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**Outer vs. Inner Reverberations: Verbal Auditory Imagery and
Meaning-Making in Literary Narrative
(Abstract)**

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It is generally acknowledged that verbal auditory imagery, the reader's sense of hearing the words on a page, matters in the silent reading of poetry. Verbal auditory imagery (VAI) in the silent reading of narrative prose, on the other hand, is mostly neglected by literary and other theorists. This is a first attempt to provide a systematic theoretical account of the felt qualities and underlying cognitive mechanics of VAI, based on convergent evidence from the experimental cognitive sciences, psycholinguistic theory, and introspection. More generally, the aim is to isolate a new set of embodied experiences which, along with more widely researched phenomena such as sensorimotor enactment or emotion, contribute to our understanding of literary narrative. The central argument is that distinctions within the domain of embodied VAI also apply to higher-order meaning-making, i. e., that discrete types of VAI are associated with discrete tendencies in spontaneous literary interpretation. Spontaneous literary interpretation stands for any process of meaning-making, however inarticulate, that reaches the reader's consciousness in an uninterrupted course of reading.

Although the necessity of phonological access for the silent processing of print is disputed, the experimental contexts in which VAI has proven to depend on lower-order embodied processes, and/or to have a pronounced effect on silent reading, are countless. But what is it like, in terms of embodiment, to consciously experience VAI? The basic felt quality of all VAI is that the linguistic medium of a written narrative enters the reader's awareness *qua* spoken discourse. This description of VAI, however apt, is not very elaborate. But as we begin to study narrative VAI experiences in greater detail, they soon fall into two distinct types, or more precisely, position themselves between two ends of a continuum. The two ends will be referred to as outer and inner reverberations.

Outer reverberations put the reader in the position of a vicarious listener, feeding on activity in the mind's ear only. Meanwhile, inner reverberations reach the mind's ear via subvocal rehearsal, i. e., covert articulatory activity in the reader's mouth and throat. While outer reverberations represent text as situated speech and may accommodate perceptual detail of the imaginary voice, inner reverberations rather tend to represent text as raw language, where the only auditory qualities to be explored are those of first-person (subvocal) speech production. Although outer reverberations can feature some kinesthetic qualities such as a sense of resonance in the reader's torso, kinesthetic experience is much more pronounced in inner reverberations, and felt motor activity in the articulatory apparatus is a distinctive trait of inner reverberations alone.

Outer reverberations may effectively be prompted by textual cues such as oral style, speaker familiarity, and situational embedding. By contrast, inner reverberations may be more likely to occur with discourse particularly lacking in such cues. However, the cuing process is subject to many variables pertaining to the text, the individual reader, and the specific reading session. More generally, then, inner reverberations can be said to result from the language of an utterance appearing markedly non-situated. As a consequence, inner reverberations entail a

sense of medium opacity, while outer reverberations may rather be associated with a relative sense of medium transparency.

On the level of higher-order meaning-making, outer and inner reverberations link with the presence or absence of spontaneous interpretation, respectively. This is due to a trade-off between one's degree of openness to interpretation on the one hand and one's bodily appropriation of the discourse on the other. The more one is engaged in what X could mean, the less one can possibly be engaged in the saying of X, and vice versa. In analogy to ordinary overt speech: When the voice is mine, the thought is mine as well. It is only when the voice is not mine that one is left to wonder what the underlying thought and meaning is. Other speakers are always ambiguous to some extent, requiring some interpretation. Meanwhile, as the firsthand speaker, one is unambiguous to oneself. Although one may be surprised at the specific course one's speech has taken, one does not reflect, on equal terms with one's interlocutors, on the many coexistent meanings of one's utterance.

Consequently, meaning may be experienced as more dynamic and less firmly tied to wording in outer compared to inner reverberations. The particular words experienced in an outer reverberation are quicker in receding outside awareness, possibly due to the load of concurrent meaning-making. Because of the experiential intensity of such meaning-making relative to the baseline, »literal« meaning-making associated with inner reverberations, the words chosen may seem comparably arbitrary. In inner reverberations, on the other hand, this impression of comparable arbitrariness is less likely. Meaning is felt to be constricted, as it were, to wording proper.

The observations made in this essay are consistent with empirical findings in various fields of psychological inquiry, ranging from reader response and memory studies to experiments investigating willed VAI. For instance, it has been reported that imagined verbal stimuli are more ambiguous when the imaginary voice belongs to an extraneous speaker (in analogy to the proposed notion of outer reverberations), compared to when imagined as voiced by oneself (in analogy to the proposed notion of inner reverberations). In other words, there is experimental evidence that language heard in the mind's ear can be more firmly or more loosely tied to meaning, depending on the imaginer's level of self-implication in its production.

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