

# The sound of authority

The rise and fall of the silent school

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Silence, we might say, is the sound of authority. PETER BAILEY

The visual aspects of modern power are today well known. The relationship between surveillance and power, above all in the wake of Michel Foucault's analysis, has been charted in countless studies. Far less is known of the acoustics of modern power. This article addresses the relationship between power and sound, and focuses on the institution that perhaps is most associated with attempts to control the sound people make: school.

The regulation of speech in school is probably one of the clearest examples of pupil discipline. In the words of the reforming educationalist Ester Boman, it is inherent to the schoolchild's position to be 'doomed to silence when she wishes to speak, and forced to speak when she has nothing to say'.<sup>1</sup> This article examines how the norm of silence in the classroom – a norm that might seem timeless and universal – first developed and was subsequently transformed. When did the ideal of silence arise, and why? What were the disciplinary techniques used to create silence? And how did schools function before the ideal of silence was established?

By studying in detail the leading educational trend in the early nineteenth century– monitorial teaching – we find a very different version of how schools sounded in the past, and how the disciplinary ideals that marked society's most important institution for the socialization of children altered character over time. The chosen period – the early nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries, concentrating particularly on the nineteenth century – is interesting because it saw the introduction of two contradictory principles for the control of sound. When discussing this period, two types of school can be distinguished: ones with noisy monitorial teaching, which had begun to spread in Sweden at the end of the 1810s; and ones with relatively quiet class teaching, which grew strongly in the 1860s. The present study is limited to elementary school education, the type of school where monitorial instruction had the greatest impact.<sup>2</sup>

## The history of the senses

The study draws on a growing field of research on the history of the senses, in which the history of sound has been attracting much interest.<sup>3</sup> Acoustic history research has included studies of concert-going audiences,

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<sup>1</sup> Ester Boman, *Uppfostran genom undervisning. Två decenniers försöksarbete vid helpensionen Tyringe, Hindås* (Stockholm 1932), 266.

<sup>2</sup> The monitorial system was also adopted in senior schools, as pointed out by Esbjörn Larsson, 'Klasser i sig och för sig Skillnader i växelundervisningens tillämpning för olika samhällsklasser i Sverige, ca 1820–1870', in Anne Berg och Hanna Enefalk (eds.), *Det mångsidiga verktyget. Elva utbildningshistoriska uppsatser* (Uppsala 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For general introductions to the history of the senses, see Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses – from Antiquity to Cyberspace* (London 2005); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, and Touching in History* (Berkeley 2007); David Howes (ed.),

medical diagnostics, church bells, ecclesiastical architecture, and much else, and all have drawn attention to the meanings that have been ascribed to different sounds, and the functions that sound has served in history. One recurring theme is the shifting view on what constitutes unwanted sound. Peter Bailey argues that noise can be likened to dirt in Mary Douglas's meaning of the word. Noise, like dirt, only arises when matter – in this case, sound – is out of place.<sup>4</sup> Noise, in other words, is a form of disorder, and in this way becomes intimately associated with the creation of order; with the exercise of power. To describe noise in this way is, of course, to look beyond sound's objective qualities to the cultural context that gives it its varying meanings. Why are some types of sound thought to belong to a certain category? Why can a sound be thought wrongly – or correctly – placed? In response to these questions, which I have never seen explicitly addressed, it is possible to reconstruct a number of answers on the basis of existing acoustic history research.

The first answer is that it is in the nature of sound that it can easily be out of place. Its ability to travel large distances and through substances means that it can easily pass the boundaries designed to keep people apart. While walls can hide people from one another's sight, they cannot entirely block the sounds they make.<sup>5</sup> The second answer is related to the dynamism of modernity. Modernity brought with it a large number of new sounds, not least those created by new technology. Studies have shown how above all else the hubbub of the city has been resisted, but also how high levels of sound have been promoted where they have been associated with something positive. The same sounds have been perceived in different ways depending, for example, on whether they are associated with modernity or with traditionalism.<sup>6</sup> As ways of life have altered, so certain sounds have been experienced differently depending on whether other sounds have harmonized with them. Thus, for example, Alain Corbin has shown how the sound of church bells ringing early in the morning only began to be thought noisy when electric lighting brought a change to people's sleeping habits.<sup>7</sup> A third answer concerns the significance of the social hierarchy. Which types of sound were socially acceptable is strongly related to power. Peter Burke draws attention to the way in which silence in early modern Europe was linked to subordination. He argues, for example, that women, children, and monks were encouraged to show respect and deference by not speaking.<sup>8</sup> In Bailey's telling formulation, silence is 'the sound of authority'. In a similar manner, Raymond Murray Schafer's pioneering work shows that it is those in power who have the right to generate a great deal of sound without being accused of making a noise; something he calls 'sacred noise'. He shows that high levels of sound were associated with divine power, and that having once been represented by the loudest sounds in nature (thunder, storm winds), these came to be associated with church bells and the church organ, and later, in profane form, the Industrial Revolution's new sounds.<sup>9</sup> Noise was in this respect an exercise of power – sacred noise was the limitless noise that the authorities were free to generate. While attempts were made to limit the noise that was seen as a form of disorder, sacred noise was a symbol of order.

However, in this growing field of acoustic history, school is notable by its absence. This is a curious oversight, given that the disciplinary nature of the school's acoustic world is so obvious.<sup>10</sup> Equally, school is a singularly thankful empirical example because it directs the attention to two phenomena that acoustic history research has tended to understress: the sound of people, and the relationship between sound and power. The

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*Empire of the Senses* (Oxford 2005); for a useful overview of the history of sound, see Mark M. Smith (ed.), *Hearing History. A Reader* (Athens 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Breaking the Sound Barrier. A Historian Listens to Noise', *Body and Society*, 2/2 (1996), 50.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 61; Raymond Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vt., 1994), 11–12; John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Karin Bijsterveld, 'The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age. Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns 1900–1940', *Social Studies of Science*, 31/1 (2001), 37–70; Peter Payer, 'The Age of Noise: Early Reactions in Vienna, 1870–1914', *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2007), 773–91.

<sup>7</sup> Alain Corbin, *Village Bells. Sound and Meaning in the nineteenth-century French Countryside* (New York 1998), 302 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Burke, *Samtalskonstens historia* (Gothenburg 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Schafer, *Soundscape*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Obvious, yes, but overlooked even in the wider field of the history of the senses, which has largely focused on adults and would have much to gain from paying greater heed to children's experiences. See M. Smith, *Hearing History*, 129.

sound of people is something little in evidence in earlier research despite being a fundamental part of modern society. The focus of many studies is the modern acoustic landscape, Schafer's 'soundscape', and it is primarily the sound of technological innovations that has been chosen to represent modernity.<sup>11</sup> Technology's ability to drown out the sound of people and animals is duly taken as a sign of a modern acoustic environment. Yet modern society also concentrates people, squeezing them into small spaces, where they are permitted – or forbidden – to generate various types of sound; something that school clearly exemplifies. Neither have acoustic history studies in any real sense treated sound as a form of disorder. True, it is frequently stated that sound amounts to a form of disorder, but what then are the techniques with which sound has been combated? One of modernity's most important social institutions, and the one that most systematically and determinedly has set about regulating the sound of people, is school. A study of sound regulation in school therefore offers valuable insights into the way the relationship between sound and power has presented itself in modern society.

At the same time, the tricky questions remain of what school may have sounded like down the centuries and what meaning this sound may have had. What in reality are the sources that can provide us with the echo of sounds that died away so long ago? Schafer believes that the best sources when reconstructing the soundscape of the past are 'ear-witnesses'; in other words, fiction authors who are able to credibly conjure up a place and its sounds.<sup>12</sup> I, however, have made use of a group of Swedish sources from lesser-known ear-witnesses: teachers and their memoirs. There is a rich collection of such memoirs, offering accounts from the first half of the nineteenth century onwards, and a good few of the memoirists go out of their way to mention the aural experience of their own schooling. The material began to be collected in the 1890s, when Sveriges Allmänna Folkskollära rförening (the Swedish Association of Elementary School-teachers) persuaded teachers to write their memoirs by holding a series of competitions. Later, a large number of these contributions were to be published on the initiative of Bror Rudolf Hall in *Årsböcker i svensk undervisningshistoria* (the Swedish History of Education Yearbooks).<sup>13</sup>

In the present study I have used the teachers' memoirs to get a sense of the sound of monitorial teaching, the teaching form that has left the largest quantity of evidence on the acoustic world of school.

Of course, one can question whether this material was coloured by the fact that it was written to be competition entries – perhaps the writers were tempted to over-egg their accounts – but the fundamental tendency in the material is also echoed in other contemporary sources. In looking for the norms of school sound levels, teaching manuals have proved very useful sources, since they frequently provide detailed instructions on how teaching ought to be designed in order to manage sound. By analysing how these guidelines changed it is possible to trace the varying ideals of school acoustic discipline over time. What these changes consisted of, and what role the individual could play in achieving them, are further illustrated by a close reading of Torsten Rudenschöld's influential critique of monitorial teaching from the 1850s. The sounds of past teaching also echo on in other sources that touch on school discipline in a variety of ways, be it an official inquiry into school discipline; newspaper articles on a point of order in the teaching press; or a poll concerning teachers' views on discipline.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past. Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham 2003); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Schafer, *Soundscape*, 8 ff.

<sup>13</sup> For Hall's work on educational history, see B. Rudolf Hall, *Undervisningshistoriska önskemål Räddnings-, upptecknings-, forsknings- och undervisningsuppgifter* (Stockholm 1948); N. Lundqvist, P. Norberg & A. Wiberg (eds.), *Festskrift tillägnad B. Rud. Hall den 14 november 1946* (Nässjö 1946); Esbjörn Larsson, 'Nittio år i undervisningshistoriens tjänst. Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria 1920–2010', *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 1 (2010), 232–241.

## The sound of monitorial teaching

It is a common misconception about the well-disciplined schools of the past that they were silent. There are innumerable stories where teachers refuse to begin lessons until the room is completely silent and pupils are seen but not heard. Yet it is questionable whether this culture of silence has ever been a reality. What is clear is that it has not always been customary, not even as a norm. If we go far enough back in time, we find forms of teaching that are recognizable by their loudness.

In the decades around the issuing of Sweden's first Elementary Education Code in 1842, what was known as monitorial teaching was all the rage.<sup>14</sup> The method was based on the principle of large-scale production, something that sat well with the rise of mass education. 'One teacher for a thousand children' was one catchphrase used to describe the method, which in simple terms meant that a teacher could teach a large number of children by using pupils as teaching assistants – so-called 'monitors'. Classes of a thousand pupils were not found in Sweden, but class sizes of upwards of two hundred children were reported.<sup>15</sup> The method could also be applied to smaller classes. One teaching manual noted that it was as well suited to teach fifty children as a thousand.<sup>16</sup> This flexibility contributed to its adoption not only in cities and towns, but also in more rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

Since the teaching was to a large extent done by the monitors, the teacher's role in monitorial teaching was small.<sup>18</sup> 'The teacher's duty is confined to ceaseless supervision and the preservation of good order', as one teaching manual put it.<sup>19</sup> In other words, what was expected of the teacher was silence. This silence could even be described as a prerequisite for the proper direction of the school:

The teacher should rarely let his own voice be heard. All orders are given by the monitors. Without this, he would himself bring his system to naught and be unable to control a numerous school, while vainly exhausting his powers and damaging his health.<sup>20</sup>

While the teacher spoke little in this method, the pupils had all the more to say. For several of the memoirists, the sound of their childhood schools had left an abiding impression: 'Silence in the strict sense there never was; the nearest one approached it was during the hours of writing, when the teacher never spoke other than in a quieter bellow', as one wrote.<sup>21</sup> Another remembered, along similar lines, that there was rarely complete silence: 'It was almost never silent during lessons, neither was it expected by the teacher, nor was it possible to

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<sup>14</sup> The monitorial system was developed independently by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster at the end of the eighteenth century, and their methods displayed both similarities and differences. In Sweden, monitorial teaching was primarily associated with Lancaster – hence the frequent use of the term 'Lancaster schools' – on its introduction in the 1810s, following Peter Reinhold Svensson's journey to Britain to study the method and the founding of the first monitorial school in Stockholm. In 1822 a society dedicated to its promotion in Sweden was founded, and the same decade saw a number of manuals published that described in detail how to put the method into practice. By the time of the first Elementary Education Code (1842), which decreed that all teachers should be familiar with the method, the number of monitorial schools had soared from 35 in 1822 to 521 (and 32,890 pupils) in 1842 (Hugo Serdén, *Sällskapet för folkundervisningens befrämjande under 150 år, 1822-1972: en minnesskrift* (Stockholm 1973), 18).

<sup>15</sup> Anders Oldberg, *Praktisk handbok i pedagogik och methodik för svenska folkundervisningen* (2nd edn.; Stockholm 1846), 122; Joh: Johansson, 'En Lankasterskola. Skolminnen från 1840-talet', in A. P. Andersson et al. (eds.), *Lankasterskolor. Interiörer från Dalarna, Gästrikland, Uppland, Småland, Västergötland, Halland och Skåne* (Lund 1922), 69. Internationally, much larger numbers were not unknown. When Svensson travelled to Britain to study Bell's and Lancaster's methods, he saw schools with up to 700 children, but he believed that class sizes should not exceed 200 children (P. R. Svensson, *Berättelse om Bell-Lancasterska undervisningssätten. Enligt Kongl. Uppfostringscomitéens beslut befordrad till trycket* (Stockholm 1819), 13).

<sup>16</sup> Adolf Fredrik Rådberg, *Praktisk handbok för vaxel-undervisningsskolor* (Linköping 1820), 35.

<sup>17</sup> For the geographical spread of monitorial teaching, see Thomas Neidenmark's Ph.D. thesis, *Pedagogiska imperativ och sociala nätverk i svensk medborgarbildning 1812–1828* (Stockholm 2011).

<sup>18</sup> The teacher's remoteness is evident in *Reglementet för Upsala folkskola* (Upsala Elementary School regulations), which were printed in a teaching manual of the 1840s. Particular importance was accorded to the teacher keeping track of time lest he 'without due cause leaves the schoolroom before the hour was up' (Oldberg, *Praktisk handbok*, 142).

<sup>19</sup> Rådberg, *Praktisk handbok*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Lars Hagstedt, *Försök till praktisk handledning i Wexel-Undervisningen. En hjälprea vid Skolors inrättande och Metodens utöfning* (Gothenburg 1821), 75.

<sup>21</sup> J. Johansson, 'En Lankasterskola', 71.

achieve.’<sup>22</sup> This absence of silence, which is elsewhere described as ‘an infernal racket’ and likened to ‘Indian war whoops’,<sup>23</sup> was the result of the children reading aloud and the teacher rarely, if ever, teaching the children in person. With large classes, teacher-led teaching was most likely impossible. According to one contemporary advocate of the monitorial system, a teacher should only be expected to teach the children in person for four hours a week.<sup>24</sup>

Contributing to the high levels of sound was the particular way lessons were learned. It was not unknown for pupils to be required to recite aloud in class the lessons they were learning. These ‘lessons’, in other words, were not automatically thought of as homework. The effect of this practise on schoolroom sound levels is mentioned in several memoirs: ‘While one child was heard, the others read their lessons aloud. Whence arose a babble, which was heard far beyond the school walls.’<sup>25</sup>

To understand the distinctive character of the monitorial system’s soundscape, we must also remember that the method depended on groups of pupils doing different things at the same time. In the same schoolroom pupils might be reciting the alphabet, learning their Catechism by heart, or chanting their times tables: letters of the alphabet, difficult words, entire sentences from the Catechism, and snatches of song, and all at the same time.

In the first circle the alphabet was read; in the second a, b, ab, b, a, ba was spelled; in the third came more difficult spellings; and so on, little by little, until in the 7th or 8th circle they were attempting ‘mayoral office’, ‘police commissioner’s regulations’, and the like. Then one came to classes nine and ten with their battledore-books. Most was spelled and read in chorus. In circles 11–21 the New Testament was read or else the Catechism committed to memory. In those circles stood also the groups learning their lessons who read, or rather sang, the various multiplication tables. Those who sang the weights and measures tables considered themselves the most important, and therefore strained their voices to the limit in their preparations.<sup>26</sup>

This is interesting because it points to a particular factor in the rise in sound levels: large numbers of children in the same schoolroom. This mechanism was described in a number of memoirs:

In order not to be disturbed, each attempted to drown out the next. The combined sound, produced by a hundred throats, was deafening.<sup>27</sup>

On such occasions there was a hubbub in the room that is more readily called to mind than described ... and to be heard it was necessary to ‘sing out’.<sup>28</sup>

The din increased more and more since the one sought to drown out the other.<sup>29</sup>

Thus it was not competition for the freedom to speak that distinguished this teaching method. Rather, because pupils were all doing different things and speaking simultaneously, it seems to have been a question of the freedom to be heard.

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<sup>22</sup> Johan Carlsson, ‘Skolminnen från Husby i Dalarne’, in Andersson et al., *Lankasterskolor*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Frans August Andersson, *När skolan inte fanns. Ur en självbiografi av F. A. Andersson*, ed. Agnar Bjälnes (Borgholm 1995), 25.

<sup>24</sup> According to this manual, the teacher should instruct pupils in the Catechism, biblical history, Swedish history, and ‘natural history’. It was intended that such lessons should be special occasions: ‘In the contrast to the other noisy hours of teaching, these hours would then make so much greater an impression.’ Anders Fryxell, *Om vexelundervisningens användbarhet. Tal, hållet vid allmänna års-sammankomsten d. 19 maj 1824, uti sällskapet för vexelundervisningens befrämjande* (Stockholm 1824), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Lars Malmberg, ‘Minnen från Älvdalen, Uppsala och Avesta’, in Levi Johansson (ed.), *Hätkomster från folkskola och folkundervisning*, vi: *Skildringar* (Stockholm 1944), 98; see also Carlsson, ‘Skolminnen’, 32–3; O. D. Lindvall, ‘Minnen från min skoltid. Föredrag vid läraremöte 16 sept. 1912’, in Andersson et al., *Lankasterskolor*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> J. Johansson, ‘En Lancasterskola’, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Lindvall, ‘Minnen från min skoltid’, 89.

<sup>28</sup> A. P. Andersson, ‘Några bidrag till svenska folkskolans historia. Upptecknade [1890]’, in Andersson et al., *Lankasterskolor*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Carlsson, ‘Skolminnen’, 32.

## *Islands of silence*

What makes the sound of monitorial teaching so interesting is that it co-existed with what was otherwise extremely strict discipline. This combination is depicted in a memoir by the teacher Anders Berg, who described his first encounter with the method in about 1839:

Initially, all appeared to me to be perfect confusion, and I became quite dizzy from the uproar and clamour. In time I nevertheless accustomed myself to it, and then found that in the confusion there was military order.<sup>30</sup>

What gave monitorial teaching its military flavour was the widespread use of various words of command. Given the large number of pupils in some of the monitorial-system schools, teachers required techniques to make themselves heard or in other ways communicate with the children. Although the schoolwork was often loud, situations did arise when the teacher needed to call for silence or instruct pupils to enter or leave the schoolroom, take up their slates, or begin lessons. Later generations used such techniques as waiting for silence to fall or raising their voices, perhaps with the classic 'Silence in class!' Monitorial teaching adopted other methods. One memoir mentions a wooden whistle that was used for various reasons, for example to call children to their feet ready for hymn-singing; it could also be used to command silence or to signal the beginning or end of break. One of the advantages of a whistle was that the teacher no longer had to struggle to be heard over a large group of children.<sup>31</sup> The use of such non-verbal orders is described in detail in the teacher manuals. It is remarked in one that the whistle could be complemented with hand signals. One blast of the whistle meant silence, two meant that lessons were to begin or continue, while a sign with the hand indicated yes or no. This silent communication with the pupils was thought to economize on energy, 'since by talking overly much he would fatigue both himself and his pupils'.<sup>32</sup>

There were several ways to avoid the spoken instructions said to tire both teachers and pupils alike. The teacher could stamp his foot, ring a bell, or gesture with his arms: all were recommended techniques. No two authors had the same opinion on the sounds involved. Peter Reinhold Svensson found the sound of a whistle or bell unpleasant.<sup>33</sup> Instead he recommended hand-clapping. This, if one is to believe Svensson, was more than sufficient:

The signal for general attention is a clap with the flats of the hands so vigorous that the sound thereof fills the whole school. All lessons, all movement ceases on this clap, which with almost magical power in a moment transforms the occupied, lively children into inactive, immobile effigies. Clap anew and they return to their activities, and with this one sign, which at different times has had different significations, one may direct and command the entire school.<sup>34</sup>

Another manual defends the sound of the whistle and bell:

There has been irritation at the supposedly hateful sound of the whistle and bell; yet such small annoyances to the senses are only avoided with difficulty. With similar reason, for example, hand-clapping could be subject to both ridicule and resentful contempt.<sup>35</sup>

These techniques were used to coordinate the teaching; to indicate when the pupils should begin or finish a certain activity. The regulation of pupils' movement seems to have been central, which must be seen in relation to the measure of mobility the method required. Pupils did not have individual places where they always sat, but rather moved to different places around the schoolroom according to the activity they were

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<sup>30</sup> Anders Berg, 'Minnen från folkskoleseminarium i Stockholm 1839–1840 och 1845–1846', in B. Rudolf Hall & Arvid Liander (eds.), *Seminarieminnen* (Lund 1936), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Lars Malmberg, 'Minnen från Älvdalen, Uppsala och Avesta' *Hågkomster från folkskola och folkundervisning VI*. (Stockholm 1944), 52.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Olof Fineman, *Anvisning till folkscholans organisation och ledning efter wexelundervisnings-metoden* (Stockholm 1830), 80.

<sup>33</sup> P. R. Svensson, *Praktisk handledning för vaxelundervisningen i folkskolor* (Stockholm 1823), 50.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 48 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Fineman, *Anvisning*, 81.

participating in, be it prayers or reading and writing lessons. These movements were tightly managed, whether it was getting the children to sit down or stand up at the same time, or marching in time to their places or out of the schoolroom (singing as they went – or not). Even closing a book or folding one's hands on one's slate were among the actions that were regulated,<sup>36</sup> again, as with the example the sound of the pupils' marching, to control the sound they generated.<sup>37</sup> In the same way, the putting down of slates in an uncontrolled fashion was not permitted. The manuals detail the art of putting down a slate in a manner that would result in the desired sound. One describes how pupils should be trained to do this in two steps, and how the movement should sound: only a slight tap should be audible.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, advice was given on the sound made by books being closed. Peter Reinhold Svensson refers in his manual to an effect 'not unlike the distant sound of a military salvo'.<sup>39</sup> The sound of the pupils putting their hands on the desks could also be regulated. Fredrik Rådberg felt that this was a movement that should be done on command, with audible results: 'only one slap' should be heard.<sup>40</sup>

There were also different techniques for creating silence, but what the teaching manuals focused on were the intervals between actual lessons; those moments taken up with something other than learning as such. They appear to have been islands of silence in an ocean of noise. Thus even if silence was immaterial, monitorial teaching had its own particular view on when pupils' noise was desirable or inappropriate. Silence was a parenthesis; it was something that was important when waiting for pupils to begin or to change task, but was not characteristic of the actual teaching. In other words, silence was not associated with learning.

### *Reverent silence*

Where did noisy monitorial teaching stand when it came to the religiosity that characterized early mass education? Silence, after all, has been described as 'one of the fundamental components in all religions'.<sup>41</sup> That being so, school seems to have presented something of a paradox. On the one hand, it was a place for religious education; on the other, it was noted for the kind of uproar that cannot have made for an atmosphere conducive to religion. The existence of a disparity between religious education and monitorial teaching methods was noted in the first Swedish article on monitorial teaching, which was published in 1810, and which observed that, while it certainly brought children up to be obedient, the monitorial system was mechanical, creating problems for religious education for which this was inappropriate.<sup>42</sup>

However, one strategy to tailor monitorial teaching to the need for pious silence was presented in 1824 by Anders Fryxell in a speech on the practicability of the method. Fryxell argued that the subjects that tended to 'the purification and ennoblement of the emotions and the will' – religious education, biblical history, Swedish history, and 'natural history' – called for a particular type of teaching. Since in those subjects one had to address the emotions and imagination as much as the intellect, one also needed to speak to the children with 'solemnity, gravity, and outward dignity', unlike monitorial teaching 'which, in all outward respects, speaks of much disruption and so little solemnity'.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, Fryxell suggested that four hours a week be set aside for the Catechism, biblical history, Swedish history, and natural history, when the teacher would teach the class in person. These teacher-led lessons would be a sort of solemn parenthesis to the normal teaching week: 'By the contrast to the other, noisy hours of teaching, these hours will then make so much greater an impression.'<sup>44</sup> Thus the pupils' silence was still not a general requirement for teaching. Silence was

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<sup>36</sup> Svensson, *Praktisk handledning*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Oldberg, *Praktisk handbok*, 135.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>39</sup> Svensson, *Praktisk handledning*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Rådberg, *Praktisk handbok*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> E. McCumfrey, quoted in Burke, *Samtalskonstens historia*, 132.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Ulrich Broocman, 'Joseph Lancaster', *Magasin för föräldrar och lärare* (1810), 148 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Fryxell, *Om vaxelundervisningens användbarhet*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

only thinkable as an exception, and the noise in the schoolroom the rest of the time presumably made the rare silences all the more impressive.

### *Blasé and sphinx-like*

The pupils' noise reveals a singular interpretation of the relationship between speech and power. History offers many examples of silence being used to symbolize respect and subordination, while noise has often been used to protest against the powers-that-be.<sup>45</sup> For the period when monitorial teaching dominated the Swedish education system, this fundamental law of silence was overturned. Remaining silent throughout the school day was not a way of showing respect for the teacher. On the contrary, complete silence could be seen as a problem that required disciplinary action: 'At times the room fell silent, but then the cane was put to use, and the hubbub rose again.'<sup>46</sup>

What we are confronted with here is a different notion of discipline. The monitorial method may have been noisy, but it was also conspicuous for its extremely strict discipline. Mechanical order and pedantic control of the pupils' movements and ability to commit information to memory are the characteristics the method has been most strongly associated with. Pupils who did not pay sufficient attention, or for example glanced up instead of bowing over their work, could be subject to various types of correction:

Not infrequently the monitor would deal an inattentive pupil a blow to the head or the back with the pointer, not too choosy where as long as the blow fell. ... Meanwhile the real teacher – a new, acting teacher of 21 years – walked along behind the reading groups, long switch in hand, landing the occasional blow on those who dared to turn their heads.<sup>47</sup>

This combination of slavish discipline and noise only makes sense if we bear the teacher's withdrawn role in mind. Joseph Lancaster believed that teachers in his schools should serve as silent bystanders, and thus that discipline should not be maintained by them personally.<sup>48</sup> In one school memoir, there is for example an account of a teacher who hardly ever taught, but walked around the schoolroom 'as silent and inapproachable as a sphinx, only delivering a blow here and a pull of the hair there.'<sup>49</sup>

Given this sphinx-like taciturnity, the risk that the teacher in turn would feel aggrieved at the pupils' noise was much reduced: the sound they made was not yet an indication of their lack of respect for the teacher's authority. Instead of being provoked by the pupils' noise, the teacher could try to let the waves of sound that the lessons created roll over him. At his desk, if he were able to ignore the noise, he could busy himself with other things. One teacher was said to have put all his energy into writing sermons:

He did not particularly trouble himself with the teaching. It is true that once 'the machinery' had ground into life he did occasionally walk around and watch, giving a correction here and a direction there, but usually midst the uproar of 200 children he was seated at his desk in peace and quiet, busy about writing sermons and suchlike.<sup>50</sup>

This example brings to mind what Georg Simmel wrote about blasé attitudes in his essay on mental life in the metropolis. He maintained that life in the city was marked by such a large number of stimuli that people's nerves were strained to the utmost, paradoxically leading to a general indifference that meant that the nerves had to work less. For Simmel this detachment was a necessary survival strategy – a way of coping with the pandemonium of the city – which prevented the human ego from atomizing: 'the nerves reveal that their final possibility of adjusting themselves to the content and the form of metropolitan life is by renouncing the

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<sup>45</sup> Bailey, 'Breaking the sound barrier'; Burke, *Samtalskonstens historia*.

<sup>46</sup> Carl Magnus Jonsson, 'Vena, Vist, Lofta 1852–1907', in B. Rudolf Hall (ed.), *Hågkomster från folkskola och folkundervisning. Skildringar av f.d. elever och lärare* (Lund 1933), 52; see also K. O. Nilsson, 'Vena', in *ibid.*, 72.

<sup>47</sup> Jonsson, 'Vena, Vist, Lofta', 52.

<sup>48</sup> David Salmon, *Joseph Lancaster* (London 1904), 7 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Lindvall, 'Minnen från min skoltid', 89.

<sup>50</sup> J. Johansson, 'En Lancasterskola', 72 ff.

response to them.<sup>51</sup> In a similar manner, it seems it was presumed that all involved in monitorial teaching would be unconcerned by sound.

## School falls silent

What was then the result when indifference to pupils' noise gave way to concern? What steps were taken towards schools where children learned to be silent, and where the adults learned to speak? In what follows, we will follow the process by which monitorial teaching fell out of fashion and was gradually replaced by teacher-led class teaching in the second half of the nineteenth century. As this transformation took place, a new notion of discipline evolved in which the pupils' silence was to play a central role.

*Thorsten Rudenschöld, noise-tamer*

One of those who contributed to the creation of a new acoustic environment in school was the aristocrat and educationalist Thorsten Rudenschöld. He is known for his early attack on monitorial teaching in elementary schools, which he launched before the method was officially condemned. His *Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande* (The practical disposition of Swedish elementary school) of 1856 is interesting because it spelled out what in his view were the problems with elementary school and the new direction it ought to take.<sup>52</sup> The essay was widely circulated in the educational system as the government bought and distributed 2,500 copies of it to school boards across the country.<sup>53</sup>

Among the things that disturbed Rudenschöld was the sound generated by monitorial teaching. It was described in negative terms both aesthetically and pedagogically: school was deafening, with continuous, clamorous waves of noise that were 'atrociously disruptive' and 'disrupted thought'. The custom of allowing several activities to run simultaneously created 'a cacophonous swarm of pupils, often under the direction of a lone, scurrying teacher.'<sup>54</sup> Rudenschöld's own educational ideal was 'one thing at a time', with the whole class doing their writing, arithmetic, or whatever all together instead of the different activities taking place simultaneously. In those instances where it was impossible for the whole class to do the same thing, one group of pupils would be set to 'silent exercises'.<sup>55</sup> The sound of school would in this fashion be revolutionized. During lessons there would be only one of two sounds, 'the one the teacher's lecture or questions, the other the pupils' answers, at times singly, at times in unison.'<sup>56</sup>

Rudenschöld thought that the teacher ought to teach in person. For this to be possible, it was essential to alter the layout of the teaching space. In the monitorial system, pupils stood in semi-circles facing the walls of the schoolroom, which of course was incompatible with being addressed directly by the teacher; instead, they were now to sit at school-desks facing the teacher, 'who, from a raised seat offering ready survey of the pupils in their entirety, may easily command the attention and discipline of all.'<sup>57</sup> It was clearly a question of a completely new disposition in the schoolroom; one that would leave the primary source of sound – the pupils' mouths – visible to the teacher. The teacher could then lead the entire class's lessons. Even when it came to reading aloud, it would be possible to orchestrate it in a wholly new fashion. The cacophony of monitorial teaching was to be replaced by reading in chorus as if in a single voice.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Georg Simmel, 'Storstäderna och det andliga livet', in id., *Hur är samhället möjligt? – och andra essäer*, transl. Erik af Edholm (Gothenburg 1981), 201.

<sup>52</sup> Thorsten Rudenschöld, 'Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande', in id., *Skrifter, iv: Andra delen, II–IV* (Lund 1921).

<sup>53</sup> Gunnar Richardsson, Torsten Rudenschöld. Samhällskritiker och skolreformator (Stockholm 1998), 166.

<sup>54</sup> Rudenschöld, 'Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande', 101 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 108 & 113.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 108.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 110.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Rudenschöld's passion for silence thus brought radical changes to the schoolroom environment. But pupils' homes were also affected, for Rudenschöld proposed that the larger part of the teaching should take place there. This transfer of responsibility was prompted by the fact that, whatever its failings, home was far superior in terms of silence. 'Naturally, the greatest success in reading is to be had when a lettered and loving mother teaches her own child in quiet moments at home', wrote Rudenschöld.<sup>59</sup> He suggested that the bulk of schoolwork should be shifted to this silent place. The effectiveness of such a solution is easy to understand: school would be divested of what was potentially the noisiest teaching activity, and pupils at best could learn in peace in an environment that was silent.

Another way of modifying the school's soundscape was to redefine what lessons were. Here too responsibility was shifted from school to the home. Rudenschöld believed that lessons ought to be learned at home, something that was far from self-evident in a period when it was sometimes expected that they would be learned in school.<sup>60</sup> He also thought some of the monitoring ought to take place in the home as well. Both ideas demonstrate the extent to which the home, rather than school, was seen as conducive to religious education. In Rudenschöld's description it was in the home that it was possible to create peace and quiet.<sup>61</sup> His proposed reform also included a new technique for checking in school that lessons had been learned. Instead of all pupils reciting the entire lesson, a few pupils could be singled out by the teacher for questioning, and then only on parts of the lesson. It was a new way of testing the children's lessons – a kind of sampling method. Rudenschöld argued that it did not mean there would be any less control over lessons; instead, it was a new strategy based on the chance that at any moment a pupil might be quizzed, or, as he put it, 'The uncertainty as to whom will be asked that day and on which part of the lesson encourages *all* to prepare it all in order not to displease a beloved teacher, who by the same token is known for energetically but fairly punishing wilfulness.'<sup>62</sup> In other words, Rudenschöld strove to displace the sound of lessons being learned from the schoolroom to the home. The sample method contributed to a new acoustic structure – a school that was largely silent. One effect of this new-won silence was an increased formality: 'While lessons are heard one at a time, the school shall be silent; this confers solemnity on the subject, and the others' participation in the lesson is an added inducement in the proceedings.'<sup>63</sup> In other words, the relocation and checking of lessons could be thought to contribute twice over to the creation of a more solemn school day. Not only did the teaching become more formal, but so did the way lessons were heard.

### *Teaching teachers to talk*

In 1864 came the official deathblow to the monitorial system. A royal circular of that year laid down the new, approved methods for mass education. Instead of gathering all the children in the same schoolroom, they were to be divided into different classes according to ability. As far as was possible, classes were to be taught in person by a teacher. The children were not to learn any lesson that the teacher had not previously presented and explained.<sup>64</sup> As Agneta Linné has shown, this was a major change that would lay the basis for the long-lived class teaching method.<sup>65</sup> Change itself came gradually. According to Åke Isling, it was only in the wake of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 106. Criticism of hearing lessons in school had been formulated prior to this. One monitorial-teaching manual underlined that lessons should be learned at home, but that schools existed that had adopted the practice whereby everything was learned at school and nothing at home (Oldberg, *Praktisk handbok*, 59).

<sup>61</sup> Rudenschöld, 'Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande', 99.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Författningar rörande folkundervisningen (3rd edn.; Stockholm 1869), 23–6.

<sup>65</sup> Agneta Linné, 'The Lesson as a Pedagogic Text: a Case Study of Lesson Designs', *Journal of Curriculum Theory*, 2 (2001), 129–156. Linné uses an analysis of draft lectures prepared by student teachers at Swedish teacher training colleges between 1868 and 1914 to argue that the new teaching method should be seen in the light of discussions about how best to enable school to exert a greater moral influence on children.

the *normalplan* of 1878 (the first national curriculum) that the transition to class teaching became appreciable.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of sound, it is difficult to see the transition to class teaching as anything but dramatic, even if the change did not come overnight. Given that the teacher was now to address the pupils directly, it became possible to reverse the acoustic roles: the teacher was associated with talking and the pupils with listening. This meant that both teacher and pupils had to be re-educated. The pupils had to learn to be silent; the teacher had to learn to talk.

From now on the sounds a teacher made were to take on a new tone. The teacher was no longer to make himself heard by clapping, whistling, or stamping; instead, he was to use his own voice. The new demands this placed on the teacher are most evident in the crucial manual *Bidrag till Pedagogik och metodik* (Contributions to pedagogy and methods), first published in 1868 when the monitorial system was in retreat: among other things, it stated that the teacher ought to adapt his language to the pupils' level, ask the correct types of question, and learn how to explain things so that pupils both understood and were interested.<sup>67</sup> In a subject such as biblical history, it was important that the teacher talk lucidly: he was encouraged to modulate his voice to the emotions and atmosphere conveyed in the story and pace his delivery accordingly, not forgetting such things as pauses and emphases, while facial expressions and gestures were to harmonize with the content of the narrative.<sup>68</sup> Among the broad qualifications for several subjects, the teacher's voice was singled out as being central: 'Using the voice's modulation and general delivery, the teacher seeks to present the material in a vivid manner.'<sup>69</sup> A manual from the 1910s spoke of an ideal voice, while warned against going to extremes: 'The voice should be serious, but not stern; soft, but not weak; clear, but not strident; expressive, but not affected.'<sup>70</sup>

The voice's strength was much emphasized as being vital to the new, talking teacher. In his teaching manual of 1875, the headmaster Fredrik Sandberg stated that a teacher had to possess certain physical attributes, among them 'a clear and powerful organ of speech'.<sup>71</sup> Well into the twentieth century, the music teacher Annie Petersson maintained that 'A good speaking voice is an invaluable asset for a teacher', and impressed on her readers how much better it would be if 'all who are dependent on speech in their daily business treated their vocal organs with the greatest care.'<sup>72</sup> Petersson also pointed out that it was a difficult challenge to have one's voice as a working implement. On those occasions when it did not function as it should, the teacher's ability to work was impaired: 'One becomes indescribably tired, more irritable, pessimistic, and thoroughly fed up with everything and everyone.'<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the ability to speak well was essential in educating children:

If the teacher has a voice that is squeaky or whining, shrill or harsh or in any other way damaged, at the very least it undoubtedly has an effect on the more nervous and sensitive pupils. They feel uneasy, although they cannot say why. On the other hand, if the teacher has a pleasant, unforced voice, calm and encouraging, he is possessed of the most splendid means of maintaining a propitious, restful atmosphere in class.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Åke Isling, *Kampen för och mot en demokratisk skola*, ii: *Det pedagogiska arvet* (Stockholm 1988), 129.

<sup>67</sup> Christofer Ludvig Anjou, Carl Kastman & Knut Arvid Kastman, *Bidrag till pedagogik och metodik för folkskolelärare*, 6 vols. (Linköping, 1868–9); see especially *ibid.*, vi: *Pedagogik: om uppfostran och uppfostringsanstalter* (Linköping 1869), 34–42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* vi. 36.

<sup>70</sup> C. O. Arcadius, *Handledning i folkskolepedagogik för seminarier och lärare* (4th edn.; Stockholm 1919), 133.

<sup>71</sup> Fredrik Sandberg, *Uppfostringslära med särskilt hänsyn till folkskolan* (Stockholm 1875), 74.

<sup>72</sup> Annie Petersson, 'En god talröst', *Skola och samhälle: tidskrift för folkundervisningen* (1938), 283.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 284.

The importance ascribed to the voice is also confirmed by the admission requirements for Sweden's teacher training colleges. As late as the 1950s, potential teachers with 'Severe speech impediments' or 'Frequently recurring, prolonged hoarseness' could be denied a place.<sup>75</sup>

### *Teaching pupils to be silent*

The rise of class teaching meant for pupils that the ideal of silence became essential to what amounted to a hidden curriculum. Work came to be associated with silence, noise with break. Pupils had to be taught to avoid thinking out loud; something not readily achieved even with practice. Two teaching manuals, published three decades apart, both stress that pupils should not be allowed to half-whisper when doing mental arithmetic.<sup>76</sup>

Learning to be quiet was also a matter of learning to listen to the teacher and not to speak one's mind. This was where putting up hands became central. True, it was not a class teaching innovation: in the monitorial system, it was recommended for pupils who needed to attract the teacher's attention for permission to leave the room.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, it does not seem to have been used to ensure the pupils took turns to speak; the pupils' speaking order in the monitorial system followed set rules.<sup>78</sup> In class teaching, however, teachers began to expect pupils to put up their hands in order to determine the speaking order. This was a logical development when teaching became increasingly structured as an interaction between questioner and respondent, and as shared exercises became more common. Hand-raising became obligatory if the pupil wished to speak. The pupil in effect was asking permission to answer the teacher's question. Just how this was to be achieved was an art in itself. In the 1860s, one teaching manual gave detailed instructions on the technique.

Those children who wish to answer a question make this fact apparent by quietly raising two fingers of the right hand while resting the elbow on the table.

**N.B.** It should never be permitted for anyone other than the child so indicated to answer, not even half-aloud or in a whisper. The children should respond in unison only to the teacher's instructions, and then always as one.<sup>79</sup>

Hand-raising can be seen as an example of how a gesture alters meaning depending on whether the setting is quiet or noisy; after all, even in monitorial teaching different types of non-verbal communication were used by teachers and monitors. However, with the emergence of class teaching, the onus of non-verbal communication shifted from the teacher to take a more prominent place in the pupils' behaviour. Teachers no longer whistled, rang bells, stamped, or clapped their hands, while pupils increasingly were expected to put up their hands. The non-verbal system of signals now took on a reverse function. While the teacher in the monitorial system used loud signals designed to be audible over the noise of the pupils, hand-raising, being inaudible, served to maintain the silence of the classroom.

The transition from monitorial to class teaching brought with it a new type of discipline according to which the tolerance of sound from the pupils must have fallen dramatically. The teacher acquired a much more active role, while pupils to a growing extent were required to be the teacher's silent audience. This role reversal increased the likelihood that pupils talking in class would be faced by an indignant teacher who was anything but blasé. It also saw teachers, who were encouraged to use their full vocal range to speak in a

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<sup>75</sup> 'Anvisningar till ledning för rektorer och läkare vid folkskoleseminarier vid bedömning av inträdessökandes lämplighet för seminariearbetet och läraryrket med hänsyn till sökandes kroppsbeskaffenhet och hälsotillstånd', *Aktuellt från skolöverstyrelsen*, 30 (1958), 543.

<sup>76</sup> Anjou, Kastman & Kastman, *Pedagogik*, vi. 58; E. Martig, *Lärobok i pedagogik för seminarier och självstudium* (Lund 1903), 164.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Hagstedt, *Praktisk handledning i Wexel-Undervisningen*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Johan Adolph Gerelius, *Det Brittiska eller Lancasterska uppfostringssystemet* (Stockholm 1820), 73; Hagstedt, *Praktisk handledning i Wexel-Undervisningen*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Anjou, Kastman & Kastman, *Pedagogik*, vi. 58. In a manual from the 1920s the instructions on how to put up one's hand had been modified somewhat. Now one should raise the whole hand, but the elbow should still remain resting on the desk (Alf Hildinger, *Folkskolepedagogik* (Stockholm 1923), 145).

riveting manner, begin to use emotionally coloured language. This was a development reminiscent of James Johnson's conclusion on music appreciation that the emergence of a silent concert audience coincided with a form of listening that was more emotional;<sup>80</sup> it can also be described in terms similar to Schafer's 'sacred noise', with the powers-that-be traditionally accorded the right to cause sound without it being thought noise.<sup>81</sup> With the introduction of class teaching, one could say that this relationship also held good in Sweden's elementary schools.

## The return of sound

During the twentieth century, education has seen the advent of various types of progressive and reforming ideas, of which one of the most important was that teacher-led teaching passivizes pupils. 'The teacher has worked far too much in the children's stead', wrote the school inspector Karl Nordlund in an anthology on working practices in elementary schools.<sup>82</sup> Nordlund would have preferred to see the children far more active, which would in turn have meant greater silence on the part of the teacher. 'There is a bad habit that is typical of the Swedish teacher: he talks too much. ... The Swedish teacher should also learn to – be quiet!'<sup>83</sup>

This brings to mind monitorial teaching, which too was marked by a high degree of pupil activity.<sup>84</sup> The suggestion that pupils should be allowed to do some of the talking can be interpreted as reflecting an increased tolerance for the sound they generated, at the same time as there were still norms of silence.<sup>85</sup> The desire to restore some respect for pupils' spoken communication was not the same as permitting talking in class, however. Far from allowing pupils to speak freely, the emphasis was on being flexible in adapting sound levels to different contexts. A teaching manual of the 1960s observed that the methods employed were crucial to the 'level of attention and order' a teacher could expect of his pupils:

For all age-groups it ought to be obvious that pupils should sit quietly whenever he is talking. However, it is not as obvious that the same degree of attention is justified when they are working independently or in groups.<sup>86</sup>

This apparently self-evident remark was repeated a couple of years later in an introduction to teaching by Eie Ericsson, who stressed that 'inappropriate talking' was not acceptable, but a 'positive background murmur' could be tolerated in the lessons 'when pupils have a right to work'.<sup>87</sup> The idea of differentiating between contexts where it was legitimate for pupils to talk is also found in Holmstrand and Edman's book *Skolan och disciplinen* (School and discipline) of 1951. This addressed the question of silence according to the nature of the subject: rather than demand absolute silence at all times, schools ought to permit talking in situations where it was reasonable, such as woodwork, group projects, art, or arithmetic.<sup>88</sup>

Thus it is possible to trace a wary interest in 'reinviting' sound into the classroom for certain types of work or subjects that involved a greater measure of pupil activity. To that extent we can speak of a 'return of sound' of sorts, reminiscent in some respects of monitorial teaching. When sound was once again welcome in

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<sup>80</sup> James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris. A Cultural History* (Berkeley 1995).

<sup>81</sup> Schafer, *Soundscape*, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Karl Nordlund, 'Arbetspedagogik', in id., Anna Sörensen & Sven Wikberg (eds.), *Arbetsättet i folkskolan: metodiska uppsatser, i: Modersmålet* (2nd edn.; Stockholm 1931), 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Thor Nordin, *Växelundervisningens allmänna utveckling och dess utformning i Sverige till omkring 1830* (Stockholm 1973), 14.

<sup>85</sup> Nordlund did not want sound levels to become too high – he mentioned 'silent reading' as one form of work – or the teacher-as-lecturer to disappear completely. Indeed, for subjects such as Christianity and history in particular the teacher's oral presentation should dominate in order to create a fittingly solemn atmosphere: 'The reverence that a teacher's exposition or account can instil is on many occasions a spiritual force for rebirth' (Nordlund, *Växelundervisningens allmänna utveckling*, 19).

<sup>86</sup> Jon Naeslund, *Allmän undervisningsmetodik* (2nd edn.; Stockholm 1963), 219.

<sup>87</sup> Eie Ericsson, *Läraren, eleven, disciplinen. Ett försök till konkreta råd för lärarkandidater samt förslag till diskussionsämnen* (Stockholm 1967), 14.

<sup>88</sup> Sven Holmstrand & Elov Edman, *Läraren och disciplinen* (Stockholm 1919) 32, 51.

the classroom, silence could no longer reasonably be thought an unconditional sign of good discipline, and the teacher therefore had to learn to tolerate some degree of noise.<sup>89</sup> However, when sound was invited back, it was regulated. There was a clear determination to rate different contexts – subjects or teaching methods – according to their sound levels; a determination that can be linked to Peter Bailey’s equation of noise with dirt, as sound in the wrong place. The suggestion that there were different subjects and teaching methods that were characterized by a variety of ideal soundscapes can be seen as an effort to hit upon a new context where the sound of children belonged. The end in view was the right sound in the right place.

Neither did the fact that sound was invited back mean that it was always a welcome guest. A poll by the Stockholm Institute of Education in the 1960s indicates that the teachers of the day felt the profession was a noisy one. In the study, teachers were asked before and after a term’s teaching practice to comment on a number of statements, one of which ran ‘working in this “noisy profession” leaves me very tired’. Informants responded very differently once their period as a trainee was over:

The statement that the teaching profession, being a ‘noisy profession’, might be tiring for its professionals finds little response before the term, but afterwards those involved have changed their minds. The difference is statistically significant. This swing seems to us to be the most surprising of this study.<sup>90</sup>

Surprising it may have been, but the fact remains that the impression that pupils talked too much in class had been noted before. As part of the 1947 official inquiry on school discipline, teachers’ opinions on disciplinary issues were addressed using a questionnaire that included a question on the types of classroom disturbance that were thought to make teaching difficult. In the responses, talking took poll position: 88 per cent mentioned ‘Talking loudly and similar expressions of poor discipline’ as a problem, and it was reported by a majority (66 per cent) to have increased in recent years.<sup>91</sup>

The inquiry then went on to give an account of the teachers’ explanations for the lack in acoustic discipline. Most of them referred to the classic explanation: children’s upbringing at home was becoming worse. The second commonest explanation was more temporal, as many mentioned the radio as a reason for poorer discipline: ‘It is noted that in many homes family members leave the radio on continuously from sheer lack of initiative, and that this contributes to the dulling of the overall ability to listen.’<sup>92</sup> That there might be a connection between poor attention and radio-listening was a notion that cropped up in the teaching press in the 1940s and 1950s, including in two leaders in *Tidning för Sveriges läroverk* (the Swedish Grammar School Journal). The argument generally ran thus:

The habit of being forced of an evening to turn a deaf ear to speech radio not only has repercussions for homework but also for schoolwork, as the young people find it easy to ‘switch off’ the teacher’s voice. The result, as is well known, is called inattentiveness.<sup>93</sup>

As late as the 1960s, Torsten Husén was writing in a similar vein.<sup>94</sup> The thought that radio could be ascribed such a negative influence on acoustic discipline may today seem strange. But it does have its logic. Traditionally, the Establishment have always been able to demand that others listen when they speak; the radio is a medium in which this ideal is eliminated. Those speaking could no longer control the level of their audience’s attention. In the home, which Rudenschöld a century before had described as a place conducive to study because of its quietness, was now depicted as a place where authority’s voice was loud, but not listened to.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Blivande lärares syn på yrket: långa ferier mer lockande för män än för kvinnor’, *Lärartidningen*, 38 (1961), 18.

<sup>91</sup> SOU 1950:3, Betänkande med förslag angående folkskolans disciplinmedel m.m. (Stockholm 1950), 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>93</sup> *Tidning för Sveriges läroverk (Tfsl)*, 13 (1945), 212; see also *Tfsl* 13 (1943), 217 ff.; *Tfsl* 9 (1953), 195; and *Lärartidningen* 12 (1959), 17.

<sup>94</sup> Torsten Husén, *Skolan i ett föränderligt samhälle* (2nd edn.; Stockholm 1963), 116.

## Sound and power

According to Bruce Smith, if we were to visit early modern London, we would be astonished at how different the city sounded. Particularly remarkable would have been how the sound of people was so intensely present. In a period that lacked the sound-generating inventions that are a natural part of our daily lives today, the human voice dominated the acoustic image.<sup>95</sup> Smith's description of a bygone soundscape fires the imagination, but at the same time it is misleading because it implies that the acoustic changes wrought by modernity can be reduced to technology pure and simple, and that human sound is above all something that belongs to the past. This exotic sound – people, and only people – is in fact a sensation that is readily experienced in the present day, not least in the classroom. By studying school, it thus becomes possible to nuance the accepted notion of modern society's auditory characteristics, and, moreover, focus on the relationship between sound and power.

School is an institution where the relationship between power and sound is patent. There are few places where the exercise of power is so strongly associated with preventing or encouraging speech. In this study I have set out to investigate how that relationship evolved over a relatively long period of time. Monitorial teaching was characterized by its high levels of noise, of which the pupils were the primary source, while the teacher was comparatively passive, 'as silent and inapproachable as a sphinx'; while what by more recent standards was an extreme tolerance of pupil noise was matched with very strict discipline. Admittedly, this discipline manifested itself in mandatory silence, but it was a silence that framed the teaching rather than being integral to it. With the subsequent abandonment of monitorial teaching for class teaching came a completely new vision of the school soundscape – one dependent on new acoustical roles for both teacher and pupils. The teacher was to do the talking, the pupils were to listen or answer questions. The change was encouraged by detailed guidelines on how teachers should talk and how pupils should be disciplined. The effect was to pave the way for a style of teaching that had a far more emotional stamp. In the course of the nineteenth century, in other words, two distinct approaches to pupil noise were formulated, and twentieth-century developments can in part be seen as pooling these two traditions. The reforming educationalists' emphasis on activity and collaboration heralded a greater tolerance of pupil noise – a tolerance reminiscent of monitorial teaching – though such forbearance had limits, and complaints about pupils talking in class continued.

Concerning the relationship of sound and power, there are two points I think should be made. The first is that there is a close connection between the authorities' objectives and received notions of sound. The connotations of various disciplinary ideals were linked to the variations in tolerance threshold when it came to pupils talking. Alain Corbin, who previously studied falling tolerance thresholds for malodour, argues in his study of the sound of church bells that it is not possible to find a similarly clear change there; if anything, it would seem the tolerance of loud noise increased in the nineteenth century, with the caveat that there are no general tolerance thresholds from which to argue because sound is so strongly contextual.<sup>96</sup> One such context was school, where the notion of regulating pupil noise changed dramatically in the mid nineteenth century: when silent pupils became the norm, talking in class came to be viewed as 'out of place', to borrow from Peter Bailey; and it created a possible disciplinary problem – pupils talking in class – and an end in view for the teacher's exercise of power – silent pupils.

The second point concerns the way in which sound symbolizes power. Raymond Murray Schafer has pointed to the noise privileges of power; Burke has drawn attention to how demonstrations of silence were a way of showing respect for authority; Bailey has in similar fashion written of the subordinate's silence as the sound of authority: yet the acoustic history of school indicates that this particular relationship between sound and power was not timeless. Monitorial teaching was distinguished by its singular combination of slavish discipline and noise, which can be seen as an inversion of Schafer's sacred noise. During lessons, pupils

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<sup>95</sup> Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England. Attending to the O-factor* (London 1999).

<sup>96</sup> Corbin, *Village Bells*, 298 ff.

demonstrated their respect by remaining anything but silent; it was rather the teacher who withdrew into what amounted to sacred *silence*. Only with the dawn of teacher-led class teaching was the teacher's authority evinced by a hushed classroom. Only at this point is it relevant to talk of pupils' silence as the sound of the teacher's authority.