

# Introduction

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**H**as anyone written a book on philosophy's bees? It was Jacques Derrida who, on several occasions, called attention to the long tradition "on the philosophical *topos* of the bee" that prevails in the West, from Aristotle through Schelling, Marx, Heidegger, and Lacan, a tradition of thinking "the sense and senses of the bee, and the bee's reason for being" (131)—always in the interests of setting apart, in binary fashion, the being of the bee from the being of man. Thus, as Heidegger has it in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, the bee, "*without being able to grasp*" things *as such*, is "poor in world," and so, unlike "world-forming man," cannot open itself in a questioning way to blossom, scent, or hive (241–49). Bee being belongs to "rigid fixity" (248), a theme that Lacan picks up in "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis," where he argues that the bee's "system of signaling" in the wagging dance is not akin to human language, but only a "fixed code" (84–85). The speechless bee, deprived of language, is, to use Heidegger's word, *benommen*: dazed, stupefied, *dumb*. Aristotle, in the first lines of his *Metaphysics*, inaugurates the tradition's binary model of species difference by explaining that the bee is dumb because it is *deaf*: bees are incapable of hearing sound, he claims, thus they cannot learn or be taught.

Sound studies no longer enable arguments in favour of oppositional species (sexual, cultural, genre) boundaries. These days, not even the beleaguered bee serves meta-physical binaries well. For as contemporary researchers Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson suggest, sound is crucial to communication among bees; indeed, is a key element of the wagging dance, the means through which information is conveyed by dancers (emitting vibrations of 200 to 300 hertz) to the receptor antennae of follower bees (173–74). If we were indifferent to species boundaries, and to the question of whether the transmitters and receptors are animal, human, or machine, we might well look to bee culture for a dictionary definition of sound: as involving both vibration

and sensation, both physics and biology. This *Mosaic* issue, the first of a two-part special, involves further boundary blurring, for it extends sound studies beyond physics and biology into literary and critical practices where it has all but been ignored, and it does so by crossing many boundaries on which these practices still depend.

The following essays engage sound as a medium for interrogating identity, for improvising multiculturalism, as well as for approaching subjectivity as a technological extension; sound as wordless and as found in silence; and sound as gesture. The issue includes explorations of the history of sound; of the soundings of a text; of the sound archive; and of the multimedial basis of psychoanalysis. There is an interest here in “irreducible openness.” The issue attempts to take down boundaries—between the senses, between cultures, between performer and text.

Look for a continuation of this provocative research in the June 2008 special issue of *Mosaic*.

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