

Jackson, Sarah. Literature and the Telephone: Conversations on Poetics, Politics and Place. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 3 Dec. 2024. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350259638>>.

Accessed from: www.bloomsburycollections.com

Accessed on: Tue Dec 03 2024 14:20:08 Greenwich Mean Time

Copyright © Sarah Jackson. Sarah Jackson 2023. This chapter is published open access subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). You may re-use, distribute, and reproduce this work in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Introduction

The telephone – a question of literature

From the ‘slender cry of the wire’ in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s ‘The Chief Operator’ to Will Self’s ‘five hundred-quid worry bead’ in *Phone*, telephones have been ringing, buzzing, snapping and pinging across literature since Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Watson first spoke on the line.¹ And yet the apparatus has long provoked anxiety for a number of writers and thinkers. Although Virginia Woolf famously remarks that ‘the telephone, which interrupts the most serious conversations and cuts short the most weighty observations, has a romance of its own’, she also privately admits to feeling ‘some trepidation’ about the apparatus.² This wariness extends to loathing for Franz Kafka. Writing from Prague in the margins of a letter to his fiancée Felice Bauer he begs: ‘Don’t worry. I definitely won’t telephone. Don’t you either; I couldn’t bear it.’³ But such concerns are not limited to the telephone’s early decades; a century later, J. M. Coetzee confesses to Paul Auster a similar disdain, insisting that the telephone creates significant structural difficulties for the writer: ‘If people [...] are continually going to be speaking to one another at a distance, then a whole gamut of interpersonal signs and signals, verbal and non-verbal, voluntary and involuntary, has to be given up. Dialogue [...] just isn’t possible.’⁴ Coetzee’s reservations suggest that the telephone’s disruptions to the mechanisms of narrative stifle the literary imagination. John Brooks agrees. Commenting on the frequent appearance of the telephone in twentieth-century literature, Brooks argues that ‘close inspection in most literary uses shows that the telephone is only a conduit, a stage prop.’⁵ In this way, Brooks’s analysis speaks to Joseph Vogl’s recognition of the ‘invisible, nonperceptible, and anesthetic’ nature of becoming-media or, in the words of Marshall McLuhan: “‘If it works, it’s obsolete.’”⁶ As the medium disappears into the message, so the telephone is rendered invisible by the call. In fact, Brooks goes on to conclude: ‘My impression is that the great

days of telephone literature are over: no matter how striking the changes in telephone uses that future technology may bring, the telephone as a subject for the creative imagination has been exhausted.⁷ For Brooks, as for Coetzee, the literary telephone is (in) trouble.

But while the effects of the telephone on narrative have long been acknowledged by writers such as Coetzee, the wider poetic, political, technological and epistemological implications of the literary telephone remain largely overlooked. In fact, as Nicholas Royle points out, 'really we have no idea what a telephone is, or what a voice is, or when or how. Least of all when it is linked up with the question of literature'.⁸ Taking the 'question of literature' as its starting point, this book examines the telephone as a complex and mutating technology with literary and cultural effects yet to be explored. Certainly, far from operating simply as a conduit for the voice, the telephone for Jacques Derrida is embedded in a theory of literature: 'The telephone is a poetico-technical invention'.⁹ Referring to H el ene Cixous's telepathic call in *H.C. For Life, That is to Say ...*, he remarks: 'this telephony, which nonetheless also literally invented the telephone, is thought itself'.¹⁰ Drawing on Derrida's work on telepathy as a 'terrifying telephone', Avital Ronell also turns to the telephone's operations 'between science, poesy, and thinking'.¹¹ 'Why the telephone?' she asks in her seminal text *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*.¹² Pointing out that it is 'unsure of its identity as object, thing, piece of equipment, perlocutionary intensity or artwork', she argues that the telephone overturns metaphysical certitudes: 'It destabilizes the identity of self and other, subject and thing, it abolishes the originariness of site; it undermines the authority of the Book and constantly menaces the existence of literature'.¹³ In this way, Ronell draws attention to the ways that the telephone not only unsettles notions of proximity and distance, presence and absence, and self and other but also throws into question our understanding of writing and reading.

Royle, too, is interested in the writerly effects of the telephone and the ways in which it can 'structure' the text: 'Or rather, the extent to which the telephone structures and de-structures, orders and disorders, sets up and upsets'.¹⁴ Arguing that the omniscient narrator appears able to operate according to 'telepathic transfer', he is concerned with a 'certain tele-logic in accordance with which the notions of telephone and telepathy are, however strangely, being put in touch'.¹⁵ The conceptual link between telepathy and telephony in the cultural imagination has been addressed by a number of critics. Discussing the rise in the popularity of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, for instance, Pamela Thurschwell establishes a clear connection between telepathy and tele-technologies; for

Ned Schantz, moreover, ‘telepathy is the telephone in a state of perfect dematerialization – no apparatus, no sound waves, no ear’.¹⁶ But for Royle, this relationship is a specifically literary one. Turning to Frank O’Hara’s claim that ‘if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem’ – a claim to which I will return in Chapter 1 – Royle sets out the possibility for a tele-logic in which ‘literature would be a telephony. Linked up through a kind of intratextual exchange, literary texts would be telephone calls.’¹⁷ Working to complicate the relations between telephony and telepathy, reader and writer, narrator and author, and text and call, these literary telephones are not merely the stage props to which Brooks refers; rather, they are wired up with the function of literature and of literary history, opening up our understanding of how, where and why literary communication takes place.

Many of the texts to which this volume refers (and the many more that are beyond the scope of my discussion) directly comment on and simultaneously perform the relationship between the telephone and the question of literature. Its potential for ordering and disordering the text is enacted, for instance, in Haruki Murakami’s *Sputnik Sweetheart* – a novel that draws attention to its own operations as an intratextual exchange. When the narrator K reflects on Sumire’s call from ‘a totally semiotic telephone box’, he wonders if ‘the phone itself is some vital message, its very shape and colour containing hidden meaning’.¹⁸ This study does not offer a straightforward literary history of the telephone, but, following K, it instead seeks to tease out some of its more cryptic resonances. In so doing, it argues that the uncanny logic of telephony – and its capacity for sparking new conversations between people, places, and ideas – is built into the very structure of reading and writing. This is of course played out in Holden Caulfield’s famous statement in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*: ‘What really knocks me out is a book that, when you’re all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it.’¹⁹ What sort of exchange takes place, this volume asks, between the reader and the writer, between different places and times, between different genders and genres, and between different cultural and critical perspectives? And if telephony is bound to a theory of writing, what happens when the network is down, when calls are intercepted, when they remain unanswered, or when the voice goes astray? In fact, although he wants to ‘hook up’ with the author, Holden, it turns out, has difficulty picking up and dialling the number: ‘I couldn’t think of anybody to call up. [...] So I ended up not calling anybody.’²⁰ Rather than facilitating connection and dialogue, the telephone in this text, as in many others, disorders and disconnects. This means that in addition to putting

people in ‘touch’, as the AT&T slogan dictates, the telephone has the potential to transmit what Roland Barthes calls the ‘*wrong voice*’.²¹

The psychoanalytic telephone

Barthes’s reference to the ‘wrong voice’ is taken from his discussion of Sigmund Freud, in which he describes the psychoanalyst’s aversion to the telephone. It is true that Freud had a peculiar relationship with the device, describing the unconscious as an invisible telephone line and the psychoanalytic method as a telephone call, facts remarked upon by Friedrich Kittler, who states: ‘Following the nationalization of the Vienna telephone exchange in 1895, [Freud] not only had a telephone installed in his study but also described the work that went on in that study in terms of telephony.’²² Despite his apparent proficiency in listening, however, Barthes points out that Freud did not actually like using the telephone – a possibility that Peter Gay attributes not only to his ‘cultural conservatism’ but also to his superstitious fear of his own telephone number, 14362.²³ Despite his concern to stress the scientific rationalism of the psychoanalytic method, then, Freud’s life and work cannot be detached from the strange and unnerving implications of the electric voice, and the various ways that the telephone is bound up with disorder and delusion. The relationship between psychoanalysis and the telephone is one that informs much of the existing scholarship in the field. Hannah Zeavin, for instance, contends that media technologies have always played a central role in the therapeutic encounter, with teletherapy offering just one form of ‘distanced intimacy’.²⁴ It is central to the work of Ronell, for example, for whom the apparatus is a ‘dual-functioning organ’ with a ‘split personality’.²⁵ Tracing the relationship between schizophrenia and the mechanized voice in the psychoanalytic work of Freud alongside Carl Jung and R. D. Laing, Ronell argues that the telephone is ‘a privileged instrument of splitting for the schizophrenic’.²⁶ The literary telephone, it is clear, is haunted by its histories, delusions and disconnections. From Thurschwell’s study of the relationship between the development of communication technologies and the ‘real and fantasized connections’ in the fin de siècle to Andrew Gaedtke’s interest in the ‘form and logic of a technological paranoia’ in late-modernist culture, questions regarding telephony and madness have been in currency since the telephone’s invention.²⁷

The relationship between communication technologies and magical thinking has been discussed at length, and this book does not seek to replicate existing

work in the field. To date, however, most of the scholarship on the representation of the telephone in literature has been restricted to its late Victorian and early- to mid-twentieth-century contexts.²⁸ For Richard Menke, for instance, the Victorian novelist's telephone operates as 'an imaginative switchboard' or 'device for representing an entire complex of media.'²⁹ For Thurschwell, this imaginative switchboard transforms metaphysical relations in the modernist text. Noting that developing tele-technologies appear to offer the annihilation of distance, she remarks that new media cultures enable previously unimaginable intimacies, ranging from speaking on the phone to contacting the dead.³⁰ David Trotter explains that the early twentieth-century phone was determined by its potential to malfunction: 'Modernist phones simply do not work, in the most basic sense; even when they do work, they don't, because their working is itself an estrangement, a disconnection.'³¹ Whether this is the result of 'technological failure' or from a lapse in 'medium-specific-protocol', Trotter argues, 'a telephonic literature began when, and only when, the event ceased to function as the catalyst for ironies extraneous to its successful completion on its own terms.'³² For Trotter, moreover, the advent of electronic digital computing during the late 1940s and early 1950s marked a 'watershed' moment in the history of telecommunications, bringing with it the notion of the human as an information-processing machine.³³ Suggesting that the rapid new developments in cybernetics and information theory after the Second World War led to the 'act of instantaneous or near-instantaneous, real-time communication at a distance, whatever its motive, method, or effect', Trotter argues that, in contrast to the previous decades, post-war literature appears to operate according to the 'principle of connectivity'.³⁴ This is a time, he suggests, that is marked not by a 'gradual change messily improvised with the help of whatever lies to hand' but by 'the sudden perfecting of a machine'.³⁵ In this way, Trotter identifies a perceived shift taking place in the second half of the twentieth century from estrangement and disconnection to connectivity and instantaneity.

Crossed lines

For Ned Schantz, this principle of connectivity feeds the fantasy of an ideal phone – one that transmits a 'singular meaning' and that 'always works smoothly, allowing its human masters to forge their bodies, their surroundings – indeed the apparatus itself – to engage in communication with perfect control'.³⁶ In a telling aside, however, Schantz admits that this version of the telephone 'never quite

manages to exist', suggesting that 'as the phone ceases to behave itself, instead of delivering messages devoutly wished for, it unearths a repressed sense of isolation and chaos.'³⁷ Schantz alludes here to the ways that the telephone continues to disrupt and complicate experience, even as the technologies that facilitate the call grow ever more sophisticated. This is confirmed by Jean Baudrillard who argues in 'The Ecstasy of Communication' that the era of production and consumption has given way to a "proteinic" era of networks' that operate to ensure that we always 'stay in contact' while also producing 'aleatory and dizzying' effects.³⁸ As a result, he says, we live 'in the ecstasy of communication' – an ecstasy that is obscene for its visibility.³⁹ Although he focuses primarily on the screen, Baudrillard also frames this condition in terms of the telephone: 'I pick up my telephone receiver and it's all there; the whole marginal network catches and harasses me with the insupportable good faith of everything that wants and claims to communicate.'⁴⁰ This 'delirium' of communication alters the limits of subjective experience. Thus, while its format and functionality – and the associated anxieties – have transformed the apparatus almost beyond recognition since its invention in 1876, the literary telephone remains haunted by disorder and undecidability.

Although, as I go on to discuss, considerable research on the smartphone has been undertaken in recent media and cultural studies, the specific relationship between telephony and literature after Trotter's watershed remains largely overlooked.⁴¹ In fact, as this volume seeks to demonstrate, the ways in which the contemporary literary telephone is connected to technical, linguistic, social and political interference have ongoing significance. It is certainly clear that examples of wrong numbers, crossed lines and unanswered calls have continued to punctuate the literary imagination over the last seventy years, testifying to McLuhan's observation that media draw attention to themselves only when they cease to operate. It is evident, for instance, in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, which opens with Daniel Quinn's observation: 'It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not.'⁴² Picking up from the point at which Trotter departs, I am interested in precisely those moments in post-war literature when the phone and its users cease to behave. More than this, however, I am interested in the ways that these moments of disruption might be understood as attempts to reconceptualize the relationship between reading and writing. This productive interference is at work, for example, in Clarice Lispector's 'Correct Assumptions', in which she asserts: 'Let us assume that the telephone system has broken down throughout the city, which happens to be true.'⁴³ She goes on

to assume that when she dials a number, it is engaged; when she finally makes a connection, no one answers; and when she does eventually get through, the line is 'crossed'.⁴⁴ But it is important to note that, for Lispector, these interruptions, interferences and disconnections open up the possibility for writing: 'I shall make no more assumptions. But simply say Yes to the world.'⁴⁵ In this way, the telephone's disconnective force marks not the end of literature but instead invites new ways of thinking and writing. This disconnective force structures her novel *Água Viva*, for instance, in which Lispector conceives of 'the world' as 'a tangle of bristling telephone wires', suggesting that the literary text is 'crossed from end to end by a fragile connecting thread'.⁴⁶ The tangled and crossed wires of the telephone become a way of understanding intra- and intertextual relations. Thus, as Hélène Cixous remarks, Lispector's is a telephonic text, inviting the reader to 'imagine a telephone that lets fluid pass rather than words'.⁴⁷ Here, Cixous speaks to the specifically literary dimensions of telephony, a concept that her own writing explicitly explores: 'I owe books and books to the telephone', she admits in 'Writing Blind'.⁴⁸ With Cixous's words in mind, this volume not only examines the telephone's function as a disordering impulse in texts from the 1950s to the present but also seeks to explore the ways that its capacity to communicate at a distance contributes to and opens out a theory of writing.

Media and mobility

Building on work by Cixous, Derrida, Ronell and Royle, among others, and analysing the ways that the telephone informs an understanding of the ontological dimensions of the relationship between the human and the technological, this book is concerned with the possibilities for tele-technologies to destabilize logocentric assumptions, unsettling relations of presence and absence, near and far, mobility and stasis, the private and the public, and life and death. At the same time, however, it also examines the productive effects of the literary telephone, and the different ways that telephony and literature speak to each other. Of course, telephone technologies have transformed considerably over the last seventy years, and the form and function of the telephone in the literary text continue to evolve: from the push-button phone in the red booth of Wole Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation' to the videophone hook-ups of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, or from the text message in Imtiaz Dharker's 'Text' to the uploading of videos on Snapchat in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, The Serial Killer*, the interactions between user, media and message remain mutable, multifarious and in flux.⁴⁹

Since the 1990s, the development of cellular technologies has brought substantial change to telephoning practices. Giving rise to new ways of generating and sharing creative content, not only does this transform our experience of reading and writing, but it also shapes experiments with language and form. These changes have been worked through in many contemporary novels of the last two decades; Shari Benstock, for instance, notes the preponderance of phone calls, text messages and emails in contemporary 'chick lit', remarking that these function to convey the rapid pace of contemporary life.⁵⁰ Social media has also contributed to new ways of engaging with literature: Roddy Doyle's *Two Pints*, for example, first appeared as a series of Facebook posts before being collated and published in print and e-book formats.⁵¹ The effects of digital media on the reading experience are further evidenced in novels such as Marisha Pessl's *Night Film*, in which 'interactive touch points buried throughout the text will unlock extra content on your smartphone or tablet.'⁵² These effects are felt in poetry too: contemporary poets from Brian Bilston to Rupi Kaur have not only embraced the multimodality of Instagram but have generated new forms of 'twitterature', demonstrating that, as Kylie Jarrett and Janeen Naji point out, digitally mediated texts need to be reframed as an assemblage of 'interactions between technologies, human creative subjects, and the wider socioeconomic context.'⁵³ For Tore Rye Andersen, both the resurgence of serialization prompted by the digital revolution and its potential for interactivity are key to the appeal of twitterature – which he describes as 'situated in some undefined zone between marketing, individual work, transmedia storytelling, interaction with readers, text, paratext, poetry and narrative' – where 'the intervals between separate instalments can often be measured in minutes.'⁵⁴ The capacity for the mobile phone to operate as writing machine is further evidenced by the popularity of the cell phone novel, in which short chapters are written on a device and often distributed to readers via text message.⁵⁵ Moreover, the use of geospatial technologies to generate site-specific content enables readers to engage with multiple stories at and across different locations.⁵⁶ This is taken further still in ambient literary works such as Kate Pullinger's *Breathe*, which uses application programming interfaces to respond to location, weather and time in order to personalize the literary experience.⁵⁷ Reflecting on these changes and addressing the ways that mobile media facilitate our engagement with multiple platforms 'on the go', Bronwen Thomas remarks that the spatio-temporal effects of digital texts that engage with cross-platform, application programming interface, location-aware and multimodal technologies can be both 'exhilarating and unsettling.'⁵⁸

The manner in which the computational capacities of the mobile phone transform the reading and writing experience continues to evolve. But while the medium-specificity of the mobile phone is important to my discussion, the histories and possibilities of both electronic literature, and literature that is specifically written on or for the phone, are beyond the scope of my analysis. Indeed, much of the current scholarship within media studies concerns precisely the generation, experience and distribution of creative content within an assemblage of human, technological, social and geospatial agents. But by bringing together the telephone and the question of literature, my aim is neither to offer a history of the telephone from the nineteenth-century apparatus to the digital devices of today, nor is it to provide a cultural, sociological or technical study of the phone's changing form and functions. These topics have been addressed at length, and in ways far better than I am able to offer, by the aforementioned writers and others. Rather, by foregrounding both the literariness of the telephone and the telephonic nature of the literary text, I hope instead to open up new conversations about the telephone's reciprocal relationship with print-based literatures from 1950 to the present, and the implications of this for how we understand the relationship between reading, writing, listening and calling.

Global networks

Of course, the telephone is not the same thing for all people at all times, and this study is sensitive to a range of cultural contexts. Telephone conversations take part in and constitute complex, heterogenous and unstable networks that are bound up with political, technological and linguistic forces. Of particular concern to this volume are the implications of literary telephony for rethinking questions of politics and place. Focusing on the early development of the apparatus, for instance, Stephen Kern points to a long-standing interest in the potential for the telephone to destabilize place: 'Telephones break down barriers of distance – horizontally across the face of the land and vertically across social strata. They make all places equidistant from the seat of power and hence of equal value.'⁵⁹ Far from overturning distance and flattening relations of power, however, I argue that telephones always remain bound up in and shape political and ideological relations. Claire Lynch notes, for instance, that digital technologies are not 'the same for any person in any place' and argues that 'cyberculture's primary function is to disrupt the authority of place.'⁶⁰ Joshua Meyrowitz, moreover, warns that even as media expand our perceptual field,

experience remains place-bound: 'We are always in place, and place is always with us.'⁶¹ That these places are both embodied and ideological is evidenced, for example, in the front page image of the New York *Daily Graphic* on 15 March 1877.⁶² Captioned 'Terrors of the Telephone – the Orator of the Future', the graphic features what McLuhan calls 'a dishevelled Svengali' with a microphone connected by thousands of wires to receiving parties all around the world, including London, Boston, San Francisco and Fiji, as well as to what appears to be a lone Indigenous American in an unnamed location.⁶³ Far from obliterating local and global distinctions, then, the telephone operates within a confluence of geospatial, industrial, technological, infrastructural and political forces, and my analysis explores the aesthetic and political nature of telephoning practices, as well as the ways in which they speak to questions of both place and displacement.

The geopolitical dimensions of telephony are clearly at work, for instance, in Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, a novel in which Makina runs the village switchboard housing 'the only phone for miles and miles around'.⁶⁴ When local calls are received, Makina is able to answer in the 'native tongue or latin tongue', and when she receives calls from the 'promised land' – which is increasingly the case – she responds 'in their own new tongue'.⁶⁵ Speaking to both gendered and racial telephoning practices, Makina's role as operator depends on her ability to translate and connect cultures: 'Makina spoke all three [languages], and knew how to keep quiet in all three too.'⁶⁶ When one of the first men to 'strike it rich after going north' returns to the village, he shows off to Makina by taking out two mobile phones and giving one to his mother: 'Here, jefecita, just press this button when you hear the briiiiiiiiiing and you'll see, just step outside, and he brandished the other one.'⁶⁷ But the 'zzzz' of the dial tone 'didn't come' and the 'peep-peeps were followed only by silence', and eventually Makina says, 'Maybe you should have bought a few cell towers too?'⁶⁸ Herrera thus demonstrates that the telephone does not operate in isolation but functions as part of an always multiple and divided network – a network that is beset with both silence and noise.

Bearing in mind the fact that the telephone always speaks beyond its immediate interlocutors and is instead connected to a range of broader linguistic, theoretical, sociopolitical and technological concerns, it is critical that any analysis of the telephone must extend beyond a reading of its hardware to its assemblages and its formats as well as its participation in global, political and social structures. Thus, even as it focuses on the telephone and the question of literature, my discussion is informed by a sense of its wider effects and contexts. In addressing these concerns, and drawing on work by Sara Ahmed, Judith

Butler, Eyal Weizman and Jennifer Gabrys, among others, *Literature and the Telephone* prompts new ways of thinking about the poetic, political and geospatial implications of literary telephony from a range of national and cultural contexts. In so doing, it seeks to explore the telephone's propensity to mediate but also to interrupt communication, as well as the ways in which it taps into some of the most urgent concerns of our era, including warfare, surveillance, mobility, globalization, ecology and the ethics of answerability. Exploring its complex, multiple and mutating functions, the present volume thus examines the ways that the telephone ignites new conversations between different historical periods, global locations, theoretical perspectives, genres and voices. Addressing the reciprocal relationship between telephony and literary language and form, it considers both wired and wireless phones, and their capacity and failure to call across borders, languages and cultures.

Calling points

The structure of this book underscores its aims: rather than taking a chronological approach, I instead tap into a series of 'calling points' that operate within and between texts in order to tease out the telephonic effects of post-war writing. In so doing, these conversations produce moments of contradiction and tension, as well as both forward and backward movements. Chapter 1, my first calling point, returns to Frank O'Hara's claim in 'Personism' that 'if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem'. Troubling the relationship between poetry and calling by interrogating notions of address, sound, rhythm and silence, this chapter examines examples of interference and errancy in work by Tom Raworth and Fady Joudah. Setting out a theory of telephonic desterrance, I argue that the principle of disconnection is simultaneously a disruptive and generative force in the text. In Chapter 2, I turn to the relationship between the telephone and the secret through a reading of (over)hearing in the work of Muriel Spark. Analysing the pattern of call and response in her writing, I read Spark's preoccupation with secrecy alongside the work of Frank Kermode, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. Arguing that the telephone calls in Spark's writing are never fully determinable, I examine the ways in which the literary telephone speaks to a provisional and always incomplete definition of literature. Building on questions of undecidability and destabilizing the relationship between technology and epistemology, Chapter 3 addresses the impact of the mobile phone's locative technologies on how we understand

the principle of orientation. Focusing on the work of Ali Smith, I consider the ways that contemporary smartphone technologies are linked to notions of (dis)location and displacement, prompting new questions regarding the relationship between disorientation and reading. In Chapter 4, I extend these questions of displacement by turning to the cultural and political implications of postcolonial telephony. Focusing in particular on telecommunications infrastructure in Israel-Palestine, I argue that the telephone in the work of Mourid Barghouti operates according to an impossible logic where picking up the phone means not getting through. Reading Barghouti alongside Jacques Derrida and Eyal Weizman, this chapter hopes to prompt a broader conversation regarding the possibilities for the literary telephone to intervene in debates regarding the relationship between telecommunication technologies, voice and power. Developing my concern with telephony and dislocation, Chapter 5 turns to the politics and poetics of the distress call. Discussing the ethics and aesthetics of 'answerability', this chapter focuses on the intersections between technology, politics, human rights and language in a reading of accounts of the 'left-to-die-boat' by Asiya Wadud and Caroline Bergvall. Questions of ethics and responsibility are picked up again in Chapter 6, where I consider the telephone call as both missive and missile in Cold War fiction. Focusing on a cluster of texts published around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, I investigate the role of the telephone in imagining nuclear catastrophe, exploring its capacity to communicate political and technological disruption, as well as the atomization of language. My final calling point engages with the role of the telephone in material culture and environmental justice by thinking through its contribution to human and ecological destruction. Focusing on mobile phone waste and the representation of Guiyu in China in work by Chen Qiufan, Sally Wen Mao and Rita Wong, Chapter 7 reflects on the implications of digital rubbish and the phone's interminable effects on the planet. Thus, this chapter's turn to the toxic potential of the telephone opens up wider questions regarding the telephone and the archive, as well as our possible telefutures.

By connecting different texts and themes, and offering a reading of the telephone through a series of calling points, this book acknowledges its own status as necessarily partial and incomplete. But in attempting to think through the crossed lines between literature and telephony – and the implications of this for notions of poetics, politics and place – it hopes to prompt new conversations regarding the relationship between writing and calling. In so doing, it seeks not only to challenge Brooks's claim that the great days of telephone literature are over but also to argue that literary telephone lines might offer new ways of

conceiving ethical and creative technological futures, as well as different modes of talking and listening across cultures.

Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, ‘The Chief Operator’, in *The Oath of Allegiance and Other Stories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 353–74 (357); Will Self, *Phone* (London: Penguin, 2017), 10.
- 2 Virginia Woolf, ‘How It Strikes a Contemporary’, *Times Literary Supplement* (5 April 1923), reprinted in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23–31 (27); Virginia Woolf, diary entry dated 27 December 1931, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 4*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), 56. See also Edward Allen, ‘Romancing the Phone: Woolf’s First Media Age’, *Critical Quarterly*, 61.4 (2019), 100–15 (112).
- 3 Franz Kafka, letter dated 17 November 1912, *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stem and Elisabeth Duckworth (New York: Schocken, 1973), 47. See also Franc Schuerewegen, ‘A Telephone Conversation: Fragments’, trans. Marvin N. Richards, *Diacritics*, 24.4 (1994), 30–40 (30).
- 4 Paul Auster and J. M. Coetzee, letter dated 7 April 2011, *Here and Now: Letters 2008–2011* (London: Vintage, 2014), 227.
- 5 John Brooks, ‘The First and Only Century of Telephone Literature’, in *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. Ithiel de Sola Pool (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 208–24 (208).
- 6 Joseph Vogl, ‘Becoming-Media: Galileo’s Telescope’, trans. Brian Hanrahan, *Grey Room* 29 (2007), 14–25 (22); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13.
- 7 Brooks, ‘The First and Only Century of Telephone Literature’, 223.
- 8 Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 164.
- 9 Jacques Derrida, *H.C. For Life, That Is to Say ...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 100.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, ‘Telepathy’, trans. Nicholas Royle, in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 496–526 (509); Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 84.
- 12 Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 9.
- 13 Ibid.

- 14 Royle, *Telepathy and Literature*, 163.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 89, 168.
- 16 Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 14; Ned Schantz, *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 80.
- 17 Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', *Yugen*, 7 (1961), reprinted in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 499, cited in Royle, *Telepathy and Literature*, 178.
- 18 Haruki Murakami, *Sputnik Sweetheart*, trans. Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2001), 227, 228.
- 19 J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (London: Penguin, 1994), 16.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 21 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 114.
- 22 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 89. In 'Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis' published in 1912, Freud writes: 'To put it in a formula: [the doctor] must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone. Just as the receiver converts back into sound-waves the electric oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free associations' (Sigmund Freud, 'Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis', *Standard Edition*, vol. 12 (London: Vintage, 2001), 115–16).
- 23 Freud's seminal text, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published when he was forty-three, and it is reported that he took this as proof that the last two digits, sixty-two, signified the age at which he would die. See Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (London: MAX, 2006), 507, 58.
- 24 Hannah Zeavin, *The Distance Cure: A History of Teletherapy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 25.
- 25 Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 105.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 252. See Carl G. Jung, *The Psychology of Dementia Praecox*, trans. Frederick Peterson and A. A. Brill (New York: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing, 1909), 99–153; R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin, 2010).
- 27 Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 2; Andrew Gaedtko, *Modernism and the Machinery of Madness: Psychosis, Technology, and Narrative Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2. See also Jeffrey Sconce,

- The Technical Delusion: Electronics, Power, Insanity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).
- 28 Particular attention has been paid to telephoning practices in the work of writers including Marcel Proust, Ford Madox Ford, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh and Elizabeth Bowen. See, for instance: Allen, 'Romancing the Phone'; Andrew Bennett, 'Elizabeth Bowen on the Telephone', in *Elizabeth Bowen: Theory, Thought and Things*, ed. Jessica Gildersleeve and Patricia Juliana Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 182–98; Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', trans. Tina Kendall and Shari Benstock, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 253–309; Sara Danus, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 11–17, 180–2; Kate McLoughlin, 'Interruption Overload: Telephones in Ford Madox Ford's "4692 Padd", *A Call and A Man Could Stand Up –*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36.3 (2013), 50–68; Richard Menke, *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies, 1880–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 49–71; and David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 38–85.
- 29 Menke, *Literature, Print Culture, and Media Technologies*, 213, 214.
- 30 Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, 3.
- 31 Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age*, 47.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 47, 49.
- 33 David Trotter, *The Literature of Connection: Signal, Medium, Interface, 1850–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 3–4.
- 36 Schantz, *Gossip, Letters, Phones*, 8.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 38 Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', trans. John Johnston, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 126–33 (127–8, 132).
- 39 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 41 See, for instance: Gerard Goggin, *Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2006); Larissa Hjorth, Jean Burgess and Ingrid Richardson (eds), *Studying Mobile Media: Cultural Technologies, Mobile Communication, and the iPhone* (London: Routledge, 2012).
- 42 Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber, 1987), 3.
- 43 Clarice Lispector, 'Correct Assumptions' (15 January 1972), in *Discovering the World*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 525–6 (525).
- 44 *Ibid.*, 526.

- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, trans. Stefan Tobler (New York: New Directions, 2012), 18, 20.
- 47 Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, trans. Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 77.
- 48 Hélène Cixous, 'Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey', trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London: Routledge 2005), 184–203 (189).
- 49 Wole Soyinka, 'Telephone Conversation', in *Modern Poetry from Africa*, ed. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier (London: Penguin, 1963), 111; David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1996); Imtiaz Dharker, 'Text', in *The Terrorist at My Table* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2006), 37; Oyinkan Braithwaite, *My Sister, The Serial Killer* (London: Atlantic, 2019).
- 50 Shari Benstock, 'Afterword: The New Woman's Fiction', in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young (London: Routledge, 2006), 253–6 (256).
- 51 Roddy Doyle, *Two Pints* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012).
- 52 Marisha Pessl, *Night Film* (New York: Random House, 2013), 10. See also Anna Weigel, 'New Reading Strategies in the Twenty First Century: Transmedia Storytelling via App in Marisha Pessl's *Night Film*', in *Reading Today*, ed. Heta Pyrhönen and Janna Kantola (London: UCL Press, 2018), 73–86.
- 53 Brian Bilston, *You Took the Last Bus Home* (London: Unbound, 2016); Brian Bilston (@brian_bilston) [Twitter]; Rupī Kaur, *Milk and Honey* (Kansas City, MO: Andrew McMeel, 2015); rupī kaur (@rupīkaur_) [Instagram]; Kylie Jarrett and Janeen Naji, 'What Would Media Studies Do? Social Media Shakespeare as a Technosocial Process', *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, 10.1 (2016), 1–18 (20). See also, for instance: Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin, *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books Retold Through Twitter* (London: Penguin, 2009); Mike Chasar, *Poetry Unbound: Poems and New Media from the Magic Lantern to Instagram* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 175–94; Charlotte Cripps, 'Twihaiku? Micropoetry? The Rise of Twitter Poetry', *Independent*, 17 July 2013, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/twihaiku-micropoetry-the-rise-of-twitter-poetry-8711637.html> (accessed 15 October 2021); Janeen Naji, *Digital Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 20, 21.
- 54 Tore Rye Andersen, 'Staggered Transmissions: Twitter and the Return of Serialized Literature', *Convergence*, 23.1 (2017), 34–48 (46, 36). See also Bronwen Thomas, '140 Characters in Search of a Story: Twitter Fiction as an Emerging Narrative Form', in *Analysing Digital Fiction*, ed. Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin and Hans Rustad (London: Routledge, 2014), 94–108.
- 55 Barry Yourgrau, 'Thumb Novels: Mobile Phone Fiction', *Independent* (29 July 2009), available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/thumb-novels-mobile->

- phone-fiction-1763849.html (accessed 15 October 2021). The rise of the ‘mobile phone fiction’ in the first decade of the twenty-first century was popularized in Japan as ‘keitai shosetu’ and brought to English-speaking audiences through Takatsu’s *Secondhand Memories* (Hermitage, PA: Sakura, 2015). See also Matt Richtel, ‘Introducing the Twiller,’ *New York Times* (29 August 2008), available at <https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/29/introducing-the-twiller/> (accessed 15 March 2021).
- 56 Bronwen Thomas, *Literature and Social Media* (London: Routledge, 2020), 34. See also Jason Farman, ‘Site-Specificity, Pervasive Computing, and the Reading Interface,’ in *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies*, ed. Jason Farman (London: Routledge, 2015), 3–16; Jeremy Hight, ‘Locative Narrative, Literature and Form,’ in *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*, ed. Jörgen Schäffer and Peter Gendolia (New Brunswick, NJ: Transition, 2010), 317–30; Michael F. Miller, ‘Why Hate the Internet?: Contemporary Fiction, Digital Culture, and the Politics of Social Media,’ *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 75.3 (2019), 59–85; and Rita Raley, ‘Walk This Way,’ in *Beyond the Screen*, ed. Schäffer and Gendolia, 299–316.
- 57 Kate Pullinger, *Breathe* (London: Editions at Play/Visual Editions, 2018), available at: <https://www.breathe-story.com/> (accessed 13 November 2020). See also Tom Abba, Jonathan Dovey and Kate Pullinger (eds), *Ambient Literature: Towards a New Poetics of Situated Writing and Reading Practices* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Farman, ‘Site-Specificity, Pervasive Computing, and the Reading Interface,’ 3–16; Hight, ‘Locative Narrative, Literature and Form,’ 317–30; Miller, ‘Why Hate the Internet?’ 59–85; and Raley, ‘Walk This Way,’ 299–316.
- 58 Thomas, *Literature and Social Media*, 34, 57.
- 59 Stephen Kern, *Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 316.
- 60 Claire Lynch, *Cyber Ireland: Text, Image, Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.
- 61 Joshua Meyrowitz, ‘The Rise of Glocality: New Sense of Place and Identity in the Global Village,’ in *A Sense of Place: The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication*, ed. Kristóf Nyíri (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2005), 21–30 (21). For further discussion of the spatial geography of mobile media, see also Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (eds), *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 62 ‘Terrors of the Telephone,’ in *Daily Graphic* (15 March 1877), 1.
- 63 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 189–90.
- 64 Yuri Herrera, *Signs Preceding the End of the World*, trans. Lisa Dillman (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2015), 7.

65 Ibid., 7, 33.

66 Ibid., 7. For a history of gender and race relations in telephoning practices, see Venus Green, *Race on the Line: Gender, Labor, and Technology in the Bell System, 1880–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

67 Ibid., 20, 21.

68 Ibid., 21.