Joshua Reynolds and Deafness: Listening, Hearing, and Not Hearing in Eighteenth-Century Portraiture

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By the time Joshua Reynolds had become the most famous artist of his day, the first President of the Royal Academy, and the epitome of cultured refinement, he was quite deaf, his hearing having been impaired at a young age.[1] Later he would endure diminished visual capacity first in one eye, then in the other. These impairments ended his career. Representations of Reynolds as afflicted by these difficulties have already received some critical comment, though this has been limited to noting the poignant extent of his diminished experience.[2] Recent work in the medical humanities has encouraged new attention to the hidden or silenced stories that lie within representations of the disability and impairment, and to ask what they mean and how an awareness might change the way we consider all forms of art. In the light of these concerns, this essay proposes a more engaged consideration of Reynolds's deafness, focusing on images of Reynolds produced by Angelica Kauffman, Nathanial Dance, and Johan Zoffany, alongside his self-portraiture. The point is not to describe works that show deafness in a single figure; there are many images from the period that achieve that level of representation. Nor will we be concerned with considering work because it was produced by someone who was deaf; the comparison might then have been Goya. Rather the intention is to explore the questions raised by paintings that depict Reynolds as a deaf man, questions that hinge on the cleaved categories of listening and hearing and their antitheses. This is only partly an issue of physical impairment. It is really a matter of ethics. As Salomé Voegelin has argued, listening constitutes an 'ethics of participation', requiring not just physical reception of sound, but a risked engagement beyond the self, in which produced and received sound plays a vital role.[3] Though widely applicable, this critical claim has an immediate historical dimension. Eighteenth-century culture was committed to the ideal of morally improving conversation, frequently enlivened by the deep attention to the senses which characterised the culture of sensibility. These investments made the issue of aural as well as oral capacity (or incapacity) a matter of urgent concern.[4]

My conjoined concerns – ethical, sonic, and art historical – are given particular acuteness by Reynolds's conception of art. Impressed by Classical and Renaissance theorists, Reynolds would have understood painting as a form of 'silent poetry', perhaps believing that silence to be its preeminent virtue.[5] Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* rejected any representation which might be judged a dereliction from the central form of Nature. Disabilities or defects were to be excluded. Painting was expected to be moral and dynamic, encouraging the correctly educated viewer to act for the good of the public.[6] There was a

1. Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

2. Martin Postle, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds', in Natasha McEnroe and Robin Simon (eds), *The Tyranny of Treatment: Samuel Johnson, His Friends, and Georgian Medicine* (London: British Art Journal, 2003), pp. 30–8. More recently, Kate Fullager, *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist: Three Lives in an Age of Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 165–6.

3. Salomé Voegelin, *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 59–67, 94.

4. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

5. Rensselaer W. Lee, '*Ut Pictura Poesis*: The Humanist Theory of Painting', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1940, pp. 219–20.

6. John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 76–82; and David H. Solkin, 'Great Men or Great Pictures? Male Portraiture and the Power of Art', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1986, pp. 42–9.

doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcad026

contradiction here, as so much that was *res publica* relied on the inspiring power of speech; yet Reynolds was wary of poses that hinted too strongly at the animation of someone speaking, so much so that grand manner portraiture, as it was practised by Reynolds, struggles, even avoids, the depiction of speech, save as a series of widely shared and derivative gestures, mostly of arms raised and uplifted eyes. Speakers (sometimes singers) were invariably tight-lipped; only ever *about* to enunciate. From this starting point, there seems to be no 'speech in painting', no willingness to reach beyond the representational frame of the image to instil a sense of sound. Consider Reynolds's *Self-Portrait* (*c.* 1780, London, Royal Academy). Everything about the image, from his posture to the furled scroll, the doctoral gown and bonnet, and the bust of Michelangelo, suggests Reynolds's eminence, while implying that he is about to speak. Nothing about this self-presentation suggests that he cannot hear, but rather that he has no intention of doing so. It is the viewer who must listen. Silence is the main effect of the image, with only a deferred promise of speech. This much-repeated reservation ensured that representations of deafness in eighteenth-century portraiture – the depiction of the experience of not registering or not fully registering sound – had an unhappy relationship with a sometimes proudly soundless art. If speech could not appear within the frame of painting (save as expectation or anticipation), would it be possible to represent sounds that are not being heard? And how might the deaf or Deaf be presented?[7]

Two paintings are central to my response to these questions: the self-portrait which Reynolds contributed to Henry Thrale's set of Streatham Worthies, *Self-Portrait as a Deaf-Man* (Fig. 1) and Kauffman's image of Reynolds in his study (Fig. 2). In both paintings Reynolds manipulates his ear, pulling or pushing it towards the picture plane. This apparently theatrical gesture (in Michael Fried's sense) establishes a self-consciousness not simply about the matter of Reynolds's deafness, but more crucially of the position and capacity of the viewer, who is placed in the role of putative speaker and not merely as silent spectator.[8] Some kind of exchange is being sought in these pictures, yet it must be striven for, a difficulty revealing wider concerns about the limit of Georgian sociable commerce. A less sympathetic intervention is made by Dance's sketch of Reynolds and Kauffman. The drawing, which is discussed at some length below, presents both artists engaged in a conversation in which Reynolds's inability to hear has a formative place, not least in relation to the articulation of desire. All three images require an exploration of the paradox that it is through the depiction of someone who cannot hear that speech enters painting. The possibility of listening (or not) focuses each image. Listening is never simply a question of capacity. As Richard Leppert contends, 'listening is a cultural, rather than natural practice … listening has to be learnt'; further, 'active listening enacts a form of subject-object-reciprocity'. Listening attentively might therefore become a utopian practice, or at least the basis for some measure of optimism.[9] Awareness of the cultural dynamics of listening extends our concerns outwards to the more uncertain, yet pressing ethical issues raised, or more properly figured, via representations of someone struggling to hear. Building on recent work that has explored what Voegelin defines as the politics and responsibilities of listening, this essay will distinguish not being able to hear from the act of not listening, defining the distinction between hearing and listening in terms of an 'attention' to the Other.[10] On these terms, it matters greatly whether Reynolds is shown as unable to hear, due to his impairment, yet trying to listen, and, if so, what attitude is taken to realise that effort and to appreciate it. To understand the stakes raised in these images of Reynolds's deafness, it is necessary first to

7. Throughout this essay, lowercase 'deaf' denotes the physiological condition, recognising with an uppercase 'Deaf' a community more varied and vital than an audiological condition.

8. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).

9. Richard Leppert, 'Music "Pushed to the Edge of Existence" (Adorno, Listening, and the Question of Hope)', *Cultural Critique*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2005, pp. 110–11.

10. Voegelin, *Political Possibility of Sound*, pp. 35–9. See also Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); and Eliza Tan, 'Voicing the Sociability of Sound: Christine Sun Kim's Plenitude of Silence', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2020, pp. 239–60.

Fig. 1. Joshua Reynolds, *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man*, *c.* 1775, oil on canvas, 74.9 × 62.2 cm. Tate Gallery, London. (Photo: © Tate.)

consider other images of the artist, to explore and then move beyond ways of thinking about Reynolds's physical incapacities which stress the representation of difference, to focus instead on the ways in which these paintings explore the

11. Edmond Malone, *Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 3 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1798), vol. 1, pp. cvi–cviii.

12. James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Late President of the Royal Academy*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1818), vol. 2, pp. 246–7.

13. Malone, *Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 1, xxvi–xix, lxxxviii–lxxxix; Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 1, pp. 30–1; Joseph Farington, *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, intro Martin Postle (London: Pallas, Athene, 2005), p. 51.

Fig. 2. Angelica Kauffman, *Joshua Reynolds*, 1767, oil on canvas, 127 × 101.6 cm. National Trust, Saltram. (Photo: © National Trust Images / Rob Matheson.)

ethics of listening via the seemingly impossible project of representing 'speech in painting'.

Portrait of the Artist as a Deaf Man

Reynolds's functional impairments were not commensurate. His eyesight only declined sharply in his final years, the result of a liver condition. His left eye failed completely in 1789, while his right eye lost function progressively until he was prevented from working altogether. Prior to that he had worn glasses to correct short-sightedness.[11] Reynolds's former apprentice James Northcote records the 'mental anguish' he endured. Much that Reynolds wanted to do, even writing his will, proved impossible.[12] His deafness is different. Reynolds's early biographers explain that impairment began as a result of a cold caught while copying pictures in the Vatican in the early 1750s. Edmond Malone conjectured that he had sat too near a stove, allowing dampness to affect his head, but was keen nonetheless to stress how important that time had been to his creative development.[13] Even if, as Malone maintains, 'from the time of his returning from Italy he was very

deaf', it did not end his career but confined his sociability, with Reynolds preferring smaller groups. Joseph Farington thought that his social interactions were limited to friends 'seated within his hearing'.[14] The preference may indicate the sonic limits of the architectural spaces in which he found himself. For someone who heard poorly, relations between sound and space would have been critical, as scholars have now begun to explore.[15] Reynolds's reticence might equally reflect a reluctance to use an ear trumpet in private settings, though it probably improved his hearing. He certainly used one in public and was conspicuous for doing so; so much so, that by the nineteenth century his name described a form of trumpet, the 'Reynolds type'.[16] Reynolds's experience of deafness accords with Michael Oliver's social model of disability. He was disabled not by his impairment, but by the nature of his interaction with others, who did not always tolerate his limited hearing.[17] Northcote, for instance, claimed that Reynolds's deafness made him overbearing and poor company.[18]

Reynolds's impaired hearing was not the only injury he sustained while in Europe. Riding in Minorca, he fell 'down a precipice', injuring his lip so badly 'as to oblige him to have part of it cut off'. He had a rather uneven mouth ever after. Reynolds's smashed lips would hardly seem to be our concern. But they are prominent in many images alongside evidence of his deafness – such as a trumpet – and as such serve as a reminder that, as Essaka Joshua explains, eighteenth-century Britons did not understand 'disability' as a distinct category, preferring instead the more encompassing and partly aesthetic category of 'defect' or 'deformity', often choosing to mock or pity blemishes and disabilities equally. Though impairments were rarely ignored, recovering their nature or extent from eighteenth-century sources is not easy. Nor can their consequence be gauged with certainty: 'concepts of impairment are affected by whether the impairment is acquired or congenital, visible or hidden, function-based or aesthetic, and, importantly, by gender, race, class, sexuality, and socioeconomic status'.[19] We will need to return to this wise counsel later; for now, it is enough to stress the indiscriminateness of eighteenth-century representations of disability, disfigurement, or blemish. Mockery and contempt might easily coexist, as might some measure of compassion. The device by which Reynolds coped with his hearing loss, by employing an ear trumpet, is a case in point, its depiction revealing prejudice and only occasionally acceptance and inclusion. Within the visual arts, Reynolds's ear trumpet functions as a lazy shorthand, enabling his easy identification. As the first part of this essay will show, artists were rarely concerned to distinguish hearing loss as an impairment as much as to use its visible consequences as a way of separating Reynolds from his peers.

Johan Heinrich Ramberg's *Exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1787* (Fig. 3) is an instance of this mode of representation, where the task of identification is curtailed via the depiction of impairment. The painting, which was best known as an engraving, depicts Reynolds, in what ought to be a moment of some prestige (the commencement of the annual exhibition) with his trumpet in hand, though not in use. The trumpet marks him out in a crowded scene, serving the same purpose as the garter star worn by the Prince of Wales, to whom Reynolds is talking.[20] Reynolds's use of his trumpet is given still crueller prominence in James Gillray's print *TITIANUS REDIVIVUS; or, the Seven-Wise-Men Consulting the New Venetian Oracle, – a Scene in the ye Academic Grove* (Fig. 4). Reynolds, recently dead, crawls from his grave to admonish his successors. You can tell it is Reynolds because of his ear trumpet, a particularly twisty one at that, spectacles, and odd-looking mouth. As Matthew C. Hunter observes, Reynolds has all 'the frailties of his physical being clearly intact'.[21] Hunter's comment underlines what an ear trumpet signalled for Gillray's audience. It is emphatically not the sign of

14. Malone, *Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 1, p. lxxxviii; and Farington, *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, p. 107.

15. Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); Joseph L. Clarke, *Echo's Chambers: Architecture and the Idea of Acoustic Space* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021); and Michael Gaudio, *Sound, Image, Silence: Art and the Aural Imagination in the Atlantic World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

16. Elisabeth Bennion, *Antique Hearing Devices* (London: Vernier, 1994), pp. 13–14; Graeme Goody and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain 1830–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016); and Jaipreet Virdi, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

17. Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

18. Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 2, pp. 178, 192, 210.

19. Essaka Joshua, 'Disability and Deformity: Function Impairment and Aesthetics in the Long Eighteenth-Century', in Clare Barker and Stuart Murray (eds), *Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 47.

20. Mark Hallett, *Joshua Reynolds: Portraiture in Action* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 376–9, 412–16; and David Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

21. Matthew C. Hunter, *Painting with Fire: Sir Joshua Reynolds, Photography, and the Temporarily Evolving Chemical Object* (Chicago, IL: University Press of Chicago, 2019), p. 100.

Fig. 3. Pietro Antonio Martini after Johan Heinrich Ramberg, *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1787*, 1787, line engraving, 32.8 × 49.1 cm. Royal Academy, London. (Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts, London.)

deafness thoughtfully understood. Still less does it serve as the marker of a different form of identity, social practice, or culture, as we would now understand the Deaf community. The trumpet signs deafness-as-incapacity. The appearance of the trumpet in Gillray's print seems designed to prompt the harmful reflection that the President of the Royal Academy's appearance did not accord with his own view of art. Such a device can have no central form (indeed it is remarkable how various his trumpets seem); perhaps this was Gillray's point too. There is little sense in either image of an attempt to explore the experience of deafness sympathetically, or to consider what it might mean to use the silent forms of the visual arts to think about what a non-hearing life might be like.

Unable or unwilling to seek an identity within a Deaf community, and wary of mockery, Reynolds was playful with his infirmity, developing a capacity for tactical deafness, drawing attention to his impairment when it suited him. This seems to have been appreciated by his social circle, whose somewhat eccentric composition we will attend to later in the essay. It was very much in this style that Reynolds reassured Richard Brinley Sheridan that he would turn his 'deafest ear' to anyone seeking to purchase the still-unpaid-for portrait of Elizabeth Sheridan.[22] This teasing assurance accords with the most often cited depiction of Reynolds as deaf: Oliver Goldsmith's mock epitaph *The Retaliation* (1774), which presents Reynolds in ways that are at once an act of exposure and friendship:

22. Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'To Richard Brinsley Sheridan', 20 January 1790, in John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (eds), *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 199.

Fig. 4. James Gillray, *TITIANUS REDIVIVUS; or, the Seven-Wise-Men Consulting the New Venetian Oracle, – a Scene in the ye Academic Grove*, 1797, hand-coloured etching, 53 × 40.4 cm. Royal Academy, London. (Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts, London.)

Here Reynolds is laid, and, to tell you my mind,
He has not left a better or wiser behind;
His pencil was striking, resistless and grand,
His manners were gentle, complying and bland;
Still born to improve us in every part,
His pencil our faces, his manners our heart:
To coxcombs averse, yet most civilly staring,
When they judg'd without skill he was still hard of hearing:
When they talk'd of their Raphaels, Corregios and stuff,
He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff.

Goldsmith explained in a justifying note:

> Sir Joshua Reynolds is so remarkably deaf as to be under the necessity of using an ear trumpet in company; he is, at the same time, equally remarkable for taking a great quantity of snuff: his manner in both of which, taken in the point of time described, must be allowed, by those who have been witness of such a scene, to be as happily given on *paper*, as the great Artist himself, perhaps, could have exhibited on *canvas*.[23]

Reynolds's deafness is presented as a characteristic akin to his snuff-taking (itself a vitiating attention to the senses), but equally a discerning artistic and social mode. He will not listen to fools or bores, so shifts his trumpet to shield himself from their nonsense. His impairment grants discrimination, such that Reynolds's Deaf-gain is an ability to opt out and to enjoy other pleasures.

How far Reynolds wanted to be 'exhibited on *canvas*' will appear later; other artists were certainly willing to do so. One to do so with particular sensitivity was Johan Zoffany. Zoffany's *Academicians of the Royal Academy* (Fig. 5) provides a sympathetic image of Reynolds as a deaf man. The image is crowded. Men are gaping and spreading in odd clusters, some turned towards a male model, whose unclothed body excluded academicians Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, whose portraits hang demurely on the right.[24] Amidst this throng, Zoffany places Reynolds, dressed nattily in black velvet, just left of the centre of the image. He is using his ear trumpet. According to Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor, it is canted to catch 'the talk of Wilton and Chambers'.[25] Reynolds's fine dress and prominent position grants him status, but it is the turn and incline of his body in conjunction with the use of an ear trumpet that are crucial. He both stoops and pivots to listen, becoming an engaged as well as engaging figure. He is socialised, he is listening. The two processes, striving to hear and being social, take place simultaneously. The reception of sound, and concomitant attention to others, an activity beyond the capacity of painting to represent directly, appears under the sign of the ear trumpet. Reynolds's functional impairment enables speech to appear in painting. This is not an entirely sympathetic gesture, for Reynolds is undoubtedly made conspicuous, nor can it be fully explained as an instance of scholarly *bonhomie*.[26] His impaired presence modulates the homosocial theatricality of the image as a whole. Attentively listening, and being listened to (perhaps they are discussing some anatomical or aesthetic point), Reynolds is depicted by Zoffany as impaired, but not disabled. Viewed from this perspective, Zoffany's group portrait might demonstrate the possibility of inclusion, in which impairment is only understood as disabling when it is discriminated against.

Here we can return to Essaka Joshua's fine calibration of the impact of disability when viewed across historical distance. It is unlikely that the experience of impairments were felt equally; elite men suffered less discrimination than many of their contemporaries. Reynolds presents a mixed character in these terms: white, wealthy, male, yet provincial and middle class. What we know

23. Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. by Arthur Friedman, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), vol. 4, pp. 358–9.

24. Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 65–6; and Holgar Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 32.

25. Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor, *The Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds with Instances of Some of His Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1865), vol. 1, p. 445.

26. For a contrary view, see Hallett, *Joshua Reynolds*, pp. 250–1; and Martin Postle (ed.), *Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 219–21.

Fig. 5. Johan Zoffany, *Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771–2, oil on canvas, 101.1 × 147.5 cm. Royal Collection Trust, London. (Photo: © His Majesty King Charles III.)

about some other aspects of his personality, his sexual interests, and the precise extent of his deafness is much less clear. Deafness has a particularly contested history in this respect and the condition has often been subject to accusations of exaggeration and counterfeit. Malone is notably inconsistent in his account.[27] Reynolds's limited capacities matter because amongst the Georgian elite to be hard of hearing presented potentially severe trials and exclusions. The much-prized culture of politeness, theorised by Joseph Addison, David Hume, and the Earls of Chesterfield and Shaftesbury, rested upon assumptions about the merits of sociability which were reliant on prescriptive idealisations of oral and aural normalcy.[28] Conversation became an almost moral act, so that being able to hear and to speak in reply was critical. In the nation's coffee houses, hearing assumed a particular prominence in the arrangement of the senses.[29] In such a vibrantly conversational culture, the injunctions and inhibitions found in Reynolds's *Discourses* (and in some of his portraits) competed with another way of appreciating painting, as 'speaking pictures'. Though this assumption had classical sources of its own, not least of which was Plutarch, it was further elaborated from mid-century onwards, and its terms expanded, such that a good portrait was often imagined to convey the viewer into private dialogue with the absent sitter, their pose signifying imminent social interaction.[30] Jonathan Richardson, whose work Reynolds knew very well, would be the clearest instance of this investment.[31] Recognition of the specificity of Georgian sociability on the one hand, and eighteenth-century artistic practice on the other, can help to define a historically specific engagement with the insights of Disability Studies. As Lennard Davies and Nicholas Mirzoeff argue, experiences of the Deaf bring the role of sound and gesture into fresh perspective, building alternative forms of cognition and culture. For many in the Deaf community, to be Deaf is not to lose experience but to gain insight and identity.[32]

We have seen that Reynolds is depicted, even in representations that elevate him, in ways that make him conspicuous and liable to mockery, even from his friends. For the purposes of this essay, it is worth teasing apart once more what Joshua recommends understanding together; the categories of blemish,

27. Malone, *Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 1, pp. lxxxviii–ix. See also David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 81–104; and Emily Cockayne, 'Experience of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2003, pp. 498–510.

28. Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Fredric Lawrence (London, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

29. Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004). For wider histories of the senses, see Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, pp. 5–9, 21–24; and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

30. Lee, '*Ut Pictura Poesis*', pp. 197–202; and Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, pp. 79–104.

31. Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses. An Essay on the whole Art of Criticism as it relates to Painting, shewing how to Judge I. Of the Goodness of a Picture; II. Of the Hand of the Master; III. Whither 'tis an Original, or a Copy. II. An Argument in Behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur; wherein is shewn the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage of it* (London: W. Churchill, 1719), pp. 57–66; Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*, pp. 23–27, 45–54.

32. Lennard J. Davis, 'Deafness and Insight: The Deafened Moment as a Cultural Modality', *College English*, vol. 57, no. 8, 1995, pp. 881–900; and Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Body Talk: Deafness, Sign and Visual Language in the Ancien Regime', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1992, pp. 561–85. See also H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray (eds), *Deaf Gain: Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

deformity, and impairment. They are coincident often enough. But the visual arts work differently to the literary sources she favours. The artists featured in the remainder of this essay separate them, and we need to too. To be clear: a blemish or deformity is something understood as deficient, something that might be observed, represented, and mocked easily. It is a matter that can be denoted, by an obvious sign such as an ear trumpet, though it might also function, in Barthes's terms, as a *punctum*, challenging the viewer.[33] A trumpet might in these terms represent a mode of defiance, both personal and artistic. But visually realised impairment, as I am defining it (as function interrupted but still striven for), while it might be observed and judged, is more properly connotative of that which cannot be presented: 'speech in painting'. Of the works discussed so far, Zoffany's work is the least confined by Classical idealisations of painting as soundless poetry. Sound is too important, even if it is imperfectly captured. Some measure of sound and sound-defined identities is brought within the frame of his picture, though Zoffany barely credits his own insight. Within such a counter-discursive practice (which also has a psychoanalytic dimension), visually apparent deafness is not merely a defining characteristic, but an instance of the drama of social interaction, its limits, and potential for exclusion. Its visual presence makes apparent the desire to be social, to listen, and to be listened to. The remainder of this essay will pay attention to the ways that portraits of Reynolds present him not as deaf-as-such, though they make a point of including his efforts to hear, but focus instead on the more complex act of listening, which requires ethical and social care beyond physical capacity.

33. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 26–7, 59.

34. Amanda Vickery, 'Branding Angelica: Reputation Management in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2020, pp. 14, 12.

35. Vickery, 'Branding Angelica', p. 5; and Wendy Wassyng Roworth (ed.), *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion, 1992), p. 38.

Deafness, Dance, and Desire

Nathanial Dance's unfinished pencil drawing of Reynolds and Angelica Kauffman, seemingly in conversation, grants an important elaboration of the image of Reynolds as deaf (Fig. 6). Amanda Vickery has condemned it as 'unflattering' and it is wise to recall, as Vickery does, that Dance was a disappointed suitor. Dance had thought that he and Kauffman had become engaged in Rome and was embittered when she 'shut Her door against Him', after she moved to London, suspecting that her head had been turned by Reynolds's attention (though his proposal of marriage was declined too).[34] This unhappy tangle may lie beneath Dance's image. Neither artist is presented as amiably or as beautifully as they would depict themselves. Kauffman holds in her left hand the instruments of her art: palette, brushes, and maul stick. She holds them negligently, but they are ready to take up. Kauffman clasps her right hand across her body so that it rests above her heart. Her body is composed into a posture of sincerity. She may be making a declaration, or about to make one. Other elements of the image are much fainter, notably an unfinished painting upon an easel, which, placed on the far side of Reynolds, awaits Kauffman's attention. On the right-hand side, seemingly behind Kauffman, is another figure, facing away from the picture plane: a woman playing guitar. It is hard to say how far Dance got, or wanted to get, with this part of the image, or even to be sure it is part of the main image. Kauffman was certainly an accomplished musician, whose 'musicality bears examination', as Vickery suggests. Wendy Wassyng Roworth reads the guitarist as an allusion to the profession of music from which Kauffman had reluctantly turned, making it tempting to see the drawing as anticipating her *Self-Portrait Hesitating Between the Arts of Music and Painting* (1794, National Trust, Nostell Priory).[35] Any denial or desire expressed surely belongs to Dance, not to Kauffman. The image represents Kauffman and Reynolds but is Dance's vision. His presentation of them, Kauffman speaking and Reynolds seeming to strive to hear, instances the state of his desire for her, its hopes, frustrations, and their probable extinction.

Fig. 6. Nathanial Dance, *Joshua Reynolds in Conversation with Angelica Kauffman*, c. 1766, pencil on paper, 16.6 x 24.1cm, Harewood House, Leeds (Photo: © The Earl and Countess of Harewood and the Harewood House Trust.)

Dance's presentation of Reynolds, seen in this light, seems at least partly satirical, not least because Reynolds appears to be importune yet frail. His body leans towards Kauffman with his legs crossed so that his knees point towards her. His right hand clutches his ever-present snuff box, while his left hand is cupped to his ear to help him hear whatever she is saying. Reynolds appears receptive to her words, to be listening, but the remainder of his body is more intrusive, his right foot pointing, nestling into her dress. The state of the drawing is partly responsible for this effect. It is most finished, the lines heavier and seemingly more assured, around the space between the two figures, giving it a charge that a completer image might lack, serving to make the distance across which words must carry more vivid. Reynolds consequently seems to interpose, though not competently, between Kauffman and her art, preventing its completion. Perhaps this is what Dance felt – that Reynolds was a rival and an interloper – his intercession substituting for the ways Kauffman herself denied Dance what he thought he wanted. What is crucial is the revelation, or anticipation of desire in the space of the image, which is enabled by the representation of conversation: consequently, speaking and hearing, perhaps listening. For Jacques Lacan, the helix of vision and desire was inevitably a spiral of frustration. *You do not look at me from the place in which I see you*.[36] Here that elegant formulation collides with something more prosaic: 'I can't hear a word you're saying', and more poignantly: 'What you hear

36. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 97–103.

isn't what I am saying'. For Roland Barthes, such disappointments are the condition of each lover's discourse: the loved other speaks differently, is hard to hear, and does not say what we want. Barthes is particularly acute in his analysis of the eruption of an unwelcome speech act in a lover's image-repertoire, and there is something of that sad but savvy realisation left here, raising an unwelcome awareness of what it means not to listen, as opposed to merely not hearing.[37]

Such complicating desires draw the image, albeit sulkily, towards an ethical insight, prompted and made visible by the problematic of 'speech in painting'. Dance offers two markers of speech: Kauffman's self-validating right hand, a familiar gesture of heartfelt utterance, given new emphasis by the culture of sensibility; and Reynolds's cupped left hand, revealing his efforts to catch her testifying words.[38] We should take a moment to notice that Reynolds is not shown with an ear trumpet. Whether its absence is intended to depict accurately Reynolds's manner when in intimate company (his earliest biographers claim that he heard in smaller groups more easily) or forms part of Dance's portrayal of him as weakened is unclear. Reynolds's cupped hand certainly lacks the flamboyance of his ear trumpets. It is worth drawing attention to his cupped hand because all the pictures discussed in the remainder of this essay all include the gesture. A cupped hand possesses greater potential for tenderness and self-care, while confirming the presence of another sense: touch. We will need to complicate this impression later, but for now what is important is the depiction of someone striving to hear, and to hear Kauffman make her declaration. He cannot be listening to anyone else – no crowd gathers round. Nor is he holding out for our words, or those of anyone else beyond the picture frame: the theatricality of this image is limited; Kauffman and Reynolds are absorbed in each other. The portrayal of a willingness to listen to Kauffman, to hear her declaration, her hand-on-heart revelation, is crucial. This desire might coincide (or collide) with other desires directed towards Kauffman, motives that prompted Reynolds's own unsuccessful proposal of marriage. Dance's drawing might even record or reimagine that unhappy moment: the moment when, in Barthes's phrase, the rival 'occupies a desired space'. Reynolds's effort to listen would then serve a double function: as repudiation of a rival, as illegitimate and incapable; equally a lingering suspicion of the once-desired other, whom mordant jealousy now paints as unfaithful and unworthy.[39]

Dance's sketch depicts Reynolds, cupping his hand, seeking to hear Kauffman – hoping to catch her voice. Does it show him striving to understand and appreciate what she is saying, or trying to say? As much of the sketch can be taken as a form of testimony on these questions, it could be read either way. However the image is taken, the testimony it offers is that provided by Dance, whose own frustrated desires ensure that it is not to be trusted, save as an instance of the disrupted and dejected longing. And it is perhaps desire and not impairment that will tell us most about what these cupped-hand images represent or are most concerned with. Reynolds's desire to listen to Kauffman, and to exist in relation to her art, perhaps underwrites his willingness to be portrayed by her. Kauffman's own portrait of Reynolds captures a particular moment, and a particular style. It is an image of Reynolds that, both subtly and sensitively, places his inability to hear but his willingness to listen centre stage. Before turning to that painting, it is important to reappraise two key terms: hearing and listening. Sound is produced, felt, registered, as a sound wave, a pulse in the ear. Hearing is the experience of those waves. It is involuntary. It is physical, lacking in intention or reflection and, crucially, attention. It is a function of the body that might be impaired, but not controlled. You cannot choose not to hear – a shout, a blast, the traffic will be heard unless steps are taken to prevent it. Listening is

37. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2018), pp. 106–15.

38. See Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

39. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, pp. 144, 113.

an attention to what is heard, especially to what is being said, or attempted to be said. It cannot be confined to the physical experience of hearing. Listening to someone requires more care than merely hearing them. Listening is an engagement, an attention to the other (even when the listener listens only to oppose what is said). Dance could not accept that Reynolds might listen, so emphasised his inability to hear. Kauffman's portrait of Reynolds and the self-portrait he painted for the library at Streatham are different. In these images, listening is a willed, even desired, interaction, the sitters striving to hear articulate sound and not merely to frame it.

Listening to Angelica

Kauffman's portrait of Reynolds, which she completed in 1767, has long been granted critical significance, not least because it was a success during her first year in England (Fig. 2).[40] Reynolds appears relaxed yet studious. He turns his right ear towards the viewer, indicating an intention to listen, yet hinting at difficulty in doing so. In her commentary on the painting, Roworth identifies strong professional and personal links between Reynolds and Kauffman, as well as with John Parker, who commissioned the image for Saltram House, Devon. Roworth regards the painting as embodying a moment of shared 'warmth' and mutual admiration. She does not mention Reynolds's deafness. His cupped ear is read not as evidencing impairment, but as indicating Reynolds's receipt of 'inspiration' from Michelangelo, whose bust occupies the upper left hand of the canvas.[41] Hallett praises the image's 'particular sensitivity' and 'tender testament' to their friendship, but does not read the image as depicting Reynolds's deafness. Yet only when understood as a picture intended to record attention to speech, hearing impairment, and the effort to overcome it does the picture make much sense. It is an odd image in many ways. Reynolds is dressed flamboyantly (as for a masquerade), yet hardly seems about to 'go out'. His body is oddly skewed, caught between competing actions. Neither the space represented nor the pose selected is congruent with the density of visual reference that the canvas contains. But the awkwardness of the pose and the odd space make sense when the movement of sound and the effort to hear speech are allowed into the picture space.

Reynolds is shown seated in a muddled room that seems somewhat between a studio and a study, and which rewards consideration as evidence of accumulated cultural capital. There is a desk on the left of the canvas on which Reynolds rests his right elbow. Books and papers crowd its surface, including works by his intellectual friends: Goldsmith's *Traveller*, Dr Johnson's *Idler*, and Burke's *Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Michelangelo's bust rises above them. On the right, angled away from the viewer, is an empty canvas. The plane it creates terminates against an empty wall, parallel to the picture plane. That wall stops, though it is hard to be sure, behind Reynolds's head, suggesting an area recessed beyond that surface, which is painted more darkly. If drawn to it, the eye feels guided to a void. Nor is the space sumptuous; it seems a pokey corner, a little higgledy-piggledy at that. Reynolds looks wedged in, stuck between his friends' massy learning and the execution of his own art. There does not seem to be much space to work. It is possible to read this painting, and the left-to-right movement it implies, as part of the creative process: the accumulation of learning as the necessary antecedent to the creation of art, but also the conversations and reflections that such works imply. Hallett promotes this reading of the image, which is sympathetic to Reynolds's own *Discourses*.[42] However, Kauffman is better understood as essaying a series of dialogues, only

40. *Public Advertiser* (20 January 1767).

41. Roworth, *Angelica Kauffman*, pp. 38–41.

42. Hallett, *Joshua Reynolds*, pp. 221–2.

some of which are visual or art historical. The role taken by Reynolds's clever friends and by Michelangelo has already been noted; but it is at least equally the case that the painting, in its use of deep chiaroscuro, is in dialogue with Rembrandt, while the sitter's fine costume and slashed sleeves suggest Van Dyke. But what kind of spoken conversation has been essayed, and which he strives to hear? Because surely that is the central drama, animating his figure?

To see Kauffman or her painting as concerned only with the representation of Reynolds's sources of inspiration simplifies a complex image. Not least because the bust of Michelangelo, central to Roworth's reading, scarcely leans towards Reynolds, nor does he seem to pivot towards it. Surely it is behind him? The pile of books occupying the space to Reynolds's right, where he leans his elbow, is key. The size of the volumes (they seem to be chunky quartos) defines the space and locates the bust, by their implication, to Reynolds's rear. More to the point, Reynolds is tugging his ear, and not very elegantly, away from Michelangelo and towards the plane of the picture, the painter, and the viewer. The turn towards the picture plane is emphasised by the placement of Reynolds's left hand, gripping his left knee (which is crossed over his right). It is surprisingly prominent in the composition, appearing pale, massive, veined, as if dominant. It catches the light almost more than anything else. Though his anatomy remains somewhat shady, Reynolds's shoulders follow this pivoting alignment, tilting towards the picture plane. Reynolds is turning away from the homosocial and art-historical baggage lying on the desk. He is rotating towards Kauffman. This is a picture of someone listening to Angelica Kauffman. The painting is, in its own way, a record of her voice. This must appear an absurd claim, but hear me out. For Reynolds is listening to someone, twisting his ear to do so. Malone thought that Reynolds only used his ear trumpet in larger gatherings; its absence suggests that we are looking at an intimate form of attention, directed to a known other.[43] Listening (as opposed to mere hearing), as Barthes suggested, is a reaching out towards and a focus upon the other.[44] This image may well represent such an effort. Barthes's conjecture of listening *for* the other valuably implicates this image within the complicating network of desires already detected in Dance's sketch.

The possibility of intentional as well as reciprocal exchange requires appreciation of the ways in which, via its organisation of light and space, and the pose in which Reynolds sits, the painting elicits forms of interaction that stretch beyond the painted canvas. Reynolds is tugging at his right ear, as if trying to pull it round to catch the voice of his addressee, initially Kauffman's, but logically anyone looking at the painting. The image must have a relation to the experience it represents, which is, paradoxically, the experience of not quite experiencing something but wanting to. The gesture emphasises what cannot be represented: 'speech in painting'. But Kaufmann's image can, and does, represent something more: both deafness and listening. In this respect, it is striking that the most clearly illuminated part of the image is the right-hand side of Reynolds's face, which he pulls towards us. It is possible that the light is meant to suggest creativity, but the track of the light appears congruent with the likely passage of sound, coming from beyond the picture and towards the right of his face, and so to his ear. The organisation of the cramped space and the fall of the light accord with the ways in which Reynolds has been posed. The complexities of his posing do not lie in its extravagance. Reynolds's gestures are minimal. Yet the pose in which Kauffman places Reynolds, or, following Harry Berger, in which he has posed himself, is revealing. Reynolds is posed as deaf, as hard of hearing – and has accepted this 'fiction of the pose'.[45] As ever, the most striking aspect of the selected pose is the intra-subjective address adopted by the sitter. Reynolds's tugged ear (a rougher version of the cupped hand) implicates the viewer within the frame of the image,

43. Malone, *Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 1, p. lxxxviii.

44. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays of Music, Art, and Representation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), esp. pp. 247–52.

45. Harry J. Berger, 'Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture', *Representations*, vol. 46, 1994, pp. 87–120.

paradoxically as speaker. Paradoxical because a deaf man silently appears to elicit speech, such that the status of deafness merely as incapacity is put into question.

Following Berger, it is possible to see that Kauffman's thoughtful positioning of her sitter creates a more elaborate, subtle kind of acting out than that suggested by his Van Dyke costume. Reynolds seems conscious of the viewer and seemingly wants some sonic interaction with them, despite their difficulty in doing so. By these means, Kauffman ensures that Reynolds's functional impairment is not presented as disqualification or incapacity, still less deformity. Her image of Reynolds as deaf is an attempt to capture and to enact connection. Someone is listening to someone else. What the image conveys most of all is the possibility, despite the evident difficulty of fulfilling it, of a desire for communication and interaction, aural or otherwise. Kauffman painted Reynolds listening to her – seemingly giving his full attention. He certainly accepted the pose and its social proposition in which she had placed him. I am arguing that this dynamic of possible interaction, between Kauffman and Reynolds, is the key to the painting; but it might be argued instead that Reynolds is no more listening to Kauffman than he is to Michelangelo. Instead he listens to Parker, Reynolds's friend and patron, in whose home the painting hangs still. Patrons were immensely important in determining many aspects of a commission.[46] This contractual possibility does not overturn my fundamental contention that Kauffman's painting is primarily concerned with the performance of a certain quality of receptiveness, an anticipation of speech (that is, attentive listening), subsequent to which the viewer must stand in the place of the painter. If the 'speaking portrait' was expected or praised during the eighteenth century, then what we encounter here is something related, but quite distinct: the 'listening portrait'. What might this modification of purpose and form entail ethically or pictorially? This enquiry is best essayed by considering another commissioned portrait of Reynolds's striving to hear, his *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* painted for the Thrales's Streatham library, and it is to that painting that we shall now turn.

A Deaf Man in Streatham

Painted around 1775, *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* presents Reynolds dressed well but without ostentation (Fig. 1). Beneath his dark brown jacket is a ruffled white muslin shirt with matching cravat. His hair is curled and powdered. His left hand gently pulls his ear round. His ear is not distinctly seen, but his hand is clearly manipulating it, pushing it forward, with care and some tenderness. He appears eager to listen. The image is both sonic and haptic, giving the viewer a sense of Reynolds's delicate pressure as he seeks to hear. *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* solicits interaction, such that engagement is the key effect of the image, not the presentation of impairment. The painting has recently been the subject of new scholarly and curatorial interest, which has considered the painting's commission and its place in the Thrales's library where it formed part of a gallery of their friends including Johnson, Goldsmith, Charles Burney, and David Garrick, all by Reynolds. The portraits were produced over several years. Though comparable in size, they differ in style, commemorative purpose, and technique, yet each is an instance of 'intimate biography'.[47] Some remember the dead, others the long absent, the remainder present the familiar habitués of the room in which their images were hung. Amongst these other images, *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* is the product of intense experimentation, Reynolds electing to mix a variety of substances: beeswax, spermaceti, walnut oil, and bitumen amidst varnishes, waxes, and resins.[48] Lucy Davis and Mark Hallett note that not only does the painting possess a 'very complex paint structure', it departs from the

46. Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, pp. 13–52.

47. Nadia Tscherny, 'Reynolds's Streatham Portraits and the Art of Intimate Biography', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 128, no. 994, 1986, pp. 4–11; and Hallett, *Joshua Reynolds*, pp. 287–310.

48. Hunter, *Painting with Fire*, pp. 47–8.

'standard pictorial conventions of Georgian portraiture, in which any form of physical vulnerability or disability was typically hidden from view'. The intimate form of the portrait partly enabled this propriety transgressing. It is not in the grand manner and scarcely aims at a public role. While these factors are important, they do not present a completely adequate explanation of a painting which Davies and Hallett herald as 'distinctive'.[49] The painting is more complex and its address to the beholder more ethically fraught than acceptance of its atypicality allows. *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* (which is not a good name) needs to be seen both within and beyond the context of the Thrales's convivial library, not least because the inclusivity of the Streatham set requires re-examination.

The self-portrait Reynolds created for the Thrales appears to anticipate the view that others might take; perhaps seeking to disarm or forestall prejudice. It is an image conscious of how the sitter-painter expects to be seen, not how they wish to be seen – unlike the stern self-portrait presented to the Royal Academy. The contrast raises questions about what form of desire motivates the portrait for Streatham, as distinct from the public image intended for Somerset House. Is the Streatham painting an image of someone listening (a 'listening portrait', par excellence), though seemingly with difficulty; or an image of someone not hearing, though striving to? *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* presents Reynolds as deaf, but more intriguingly as listener. He is not obviously the author, still less the speaker, of his *Discourses on Art*. Reynolds would have had a relatively free hand in the creation of the image. It is hard to imagine that Thrale chose the pose, still less that he insisted on it. That said, other images in the library suggest that there was an intention to convey people as they appeared to their friends, blemishes, defects, disability, and all besides. Goldsmith looks vacant, balding too. Baretti struggles to see, suffering from evident short-sightedness. Johnson is bleary and sallow, seemingly ill at ease in the light. Johnson hated it, complaining: 'He may paint himself as deaf as he chooses; but I will not be *blinking Sam* in the eyes of posterity'.[50] This notorious remark merits unpacking. The key phrase is 'as deaf as he chooses'. It serves to attribute intention and control to Reynolds, which Johnson wishes to reclaim, but also functions as a critique of the scale of that presented deafness, in which the maximum revelation is understood as perfectly possible but more forcefully as improper and unwise. Johnson complains that Reynolds has chosen to flaunt his deafness, to make it unmissable, a decision he denigrates.

With Johnson's objection still ringing in our ears, we can think further about the gesture *in* the painting (the cupped hand, striving to hear) and *of* the painting: this is who I am, this is how I hear. The hand first: its status as a hand, as part of his body, is crucial. It is in this sense very different from an ear trumpet, which, however successful in promoting audition, remains prosthetic. Reynolds's disinclination to use it in private suggests an awareness of this view of his trumpet, though more recently prosthetics have been reconsidered as forming rather dismantling identities.[51] Zoffany, Gillray, and Ramberg all show Reynolds with a trumpet, some fantastically shaped and styled – as if crucially part of his appearance, so its absence from the painting made for Streatham, as in Kauffman's portrait, requires thought. Unlike other members of the Streatham set, Reynolds appears without any accompanying object, or hint of his profession. Baretti has his book, as does Goldsmith. Burney has robes and a scroll of music; William Henry Lyttleton sits in his robes, his high office evident. The portraits of Garrick and Arthur Murphey indicate their work for the stage. Reynolds has nothing, making his well-placed hand all the more telling. That hand is capable of dexterity and thoughtful direction, enacting an address beyond the plane of the picture. The emphasis on touch suggests self-care and self-awareness but equally

49. Lucy Davis and Mark Hallett (eds), *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* (London: Wallace Collection, 2015), p. 13.

50. Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, vol. 2, pp. 3–4.

51. See Jonathan Sterne, *Diminished Faculties: A Political Phenomenology of Impairment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); and Vivian Sobchack, '*Carnal Thoughts': Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 205–25.

a delicacy of self-presentation, which for all a self-portrait's self-centredness is directed towards another. Reynolds's self-portrait does not show 'speech in painting', though it marks a moment when the reception of speech is sought, even encouraged. It is most of all a moment of intended listening, the action of a good friend, keen to listen: keenest for you to speak. The sonic nature of friendship is defined by Barthes: 'the perfect interlocutor, the friend, is … the one who constructs around you the greatest possible resonance'. Friendship might even 'be defined as a space of total sonority'.[52] The Thales's library might be best thought of a space of reverberation and sonic interchange, a resonance that this painting seeks to capture.

It is the gesture *of* the painting that is most important. The Deaf do not possess the pictorial and iconographic tradition which has made the Blind prominent in European art: there to be looked at.[53] Reynolds's painting represents someone seeking to conform to the norms and notions of conviviality. The Streatham library context is crucial; understood as an instance of private, polite, predominantly but not exclusively male sociability. In such an environment there might be an expectation of sympathetic viewers, ready to respond to its ethical injunction: as call to hear, speak, listen. Hallett leaves the matter confined to Thrale's private conviviality, which does not seem enough. More significant is the issue of communication, interaction – engagement with the other: an ethics of communication. The issue is most dynamic in the cupped-hand images, and in *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man* especially, not least because we cannot tell which ear Reynolds offers – his left obviously (he is painting with his right), but is that his 'deafest ear'? As Goldsmith knew, and Reynolds assured Sheridan, his not hearing was partly elective. So: is he listening, or pointing out that he is not, and consequently (and rudely) suggesting that we are talking rubbish: nonsense about 'Raphaels, Corregios and stuff'. The paintings by Ramberg and Zoffany only show a man unable to hear, seeking to catch the words spoken around him, and looking a little too conspicuous in the process. There is less obligation to think about hearing and listening. They do not ask whether the sitter *wants* to hear, only requiring the viewer to observe that they do not hear well. Reynolds, like Kauffman (perhaps following where she had led), has produced a 'listening portrait', in which the act of paying attention to an implied but unseen other occupies a central position. Above all, the 'listening portrait' is a mode through which the near impossibility of 'speech in painting' is manifested through the representation of its reception, rather than its production, such that interaction and responsiveness predominate over utterance. This seeking for connection, so deeply characteristic of the conversational and sentimental cultures of the later eighteenth century, is in the end the significance of the cupped hands, whose true function is not to mark deafness, but to realise what Pamela N. Corey terms the 'aural implication' of seemingly silent works of art, allowing it to break beyond its formal conventions and physical bounds into a more inclusive space.[54]

Listening and Hearing in Art

Reynolds and Kauffman's cupped-hand portraits can be compared finally to work by Sir Thomas Lawrence, not least because Lawrence is generally more confident in his portrayal of speaking, as his portraits of George Canning reveal.[55] His group portrait *Sir Francis Baring, 1st Baronet, John Baring, and Charles Wall* provoked press comment when exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1807 for its 'portrayal of Baring's deafness' (Fig. 7).[56] Someone is speaking, but Baring must strive to hear them, cupping his hand to do so. Lawrence's painting is different from Reynolds and Kauffman's portraits, however, in that the viewer is left to observe an act of speaking and attempted hearing, but is not required to think

52. Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, p. 167.

53. See Emma Barker, 'Envisioning Blindness in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2020, pp. 91–116.

54. Pamela N. Corey, 'Toward a Horizon of Un-Knowing: Voice, Aurality, and the Politics of Identification in the Art of Vong Phaophanit and Claire Oboussier', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2020, pp. 235–6.

55. A. Cassandra Albinson, Peter Funnel, and Lucy Peltz (eds), *Thomas Lawrence: Regency Power and Brilliance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 19, 21–3.

56. Albinson *et al.*, *Thomas Lawrence*, p. 204.

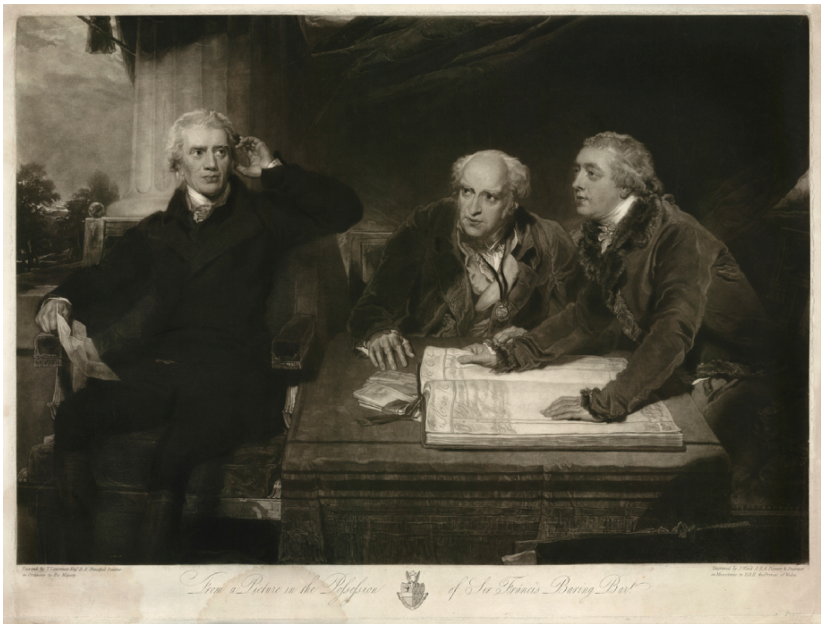

Fig. 7. James Ward, after Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Sir Francis Baring, 1st Baronet, John Baring, and Charles Wall, 1806–1807*, mezzotint, 50.4 × 65.6 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London. (Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.)

much about their own willingness to listen. We merely see Baring straining to hear. His raised hand reminds us that 'speech in painting' is not seen and not heard. Baring's gesture is not theatrical. He is totally absorbed in the scene. He acknowledges no viewer. Dance's sketch is different: its play of unhappy desire recruits the viewer (as proxy) implanting and insinuating them. Lawrence records the expected or difficult transmission of sound, the waves of conversation, but we are not implicated in what might be being said (and he makes little effort to show us who is speaking in any case). While Lawrence's painting lacks Dance's entangling complicity, it avoids the ethical and sympathetic demands that Kauffman and Reynolds's portraits insist upon. The viewer is required to observe, not to engage. What might be said or heard is immaterial. But the cleaved terms – hearing, or not hearing, and listening – remain vital. Listening is never merely a characteristic, and that, in the end, is the distinction that I am claiming for Kauffman and Reynolds: the impaired other is addressed and not merely depicted. Moreover they are represented as responding attentively to that address.

Reynolds and Kauffman's portraits reach out beyond their frames to speech and to the act of listening. They are not simply about impairment, about not being able to hear, though it is fundamental to how they enact their ethical query. The paintings' insight rests ultimately on its own particular paradox: staging a relationship that cannot be articulated within the medium in which it is presented. It is hard to represent a conversation in paint, other than via a set of rather stark signs: ear trumpets, opened mouths, hands raised. What is important, however, is what the paintings enact, or more strictly require, not what they display. They demand a moment of interaction, of audible exchange, one that is paid attention to, rather than merely heard. This requirement is what distinguishes Kauffman's image and Reynolds's self-presentation. Their cupped-hand images prioritise listening as an ethics of engagement over impairment in representation. Kauffman and Reynolds's work implies a requirement to speak,

ultimately to listen in turn, in ways that are generative of an ethics of receptiveness. The painting elicits reflections on the practice of aural receptiveness. Precisely, conversation as listening, not holding forth. Deafness is not something that Reynolds and Kauffman's portraits merely show; rather, it is the phenomena that constitutes their essential drama and purpose. What they aim to dramatise, above all, is the effort required to listen, the effort to overcome the impairment of not hearing, in order to attend to someone else. There are risks in this endeavour – pictorial, obviously, for how might hearing or not hearing appear in paint without folly; equally, the risk of engaging with another, a process which might always result in losses.

My argument has prioritised the ethical imperative of listening, and consequently a range of social norms, about communication and interactions, the merits of which were too readily assumed during the eighteenth century, a presumption that has continued since. I have pursued this emphasis, in some measure, at the expense of recovering the lived histories of impairment and disability. An ethical engagement has been preferred over the recovery of an identity. I have not claimed an early appearance of the Deaf in eighteenth-century art because, I do not think that the images we have been discussing seek to establish difference and distinction in quite these terms. Although they clearly seek to recover the experience of sound and the effort to hear (and not unsympathetically), they are not primarily concerned with presenting lives experienced differently or modulated forms of sociability. The prejudices underpinning some of them are profound, but they do not operate within a regime of identity that isolates specific features, other than to render them as defective or peculiar. Nor did identities at this point in the eighteenth century derive from what were imagined to be wholly fixed characteristics.[57] To argue otherwise would be to make claims for them that they do not bear out. This does not mean that these images ignore important questions about the nature of social interaction, its seeming dependence on sound, an experience largely absent from previous accounts of the experience of a viewer of Georgian art. Placed within the sensory world of the culture of sensibility and the conversational imperatives of sociability, these 'listening portraits' separate not the Deaf from the unimpaired, but hearing (a mere physical trait that might be diminished) from listening. To listen is to give attention to the other (and their possibilities) than merely to hear. In this socialising and ethical sense, listening cannot be impaired; it is a moral not a physical capacity. The paintings by Reynolds and Kauffman point towards that ethical and imaginative act. It is in the representation of this possibility that these paintings become valuable. The images discussed in this essay might even allow us to appreciate a greater aural diversity. In light of this possibility, Reynolds's carefully presented self-image would be better styled *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man Listening*.

57. Joshua, 'Disability and Deformity', pp. 58–9; and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

Acknowledgements

This article was written primarily in the evenings and mostly during the pandemic. Despite the obvious detachment from colleagues that this caused, I benefitted from the advice, encouragement, and scholarly example provided by Clare Barker, Helen Graham, Alinka Greasley, and Erin Pickles. I am grateful to Fiona Becket who took time to read an early draft carefully and encouragingly. While revising the essay for publication, I received an invitation to speak at The Box in Plymouth at an event to mark the tercentenary of Reynolds's birth. The event gave impetus and focus to the final version, so I am very grateful to Jenny Graham and Dafydd Moore for asking me.