose a response grounded in hearkening, a form of listening that fosters relational ethics, mutuality, and openness in intercultural interactions.

I am concerned with interpreting encounters starting from the senses. Therefore, the purely linguistic dimension will largely be set aside. Not only is hearing the sensory aspect of the word, but this often-forgotten other side of language takes precedence over speaking insofar as it constitutes the very condition for it. This phenomenological approach, grounded in the senses, is particularly oriented towards the characteristics of each respective sense. It does not stop there, however, and proceeds from this foundation towards different relations with the world or modes of thought. We move, thus, within a tension between the sensory and metaphorical levels of these senses, which often inevitably intermingle and mutually influence one another (Espinet, 2009: 13-32; Grüny, 2018: 255).

Three further aspects should be emphasized. First, seeing does not always function in the way described below. Rather, what is at issue concerns a specific 'scopic regime' that often emerges in encounters between 'locals' and 'migrants'. Martin Jay (1994: 9) explains the meaning of scopic regime by highlighting the permeable boundary between the cultural and natural dimensions of vision:

> "[T]he universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically. Natural science, therefore, itself suggests the possibility of cultural variables, at least to some degree. It implies, in other words, the inevitable entanglement of vision and what has been called 'visuality' – the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes. […] Observation, to put it another way, means observing the tacit cultural rules of different scopic regimens."

Although Jay primarily refers to language here, it becomes clear over the course of his text that cultural variables arise from a range of additional factors. In a similar way, we can

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assume that certain historically mediated cultural variables contribute to the formation of a specific scopic regime in relation to the phenomenon described in this text.

In considering these regimes, it is important to note that, alongside the "*regard inhumain"* (Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 414), there exist far more affirmative forms of encounter and gaze.[4] These are shaped by distinct "ways of the gaze", "gaze content", "movement of the gaze", and, most significantly, by the "attitude of the gaze" (Waldenfels, 2016: 501-503), in which a particular worldview is revealed. On the other hand, the roles can be reversed, so that 'non-migrant' groups may undergo similar experiences. The specific effects of the gaze, however, shift accordingly and will be described below from the perspective of individuals with a discernible migration background. In parallel, an ideal scenario of listening – or more precisely: of hearkening – will be outlined as a counterpart. Other, especially negative forms of listening, such as obedience (*Gehorsam*), will be excluded for the purposes of this discussion (Welsch, 1996: 233-234).

Second, I do not differentiate the term 'migrant'.[5] Although the metaphor of shipwreck runs throughout the text, the focus is primarily on the notion of a migration background in general and on how the senses relate to it. This background is intended to allow for the inclusion of diverse migration experiences. It may be so concealed or outdated that it hardly influences an encounter – or only becomes visible within it, thereby turning into a *foreground* of migration. At the same time, it can also shape the interaction from the outset. Migration backgrounds are multifaceted: They can create connections, since each of us carries one, yet, they are also highly heterogeneous, encompassing vastly different experiences.

Moreover, I seek to avoid reproducing linguistic violence and therefore consciously refrain from using the stereotypical label 'migrant' wherever possible. I do not always succeed in meeting this standard, at times I even deliberately subvert it in order to draw attention to the very dynamics it entails. Almost as an act of counter-violence and empowerment, an undifferentiated 'migrant' 'we' is invoked, set in contrast to the anonymous collective of 'they' respectively 'one' (the German 'Man') (Heidegger, 2006: 126-130). This is intended to highlight the stereotyping inherent in the scopic regime – stereotyping that only begins to dissolve through hearkening.

Thirdly, each of the two sections is preceded by a description. This "personal digression", based on "[s]trange encounters", follows the methodology of Sara Ahmed (2006: 22; 2000: 14) as well as George Yancy's (2025: 41) "elevator effect". By capturing quotidian situations, this autoethnographic approach seeks to transform personal experiences into productive narratives for phenomenological-philosophical inquiry. To allow for identification, the scenes are deliberately kept abstract and anonymous. This aims to open a level of experience often neglected in purely normative discussions, a level that retains

[4] Positive forms of looking include, e.g., a "*regard libérateur*" (Fanon, 2011: 153), a successful, self-empowering "oppositional gaze" (Hooks, 1992: 116), the uninhibited and spontaneous gaze of a "person of essence" (Buber, 1954: 597), an "open" gaze that transcends the separation between subject and object and moves towards the unveiling of truth (Levin, 1988), and finally, the prereflective "circumspection" (*Umsicht*) (Heidegger, 2006: 137).

[5] For a distinction between the terms 'refugees' and 'migrants' in the German context, see for example Schwenken (2018: 42–47). Regarding the concept of migration and related issues, see Ehrenfeld (2024), who also provides further references.

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its emotional and even physical dimensions. The goal is to supplement the "epistemic shortcomings" of migration discourse, which arise from one-sided representations, with unheard perspectives (Markow, 2018: 23). This is achieved through a critical phenomenology that, unlike normative approaches, seeks, through its descriptive approach, to avoid dominating and objectifying individuals with a perceptible migration background (Di Cesare, 2020: 122).[6]

In other words, we want to be listeners during the sea rescue.

2 Spectator to the Shipwreck

We arrived at the train station of a small town. At first, we didn't notice the people's gazes, as we were looking at the station's architecture, and soon after, that of the town center. With every step, the number of gazes grew, at times even turning into stares. Some people stopped walking, others turned around to look at us. We looked at each other, puzzled, wondering whether something was wrong with us, whether we had toothpaste still on our faces. A few more glances, and then it became clear: apart from us, no one else seemed to have a migration background. Our skin, hair, and origin gave us away. The only difference: I was born in Germany; my friend was not.

Suddenly we could feel their gazes on us, almost inside us, even when we turned away from them. They were examining, suspicious, sometimes condescending gazes. Gazes that came (too) close, while the people themselves felt unsettlingly far away. We were seen, but only in a particular way. Their way. We felt shame. Their gazes made us aware that we had a different phenotype, a migration background. Not only did we feel foreign in their eyes, but the town – just moments ago admired – also began to feel foreign. A distance emerged between us and the town, its people, and even ourselves.

Because we could not escape their gazes, we looked back. No matter how intensely we looked, it seemed not to affect them. We had no choice but to move on, trying to ignore their gazes, even though they repeatedly tore us out of our sense of being. We moved, yet it felt as if we weren't making any progress, as if we were petrified under the weight of their stares. Although no one stood behind us, it felt as though their gazes lay on our necks.

Until we realized that we had lost our way. We searched for the right address, still feeling the gazes, even when no one was looking at us anymore. Then we noticed an older man walking past us on the other side of the street. We crossed to ask for directions. My friend didn't dare speak; her accent and grammatical mistakes had often led to her not being taken seriously or being dismissed as unreliable. But even when I spoke, the man didn't answer. He looked at us briefly, then through us, averted his gaze, and walked on.

2.1 Falling into Visibility: The Objectifying Gaze in Context

This scene illustrates how the gaze shapes the encounter between 'locals' and people with an (obvious) migration background. Just as the sense of sight dominates most of our interactions, influencing our understanding and thinking more than any other sense, even shaping

[6] Although my emphasis is on the phenomenological and theoretical aspects, I will occasionally suggest practical implications of these findings. Given the scope and length of this paper, these suggestions will remain provisional. To maintain the focus of the discussion, I will draw exclusively on theoretical research, omitting empirical studies that could, nonetheless, support my argument.

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culture as a whole (Welsch, 1996: 236-241). In many ways, this dynamic recalls what Jean-Paul Sartre (1995: 314) describes: "My being for-others is a fall through the absolute void towards objectivity."[7]

What does this mean in relation to our example? At first, our consciousness was in a non-thetic state (Sartre, 1995: 298). That is to say, there was no 'I' inherent in our awareness. We had consciousness of things, a form of awareness fully absorbed in its actions. Aware of the architecture we observed upon arrival, at times aware of the steps that carried us from the station into the town. Only the gazes of others pulled us out of this state. By seeing us, they caused us to begin seeing ourselves (Sartre, 1995: 299). The 'I' broke into consciousness. This is why we looked at one another in confusion. But this rupture, this fall, was more radical than in other situations. After all, we are seen every day – by family, friends, even strangers – without being thrown into objectification.

This marks the first difference from Sartre's account: The emerging self-consciousness is experienced as a genuine fall, producing a deeper sense of disorientation. Why were *we* the object of their gaze? What was wrong with *us*? And *what* did they see in *us*? What Sartre describes as becoming-an-object in the gaze of the other unfolds here in a more forceful way. The objectification is more intense than in other situations – or rather: while other gazes may still perceive one as a subject, here one is almost entirely reduced to an object. It is precisely in this moment that a central characteristic of vision manifests with particular intensity: More than any other sense, sight tends to objectify and, thus, enacts a sharp separation between subject and object (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 365).

Even if one – contrary to the existentialist perspective – agrees with Martin Buber that in interpersonal, dialogical encounters one can never appear to the other as a mere object, not even in a boxing match, because "the hidden activity of my being is capable of setting an insurmountable barrier to objectification" (Buber, 1954: 595), there are still people like us who are often regarded more as objects than others, despite a remaining moment of subjecthood.

"[S]ome-bodies are more recognizable as strangers than other-bodies", Sara Ahmed (2000: 30; cf. 2006: 142) aptly writes. This, she explains, is because they are already read and evaluated through the demarcation of social spaces. If perception is shaped by history and culture, then hardly any gaze can be free from pre-existing value attributions (Alcoff, 1999: 19). According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2001: 178), our perception is always subject to a "habitude perceptive". If we expand these actively learned bodily modes of perception to include a socio-critical perspective, this concerns not only the distinction between colors such as blue and red, but also the perception of certain phenotypes, accents, or other markers of migration. That is why, back then, people did not simply see us, they saw us through their specific, familiar mode of perception, their unreflective scopic regime: as more foreign objects.

Just as we must expand phenomenology to include a critical dimension, we should also complement Sartre's interpersonal perspective with a societal dimension that accounts for hierarchization and stereotyping. Precisely because of its objectifying and fixating properties, vision – more than any other sense – is particularly prone to being

[7] Translated by the author: "*Mon être pour-autrui est une chute à travers le vide absolu vers l'objectivité*."

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instrumentalized as a tool of power.[8] In this light, Frantz Fanon's (2011: 175n) critique of Sartre can be applied to our situation: Even though Sartre's account of alienated consciousness is fundamentally accurate, it falls short with regard to the 'Black' consciousness, since the 'White' man additionally assumes the Hegelian position of master. For us, this means: the 'locals' saw us from a position of greater power, from above. And it was this 'from above' that caused our fall.

2.2 Migrantification: Foregrounding the Migration Background

Another difference from Sartre's description lies in the fact that these gazes did not merely make us self-aware, but specifically aware of a particular part of ourselves: our 'migrant' identity. This is what we refer to as migrantification: Through certain practices – such as, in this case, a particular gaze – the background of migration is brought to the foreground. Until this occurs, it often remains so far behind us that we lose sight of it entirely. Much like our experience in the town, it ceases to function as a mere background, but becomes a dominant migration foreground, overshadowing nearly everything else.

This is similar to what is known as "corporealization" (Fuchs, 2000: 136). The body is always there, but only through experiences of estrangement, objectification, or distancing – such as pain, pregnancy, or the gazes of others – does it emerge from its role as a habitual body into our conscious awareness. Migrantification functions similarly: the migration background, like our body, is present in a particular way, sometimes more, sometimes less palpable. Yet, in moments like these, it steps out of mere functionality into consciousness (Fuchs, 2000: 125-126). And because it does so, it stands before us like a foreign object, opening up a distance between ourselves and it. In other words, migrantification refers to the act by which they – often members of the dominant group – reduce our identity to that of a mere 'migrant' through certain procedures. In doing so, they pull this aspect of our identity from the (sometimes long-forgotten) background into the foreground, to such an extent that it begins to overshadow our entire sense of self, even for ourselves.

According to Ahmed (2006: 131–132), "whiteness", on the other hand, functions like the habitual body, it lags behind, even behind action, and does not get in the way. For the 'locals', it is similar: their migration background has already fully dissolved into the environment, to the point of invisibility. It remains in the background and does not intervene – neither between them and their actions nor between them and the objects or people they encounter. This is not the case for our migration background, which cannot become neutral because it is continually brought into the foreground.

2.3 Dimensions of Distance and Disorientation

The distance and the accompanying subject-object split manifested on two levels. First – as already indicated – in relation to ourselves: the process of migrantification produced a distancing between the subject we were and the foreign object we were made to be, between "being-for-others" and "being-in-itself" or "being-for-itself" (Sartre, 1995). This becomes problematic when we are repeatedly looked at in this way, and our migration background is so frequently brought to the foreground that we become divided persons. Divided because the objectified part is more strongly determined by the image others have

[8] Be it the disciplinary gaze (Foucault, 1975: 197–229), the colonial gaze (Fanon, 2011: 153-158; Hooks, 1992: 115), or the patriarchal gaze (Dolezal, 2016: 54-57).

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of us than by our subjective self-image. Time and again, we are forced to view ourselves through the eyes of others, until we develop a "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 2008: 8).

The contentious Sartrean (1985: 81 ff.) finding that Jewish identity is primarily the result of external ascriptions applied, at least in part, to our situation. Initially, the 'migrant' aspect of ourselves was not dominant. Rather, we were shaped by the roots of either the country of origin or the country of arrival, perhaps a mixture of both or some other combination. Not to mention the many other components that comprise what we call 'identity'. The specific identity as a 'migrant' was, thus, established – at least to this degree – through the gaze of the other and the associated ascriptions. This can lead to a split, a rupture between self-image and external perception.

Secondly, the distance (as well as the separation between subject and object) arose between us and the observers, whose gazes paradoxically came too close to us.[9] Seeing is often described as the sense defined by distance (Welsch, 1996: 249–250). This is associated with its supposed objectivity and the related objectification, as well as an *affectlessness* (especially regarding the body). Exactly because the observers turned us into objects, they distanced themselves increasingly from us. As long as they watched us, they could maintain distance and did not have to allow us to come close. This distance suggested control. Whoever sits at the center of the panopticon can surveil everyone precisely because they do not have to let anyone get near. We can, accordingly, extend the observation that ethnic differences are often perceived as distance, despite spatial proximity, to the process of migrantification (Alcoff, 1999: 22).

Another characteristic caused by distance, which may not play a role specifically in our situation but does in others, is described by Donatella Di Cesare (2020: 183):

> "The imagination is blocked, held back by the numbers, inhibited by the mass. For a moment, the gaze fixes on a woman wavering as she disembarks from a ship. But how is it possible to feel something without having an understanding of her history, without knowing anything about her?"

Regarding the people in the boats, distancing and control prevent any genuine relationship, one is not affected. Objectification – such as reducing them to numbers – inhibits feelings and, therefore, prevents one from reaching the subject. Distance is also linked to its nature as a totalizing sense of simultaneity (Levin, 1988: 79, 97; Jonas, 1973: 199): Multiple objects appear simultaneously side by side on the tableau within our field of vision, crowds in which the individual gets lost.

Distance, therefore, enables a totalizing perspective that not only promises control but can also overwhelm through the resulting overall picture, while simultaneously creating a further sense of detachment. Precisely because the gaze captures so much at once, it often seems, metaphorically speaking, unable to see deeply or look beyond. It lingers on the surface of the migration foreground. As if from a distance, with its totalizing perspective, the migration background is, almost paradoxically, the only aspect that becomes visible and, consequently, foregrounded. What remains inaccessible to it is the

[9] Perhaps this could be described as a kind of "distant closeness": Although the observers distanced themselves more and more through their gazes, a part of them – namely their gazes themselves – came close to us, as will be examined in more detail below (Ohashi, 2018: 32–37).

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story that first renders the individual a unique person. Just as our story was unknown in the town, and there was no sign of any effort to get to know it.

At the same time, the town and its architecture distanced themselves from us, which until then had been closely connected to our conscious experience. Only when the gazes of others pulled us out of this state of consciousness did we realize how far this building and that wall actually were from us. A "complete metamorphosis of the world" (Sartre, 1995: 300, 308) took place, and the town flowed away towards the others. That is why we felt alienated from it, even though at the beginning we thought we were welcome. It became (again) the town of the residents. The slipping away of the world, and, for this reason, of the town, also became clear to us in the fact that we got lost. Either we could perceive the gazes or the world, both at the same time was impossible (Sartre, 1995: 298). And since the gazes kept pressing upon us, even when we did not see them, we lost hold of the world.

This phenomenological observation also requires a critical extension. Ahmed (2006: 9) describes migration as a process of dis- and reorientation. In this sense, 'home' may be the place where we are best able to orient ourselves. We were in the process of orienting ourselves, but the gazes threw us off course, giving us the sense of being "out of place" (Ahmed, 2006: 135). This disorientation also manifested in the fact that not only the observers but also we blinked, turned around, and looked again.[10]

Besides the relationship to the space itself, the disorientation also changed the perception of the things within it. Objects that had just seemed close to us suddenly receded into the distance or became alienated. The street, for example, was no longer a path to a destination, it became a path into the unknown. Unlike the 'native' body, which unobtrusively trails behind in its encounters with objects and others, the migration foreground pushed itself between us and the things (Ahmed, 2006: 132).

2.4 The Dissecting and Fixating Gaze

The characteristics of the gaze can be further deepened with Fanon (2011: 158):

> "And already the white stares – the only real ones – are dissecting me. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively slice away my reality. I am betrayed. I feel, I see in those white stares that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new type of man, a new kind. A Negro, that is all!"[11]

Applied to our situation, this connects to the previously described scrutinizing gazes, which can examine precisely because they hold a dominant position and stand above us at a distance. The microtome, simultaneously, slices beneath the microscope, enabling a close, supposedly scientific and objective examination that naturalizes the body in question. This examination here is like a dissection, metaphorically close to the rupture within our self-image. Accordingly, seeing is often described as the analytical sense, the one that takes things apart. More than that, it represents something invasive that penetrates us. No wonder Fanon *feels* this way. These are gazes we feel on and beneath

[10] Ahmed here refers to Nirmal Puwar.

[11] Translation by the author: "*Déjà les regards blancs, les seuls vrais, me dissèquent. Je suis fixé. Ayant accommodé leur microtome, ils réalisent objectivement des coupes de ma réalité. Je suis trahi. Je sens, je vois dans ces regards blancs que ce n'est pas un nouvel homme qui entre, mais un nouveau type d'homme, un nouveau genre. Un nègre, quoi*!"

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our skin, a distance that is too close for comfort. When Ahmed (2000: 92; cf. 90) writes that "[m]igration stories are skin memories" because migration often comes with unexpected sensations on the skin – whether warmth, cold, or unfamiliar air – then these gazes are also such skin memories in a metaphorical sense: They leave marks that cut deep beneath the skin.

At this point, it becomes evident once again that we are dealing with a profoundly embodied experience, as the lived body constitutes a "fundamental phenomenon" (Waldenfels, 2016: 464). Sartre (1995: 298) even goes so far as to argue that the gaze refers to me not because it originates from a physically present person, but because I am vulnerable and possess a body that can be wounded.[12] Corporification and migrantification are closely intertwined. Since migrantification is often established at first glance through our appearance, through our (lived) bodies, we become aware of it at that very moment. Like the migration background, the (lived) bodily usually remains in the horizon, only now is it dragged into the foreground (Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 175).

Under the gaze of others, however, our (lived) body was degraded into a mere object, a body that no longer corresponded to our own lived experience. For example, we are usually not consciously aware of the darker tone of our skin. This process – often tied to (negative) emotions – has been described as a form of "confiscation" (Yancy, 2020; cf. Fanon 2011: 156). Much like an actual confiscation, our lived body was seized by authoritarian gazes, reduced to certain features, essentialized, deformed in the process, and returned to us as something alien: a migrantified body, estranged from ourselves. Our "body-for-itself", the spontaneous expression of our freedom, was, in Sartre's (1995: 345-400) terms, not only captured as a "body-for-others." It was not even transformed into a familiar other lived body, but into an unfamiliar other-other: a foreign body, one that served as a point of contrast for the familiar (Ahmed 2000: 54).

At some point, these gazes, much like in the panopticon, detached themselves from the observers, became autonomous, and created the feeling of being constantly watched (Foucault, 1975: 202–203). A gaze that, paradoxically, seemed to follow us even when fixed directly in front – as if coming from behind and striking us where we were most defenseless – now pressed down on the back of our necks even more (Waldenfels, 2016: 500).

Our fixation through the gaze, as described by Fanon, went beyond mere objectification, which Sartre (1995: 307) understands as a freezing in the midst of the world. This fixation also meant stereotyping and prejudice, forces that pinned us down. It was the counterpart to a gaze that, in its rigid and narrowed perspective, was itself fixed, both metaphorically and literally. This makes sense, insofar as vision is the sense most closely associated with establishing (*fest-stellen*), making manifest, and permanence (Nancy, 2002: 15; Welsch, 1995: 247–248). That is why the gazes weighed so heavily on us and gave us the feeling of being unable to move.

2.5 The Myth of Objectivity and the Politics of Invisibilization

The powerful gaze from above grants the authority to define truth. Its perspective determines reality. Vision, in particular, claims to be *objective*, a view from nowhere or

[12] For the connection between vulnerability and the emergence of the lived body, see Fuchs, 2000: 125.

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rather from everywhere, and in doing so forgets its own viewpoint and the limits of its horizon. It forgets that the visual field, with its finite roundness, always lies before us, whereas the auditory surrounds us (Ihde, 2007: 206-207). At the latest, with the rise of scientific rationality and the associated observation of nature, seeing gained importance in modernity due to this presumed objectivity. Even today, modern vision, shaped by technology, science, and patriarchy, relies on the "god trick" to supposedly see everything from everywhere (Haraway, 1988: 581). Yet even without acknowledging alternative ways of seeing, such as mystical ones, it remains undeniable that all seeing is embodied and situated. This applies not only to subjective perception but also to scientific observation.

When it became clear to us that we could not escape the power play of the gaze, we did everything we could to gaze back. The servants now stared at the masters, determined to transform from the seen into the seeing, in order to reclaim the wholeness that had been fractured by the master's gaze (Waldenfels, 2016: 500). But in the struggle to assert ourselves as subjects, our gazes had no effect against the prevailing scopic regime. Perhaps it was due to our small number, or more generally to the power imbalance between those who see themselves as 'natives' and those marked by a migration foreground, that we were never even able to engage in the Hegelian struggle for recognition.

Despite being repeatedly objectified, the encounter retained a certain "responsivity" and, consequently, a degree of subjecthood (Waldenfels, 2016: 320-336). We were looked at, albeit from an elevated, superior position – and we responded with gestures, facial expressions, a returning gaze. It seems impossible to experience a human interaction completely devoid of responsivity. The question is not whether we respond, but how. "Even one who shuts the door", writes Bernhard Waldenfels (2022: 92), "who shuts themselves off, who rejects the newcomer, still responds."[13] However, in encounters that become dehumanized, where we are increasingly turned into objects, responsivity fades. They can more easily pass by objects without concern; there is no need to respond to them. This, too, is characteristic of the visual sense: it can look away.

When the man, finally, walked past us as if we didn't exist, we were almost less than an object.[14] Even a dead body can still provoke reactions, a horrified glance, although perhaps one directed at the lost subjectivity to which the lifeless remains bear witness. Aside from the fact that the decision – if it was one at all – to completely ignore us and look away did, in itself, constitute a form of responsive behavior, we were, through the act of being-looked-through, deprived of responsivity to the utmost degree (Waldenfels, 2022: 98).

What happened here was not merely an evasion of response, for example, by reducing an individual to a bureaucratic case (Waldenfels, 2022: 92). Rather, it could be described as

[13] Translation by the author: "*Auch wer die Tür verschließt, wer sich selbst verschließt, wer den Ankömmling abweist, antwortet*."

[14] That the man was able to walk past us, as if we weren't there, reveals an underlying power dynamic. It is often people with a migration background who do not have this privilege. They are stopped at borders, or for so-called 'routine checks'. In reference to Ahmed (2006: 139–140), one might say that being stopped makes visible the fact that the 'native' body, unlike the body marked by a migration foregrounded, is able to move through space unhindered. Being stopped not only interrupts physical movement but is inseparably tied to the question of 'Where are you from?', placing the (lived) body in a state of sensory and social stress.

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an "existential negation": the moment in which we are no longer even perceived as foreign or exotic, because we are condemned to invisibility (Di Cesare, 2017: 154, 161). Building on Fanon's (2011: 175) descriptions, it has, therefore, been proposed to expand Sartre's existing categories of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others by introducing a fourth category: that of nonexistence (Sealey, 2020). This *being-(for)-nothing*, as we might term it, is described as an experience more profound than the shame and alienation Sartre outlines.

This act of "invisibilization" (Taylor, 2016: ch. 2) is not necessarily the personal decision of a single observer but tends to occur especially when 'migrants' are reduced to a dehumanized mass. This may be brought about as much by the images of people in boats described by Di Cesare earlier as by stereotyping and the negation of the other's perspective. In this case, it becomes irrelevant whether the onlooker genuinely gazes at the other, as noted above, or merely feigns looking away. In both instances, the other is reduced to a "seen absence", a "visible [...] invisibility" – an act that replaces individuality with anonymity (Yancy, 2025: 72). Returning to our metaphor of the migration background, we could say that bringing it into the foreground is, simultaneously, an act of invisibilization, for the now-visible foreground renders the rest of the person unseen, reducing them to a being-(for)-nothing.

To summarize, I have argued in this section that the objectifying gaze, particularly towards people with a migration background, intensifies alienation by foregrounding migration identity and overshadowing the whole self. This gaze enforces social hierarchies, reduces bodies to fixed objects, and produces disorientation and invisibility. Although those objectified may respond, power imbalances hinder the reclaiming of full subjecthood. The purported objectivity of vision conceals its role in control and dehumanization, revealing how seeing can exclude rather than recognize.

3 Sea Rescue with Listener

By now, we were back on the train, sitting across from an elderly woman. Apparently, it was obvious how much the experience in the town had affected us, because she emphatically asked how we were doing. We didn't respond, at first, and remained silent. My friend even looked out the window. It took a while – a few returned smiles, a few hesitant sentences – then she began to speak. About her feelings, her thoughts, stories of her escape and other experiences she had never shared before, not even with me.

The woman had a special gift for listening. She leaned forward slightly, just enough for us to feel that she was coming towards us, without intruding. With an open posture, one ear subtly turned in our direction. Later, she told us that she was trying to take in our voices without letting them be drowned out by her own inner voice. And that she was listening to us without necessarily needing to understand.

She let us speak without interrupting. Even when my friend was silent for seconds, even minutes, the woman waited patiently until my friend began to speak again. It seemed as if new thoughts emerged precisely in those pauses. We felt a deep connection, as if the boundaries between us were becoming porous. The woman was listening not just to our words, but to our facial expressions, our gestures, our entire being. She was attuned to our emotions and to what remained unspoken, perhaps even what could not be said at all. As if she understood something that couldn't be grasped in any other way, something that could hardly be put into words. Not only about us, but also about herself.

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3.1 Recognition through Active Listening and Hearkening

In this scene, the encounter no longer unfolds primarily through seeing, but through hearkening.[15] Hearkening respectively listening is often assigned a subordinate role, partly because, in classical theories, speaking, much like seeing, is associated with action and agency. Hannah Arendt (1998: 176), for instance, describes a life in the absence of speaking and acting as "dead to the world". In her (Arendt, 1998: 178) view, this is closely tied to the question "Who are you?", which is asked of newcomers. They respond with their words and actions, thereby revealing their uniqueness.

Although this cannot be denied, all the speaking and acting of the newcomers remains in vain if they are not listened to and are not granted that first form of recognition through being heard. In this sense, recognition begins less with merely allowing someone to speak, and more with attentive hearkening. Life becomes dead to the world precisely when it offers no space for non-speaking, for silence and listening. This held true for us on the train just as it does for others, whether or not they have an apparent migration background.

Hence, the simplistic polarity between activity (speaking and seeing) and passivity (hearing) can no longer be maintained, especially since such hearkening can indeed be interpreted as a form of action (e.g. Jonas, 1973: 202-203). This is not, in Arendt's (1998: 179) sense, a matter of "complete silence" or "perfect passivity" that obscures the "who" of the other. Rather, it requires a conscious, appropriate silence, an active passivity that creates the very space in which the 'who' of the other can emerge. This 'who' is not defined by the (gaze of the) other, nor is their migration background dragged to the foreground. In this way, the woman on the train, despite her silence and attentiveness, was anything but inactive. It was this very attitude that allowed my friend to share something she had otherwise kept hidden.

Attentive listening or hearkening, thus, differs from mere hearing, as the former demands a higher degree of activity due to its intentional orientation towards the other (Waldenfels, 2016: 250). Initially, this activity may even require a level of engagement that effortless seeing often lacks. The ears are sharpened, stretched open. Phenomenologically speaking, through an auditive *epoché*, the woman deliberately directed her consciousness towards the experience of something, striving to reduce both external and internal noise, including prejudices and mental categories. She listened to what we said and made an effort not to overlay our words with the commentary of her own inner voice. This was the first step in not dragging the migration background into the foreground.

It was Burkhard Liebsch (2019: 168) who, as one of the few, emphasized listening in the context of migration. Listening, he argues, should be understood as a form of recognition

[15] In the following, I will not be able to precisely differentiate the terms such as listening, hearkening, eavesdropping, or hearing. I have chosen the term 'hearkening' (as opposed to merely 'hearing') in reference to Martin Heidegger and the metaphysical dimension of the concept. Moreover, hearkening implies a form of expectant listening, an attunement to something whose meaning has yet to be revealed (Espinet, 2017: 354). In German, I tend to place the prefix '*hin-*' before '*horchen'* (harkening), forming '*hinhorchen'*, to emphasize and highlight its active nature. While mere hearkening is often at odds with intentionality, this construction is meant to convey a sense of directedness: a turning-towards-the-Other that goes beyond what simple hearkening entails.

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of the social and (political) existence of the other – beyond propositional knowledge. Accordingly, the woman's hearkening said to us, 'You are here', and allowed us to become subjects.[16] Shortly thereafter, Liebsch writes that this is where hospitality lies, that it is a symbolic act of inviting someone in.[17] As he, however, does not further elaborate on this mode of listening, I will attempt to explore it in greater detail below.

First, it must be said that the 'who' of the other is not exhausted in what she or he says. The entirety of their existence cannot be captured through their speech. The 'I' always carries a surplus that cannot be contained by storytelling. This is, in part, because the 'I' is unable to account for how it has become the 'I' telling the story – a phenomenon that seems especially true in the context of migration. The 'I' always arrives too late to itself. With each act of telling about itself, the 'I' actualizes itself anew and is already different. With every act of recognition, indeed every encounter, it transforms. Not only for the woman who listened to us attentively, but also for us, who think we know ourselves, we are always more. Precisely for this reason, the reduction to the migration foreground is insufficient in a double sense (Butler, 2005: 27-28, 42-43, 66, 79).

Here, too, the non-propositional moment becomes apparent, especially since recognition must not be based (solely) on knowledge, but on the awareness of its limits. Even Arendt (1998: 181) acknowledges that the 'who' someone is cannot be fully captured in clear words, and that the essence of a person always remains elusive, though this does not diminish the significance of attempting to articulate this 'who'. Not only is the answer to 'Who are you?' inexhaustible, but so is the answer to 'Where do you come from?', which implicitly underlies the first question. Like the 'who', the 'where' contains a surplus and is actualized anew with every movement in the world. This also means not hearing people with migration backgrounds only as such, thereby ignoring their other subject positions and shifting the background back to the foreground. We are more than our migration history. And yet, it is precisely through hearkening that the story of the 'who' can be told, allowing the individual to step out from the image of the mass.

The first characteristic of hearkening ethics, both in the migration context and beyond, is that the act of attentive listening constitutes the primal step for recognizing the Other and, thereby, constituting them as a subject, in opposition to the objectifying gaze. This ethic is grounded in the refusal to define the Other by arbitrarily positioning foregrounds and backgrounds as fixed identities. It is enacted by allowing the Other to form their subjectivity through an (almost) ceaseless narrative, unencumbered by the listener's "internal noise". Concretely, it means giving the person with a (discernable) migration background as much space as possible through hearkening, whether in a bureaucratic or private context. This approach can help prevent reducing the other person to their migration foreground.

[16] This type of listening has also been described as modern, attuned to the 'who' behind the speech (Barthes, 1982: 217).

[17] If we were to answer Jacques Derrida's (Dufourmantelle et al., 1997: 31, 93.) query – whether hospitality consists in questioning the newcomers or in receiving them without – we would have to respond: True hospitality begins with listening to the newcomers. Listening is a form of receiving: *"Nous l'écoutons, l'aveugle, l'étranger sans regard"* (translated by the author: "We listen to him, the blind man, the stranger without a gaze").

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3.2 The Openness of Hearkening

Precisely because hearkening is aware that the 'I' is always more than its story, it does not turn away from the Other. It remains turned towards-the-Other, especially since it does not presume to have fully understood and thereby concluded the encounter. Like a Platonic dialogue, an aporia persists. Ideally, it consists of an inexhaustible surplus of attention that remains independent of what is said and heard (Lipari, 2014: 197). In the intercultural context, and based on the primacy of listening, Heinz Kimmerle (n.d.) described the interaction with the Other similarly as an "unfinishable movement" and an "infinite task", one that repeatedly leads back to the self, which, thereby, constantly mingles with the Other.

The incompleteness points to the openness of hearkening, even though it can be said to have a certain directionality and one can also choose not to listen. In Heidegger's (2006: 163) thought, this open ear even becomes something ontological: an "existential openness" that transforms *Dasein* into being-with (*Mitsein*). Unlike the eye, which can be closed with a lid, the ear remains receptive. It is less totalizing and thus less conclusive. This openness was already evident in the woman's posture and points to the embodied, physical dimension of hearkening, which received more attention in antiquity. The woman listened not only with her entire (lived) body but also attended to what was pre-linguistic – glances, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. In this way, she perceived the sad eyes of my friend and heard the initial trembling in her voice.

Here, too, we must not fall into the mistaken belief that openness is something purely passive. It is something active, at first even an effort, that, much like hearkening, must be cultivated. Nevertheless – or perhaps precisely because of this – it is accompanied by vulnerability, which is why it is often avoided. Guests whom one lets into the house can always come too close. Listening is sometimes even associated with a certain weakness: it is considered the most sensitive of all senses, the one that touches our emotions most directly. It is precisely this vulnerability that marks a central difference between conventional hearing and hearkening, or "listening otherwise", as Lisbeth Lipari (2014: 197) calls it. This vulnerability connects those engaged in dialogue through their shared humanness. All of this – directedness, openness, vulnerability – ultimately means that they cannot simply look away. Hearing a voice involves a kind of "non-indifference"[18] (Grüny, 2018: 261): I must respond to it.

This incompleteness and openness may likewise be attributed to the dynamic nature of hearing, its movement through time (Jonas, 1973: 200). While seeing captures everything and everyone at once within a visual field, our vocal sounds reached the woman gradually. In a certain sense, this dynamic mirrors the continual transformation of subjects. One could even argue that the weaker, more indirect object-relation inherent in this dynamic counters the objectification of the Other. In hearkening, the woman first perceived our voices and only then inferred us as persons. In contrast to the visual, whose presence is immediately given, the auditory presents itself more like those who arrive: in the process of arriving (Nancy, 2002: 34).

An ethics of hearkening is, as a consequence, further characterized by vulnerability and (active) openness, sustained through its surplus of attention towards-the-Other, allowing

[18] Grüny's thinking is grounded in Emmanuel Lévinas.

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them to reveal themselves rather than becoming a being-(for)-nothing. In practice, this could mean giving the person with a migrant background the opportunity to continue their narrative, even if it breaks off at times. An additional disclosure of vulnerability on the listener's part could enrich the encounter but appears particularly challenging in bureaucratic contexts.

3.3 "Listening Otherwise" and Non-understanding

Through all of this, we not only make space for otherness, but consciously listen for it, we practice "listening otherwise" (Lipari, 2014: 177-187). Rather than listening as an act of adaptation, listening to otherness means giving oneself the time, space, and opportunity to appreciate the Other's difference and to endure it (Schutte, 1998: 61). At this point, a problem becomes apparent, one that extends beyond questions of migration and reaches deep into philosophy itself, helping to explain why philosophy has historically privileged sight. Anglo-European philosophy has long tended to appropriate the Other (in the process of understanding).

This, too, can be linked to the sensual qualities involved: While seeing fixes and objectifies, hearing is belated, always arriving too late. As a result, the Other remains, to some extent, inaccessible and resists appropriation, which may further account to why the 'I' is necessarily more, as noted above. The woman perceived our words only after they had already left us, after our thoughts had long been translated into language. And each time she heard a new word, it had already faded, lingering only as a retention in the next sound.

Appropriation is known to be the most effective form of defense; it protects the self from being called into question. As soon as the Other is assimilated into the Self, alterity succumbs to identity: Otherness disappears, and the process of understanding is considered complete. Those who take possession of something need not open up or step outside of themselves, thereby avoiding vulnerability. Understanding certainly can be a shield. In the context of migration, hearkening might encourage integration without assimilating (like the eye does) and erasing otherness. For while opponents of immigration often recognize the otherness of Others and repudiate them precisely for that reason, supporters often advocate for acceptance only on the condition that this otherness be relinquished.

Unlike hearing understood as "*deciphering*" (Barthes, 1982: 217) or Cartesian seeing, which – in the spirit of science – strives for complete penetration and comprehension, hearkening does not seek to appropriate the Other through forced understanding. In fact, succumbing to the belief that one understands the Other can obstruct the very process of understanding. On the contrary, the ability of non-understanding may offer a path towards insight or to an awareness of the limits of understanding itself (Gurevitch, 1989). Through deliberate estrangement and the suspension of prior knowledge, the Other's otherness is restored, enabling a new beginning in the cycle of understanding. Perhaps the problem lies already in the *will* to understand. For this will to understand, emanating from the 'I', constrains the space for the unchosen, the pre-intentional. Derrida (1984: 57; cf. Kapsch, 2007: 133-134), referring to Heidegger, situates this will to understand within the "metaphysics of the will", a framework of a bygone era, characterized by self-interest and a will aligned with power, which ultimately undermines the process of understanding.

The act of becoming attentive or listening up carries particular significance here. These are pre-intentional moments that generate meaning without deliberately seeking it

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(Espinet, 2009: 127). Listening still moves towards the Other, but without knowing exactly where to, because the position of the 'who' or 'what' is continually redefined in the very act of hearkening. Such attentiveness creates space for the otherness of the Other, as it exceeds expected meaning and thus avoids appropriating the Other. It is precisely the previously mentioned surplus of attentiveness that prevents this process from reaching closure.[19] Closure would undermine the otherness, which is itself marked by constant transformation.

Understood in this way, hearkening is will-less and committed to a metaphysics of being. It seeks neither to dominate nor to categorize or understand. It simply is, it is all ear (Nancy, 2002 16-17). An ear attuned more to wonder than to curiosity, the kind of curiosity which is closely tied to the visual and seeks to comprehend (Heidegger, 2006: 170-173). Wonder, by contrast, is marked by the unknown, which transcends the limits of understanding. Accordingly, one might say: The woman may have wished to understand us as a whole, but only insofar as that understanding was not constrained by her own will. She made a conscious effort not to translate what she heard directly into what was already understood.[20] Only in this way could she marvel and remain open to the unexpected in what we shared. To that which lay behind the migration foreground.

The problem, nonetheless, lies in the fact that most listening is already a form of understanding, and it requires practice, even effort, to at least partially detach listening from this interpretive process (Heidegger 2006: 163-164).[21] The woman did not just hear a squeaking sound, she immediately associated it with the object that produced it, the train wheels and tracks. Similarly, she did not only perceive our voices and words but instantly linked them to us and interpreted the meaning of the sentences. Without doing this to some extent, communication likely would not have been possible. And yet, she tried to reduce interpretation to the necessary minimum.

In short, an ethics of hearkening must cultivate acceptance of non-understanding, thereby enabling and, at times, enduring, difference or strangeness. In some cases, this non-understanding may even serve as a prerequisite for genuine understanding. Practically speaking, this means finding a balance between understanding and non-understanding

[19] What is needed is an ethics of attention that specifically relates to the act of hearkening, though this cannot be elaborated further here. Simone Weil's (1980: 76) reflections – which, like those of Iris Murdoch later, tend to focus more on the visual – are particularly relevant in this context: "*L'attention consiste à suspendre sa pensée, à la laisser disponible, vide et pénétrable à l'objet, à maintenir en soi-même à proximité de la pensée, mais à un niveau inférieur et sans contact avec elle, les diverses connaissances acquises qu'on est forcé d'utiliser*" (translation by the author: "Attention consists in suspending one's thought, making it available, empty, and open to the object; in keeping within oneself, close to thought but at a lower level and without touching it, the various pieces of knowledge one is obliged to use").

[20] In the psychoanalytic context, it was Sigmund Freud (1912: 483) who further developed listening in this direction. This form of listening was not meant to judge or hierarchize, but rather to be "*gleichschwebend*" (evenly hovering) – that is, to give equal attention to everything that is said, in order to create space for the unexpected. The complex question of the role of the will – and the paradox of how it is possible to will not to will – cannot be explored in full here (cf. Heidegger, 1995).

[21] This attempt is made particularly in non-dualistic philosophies, which strive for the pure experience of sound, free from anticipation and presuppositions (Loy, 2019: 65). However, it is likely necessary here to distinguish between sounds and voices.

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that enables people with an (apparent) migration background to live together with 'locals', respectively those for whom this background has faded into oblivion. It implies shaping 'integration' policies in a way that ensures otherness does not vanish entirely but rather holds the potential to enrich society.

3.4 Hearkening to Silence

The will-lessness, coupled with its openness to the Other, also manifests in the silence already alluded to, a silence inseparably linked to hearkening, which will be addressed here only briefly. It was this silence that repeatedly settled between the woman and us. As with hearing and hearkening, different forms of silence or stillness can be distinguished (Fuchs, 2004: 151-156): the silence that surrounds words and sounds; the kind that is necessary to transform mere hearing into hearkening; and the silence that conveys the unsaid – often more meaningful than words themselves, as suggested by Socrates and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Like hearkening, this silence is neither passive nor weak. While in liberal traditions it is often associated with a deceptive kind of infallibility, it is not a merely withholding or obstructive silence, but a productive, transformative, and subversive one, a silence in which alternative ways of being, thinking, and acting can find space (Brunner, 2018: 51, 57).

Together with hearkening, we thus create space for the "twice unspoken": both for what power conceals and for what remains unarticulated in our interlocutor (Brunner, 2018: 53). Especially my friend, who often dared not speak due to epistemic injustices,[22] only found the courage to express herself through the woman's silence. But this silence does not merely serve to make room for the unspoken, it also accounts for the surplus of meaning (Ferrari, 2021: 247). It opens space for all that we have (not) been and cannot (yet) put into words. At the same time, as will be elaborated later, it creates a space where meaning can emerge. It allows for something other than the migration background to come to the forefront, something unexpected, even unheard, that speaks out against power structures.

Silence can be understood as a counterpart to the previously described stopping. While stopping makes the migration background visible, silence holds the possibility that it recedes or does not appear at all. In connection with seeing, this dynamic has been linked to the concept of hesitation: Hesitation means putting aside the immediacy of affective reactions while the affective experience continues (Al-Saji, 2014: 147). In this sense, one can say that silence is a form of hesitation that creates space – for reinterpretations, for corrections, for change.

In brief, an ethics of hearkening is closely tied to silence. It not only enables the listener to question the power structures they may be entangled in, but also provides the speaker with space for the unspoken, whether it emerges on its own or is transformed into articulation. In this way, it permits the migration foreground to recede or even remain absent from the forefront. Applied to encounters between 'locals' and those with a more pronounced migration background, this entails cultivating an acceptance, even an

[22] Even an accent is enough for native speakers to stop (truly) listening and to attribute linguistic or intellectual incompetence. This affects not only how we speak, but also what we feel able to say at all, illustrating how a migration background comes to the forefront not only through seeing but also through hearing (cf. Schutte, 1998: 60, 63.).

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appreciation, of silence, allowing others the time to find their words, if they choose to speak at all. It may even involve learning to listen to what the unsaid is saying.

3.5 The Resonance of Truth

What is suggested once again is that through hearkening we seek to attend to certain forms of surplus and provide them with space. Connected to this is a concept of truth – here only briefly indicated – that goes beyond the correspondence theory and other dominant notions of truth. Theories dealing with listening often point in a similar direction: We listen to what lies in unknown depths, beneath the surface, not what is immediately visible. This stands in contrast to a concept of truth understood (following René Descartes) in terms of the visual as representation (e.g., Heidegger, 1977: 91).

Jean-Luc Nancy (2002: 19), for instance, emphasizes in his discussion of listening that meaning not only has to make sense but also resounds from a depth of meaning or truth itself that can only be experienced through listening. This is linked to the idea that the self – in line with the ever-evading 'who' – is not available but rather a *"a resonance of a deferral"* (Nancy, 2002: 30). Heidegger, who increasingly turns to listening, similarly understands this as a truth not solely anchored in beings (*Seienden*) or in what is present visually, but pointing towards Being (*Sein*) itself. We are more than what the woman saw in us, even more than what we expressed. More than our migration background or foreground. If anything, the woman could do justice to this excess only through hearkening, either because she understood it or because she knew it did not need to be understood (entirely).

Many prevailing notions of truth fall short when it comes to hearkening because hearkening itself generates meaning. Rather than us conveying something to the woman that she then tried to decode as accurately as possible, her hearkening brought forth something that had not existed before. Much like Socratic maieutics or the Sphoṭa theory, meaning emerges within the dialogical space through the act of hearkening itself (Lipari, 2014). A simplified explanation for why this happens lies in the resonant space opened up by the accompanying silence. Within that space, what is said can unfold, shift, perhaps echo, creating the conditions for new thoughts to emerge. Put differently: hearkening expands the gap between pathos and response, the "site of *incubation*" from which something new can arise (Waldenfels, 2017: 36). This aligns with the idea that every encounter already shapes the 'who' and 'what' they express. The fact that the woman sat across from us and hearkened was already influencing the overall meaning. This momentary emergence of meaning – where resonance, openness, and truth converge – complicates the formation of stereotypes.

The concept of "truthful listening" (*Wahrhören*), as formulated by Waldenfels (2015: 422-421) in reference to Michel Foucault's notion of *parrhēsía* (truth-telling), can be fruitfully applied in this context. Although Waldenfels initially refers to the act of listening to one's own speaking, he also invokes Socrates' *daimonion* and emphasizes – much like in the previously discussed notion of a resonance space – that this is not a straightforward transmission of information from sender to receiver. Foucault's (2008: 43) term further highlights qualities that are especially relevant in the context of migration. For him, *parrhēsía* is, among other things, a *franc-parler*, a way of speaking the whole truth openly, regardless of evidence, rational discourse structures, rhetorical strategies, or possible consequences. It is speech as a risk, saying what the other does not want to hear. Applied

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to hearkening, this might mean, it is a form of hearing (and speaking) that resists the conventions shaped by power and habit, thereby making space for a 'whole' truth, one that might otherwise remain unspoken, as was the case with my friend, who often did not dare to voice what moved her. For such truth-speaking to become possible, it requires a mode of listening that, like that of the woman, becomes truthful listening precisely by suspending its own speaking and, therefore, not drowning out what is being said by others (Brunner, 2018: 59).

In essence, an ethics of hearkening is connected to a concept of truth that differs from the prevailing correspondence theory and similar frameworks. It acknowledges what is not immediately apparent, allowing meaning to emerge through dialogue and giving voice to truths that are often unheard (of). Again, this enables migration foregrounds to withdraw or remain merely in the background from the outset. When applied, this means refraining from judging people with an (obvious) migration background according to one's immediate, assumed truths. Instead, one should create conditions that encourage us to speak freely and without constraint.

3.6 Hearkening In-Between Subject and Object

The openness of hearkening can also be related to the relationship between subject and object, as well as to the accompanying question of distance. Unlike seeing, which often creates distance from 'migrants' and objectifies them, hearing is described as a sense that affects and moves us. The auditory penetrates our thoughts more directly than the visual (Ihde 2007: 212). This may be because the ear tends to lead inward, while the eye leads outward. Although hearkening focuses on something, it operates differently from the previously described mode of seeing:

> "What certainly does not exist in hearing is an equivalent of Sartre's gaze, which pins down and objectifies the other – speaking of a piercing, drilling, or dissecting kind of hearing makes no sense"[23] (Grüny, 2018: 262).

Moreover, this capacity to be affected is conditioned by the fact that light rays come to rest on our retina, whereas sound waves penetrate us and set our bodies in motion. We hear with skin and hair, we listen with flesh and bone. That our voices resonated within the woman illustrates how pronounced intercorporeality is in comparison to seeing. The boundaries between subject and object may never dissolve entirely, but the rigidity of this distinction is weakened in the process. As we spoke with the woman, our voices entered her and found expression within her. In the very moment they resounded in her, we had already become a part of her, just as our own voice speaks within ourselves.

It was only when the woman began to reflect that she estranged the voices once more, thereby making them, to some extent, ours again. And yet, the otherness remained and became a part of the Other within her. These qualities of hearkening result in a blending of the outer and inner, such that the woman was both herself and the Other, singular and plural at once (Nancy, 2002: 31, 33). She was herself and at the same time, she was my friend and me. To return once more to the concept of listening otherwise: Although we open ourselves and take in the Other – thereby challenging the boundaries between

[23] Translation by the author: "*Was es beim Hören sicher nicht gibt, ist ein Äquivalent des Satreschen Blicks, der den Anderen festnagelt und objektiviert – die Rede von einem stechenden, bohrenden oder sezierenden Hören hat keinen Sinn*."

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alterity and identity – the self never dissolves completely (Lipari, 2014; cf. Levin, 1989: 228).

It is not about fusion, but about entanglement. Fusion, in this context, would amount to dispossession rather than appropriation. Instead, the 'we' and the 'they' meet each other. The boundary between the 'locals' and the 'migrants' becomes as porous as the one between us and the woman, without either party losing their sense of self. Perhaps the synthetic quality of listening – beyond the assembling of sounds, tones, and noises – lies precisely in this capacity.

To summarize, the ethics of hearkening would enable and support overcoming the dichotomy between those involved in the encounter, without erasing differences. On the one hand, the migration foreground could recede through entanglement with the 'locals'. On the other hand, there would be no need to negate it entirely.

4 Conclusion – or the Boat in the Harbor

I was only able to outline hearkening, and the ethics thereof, in rough contours, leaving certain aspects aside. For instance, the fact that the present scopic regime, in accordance with its scientific influence, is committed to ratio, whereas hearkening possesses an emotional component. Nonetheless, I hope to have highlighted a central point: If we genuinely aim to shape migration policy and interactions with people who have an (apparent) migration background in ways that contribute to a more humane and just world – one where migration is perceived as an enrichment rather than a threat – then this lies in meeting newcomers and those with a migration background not primarily through the dominant logic of seeing but through cultivating the practice of hearkening. Doing so helps prevent the migrantification of the current scopic regime, which tends to foreground the migration background. Such ethics of hearkening was described as an active, open, vulnerable, and bridging practice of recognizing the other as a subject through attentive silence and (truth-)listening. Although we, at first, applied this to the 'local' residents, it equally applies to people with a (discernable) migration background themselves – and even beyond the migration debate.

It would, however, be not only impossible but also undesirable to close our eyes entirely. Rather, the goal is to establish a balance between the senses, and in doing so, to develop a way of seeing that is less shaped by the negative tendencies it currently exhibits in this context, such as objectification, fixation, distancing, and invisibilization. Recently, it was Alia Al-Saji (2024) who, drawing on Fanon, even brought the metaphor and sensory dimension of touch into the debate on colonialism and racialization. This might serve as a reminder that such interactions must ultimately be read through the lens of the *sensus communis*, or the interrelation of the senses, as we may indeed be 'touched' by what we see or hear.

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