THE ETHICAL SOUNDSCAPE

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To Nameer and Dominic
In this chapter I have traced a set of shifts that have affected practices of ethical listening in Egypt. Shifts that have repositioned the pious ear in relation to both the nation and institutions of Islamic authority. The progression I describe is not one of continuous development along a singular axis but rather a series of partial displacements, recuperations, and reorientations. While the ear acquired the features of a national sense organ, it continued to resonate with sensory memory grounded in the tradition of ethical affect and sensibility I began with, a tradition that encompasses the music of tarab, Quranic recitation, practices of mystical discipline, and sermon listening. I now turn to this latter to explore the role of the cassette in shaping the ethical sensorium of a contemporary Muslim citizen in Egypt.

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THE ETHICS OF LISTENING

Intellectual life is not an empire within an empire; it is impregnated with affective states which themselves tend to self-expression in movement; it has therefore a constant tendency to play itself out externally.

—Marcel Jousser

Ahmad was one of the men with whom I listened to sermon tapes on a regular basis when I was in Cairo. He lived with his mother and sister in the lower-middle-class neighborhood of Ain Shams and worked in an aluminum processing plant on the outskirts of Cairo. Ahmad’s father had abandoned the family and gone off to work in Germany some years earlier, and for years now, his father’s sole contribution to their family was an occasional phone call and the long-unfulfilled promise that he would someday bring Ahmad to Europe and set him up with a job. After her husband’s departure, Ahmad’s mother took up a job as a clerk in a government office; her salary, combined with Ahmad’s, just barely covered basic expenses. Like many Egyptians in their late twenties and early thirties, Ahmad was desperately trying to put enough money aside to afford marriage, an issue all the more pressing given the increasing impatience of his prospective bride.

Ahmad had become involved in da’wa activities as a student during his years at Ain Shams University, from which he had graduated the year
before I met him. Approached by other students, he had joined a small group that met regularly in a mosque not far from his house where they received instruction from the resident shaykh. The mosque provided the group with sermon tapes, sheets with devotional sayings, and other instructional materials. The group followed a program aimed at strengthening their knowledge of Islam and their ability to live in accord with its precepts, a program that included the stipulation that they listen to a sermon tape at least twice a week. During one of the many government sweeps aimed at uncovering Islamic militants, a number of the group members were arrested, though most were released after two weeks. This experience led Ahmad to distance himself somewhat from the group and to generally steer clear of Islamist associations on campus. He still had a circle of friends with whom he would exchange tapes, and when they visited his house while I was there, we often listened to a tape together. Thus, while he continued to ascribe great importance to religious practice in his life—praying regularly and attending to his other religious duties, as well as listening to sermon tapes and reading current publications from Islamist presses—he no longer engaged in organized da'wa activities or participated in Islamist political associations.

As with other sermon listeners I came to know in Cairo, Ahmad emphasized the utility of sermon tapes as a form of pious relaxation, similar to reading or listening to the Quran, a practice that calmed the mind and body while fortifying the soul. As he described it during one of our meetings:

Remember when we were sitting at Muhammad's once and we played a tape of [the khattib] Muhammad Hassan, you felt relaxed [istirikha']? This is what can happen, this is the opening of the heart [literally, "chest": inshirah al-sadr], the tranquility [ritmi`an] that makes you want to pray, read the Quran, makes you want to get closer to God, to think [tafakkir] more about religion [din]. When you listen to a sermon, it helps you put aside all of your worries about work and money by reminding you of God. You remember that you will be judged and that fills you with fear [khawf] and makes you feel humility [khushu'] and repentance [nadam]. The shaykh teaches you about Islam, what it requires of you, so you won't make errors.

As with most of those I met in Cairo who listened to sermon tapes, Ahmad seldom employed them in an exact or rigorous manner. Rarely, for example, would he listen at precise times of the day according to a fixed schedule. He most often put on tapes in the evenings, after he had returned from work, sometimes inviting a friend from the neighborhood to join him, especially if he had a new tape to play. On such occasions I would often be invited as well. We would usually sit in his small living room, drinking tea while listening to the tape on his portable tape player. While listening, Ahmad or someone else would often interject comments on the content of the sermon: "Can that be true?" or "The shaykh's going to get in trouble for saying that!" or "I heard that hadith was inauthentic." During the more passionate moments of the sermon, however, such verbal interjections were rare.

Often someone would light up a cigarette. When I asked Ahmad about the compatibility of smoking with sermon auditions, he commented: "Of course smoking is wrong [ghalat]: you are hurting yourself, one of God's creations, and that is forbidden [haram]; and to do it while listening to a sermon, you know, that is especially bad: in the presence of Quranic verses, words about God and the prophets?" Then, cracking a smile, and making a gesture of resignation with his hands, he added: "Yes, of course I know I shouldn't do it, but sometimes I still do. That's the kind of times we're living in." While many of the people I met rejected cigarettes outright as haram, perhaps an equal number expressed views similar to Ahmad's.

Ahmad's brother, Hisham, who lived nearby with his wife and young child and who would drop by on occasion to listen to a tape, would criticize the group for not listening with the appropriate gravity. Hisham worked in the same plant as Ahmad, and the two of them would frequently undertake the one-hour bus trip to the work site together. He had spent many years in a sort of apprenticeship to a shaykh at a local mosque, where he had studied Quranic recitation (tajwid), the hadith, and various classical exegetical and doctrinal texts. Ahmad would often turn to him whenever he was unsure about the meaning of a particular Quranic verse, the correct form of a ritual act, or the validity of a statement made by a khattib on a tape. Hisham was particularly emphatic about questions of ritual practice, and, at our first meeting, spent twenty minutes explaining to me how most Egyptians fail to wash their ankles correctly when doing ablutions. He had begun listening to tapes while under the guidance of his shaykh. He greatly appreciated passionate oratory but also emphasized the benefit of more explicitly pedagogical tapes, those that provide information about such issues as the correct enactment of prayer, the responsibilities of husbands and wives, and the cleansing and burial of the dead, as well as on the proper interpretation of Quranic verses and hadiths. Given his taxing work schedule, Hisham could not devote as much time to his study with the shaykh as he used to, but he still liked to listen to sermon tapes in the evening together with his wife and children.
During one of his visits to Ahmad's house, Hisham commented that "most people only listen [yasma'] to tapes, whereas to really benefit from them you need to listen carefully [yunsit—literally, to incline one's ear toward] to the preacher's words." The distinction invoked by Hisham is most commonly elaborated in relation to the audition of the Quran. The two terms he contrasts (yasma' and yunsit), for example, often appear in those fatwā (nonbinding legal opinions, sing. fatwa) concerned with the proper attitude and state of mind to be assumed when listening to recitations of the Quran. The following, taken from an official publication of al-Azhar fatwā, is characteristic:

One need listen intently [yunsit] rather than just hear [yasma'], so it is done with intention [gasd wa niyya], and directing the senses [hiss] to the words in order to understand them, to comprehend their intentions and their meanings. As far as hearing [al-sam'], it is what occurs without intention. Close attention [al-insat] entails a stillness [sukun] in order to listen so as not to be distracted by surrounding words. . . God ordered man to listen to the Quran with attention . . . [and] listening intently is the means to ponder over [tadabbar] the meanings of the Quran. . . . It is a duty on all Muslims to educate themselves, and be guided by the etiquette [adabi] of al-Quran.

(MAKHLOF 1950)

"Listening with attention," al-insat, is figured here as a complex sensory skill, one opposed to mere hearing (sam'), understood as a passive and spontaneous receptivity. According to Hisham, such was the kind of attentiveness appropriate to those moments when one's heart is inclined toward God, as should be the case in sermon listening: "Many people in Egypt listen to sermon tapes for entertainment [ka tasliya], as if it were popular music, or they play a tape while doing something else, driving a car, or selling groceries: they don't really follow the sermon with their hearts.

Ahmad disagreed with Hisham. While he concurred that some concentration was required, he argued that the state of ethical receptivity that enabled one to benefit from tape audition did not demand the sort of active concentration indicated by Hisham: "Of course, if you listen as one would read a newspaper or watch the television, distractedly or indifferently, which many do, then the benefit is much less. What is most important, however, is to listen with humility [khushu'], with a pious fear [bi'il-taqa']. If you listen with a sensitive heart, filled with humility and faith [iman], then even if you are momentarily distracted, or the phone rings, or your thoughts stray for a moment, you will still benefit [tastafid minu]. And if the shaykh is good, he will incite in you these feelings, and keep you close to God." Thus, for Ahmad, sermon tapes afford the listener a type of relaxation from which one can nonetheless expect an enriching of one's knowledge and a purifying operation on the soul. For people like Ahmad, tapes enable a strengthening of the will and what many people refer to as an ability to resist the devil's whispers (wasawis). With repeated and sensitive listening, they can also help lead a listener to change his or her ways. In short, for Ahmad and others, listening to sermon tapes is understood as a means by which a range of Islamic virtues could be sedimented in one's character, enabling one to live more piously and avoid moral transgressions.

For many sermon listeners, the regular practice of audition also serves as a constant reminder to monitor their behavior for vices and virtues. Tapes help one to maintain a level of self-scrutiny (muraqaba) in regard to one's day-to-day activities and, when possible, to change or modify one's behavior. As Beha, a taxi driver with whom I would often exchange sermon tapes, told me:

One of the main things gained from listening is that one is reminded what Islam really entails. It then becomes more likely that one will correct one's behavior and be guided from one's state of being astray. See, I am not very Islamic [pointing to his cigarette], I smoke, but when I hear these things on tape, I am encouraged, steered toward correct practice [a'mal saliha]. I gain enthusiasm [hamas] for doing what is right.

Beha lived in Imbaba, which is one of the poorest quarters of Cairo and is often viewed as a hotbed of Islamic militancy (see chapter 4, note 35). He frequently put in eighteen-hour days behind the wheel in an attempt to feed his wife and two kids, and on such long days sermon tapes were his constant companion. As his comments suggest, Beha recognized that he often acted in ways that contradicted what he held to be morally appropriate behavior. While he viewed such contradictions as moral lapses of greater and lesser degrees, they were lapses he sought to overcome within a teleological process of learning, one that included, among other things, the audition of sermon tapes. Many of the young men I worked with in Egypt related their decision to become diligent in the performance of their Islamic duties to having been moved by a particularly powerful sermon, heard either on tape or live at the mosque.
There are other pleasures and benefits that sermon tapes provide as well. For example, for those who work in public transportation, sermon audition may simultaneously help them to achieve a state of closeness to God and allow them to remain calm and relaxed in the face of Cairo's maddening traffic conditions. As Beha commented on another occasion:

I listen to sermons while I am driving because it soothes and relaxes me. So I don't get upset and begin to shout at the other drivers. Reading the Quran is even better, but I can't read and drive. Sometimes music works as well, but sermons are better. They give you religious knowledge, and make me remember God when I get too caught up in making a living. When I hear the tape while I am driving, and the shaykh talks about the Quran, or the Prophet, or death, or the grave, then I start to remember that everything I do will be judged, that my money, work, children all will be gone, and I will be judged for my good works alone. Then I say 'I fear God in His Glory [ataq allaah 'azim].' "May God forgive me [astaghfor allah]." This gives me strength, and calms me and leaves my heart open [munsharih].

The tape produces in those already rightly disposed the sensorially rich experience of inshirah—the Quranic concept referring to the opening of the heart that accompanies drawing near to God—and in doing so, allows one to better meet the stress and monotony of urban labor. In contexts where reading the Quran or praying is impractical, a sermon tape on the Death of the Prophet or the Heavenly Pool of Kawthar that awaits the virtuous in the hereafter delivers diversion with a mild ethical elixir to the right place at the right time.

Muhammad Subhi, the khatib from whom I took lessons in the art of preaching for over a year, would often emphasize this calming and bolstering effect of recorded sermons, at least sermons by those khutaba' he considered masterful at the art.

Listening to the Quran or sermon tapes, it leads you to a state of relaxation, or sakina. What does sakina mean? It means the calm one feels knowing that only God can determine when one will die. A calm by which one can stand firm before all oppression. It means one can let the winds of the mass media blow—all their silly words about Islamic terrorists, the [Islamic militant organization] al-gama'at al-islamiyya, all the lies they throw out, all of the seductive images they surround us with—one can live in this swirl of falsehoods but not follow or be moved by them, remain calm and sure before them.

Here, the modulation of affect performed by the preacher on the tape enacts an ethical therapy on the listener, both relaxing the body and enhancing the listener's capacity for discernment in the face of moral danger—in Muhammad's example, the danger of being deceived by state propaganda and corrupted by impious entertainment. Muhammad, like many of those I worked with, would frequently put on a tape upon coming home from work after a day of frustrations and difficulties. The mechanical manipulation and modulation of affective-kinesthetic experience enacted by the tape made him feel, in his words, lighter, fresh, and relieved, and turned his thoughts to God and religion. In this way, cassette sermons offer a portable, self-administered technology of moral health and Islamic virtue, one easily adapted to the rhythms, movements, and social contexts characteristic of contemporary forms of work and leisure.

In addition, sermon tapes may even serve to automatically reorient the heart in relation to God when one has inadvertently committed a moral error. One of the men I met once while visiting Cairo University was a twenty-three-year-old student named Saif. Saif had grown up with sermons: his father had been a khatib, though he now worked as a censor (mufti) for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which sent him round to different mosques each week to ensure that preachers were not straying into “sensitive” (hassasi) topics. Despite his father’s official position, both Saif and his father emphasized to me the number of occasions their strong preference for the more oppositional khutaba’ associated with the da’wa movement. On one occasion Saif explained to me why he made a point of regularly listening to sermon tapes:

Let's say that you looked at a woman desirously during the day, without even being aware you were doing it. In other words, you committed an act of disobedience to God. You should immediately ask for God’s forgiveness, but let’s say you are rushing somewhere and by the time you get there you don’t even remember what you did. Well when you hear the shaykh in the bus on the way home talking about Judgment Day, or the tortures of the grave you get worried and start to fear. Your predicament becomes clear: you are going to die. You had forgotten to fear, and without it, you were probably preparing a place for yourself in hell. Then you will say, God, I seek
your forgiveness for my disobedience. Of course, you don’t need a tape to
this, and you should do it automatically. But the tape helps if you forget.
Especially if the tape is a really scary one.

Here, sermon media sustain one of the primary affective conditions of
virtuous conduct, an active fear of God, consumed as both ethics and en-
tertainment. As a device for the reanimation, modulation, and embodiment
of pious sensibilities, cassette technology may be seen as a prosthetic of the
modern virtuous subject: a mnemonic instrument that both enhances and
supplements the capacity for memory, ethical feeling, and moral discern-
ment while providing many of the pleasures of popular entertainment.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE QURAN

As I discuss in chapter 2, the utility of tape audition for the task of ethi-
cal self-improvement is founded on a language ideology foregrounding
the performative dimension of godly speech and its capacity to reform and at-
tune a rightly disposed heart. The effect of sermon speech on a “rusty
heart,” as the khatib and prolific writer on the craft of sermons, Ali Mah-
fuz, describes it, is not just one of cleansing. Sermons are understood to
evoke in the sensitive listener a particular set of ethical responses, foremost
among them, fear (khawf), humility (khushū’), regret (nadam), repentance
(tawbā), and tranquility (ittimān’ or sakina). These terms appeared con-
stantly in the descriptions of the people I worked with, as in the follow-
ing comment by Beha:

Tapes are always of benefit, whether on the torment of the grave (’adhab
al-qabr), Judgment Day [yawm al-qiyamah], death [al-мawt], on the most
dangerous of sins [kabā’ir], or the headscarf [hilāb]. You learn things you
didn’t know, and this is useful. And they restore you to [moral] health [bīyās-
hfiya]. Listening to a tape of a sermon you’ve already heard is a way of rein-
forcing what you’ve learned, strengthening the fear of God’s punishments,
s o you won’t commit a moral error [ma’āš]. This leaves your heart calm
[nīmūta’ın]. There are some people who just do what they should. Many
others, however, they realize that the devil [shaytān] has got into their heads
[yuwaswasu—literally, whispers to them], and is making them think that
what is evil [haram] is actually good [halāl]. By listening, they strengthen
themselves against this, as it gets them to pray and read the Quran. Then
they begin to regret [nadam] what they have done, and ask God for forgive-
ness [istighfar]. The tape, in other words, helps them to fight [bījahidūnā]
against the devil.

As elaborated within classical Islamic moral doctrine, the affective disposi-
tions Beha describes that endow a believer’s heart with the capacities of
moral discrimination necessary for proper conduct (see Fakhry 1983; Izutsu
1966, 1968; Shehīr 1975). They are both virtues and states of emotional recep-
tivity and response. Traditional texts on the task of moral refinement (tah-
idh al-nafs) elaborate these dispositions extensively, as does contemporary
daw’a literature. In order to understand how this terminology of ethical af-
fect was employed by the men I worked with, however, it will be useful to
draw on some of the contemporary writings that they themselves used and
frequently referred to. The following discussion comes from an article pub-
lished in al-Tawḥīd, a monthly journal put out by the da’wa association al-
’Āsara al-Sunnah al-Muḥammadīyya, and often purchased or referred to by
those I worked with. The article focuses on the effect of particular Quranic
verses, when used by a khatib, on the moral condition of a faithful Muslim
listener. Drawing from the exegetical works of classical scholars in regard to
the interpretation of a verse from the Quranic chapter entitled “al-Zumar”
(The thorngs), the author notes:

What is meant here is that when the true people of faith, the people of the
ternal and deeply rooted doctrine [al-’aqīda] hear the verses of warning
[al-wa’id], their flesh trembles in fear, their hearts are filled with despair
[īnqabādat quilabhum], a violent angst shakes their backs [irta’ādat far’ī
dsahum], and their hearts become intoxicated with fear and dread. But if
they then hear the verses of mercy [al-rāhīma] and forgiveness [istighfar],
their flesh becomes filled with delight [inbasatul jilubhum], their chests
are opened and relaxed [insharahāt sūdrūhum], and their hearts are left
tranquil [ittimā’ annat quilubhum].

(Radawi 1996b:11–12)

What is described here is a kind of moral physiology, the affective-kin-
esthetic experience of a body permeated by faith (iman) when listening to
a khatib’s discourse. The description is derived directly from numerous
verses of the Quran depicting the impact of godly speech on a rightly dis-
posed listener, as in the following verse from the chapter entitled “al-Anfāl”
(Spoils of war): “Believers are only they whose hearts tremble whenever
God is mentioned, and whose faith is strengthened whenever his messages are conveyed unto them” (Quran 8:2). This particular responsiveness constitutes what might be termed a Qur'anically tuned body and soul. This attunement, according to Badawi, is a characteristic of a person who is close to God. For such a person, auditory reception involves the flesh, back, chest, and heart—in short, the entire moral person as a unity of body and soul. To listen properly, one might say, is to engage in a performance, the articulated gestures of a dance.

The moral physiology that is invoked and refined in the context of sermon listening is elaborated in a plethora of visually striking images, found both in the Quran and in a vast body of exegetical and ethical writings. Note, for example, the author’s description above of how one relaxes in the process of hearing the verses of mercy and thus moves closer to God. The term used both here and by those I worked with in Cairo to denote this state of calm and relaxation is insirah (literally, opening of the chest). As an ethical concept indicating the joyous relaxation that often follows acts of supplication or seeking forgiveness, it embeds strong affective and kinesthetic contours: to convey its meaning to others almost always involves an act of opening up the arms, raising and relaxing the chest, turning the face upward. The experience of insirah has its origins in an event mentioned both in the Quran (in the chapter entitled al-Sharh) and in many hadiths. It is recounted that on the night of the Prophet Muhammad’s ascension to heaven (al-isra), God opened his chest and took from his heart all the resentment, rancor, and lust and replaced them with virtues of faith and knowledge. The account, in other words, connects the purity of the soul with the powerful image of God opening up the chest—what Muhammad, the khatib I studied with, described to me as a “surgical operation” (‘amaliyya jirahiyat). This connection provides the authoritative textual basis upon which a particular pattern of gestural and kinesthetic reponse is both conceptually and experientially linked to a moral state (insirah). For insomuch as the reading—or rather, recitation—of the event occurs within the disciplinary context of a Quranic education, it contributes to the training and inculcation of sensory habits. The account is not a dispassionate description but a story whose contours are learned with the body, in all of its kinesthetic and synaesthetic dimensions.

THE GESTURAL SUBJECT

In order to deepen this inquiry into such affective-gestural aptitudes and their place within contemporary practices of sermon listening in Egypt, I want to draw on one of the most interesting and neglected figures of early-twentieth-century anthropology, Marcel Jousse. Jousse had the good fortune to have studied under two of the most fertile thinkers of his generation on questions of thought and human embodiment, the pathological psychologist Pierre Janet and the sociologist Marcel Mauss. Based on his ethnological study of traditions of recitation in preliterate societies, Jousse came to formulate a theoretical account for the stylistic features common to oral genres. He was particularly fascinated by the prevalence of rhythmic gestures among storytellers and reciters, and he eventually came to see mimetic gesture as fundamental to both speech and memory:

All reception, internal or external, triggers in the organism “a complexus of which kinesthetic elements [ocular, auricular, manual, etc. . . . gestures] form the stable resistant portion . . . they ensure continuity. When our past experiences [our gesticulations] are submerged in us, they nevertheless subsist and are even active (facts prove this). What remains of them if not that portion which is their "support tissue," which most easily does without consciousness? It is this [this infinitude of past gestures lying under the threshold of consciousness and setting each other off] that makes possible [revivification] of past states and the totality of their multiple connections.” (Jousse [1925] 1990:27)

Jousse’s ideas bear the imprint of the physiology of vibration that oriented much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinking on the senses and that was largely inspired by Isaac Newton’s work on vision. Language and consciousness are constructed upon a substrate of rhythmic motions, determined both by the mnemonic faculties of the senses and the dynamics of bodily rhythms (respiration, pulse, heartbeat, and so on). Humans are “essentially balancing, undulating beings” (Jousse [1925] 1990: xx), awash with pulsations and reflexes through which the body registers its involvement in its sensory surroundings. The “human compound,” as Jousse glosses the indivisible unity of body and mind, is the product of a complex dance of rhythmic gestures, or “gesticulations,” the motor actions by which the body “intussuspects” the world it inhabits, incorporating what is outside within it. These gesticulations traverse the entire human organism in its diverse physiological, psychological, and autonomic modes of functioning, from the motions of the sense organs (ocular reflexes, auricular vibrations), to the movement of the muscles and limbs, to the unfoldings of thought. Memories are precisely these “gestural reviviscenses,” this repetition of past
receptions for which the body in its sensory entirety has served as medium. Memory, in other words, is not built upon ideas, and much less upon visual images, but rather on the reactivation of gestures, understood as the sensory sediments of prior perceptions. It is founded, we might say, on the body's potential for reproducing its sensorimotor past without the mediation of thought, as in such activities as walking, or riding a bicycle. 

While particular percepts might recruit some parts of the sensorium more than other parts—as when one has been trained to attend to a very limited range of sensory experience, such as in modern academic reading—to at least some extent, the organ of reception remains the body in its entirety. Jousse uses the example of a spectator to a fencing match:

"Without our knowing it, all that we see projects itself instantaneously into our musculature" (Verriest: 46). "As a spectator at a fencing session follows the movements of attack and defense, each one of these movements repeats itself with lightning rapidity in his own musculature. Motor waves run through his whole body; in his person he fights, attacks, fords off, wins or succumbs. The associated sensation of ease and well-being at the right movement, of embarrassment and pain at the wrong movement are felt by him in the same way as by the fencers themselves" (4.4).

(Joussse [1925] 1990:24)

The mimetic reception of the event involves the sensorium in its entirety, entwining proprioception with various forms of synaesthetic experience—the patterned interconnections of touch, vision, hearing, smell, and taste that tend to remain outside of awareness in adult perception. These gesticulations, as Jousse labels them, constitute a substrate of latent tendencies, dispositions toward certain kinds of action operating independently of conscious thought. As sensory memory, these tendencies may be reactivated with greater or lesser degrees of intensity, from fully elaborated gestures and movements, perceptible to others, to gesticulations that are merely "sketched," as in acts of imagination (Joussse [1925] 1990:29). Generally, however, they remain outside of consciousness, present as a sensory background, the body's affective involvement with the world that forms the constitutive outside of our consciously directed actions.

While aspects of Jousse's physiology are now outdated, his expanded notion of the gestural provides a particularly useful tool for thinking about

the practice of ethical sermon listening I am concerned with here. Within the Joussian analytic, oratorical performances are viewed in their capacity to organize the sensorium, to install and attune affective-gestural potentialities at the level of sensorimotor processes, within the mnemonic folds of visceral, kinesthetic, and tactile experience. Jouss' exploration of the way speech and audition work to sculpt the body extends a line of inquiry opened up by his mentor, Marcel Mauss. For Mauss, as Talal Asad notes, the human body was not to be viewed simply as the passive recipient of "cultural imprints," still less as the active source of "natural expressions" that are clothed in local history and culture, as though it were a matter of an inner character expressed in a readable sign, so that the latter could be used as a means of deciphering the former. It was to be viewed as the developable means for achieving a range of human objectives, from styles of physical movement (e.g. walking), through modes of emotional being (e.g. composure), to kinds of spiritual experience (e.g. mystical states).

(T. Asad 1993:176)

Following leads opened up by Jouss' provocative notion of gesture, I want to think of sermon listening as a practice predicated on the developability of the body as an auditory instrument. To "hear with the heart," as those I worked with described this activity, is not strictly something cognitive but involves the body in its entirety, as a complex synthesis of patterned moral reflexes. Indeed, as I describe below, the imaginative response evoked in the course of sermon audition runs along a progression from full-voiced interjections and dramatic gestural movements, to whispering and subtle postural shifts, to a slight moving of the lips and tongue, to an apparently invisible response, with all gradations in between. Listening invests the body with affective potentialities, depositing them in the preconscious folds of kinesthetic and synaesthetic experience and, in doing so, endows it with the receptive capacities of the sensitive heart, the primary organ of moral knowledge and action. Importantly, Islamic ethical traditions give explicit recognition to this kind of somatic learning, as we see in Badawi's invocation of the faithful listeners whose "flesh trembles," who are seized by "a violent angst [that] shakes their backs," whose "chests are opened and relaxed." Contemporary sermon listening, in other words, inherits and extends a practical tradition for the formation of a pious sensorium.
THE RECITALATIONAL BODY

To flesh out the perspective I am developing here, it is useful to examine some of the body techniques deployed in the context of Quranic recitation, especially as they both inform the practice of sermon audition and depart from it in certain crucial aspects. All of my informants had memorized portions of the Quran and learned at least the rudimentary skills of recitation by the time of adolescence, either through lessons at Quran schools for children known as kattab (sing. kuttab), in classes within the secular public school system, or under direct tutelage from their fathers and mothers. A few only began to learn it as young adults when, like many Egyptians of their generation, they came to see Islamic practices as increasingly important to their lives. The recitational techniques taught today are founded upon longstanding Islamic traditions, and even the most popularized literature on the practice relies heavily on classical models found in medieval sources. While such works provide instruction in a particular tradition of vocal performance, the performance itself is understood to involve a kind of audition, insomuch as a skilled reciter should attempt to “hear the speech of God from God and not from [the voice of the reciter] himself” (A. H. al-Ghazali 1984:80).

Among the demands of this audition cited by the eleventh-century theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali are both practices of mental concentration and a variety of affective, gestural, and verbal responses, some of which require the listener to assume the ethical dispositions corresponding to the recited or audited verses: humility, awe, regret, fear, and so on. Al-Ghazali elaborates this in terms of “fulfilling the right [al-haqq]” of the verses:

Thus when the Quran reader reads a verse necessitating prostration before God, he will prostrate himself. Likewise, if he hears [the recitation of] a verse of prostration by another person he will prostrate himself when the reciter prostrates. He will prostrate only when he is physically and ritually clean. . . . Its perfect form is for him to utter allaahu akbar [God is Great] and then prostrate himself and, while prostrate, supplicate with that supplication which is appropriate to the verse of prostration recited. (1984:44–45)

For al-Ghazali, listeners and reciters must feel the emotion appropriate to each verse, foremost among them, fear.

Whenever the Quran reader’s knowledge [of the meaning of the verses recited] is perfect his fear will be the most predominant of the states of his soul . . . when reading a verse which warns and restricts divine forgiveness to those who fulfill certain stipulations, he will make himself so small as if for fear he is about to die. When a verse on the promise of forgiveness is recited he will rejoice as if he flies for joy. When God, His attribute and names are mentioned, he will bow his head in submission to His majesty and in awareness of His greatness. When he reads a verse on the infidels’ belief in an impossible thing for God (great and mighty is He)—e.g. their belief that God (great and mighty is He!) has a child and a consort—he will lower his voice and be broken hearted in bashfulness because of the evil of what they have believed.

The word of God demands a range of ethical performances from the reciter/listener. She must not only seek to understand God’s message, in the cognitive sense; she must also make herself into an adequate “host” for the presence of divine words, by bodying forth the attitudes and expressions corresponding to the verses heard or recited. Through practice, she must make her body and heart into an instrument capable of resonating (re-sounding) the words she submits to (see chapter 2 for an elaboration of the ethical and doctrinal bases of this model). Training in such skills begins in earliest infancy, as the interwoven practices of audition, memorization, and recitation are central to the ethical upbringing of children in Egypt. Parents, upon introducing me to their children, would commonly ask a child to recite part of a sura (a chapter of the Quran) he or she had mastered. Beyond such instruction, however, the Quran—as well as other traditional Islamic genres such as hadiths, qisas (Islamic stories), and siyar (biographies of Muhammad and other early Muslim figures)—are woven into much of daily life, with verses often punctuating the succession of devotional, ritual, public, and family activities occurring in the course of a day (Graham 1987; Schimmel 1994). Moreover, just as individual Quranic verses invoke ethical responses, so also do ethical situations often give rise to the citation of verses, whether in acts of giving advice, instructing children, making decisions, or arguing a point, particularly among those Egyptian Muslims more observant of the demands of piety. In this sense, the Quranically tuned body, with its repertoires of affect and expression, makes possible the form
of pious sociability that the Islamic Revival has sought to enhance and extend, a phenomenon the next chapter explores at length.

While sermon audition facilitates the development and formation of the virtues, the practice is distinct from Quranic recitation and other disciplinary programs geared to this task. Inasmuch as sermon tapes are used as a kind of background or environmental sound, attended to in a relaxed manner, often with shifting degrees of focus, their reception needs to be theorized at the level of the somatic more than the programmatic. Instead of the fully elaborated sequences of gesture, speech, and bodily movement that accompany the act of Quranic recitation, tapes produce a modulation of affect registered kinesthetically and viscerally, one experienced as an ethically enhancing form of relaxation. In this sense, what is acquired through the practice are less honed dispositions, moral skills as delineated and organized within disciplinary regimes, than the somatic and affective potentialities from which such dispositions draw sustenance.

This point can be usefully elaborated by drawing on a distinction made by Brian Massumi (2002) between affect and emotion. Massumi reserves the term “affect” to describe the myriad emotional movements within the body occurring below or outside of consciousness, the vast sea of emotionally charged perceptual responses that traverse the body without being assimilated as subjective content (2002:27–28). Affects are part of the pre-subjective interface of the body with the sensory world it inhabits, a linkage registered at the level of the visceral, the proprioceptive, and other sites where memory lodges itself in the body. (While I write these words at an outdoor café, a bird lands on the table in front of me. I casually watch the staccato motions it makes with its head. Each of these jerky movements rebounds off of my neck and upper body as a sort of shock wave. Now imagine a similar pulsation, though one carrying ethical potential, say the “shock wave” that accompanies a reaction of moral disgust.) Emotion, on the other hand, refers to culturally qualified affect, affect elaborated and codified within sociolinguistic frames, inscribed within scripted action-reaction circuits, and made the property of a subject inhabiting a world of constituted objects and goals (Massumi 2002:26). “Khusush” or “taqwā”, the Islamic virtues with strong affective dimensions that I mentioned above, are examples of such discursively defined emotional content.

Cassette-sermon listening may be seen as just such a strategy. In their ability to mold both soundscapes and human receptivity, sermon tapes help fashion and sustain the sensory conditions for a modern Islamic ethics. One of my key arguments in this book is that such undisciplined disciplines play a far more pervasive role in shaping traditions, both religious and secular, than their more “serious” (rigorous and systematic) counterparts.

In order that the claim I am making not be misunderstood, let me clarify one point. Some readers might object that the analysis of cassette listening I am suggesting here rests on a generic model of human perception, one of questionable universality. This is not my argument. As I have shown, the practice of sermon listening is informed by those Islamic traditions of ethical cultivation that highlight the role of affective, kinesthetic, and gestural modalities of bodily experience within processes of ethical learning—those
tions, in other words, that take the sensorium as an object of pedagogy and ethical attunement. My recourse to such theorists as Marcel Jousser and Brian Massumi, in this regard, is to sharpen our appreciation of certain aspects of these traditions rarely attended to by scholars of ethics—not to demonstrate the universal validity of the perceptual models these thinkers articulate. I should also point out, however, that the theoretical accounts of sensory experience I have drawn upon have clear filiations as far back as Greek harmonic and vibrational theories, theories that also shaped the development of Islamic traditions of philosophical and mystical inquiry (see Carruthers 1990; Chittick 1989).

LISTENING AS PERFORMANCE

A more detailed look at the sensory elements of this active and ethical listening practice is needed. Many of the protocols of sermon audition are transferred over from the live context in the mosque to the cassette, though in attenuated and abbreviated form. At times, one follows the ethical movements of the sermon with its appropriate gestural, vocal, and subvocal responses with some sort of automaticity and spontaneity by which commuters intone popular radio hits with only a vague awareness they are doing so. The more times one has heard a particular sermon tape, the more one enacts its demands without the support of conscious thought. To begin with, the sermon necessitates a voiced or subvocal accompaniment, as listeners are repeatedly required to enact a range of illocutionary acts. The preamble is a collective utterance composed of acts of remembrance (dhikr), praise (thana’), and supplication (du’a’). While the khatib provides the guiding vocalization for these acts, it is incumbent on the audience to accompany him in this with their hearts, an act that often involves the mumbled or whispered utterance of the appropriate devotional formulas. The preeminent khatib Shaykh Kishk on occasion called on his audience to repeat word for word the invocations he recited or, more frequently, had them repeat one phrase over and over (such as “I seek forgiveness from God”), exploiting the pathetic momentum such rhythmic repetitions evoke in an audience.

Listeners also must be ready to pronounce the basmala (“In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful”) each time the khatib begins to recite a verse from the Quran and the call for prayers upon the Prophet (“God bless him and grant him salvation”) each time his name is mentioned. Additionally, throughout a sermon listeners are frequently enjoined to vocalize a wide variety of supplicatory locutions, or du’a’, that relate to the argument the khatib is making or the situation he is describing. For example, in warning his audience about the dangers of gossip (ghaba) or backbiting (naminga), a khatib will call on them to implore God for forgiveness from moral error. When lecturing them on a topic such as proper burial technique, he will have them ask God to increase their knowledge, to lessen the agonies of dying, or to illuminate the darkness of their graves. While discussing the plight of Muslims in Chechnya, he will pause to have the audience ask protection for Muslims who face affliction elsewhere in the world, for the defeat of their enemies, for the strength to persevere through the hardships they suffer. The popular khatib Umar Abd al-Kafi punctuates his sermons with such rapid-fire enjoiners, continuously recruiting his listeners to vocally and morally participate in the oratory he performs. In the context of cassette audition, listeners may respond with clearly audible utterances, with whispers, with a silent movement of the lips, or without visible or audible gesture. When the response of tape listeners passes the threshold of audibility, it may simply consist of an abbreviated acclamatory expression, such as “amin” (amen), or a longer phrase repeating the verb invoked in the supplication (“strengthen us, defeat them . . . ”).

The final section of a sermon is composed solely of such acts of supplication, strung one after another by the khatib in a rhythmic crescendo that gathers emotional momentum as it proceeds. During the live performance at the mosque, this is the point when the pathos of the audience reaches its peak, and it is not uncommon at this point for the entire assembly to weep without restraint. While a particularly moving du’a will also often provoke tears among cassette listeners, the intensity of the expression is relatively less in the absence of the emotional dynamics put in play by a large crowd. Nonetheless, many of the men I worked with appreciated this section of the sermon for the ethical-affective progression it could initiate, leaving them with a sense of closeness to God and the accompanying experience of relief and tranquility (itmi’nan and sakina). As I have argued, this should not be thought of through a generic, psychophysiological model of catharsis but as an experience of moral relief whose specific contours have been honed through a range of ethical practices, including sermon audition itself. The listener, for example, must have cultivated the capacity for humility and regret: these are both felicity conditions (in Austin’s [1994] sense) for the act of supplication as well as soma-ethical conditions for the body’s experience of itmi’nan, the relief and kinesthetic relaxation that follows—via regret and repentance (nadam and istighfar)—from such an act. If these
conditions are not met, then the listener will not be able to adopt the attitudes, the dispositions of the heart, upon which successful and beneficial acts of audition devolve. One's listening, in short, will be impaired.

Much of the substance of sermons is drawn from those pieces of text that form the common stock of cultural wisdom: Quranic verses, hadiths, biographies of the Prophet, accounts of the lives of early Muslims, and various traditional story genres that have been elaborated on the basis of these primary sources. Sermon listeners come to the sermon already familiar with many of these narratives, though sermons are also one of the contexts where new ones are learned. As with storytelling in other cultural contexts, the listening pleasure found in such narratives does not reside in the presentation of something entirely new but in the effective and stirring performance of a known account, one interpreted and revised through its retelling in a new narrative context. Often while a group of us were listening to a tape, for example, on the signs that precede and indicate the arrival of the Day of Judgment, a person would note with interest and satisfaction that he had never before heard a particular detail mentioned by the khatib, such as the blue eye of the Antichrist (al-masih al-dajjal) or the sun turning red. Saif, the Cairo University student, would on occasion tell me with surprise and skepticism about a particular rendition of the eschaton recounted by the khatib at his mosque during the Friday sermon. A few times, when the issue had really piqued his curiosity, he went and either checked in a book on the subject or asked the shaykh in his mosque.

Knowledge of these Islamic narrative forms, as the sermon listeners I knew visibly demonstrated in explaining the sermons to me, consists not simply in the ability to recite a given text, but also in performing its emotional, gestural, and kinesthetic contours, the bodily conditions of the text as memory. While listening to taped sermons with these men, they would often interrupt with comments and gestures intended to help me understand the particular hadith or story being recounted by the khatib, sometimes stopping the tape to elaborate in more detail or introduce relevant passages from the Quran or other traditional textual sources. In doing so, they would bring a common expressive-gestural repertoire to their explanations: in the context of recounting a hadith, the narrowness of the grave (a common sermon topic) is expressed by a drawing up of the shoulders; the exit of the soul from the neck of a good man is distinguished from that of an infidel by the smoothness of the hand movement tracing the passage and the relaxed muscles of the face and hand, which are tightened and contorted in the case of the infidel; encounters with respected Muslim figures in heaven are accompanied by the joyful relaxation of the chest, the upward glance of delight. The events surrounding Judgment Day, a very common sermon topic on which many khutabah have produced extensive cassette series (drawn either from sermons or mosque lessons), all have a strong gestural component: the grasping of the book of one's deeds from above the right or left shoulder; the testifying of the individual parts of one's body as to the deeds they have committed; the binding of the hands by the guards of hell. While these stories all have a striking visual intensity, they are in fact rarely given visual representation; their most visible aspect therefore lies in the gestures and emotional expressions that accompany their verbal performance. The narratives are rooted in physically grounded imagery, insomuch as their ethical dimensions have affective and bodily correlates. It is the sensual experience of the body accustomed to such performances that attunes the heart to their appropriate reception. A listener does not enact the performance, but his experienced body shapes his response and reception of it. Recall Jousse's spectator to a fencing match, whose nerves and muscles register each gesture of attack and defense, of humiliation and victory.

The stock of Islamic narrative forms that provide the raw material for many sermons also has a strong bilateralism, each gestural text having its right- and left-side variants, the former always associated with moral probity in accord with classical Islamic body schema. Thus, the angel that counts one's good deeds sits on the right shoulder, the one counting evil deeds on the left; a virtuous person will take the book of his deeds from his right on Judgment Day as he or she stands before God, the sinner from the left. The positive valence given to the right side within Islamic societies extends to a vast range of activities, a pattern scholars have frequently noted in other societies as well (see Hertz 1909; Needham 1973). This includes devotional acts such as ablutions and prayer, where each movement is specified in terms of the bilateral axis: the Quran is held only with the right hand; one looks first to the right after completing prayer; for ablutions, the limb on the right is washed first then the left. All sorts of mundane daily actions also incorporate right/left organization: one enters the house with the right foot but the bathroom with the left, one must wash the teeth of a corpse only using the right hand, and so on. On many occasions, someone would correct me for having entered a room with my left foot instead of my right, or picking up the Quran with my left hand. This bilateral training of the body and the repertoires of gesture, movement, and speech learned in accord with such a coding were further conditions shaping the sensory orientation of listeners to the narrative fragments composing a sermon.
Notably, the young men I knew in Cairo did not always agree with each other in regard to the truth status of some of the accounts commonly found in sermons. Often, for example, one person would refer to a narrative element (such as the throne of God) as a symbol (ramz or kinaya), while another would claim it as “real” (haqiqa), though in a way beyond human comprehension (bila kaf). The student Saif would often describe as “metaphors” those parts of a sermon he understood to be somewhat far-fetched: for example, the writing of the word “infidel” on the forehead of the Antichrist, or the blackening of the heart that follows from sin. In contrast, Ahmad and his brother Hisham, as well as most of the khatibs themselves, insisted that these were statements of literal truth. In some instances, one informant might not know the meaning of some of the key terms used by the khatib. Yet despite these differences of opinion and comprehension, all of the young men I worked with would mimetically represent the narratives from which these elements were drawn in more or less the same way, including the corresponding facial and postural expressions of fear, delight, or tranquility. I do not mean to imply that these differences of interpretation are insignificant. Indeed, arguments about the ontological status of Quranic references have been extremely consequential throughout Islamic history. What I am pointing to here is that beneath the level of expressed belief and opinion, those I knew who participated in sermon listening shared a common substrate of embodied dispositions of the sort I have described as instrumental to the task of sermon audition. It is these sensory dispositions, I argue, more than a commitment to a normative rationality, that constitute the common ground upon which the discourses of a tradition come to be articulated, the “reflexes” that make arguments about the status of Quranic references meaningful and worthy of engagement.

THE LIGHTNESS OF ELECTRONIC VIRTUE

When I first asked the khatib Muhammad Subhi what he thought about the fashion of cassette-sermon listening and its contribution to al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Revival movement), of which he considered himself to be an active proponent, he responded, much to my surprise: “They’re not important. How can tapes be important when the people who listen to them will turn around and deny they do so!” This response made little sense to me at the time, though I assumed the reference to denial had to do with the fact that in the context of the current government crackdown, many people had become more circumspect about the practice, fearing it might make them appear suspicious in the eyes of the police. The comment became even less comprehensible as I got to know Muhammad and discovered that he not only avidly listened to sermon tapes himself but had also recorded many of his own for personal use and to give to friends. It was only much later, after having encountered a range of preoccupations concerning the practice, that I came to understand his criticism as reflecting an aporia within the practice engendered by the cassette medium itself, though one also related to the broader reorganization of Islamic authority I describe in the previous chapter.

Among listeners, this aporia was usually expressed in terms of a skepticism about the efficacy of the practice. As with modernity’s other popular technologies of the self, such as Eight-Minute Abs or learning Chinese subliminally while you sleep, the beneficial effects of recorded sermons often didn’t live up to initial expectations. One of the men who expressed such a view was Ahmad’s friend Ibrahim, who I mentioned in chapter 1 together with his sister Huda. Ahmad and Ibrahim had both graduated from the geography department at Ain Shams University and had participated in the same Islamic study group during the period of their studies. Unlike Ahmad, however, Ibrahim had a solid job waiting for him after graduation at a publishing company where his father served as acting director. His father had studied business back in the 1960s and had been fortunate enough to secure a position consonant with his level of education, a rare accomplishment in contemporary Egypt.

During one of my visits to Ibrahim’s house, he told me of his initial enthusiasm for and subsequent disappointment with sermon tapes:

When you first hear a tape by Abd al-Hamid Kishk or Muhammad Hassan, you feel very enthusiastic, enthusiastic for Islam, for doing right, visiting my relatives, encouraging others to stop disobeying God. I used to listen all the time, always giving tapes to friends, telling them we should go to the mosque together. Now I still like to listen sometimes but it is not as important to me as it was before. I mean, there is clearly benefit in sermon listening, and moreover you get merits with God in doing so, but unless you pray regularly and read the Quran often, the benefit will be limited. That’s the way it is most of the time: someone will hear a really moving sermon on the afterlife or the grave. It will scare them and strengthen their resolve to do good. Then you see them a few days later and they have gone back to the way they were.

Many listeners expressed similar concerns that the effects of the practice might not extend beyond the moment of listening itself. Indeed, an
ambivalence regarding the practice is evident in the way the notion of the tape recorder is used metaphorically in popular speech. As a figure used to designate a specific human quality, for example, it carries both positive and negative valences, suggesting a prodigious capacity of memory, on the one hand, but a kind of learning that remains somewhat superficial on the other. Tapes are good for you, but the benefits may be insubstantial and short-lived.

This concern was raised with far more urgency and intensity by khutaba'. One of the signs that many people take as evidence of a khātib's virtuosity is an ability to move an audience to tears. Weeping has an important place within Islamic devotional practices as a kind of emotional response appropriate for both men and women when, with humility, fear, and love, they turn to God. Many khutaba' today, however, are concerned that people are crying during sermons for the wrong reasons. Note, for example, the following remark by the popular Egyptian khātib Fawzi Said, made in response to a question by an audience member during one of his mosque lessons about why he didn't do more to evoke the passions of his listeners in his sermons:

Lots of people today just look forward to crying during sermons; they feel they are being cleansed, like Christians at baptism. But the sermon that just leads you to cry doesn't imprint upon the heart. It doesn't get people to change their actions. It is only through a careful engagement with the texts, reading the Qur'an and hadith literature, that knowledge gets rooted in the heart. Not that the sentiments are unimportant; but many people no longer know why they are crying.

Said's manner of distinguishing sentiment from action signals a rupture within the Aristotelian foundations of the practice of ethical listening. As I note above, the model of cultivation invoked by those who undertake the practice is premised on a notion of affect as integral to action. Sadness (huzn), humility (khushū'), and pious fear (khawf or taqwa) are not internal, subjective states appropriate to the performance of certain actions. They are actions in and of themselves. As an attribute of character, khawf entails and is expressed through the performance of a vast range of ethical actions, from prayer, to giving alms, to visiting one's parents. To perform these actions without khawf, to walk away from a group of acquaintances drinking alcohol impelled by something other than pious fear, is to do it incorrectly, poorly. To have pious fear and drink alcohol is not to have pious fear, or to have an inadequately developed capacity for it.

In short, Said's comment registers a breakdown in the continuity that binds affect to action, and thus in the tradition of the virtues from which that model is derived. The anxiety it gives voice to, and that informs Muhammad Subhi's offhanded dismissal of the practice, is bound up with the cassette medium itself. As I note in chapter 2, the cassette removed the sermon from the structures of authority and discipline that previously grounded its ethical functioning. As a result, the "machinery of affect" mobilized by the sermon is now truly a machine, one only contingently related to a subject who operates it on his or her own prerogative (see Keane [1997, 2002] on affect and materiality). This displacement not only separates the affects from the institutional moorings that ensured their ethical cultivation, but also from the subject itself: "people no longer know why they are crying," for the production of the tears is now determined by the functional possibilities of cassette technology. Tapes exteriorize an entire circulatory system that had remained invisible, submerged within the practical and institutional conditions of community life. Floating free of subjects, cassette piety is now left to the whims of subjective appropriation, or equally possible, as Muhammad Subhi noted, simply denied.

This displacement effected by the cassette also contributes to a broader epistemological crisis within the oral tradition of which the sermon is a part: for Said, writing (and reading) must be called in to guarantee the validity of the oral forms of knowledge, a particularly surprising gesture for a khātib to make and one reflecting the status of written texts within the contemporary economy of meaning. Saif and Ahmad would often tell me that the best way to confirm the validity of a khātib's assertion was to "check in books" [wa'akidu fi kutub], though exactly how one might do so and with which books remained notably vague. Calls for textual fact checking, in other words, revealed more about epistemological tensions within the ethical project of da'wa than about actual procedures undertaken.

These fissures within the practice of sermon audition frequently emerged in conversations I had with Muhammad Subhi and other khutaba'. In a discussion on the problems of preaching today, for example, Muhammad noted:

When people today listen, they hear about Judgment Day and the torment of hell and they feel relieved and exalted [intishā']. Intishā' is what you experience when you drink alcohol and feel that all of the pressures and difficulties of your life have been lifted. Or when you hear a really beautiful song, that touches all of your emotions [awatif wa masha'ir] and sensibilities [ihsās]. You feel a kind of comfort and relief [tanfisa], a calm [raha], a kind
of catharsis [katharsis]: this is intishā'. If I am a Muslim, when I listen to the Quran or a sermon on tape I feel this relief [naswahā]. But things must not stop at this feeling, as so often happens. It must be transformed into part of one's practical reality.

Much like Fawzi Said, Muhammad worries about the disjunct between affect and action, though his use of a nonethic vocabulary to describe the experience of listening further accentuates the split: "calm" (raha) instead of the Quranic "opening of the heart" (inshirah); "comfort" (tanfiṣ) and "relief" (naswahā), instead of the stillness of the soul suggested by the term itmi'nan and the numinous quiet of sakīna. In his recourse to "katharsis," a transposition into Egyptian Arabic of the English "catharsis," the secularization of the emotions and their detachment from ethical life reaches its apogee. As with Said, the specter of "entertainment" hangs over this comment. People may be listening for little more than the momentary experience of catharsis and pleasure. This concern may partly derive from the fact that, by convention, cassettes are a medium of (musical) entertainment. Indeed, while sermon tapes may be described in ethical terms by their users, their mode of employment differs little from other popular cassette-based media. Insomuch as one of the interpretive conventions distinguishing the category of entertainment is precisely its unseriousness, its irrelevance to what Muhammad Subhi refers to as "practical reality," attempts to assign ethical significance to practices of cassette audition will be aporetic, the medium itself throwing into question the very project for which it serves as instrument.

This concern can be heard again at the beginning of a recorded mosque lesson on the topic of Judgment Day by the popular khatib Muhammad Hassan:

Maybe you will go home today and tell your wife, husband, or children about the good stories you heard. It will just become, "Once upon a time, when the Prophet lived . . ." as if it were no longer an issue of today. But this is not some escape from reality, not entertainment, or cold culture which only addresses the intellect [al-adhān] and the rational mind [al-aqīl]. Belief in Judgment Day is one of the foundations of Islam, along with belief in God, His prophets, His books, and His angels. Unless you understand Judgment Day and know of its circumstances, how can you believe in it? Thus, we need to grasp [nastawīb] this knowledge, and live by it [na'mal bihi].

Knowledge of the events of Judgment Day must not become assimilated to the category of entertainment, Hassan is saying. The very operation by which this is overcome, however, is itself already premised on a rupture that the category produced, evident in the copula dividing the grasping of knowledge from living by it. Knowledge, in other words, does not designate a teleological process of ethical becoming but, in accord with a liberal notion of the autonomous subject, a possession, first acquired, then deployed. ("Istibqāq," "implementation" or "execution," a term with strong echoes of the "Five Year Plans" frequently announced and rarely carried out by the Egyptian state, is the term I heard most often to describe what Muslims today were failing to do.) In another comment, made this time in the context of an interview with the newspaper al-Liwa' al-Islami, Muhammad Hassan advises:

Every Muslim must enact a practical shahāda [shahāda 'amaliyya] on the ground of our lived reality after they have pronounced a verbal shahāda [shahāda qawliyya] with their tongues. The smallest libraries today are full of books and [sermon and mosque lesson] cassettes, but this theoretical project does not equal the value of the ink which it was written with until we transform it into a practical reality and a way of life.

(al-Liwa' al-Islami 1996)

Hassan's use of the terms "theory" and "practice" invokes a sort of Platonic division between a world of ideas and a world of action and thus diverges sharply from the model of ethical cultivation invoked by preachers and listeners. According to doctrinal sources, the uttering of the shahāda—"There is no God but the One God, and Muhammad is his apostle [la ilaha illa allah wa muhammad rasul allah]"—is the minimal sufficient condition for becoming a Muslim. There is considerable argument, however, over what precisely is entailed in making the utterance. Ibn Taymiyya, a fourteenth-century theologian whose doctrinal writings have had considerable influence on contemporary Islamic thought, especially within those currents represented by the khutba of my study, argued that to utter the shahāda without fulfilling the prescribed duties of Islam, such as prayer, fasting, and giving alms, is not to have truly uttered the shahāda. The enactment of these duties, in other words, was understood by Ibn Taymiyya as a felicity condition for the illocutionary act of the testimony of faith (see Ibn
of classical tarhib techniques, he would improvise a sermon, stringing one piece from this memorized stock of texts after another with extreme rapidity and precise cadence. His point in making such a display of virtuosity, however, was to highlight what he saw to be an improper practice on the part of many khatibah, those who, in his view, "mechanically produce emotional responses [bishaghulu al-`awatif bi tariq makanikiyya] by such means without grounding those emotions in a useful and lasting knowledge rooted in the lived reality of the audience." A virtuoso khatib, in contrast, constantly weaves the classical narratives into the fabric of lived experience in an ongoing attempt to mend the fractures within ethical life with voice, image, and ear.

**BETWEEN ETHICS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

The tensions I have located within the ethical project of Islamic audition in Egypt today do not lead inexorably to the project's failure. Rather, they shape the fractured terrain upon which that project is pursued. As a continual source of friction mediating the realization of the project's ethical goals, such tensions find expression among those who promote and sustain the project in moments of ethical contradiction, in inconsistencies of action, or in experiences of vulnerability. Importantly, it is precisely from the vantage point of an ongoing attempt to impose discursive and practical coherence on this modern ethical regime that such moments of rupture acquire their meaning within lived experience.

One of the ways Islamic Revival activists like Ahmad, Saif, and Ibrahim coped with such conditions of ethical ambiguity was to draw upon popular discourses on the distinctions between Islamic and non-Islamic cultural forms. As I describe above, the very diffuseness of the affects associated with taped-sermon audition, along with the structural similarity of the practice to other forms of listening, introduces a worry into the practice: How is the experience produced by the tape different from the nonethical senses of pleasure, fear, or well-being produced by other popular media? Many of the people I spoke to invoked the example of music in order to explain to me the kind of relaxed feeling one feels when listening to a sermon. Beha described for me the workings of tarhib in a good sermon, and then compared it to the experience of music:

> When you hear about the tortures in the grave, you get scared, you fear God, then you start to feel regret, between you and yourself, for what you've done.
wrong, so you ask God for forgiveness, you repent, and then you remember his mercy and you feel calm [raha], your chest opens [musharikh al-sadr], open to Islam, the Quran, God, and knowing that you will get close to him. When you listen to music, you also feel calm and relaxed, but that doesn’t mean you’re really close to God. With a sermon or Quran tape you can attain that closeness, so the feeling is better and more intense than when you are just relaxed.

Many of the sermon listeners I spoke with in Egypt suggested that although they listened to taped sermons as a means to ethical improvement, there were also times when, feeling tired or tense, they might choose a music tape over a sermon. Both could bring one to a state of relaxation. Yet, as Beha’s comment begins to suggest, there is a key distinction to be drawn between the two experiences. As opposed to music, the sermon sets in motion a moral (and, as I have suggested above, affective and somatic) progression from fear, to regret, to asking for forgiveness, to repentance, and eventually to a sense of closeness with God, an experience that was described to me through terms such as inshirah al-sadr (opening of the heart or chest), itmi‘an (tranquility), and sakina (stillness). This progression constantly reappeared in the comments of the people I worked with in Cairo. Again, in Ahmad’s words: “If a Muslim sees hell close to him [through a good khatib], he won’t find peace until he asks forgiveness for his errors, repents, and returns humbly and fearfully to God.” Such is the movement that a listener’s body/heart makes, one learned in the soma-ethical dispositions I discuss above, under the guidance of a skillful khatib. Importantly, this is not the raha (calm) produced by soft music but rather a moral state conceptually articulated within the traditions of Islamic self-discipline.

Similarly, listeners distinguish pious fear (khawf or taqwa) from other forms of fear. When I asked Ahmad's brother Hisham to compare the experience of listening to sermon tapes on hell and death with horror films, he explained:

There is no comparison. True, when people watch scary films, terror may grip them and become imprinted on their brains [fi mukhhkhlhun]; then, when they hear a door creak, or see a mouse, they get scared. This kind of terror is also caused by ’ajarat [demons], but it has nothing to do with hell, Judgment Day, or the tortures of the grave that the shaykh is talking about. Fear of these doesn’t make you jump or scream; it is a fear implanted deep in your heart, and you can tell this because it keeps you from committing impious acts. Besides, most of those films are foreign anyway.

In his comment, Hisham contrasts two opposing structures of motivation, two psychologies of action, one moral, connected with the virtues, the other almost instinctual, a kind of animal reactivity. The fear and terror produced by popular films is morally neutral in this view, neither corrupting nor ethically fortifying. It is similar to the fear evoked by demons, a class of sometimes frightening otherworldly creatures within Islamic supernatural taxonomies, whose existence does not carry the existential significance nor demand an ethical responsiveness as do the facts of the brevity of life and the events of the eschaton. In short, for Hisham, the emotions induced by reflection on the grave presuppose and are integral to a structure of moral action, one presupposing a particular kind of motivation. Note also the different loci of the contrasting types of fear, one literally in the brain (mukkhk), the other in the heart, the organ of moral knowledge and practice. An even more common distinction drawn by people I worked with was between a kind of hearing that only engages the mind (al-’aqil) and one that stems from the heart (al-qalb). As should be clear, their use of this distinction is not simply grounded in a metaphorical conceit. Instead, they are pointing to two contrasting modes of sensory organization, one purely intellectual, the other ethical and grounded in the honed patterns of sensorimotor responsiveness I discuss earlier.

As historians of media have often remarked, our tendency to speak of hearing as something achieved with the ears does not simply reflect a physiological datum but a variety of historically grounded assumptions embedded in our concept of hearing and in the cultural practices that organize and give form to our sensory experience. Specifically, we hear speech with our ears because, among other things, our alphabetic technology has encouraged us to conceive of speech as sounds produced by the mouth, tongue, and lips; it is only sound (of an extremely limited range) that such a technology can give visual form to. The remnants of another kind of hearing can still be seen in such expressions as “to learn by heart” or “open your heart to what she is saying.” As Illich notes, for the Greeks, “utterances could be articulated by the lips, tongue, or the mouth, but also by the heart when it spoke to a friend, by the thymos (which we might call ‘gall’) which rose in Achilles and drove him into battle, or by the onrush of a wave of blood” (1993:39). To listen to an Islamic cassette sermon with the heart means to
bring to bear on it those honed sensory capacities that allow one to “hear” (soulfully, emotionally, physically) what would escape a listener who applies only her “ear” or al-aql (mind). Sermon audition is one of the means by which such capacities are developed and deepened.

Hisham’s reference to the foreign origin of such films points to a certain mapping of moral space onto a political and cultural one. The virtues toward which the practice of sermon media is oriented, in other words, presuppose a nationalist political geography. More than this, however, the abrupt shift of argument—from the ethical content of emotions to the site of their manufacture—betrays an underlying anxiety of the sort I note earlier in the chapter: the film’s foreign origin is called in to shore up a distinction that is threatened with dissolution or irrelevance, namely, the distinction between ethical and unethical practices, and specifically media practices, in contemporary Egypt. In the face of this threat, the reference discursively bolsters the bond between the cassette-mediated experience of fear and the forms of ethical comportment in which it ideally finds expression.

SERMON RECEPTION AND ETHICAL SEDIMENTATION

As should now be clear, sermon oratory recruits the body of the listener in multiple ways. Beyond its referential content, the sermon can be seen as a technique for animating and organizing a stratigraphy of bodily experience and for endowing the human compound with gestural potential, in Jousse’s vocabulary. The auditory apparatus consists of an experienced body in its entirety, one learned in the gestural vocabularies by which the sermon’s ethical narratives have been woven into the autonomic and motor responses of this compound. Sermons impart not simply moral lessons but affective energies of ethical potential, a background of sensory and motor skills considered by those I worked with to be necessary for inhabiting the world in a manner appropriate for Muslims. The many performances involved in a sermon—such as the khatib’s visually striking depiction of extracting the soul of a sinner with a labored and trembling gesture of the hand rising above the neck—enliven and deepen the affective-gestural experiences that make possible—in the view of the sermon listeners I knew—the practices, modes of sociability, and attitudinal repertoires underlying a devout Islamic community. The task may be compared to that of an actor who, when playing the part of King Lear, must hone the strained gait, the movement of the hands, the manner of labored breathing, and the contortions of the face that express the tortured soul of one so betrayed (although in the cassette context, as I have argued, it is more an affective substrate that is honed, not fully elaborated performances). Note that I am not referring to the symbolic coding of the body, the attribution of meaning to its surfaces, movements, and speech. Rather, it is more like what rhetoricians call “attitude,” a kind of “non-self-referential mode of awareness” not reducible to mental states or symbolic processes.

The reference to rhetoric here can be extended further. In learning the art of rhetoric—one of the pillars of both classical education and the Christian curricula well into the early modern period—students not only acquired a capacity for eloquence but also skills of character, comportment, and affective expression. For example, pronuncia, or delivery, one of the five categories of rhetorical analysis, focused on the role of voice and gesture as they express the character of the speaker, character being a condition for the persuasiveness of one’s argument. As the Roman orator Quintilian explains: “And, indeed, since words in themselves count for much and the voice adds a force of its own to the matter of which it speaks, while gesture and motion are full of significance, we may be sure of finding something like perfection when all these qualities are combined” (1963:9). It is worth noting that such an analysis blurs the boundaries between language and character, and between speech and action.

While for Aristotle (and later Augustine), rhetoric was a neutral art (tecline), equally deployable for both good and evil aims, another school of thought (one more indebted to Quintilian and continuing up at least until the Renaissance) postulated a necessary relation between rhetorical excellence and moral virtue, that is, between speaking and being. As the historian Nancy Christensen suggests in her discussion of the teaching of rhetoric during the British Renaissance, the discipline involved a strong ethical component: in learning to speak and act with decorum, to be persuasive in one’s demeanor, one necessarily mastered the ethical attributes of upstanding character and, in that sense, became wise. Our modern inclination, of course, is to dismiss such skills as mere acting. However, while a distinction between inner self and outer acts is relevant in this context, that distinction indexes mastery, rather than degrees of truthfulness. As Christensen notes:

While the “role” and the person can be distinguished, the person is recognized by his or her roles. While the speaker may change roles, the choice and the manner of playing each role reveals the speaker’s sense of decorum.
the moment of listening to a sermon, one does not act out all of the gestures and movements corresponding to the particular account being narrated by the khatib, nor vocalize each and every response solicited. Rather, and this is an important part of my argument, an experiential knowledge of the gestural and emotive elements of the story constitutes a condition for its ethical reception. That is to say, one is capable of hearing the sermon in its full ethical sense only to the extent one has already cultivated the particular modes of sensory responsiveness presupposed in the discourse's gestural vocabulary, a vocabulary rich in affective, kinesthetic, and visceral dimensions. Collingwood makes this point in regard to the phenomenon of synaesthesia in aesthetic appreciation: we hear the sounds, colors, movements, and emotions that a composer has written into his music only insofar as we have an ear—and a body—trained in the sensibilities the composer brought to bear on his work (1966:146–51). One does not hear “the raw sound” and then elaborate upon it an imaginary experience of motion and color. One simply “hears” the emotion and color. The sensibilities that allow one to do so are not something purely cognitive but are rooted in the experience of the body in its entirety, as a complex of culturally and historically honed sensory modalities.

The art of painting is intimately bound up with the expressiveness of the gestures made by the hand in drawing, and of the imaginary gesture through which a spectator of a painting appreciates its ‘tactile values.’ Instrumental music has a similar relation to silent movements of the larynx, gestures of the player’s hand, and real or imaginary movements, as of dancing, in the audience.

(Collingwood 1966:242)

The synaesthetic experiences of movement, color, touch, and emotion that occur when we listen to music are not produced through the free creative activity of the mind but are grounded in the actual sensual experience of the body as a complex of culturally honed perceptual capacities. Our sensory responses are similar to those of other listeners or viewers to the extent that our capacities for hearing or vision have been shaped within a shared disciplinary context. They possess a specific affective-volitional structure as a result of the sensorial practices by which we have been formed as a member of a specific community.

This way of construing audition in terms of tactile, kinesthetic, and visceral responsiveness is strongly reminiscent of Jousser’s gestural subject, one
whose anemone-like body ripples with the rhythmic motions of the universe. Jousse’s psychophysiology (which has clear Aristotelian roots) rests on a vision of the cosmos as a dynamic whole in constant rhythmic interaction, a vision with a definite affinity to aspects of Islamic mystical thought. For Sufi mystics, such as Ibn al-Arabi, it was by means of the sound, rhythm, affect, and harmony afforded by both poetry and recited Quranic verses that imaginal knowledge of the right and true (as opposed to rational knowledge) could be achieved, or, in Ibn al-Arabi’s term, “tasted [dhawaq]” (see Chittick 1989; Schimmel 1994). While the contemporary da’wa movement rejects many aspects of Islamic mysticism, it has incorporated this tradition of linking the realization of ethical being with the resonant body. Jousse’s own framing of this kind of linkage is worth citing here:

We know and think first of [our gestures, and that] in order to act; and of the things we know, not one is a biological luxury. We have seen that every [reception, external or internal] contains, besides its representative elements, an affective element and [above all, which constitutes its substratum] and active [gestural] element. . . . This applies also to . . . [reviviscenses of every kind] and to ideas properly speaking, whose primary function is to direct the action [of the various gestural systems].

(JOSSE [1925] 1990:96)

PASSIONAL REASON

The kind of affective dispositions acquired and enhanced by the men I knew through taped-sermon audition (among other practices) are precisely the kind that worried Plato in The Republic. In his view, those performances that engaged an audience in ways that bypassed a reflective, philosophical understanding—such as poetry, theater, or song—had a power to impact and mold individuals that rendered such acts especially dangerous. As a present-day interpreter of Plato notes:

The problem with uncontrolled mimesis, as Plato sees it, is not just the character of the likenesses it brings into our presence. It is how these likenesses gradually insinuate themselves into the soul through the eyes and ears, without our being aware of it. . . . It is as if eyes and ears offer painter and poet entry to a relatively independent cognitive apparatus, associated with the senses, through which mimetic images can bypass our knowledge and infiltrate the soul.

(BURNEY [1998:8])

Recognizing the power of such acts to shape moral character, Plato advocated the prohibition of those performances that depicted human qualities not corresponding to the Athenian virtues he saw as foundational to the ideal city. Later Christian thinkers, in contrast, have tended to place more emphasis on the positive contribution of embodied forms of knowledge. Arguing along lines much closer to those suggested by the men I worked with, Christian theologians from Aquinas to Luther to John Henry Newman have asserted that a certain disposition of the passions was necessary in order to assess the validity of claims for the truth of Scripture; that ethical affects such as gratitude, humility, and love of God have an epistemic value, allowing one to evaluate evidence for the authority of the Bible in the proper light (see Wainwright 1995). According to Newman, it is precisely in living piously that our emotions, imagination, and attitudes (our senses and sensibilities) are shaped so as to appreciate Christian arguments. Conversely, sinning renders one’s faculties over time incapable of evaluating the evidence of religion.

The sermon listeners I worked with in Cairo held a similar view of the positive contribution of passional factors to acts of moral reasoning and saw the practice of sermon audition as a means by which such affective orientations could be honed in accord with models of Islamic moral personhood. In my analysis of this auditory practice, I have—following Joussean tracks—chosen to view the body as a kind of fluid medium, one animated and traversed by an ensemble of interlinking movements: the gestures of the hands, the face and eyes, the nerves, muscles, and breath that in their synthesis and complementarity form the sensitive heart of an ethical listener. This ensemble of sensorimotor reflexes, Jousse argues, “constitutes the warp upon which [and by means of which] consciousness weaves its designs” (1925) 1990:8).

There is an echo of Benjamin’s storyteller that merits being heard here. As I note in the introduction to this book, for Benjamin, the craft of storytelling depends upon a particular coordination of “the soul, eye, and hand” that has been lost with the disappearance of artisanal modes of production and their replacement by forms of labor that do not entail or engender such affective-gestural skills (1969:108). While the sermon-tape listeners I
have described inhabit this postartisanal world, this is not the end of the story. Nor, for that matter, have the soul, eye, and hand simply parted ways, despite their current reliance on tape recorders, TVs, automobiles, and commodity markets. For boredom—the relaxed attentiveness produced by artisanal labor that, in Benjamin’s view, enabled listeners to assimilate the story material—has not been overcome, although its somatic rhythm and texture have changed considerably for the taxi drivers, store clerks, and aluminum plant workers of today. Within such moments of modern boredom, the cassette sermon, with its distinct rhetorics, technology, and circulatory modes, offers up a collective wisdom to the senses. Benjamin’s analysis of how the perceptual regime ushered in by modernity renders traditional worlds silent, invisible—in short, imperceptible—needs to be complemented by a recognition of the ways in which practitioners of a tradition, through innovation and adaptation, attempt to cultivate and sustain the sensory conditions and the modes of attention and inattention that make that tradition viable within modern contexts. While Benjamin was clearly correct to point to such processes of sensory erosion, we must avoid the tendency—encouraged by the concept of modernity—to interpret these as instances within a totalizing historical process, as disparate manifestations of a singular teleological development. As scholars have increasingly recognized, an account of modernity can no longer be told simply in terms of the destruction of the old and its replacement by the new; modern lives have been shaped both by the maintenance of continuities with past practice and by revivals, reworkings, and rediscoveries, including rediscoveries of buried sensory experiences.35

SCHOLARS EXPLORING the incorporation of modern mass media into religious practices have frequently approached the topic in terms of a polarity between what are assumed to be two contradictory processes, the deliberative and the disciplinary. Analyses focusing on the deliberative aspect have emphasized the possibilities of argument, contestation, and dialogue that have been afforded by the advent of universal modern literacy, the diffusion of printed texts, and the operation of electronic mass media.1 Following conventional histories of the Protestant revolution, this scholarship has given particular emphasis to the role of print and other media technologies in propelling a democratization of religious authority. The new objectlike quality of religion and the universal accessibility of religious texts, it is argued, transform ritual speech into individual assertion, oral mnemonics into analytical memory. Equipped with these newfound sophistications and the autonomous reasoning that they facilitate, a growing number of individuals engage with and revise the religious traditions they have inherited.

Scholars emphasizing the disciplinary functions of religious media, on the other hand, have stressed the ideological over the dialogic aspects of the phenomenon.2 Media technologies, in this view, enable an extension of an authoritative religious discourse. The resultant public is less a site of discussion than of subjection to authority, part of a project aimed at promoting and securing a uniform model of moral behavior. In short, the public arena constituted by the media practices of religious actors tends to be identified
expression understood to facilitate the development and practice of Islamic virtues, and therefore of Islamic ethical comportment. For contemporary Egyptian Muslims who participate in this sphere of dialogic engagement, the definition and articulation of Islamic ethical norms and their embodiment as practical aptitudes are critically dependent upon the communicative practices and discursive conventions of this public arena.

Although shaped in various ways by the structures and techniques of modern publicity, the form of Islamic public I discuss here exhibits a conceptual architecture that cuts across the modern distinctions between state and society and between public and private that are central to the public sphere as a normative institution of modern democratic politics. In their objects, styles of reasoning, and modes of historicity, the entwined deliberative and disciplinary practices that constitute this arena reflect the way Islamic notions of moral duty and practices of ethical cultivation have been mapped onto a national civic arena by Muslim reformists over the course of the last century. As mosques in Egypt over the last fifty years became the site for new kinds of social and political organization and expression, everyday practices of pious sociability gradually came to inhabit a new political terrain, one shaped both by the discourses of national citizenship and by emerging transnational forms of religious association. In the course of this shift, forms of practical reasoning tied to the tradition of the virtues became oriented not simply toward a notion of moral community (an 'umma) but toward what we would recognize as a public as well; the practice of the virtues and the deliberation of issues of public concern were fused together in a unique manner. The cassette sermon has provided the discursive vehicle whereby this interdependency has been most extensively and intensively worked out.

As opposed to the private reader, whose stillness and solitude became privileged icons of a distinct kind of critical reasoning within the imaginary of the bourgeois public, it is the figure of the ethical listener—with all of its dense sensory involvements—that founds and inhabits the counterpublic I describe here. Informed by a language ideology emphasizing the poetic and performative dimensions of speech and its ethical resonances across multiple sensory registers, the form of public reason and sociability I describe remains dependent upon and positively oriented toward its own affective, gestural, and kinesthetic conditions. Through the deployment of new styles of moral exhortation and critique and their circulation within an aural media geared to the honing of sensibilities and the cultivation of pious habits, a fragmented history of soma-ethical experience found new
coherence and expression as the sensory background for an emergent form of public sociability. This public is a fragile and unstable accomplishment, the contingent product of the way embodied forms of historical memory have congealed within new social and political spaces as the visceral substrate for a modern Islamic ethics. I say fragile because the practices that constitute this arena are continually subject to rival and more powerful discursive framings that are tied to the market, the regulatory institutions of the state, and conditions of governance more generally.

The moral and political project that I explore in this book does not lend itself easily to the dominant binaries of contemporary political debate: liberalism/communalism and democratic/authoritarian. To the extent that I use these terms, I do so lightly, to avoid obscuring what I consider to be the unique and politically challenging aspects of Egypt’s Islamic counterpublic beneath the analytical umbra cast by these terms. The notion of fundamentalism is even less useful. As I will argue in my concluding chapter, the interpretive grid fundamentalism provides is entirely inadequate to the arguments and histories of contemporary Islamic activism. Worse, it deafens us to some of the ways that the contemporary struggles of pious Muslims speak to our own moral and political conundrums. Learning to hear, in this regard, is as important a political precept for us as it is an ethical one for sermon publics in Egypt today.

CASSETTE DA’WA

The production and consumption of sermon tapes has, since their beginnings in the early 1970s, been associated with the broad movement known as al-da’wa (literally, a summons or call), and, as noted in chapter 2, almost all of the preachers who make use of this medium refer to themselves and are referred to by others as du’at (sing. da’iy), that is, those who undertake da’wa. The term da’wa has historically encompassed a wide range of meanings. When found in the Quran, it generally refers to God’s invitation, addressed to humankind and transmitted through the prophets, to live in accord with God’s will.6 Over the early centuries of Islam’s development, da’wa came to be used increasingly to designate the content of that invitation, and in the works of some classical jurists it appears to be interchangeable both with the term shari’a (the juridical codification of God’s message) and din (often translated as “religion”).7 Da’wa also, however, carried another sense from early in Islam’s historical career, one that has been central to contemporary Islamic thought: that of a duty, incumbent upon some or all members of the Islamic community, to actively encourage fellow Muslims in the pursuance of greater piety in all aspects of their lives.8 It is the performance of this duty, one now charged with new social and political functions, that founds the Islamic counterpublic in Egypt.

The contemporary practice of da’wa can be illustrated through a conversation I overheard during a taxi ride through downtown Cairo and that is rather typical of the kind of public interactions for which cassette sermons have played a constitutive role. Taxis in Cairo frequently pick up more than one passenger. In this case I was sharing the ride with two other people, a teenage boy and a young woman who wore the hijab (headscarf). The taxi driver, who had a long beard and was dressed in a jallabiyya (a male form of pious dress), was listening to a sermon tape by the popular preacher Umar Abd al-Kafi. At a certain point during the ride, as the tape came to an end, the boy sitting in front next to the driver asked him if he had any song music he might put on instead. After a few moments of awkward silence, the driver responded that music was haram (forbidden) in Islam. The boy looked surprised and irritated but kept quiet and turned away. The driver, noting the boy’s irritation, said: “Don’t just look away, tell me what you’re thinking. We can talk, there’s no problem.”

“How can singing be haram?” said the boy. “Who told you that?” The driver replied, “Do you or don’t you believe in the Quran and the sunna [the Prophetic traditions]?” The boy responded that of course he did. The driver continued, “Shouldn’t we do everything in our lives to follow the sunna? Doesn’t it tell us not only the rules of God, but as Muslims, isn’t it also a model for us?” Again, the boy, now getting impatient, concurred. On a roll, the driver moved to clinch the argument by means of a hadith, an account of one of the Prophet’s sayings: “When the Prophet used to hear songs, he would put his fingers in his ears, and considered music to be one of the devil’s snares [madkhal at-shaytaan].” The boy quickly retorted that the driver’s hadith was “da’if,” a classificatory term referring to a category of hadith whose authority is of the weakest kind. Not ready to concede the point, the driver continued: “Do you believe there is nothing that is haram in religion [din]?” “Of course,” the boy countered, “but I must know where the proof [dalil] is for the haram. Someone can tell you today that driving a car is haram, and you’ll stop driving. Then later you’ll find out it was wrong, and start to drive again, unless you found out from the beginning what was called haram was really haram or just an erroneous invention.”

The driver, realizing now that he had better take another tack, asked, “Don’t you think that drinking alcohol is haram? Do you know why? Because
it interferes with prayer. It's the same with songs; when you hear songs your mind goes somewhere else and you can't pray.” The boy retorted vigorously: “Alcohol is one thing, but the Quran says nothing about music. I pray, fast, and do all my obligations of worship [‘ibadat], and what is wrong if I hear songs as well? I am not doing anything haram!”

At this point, the woman sitting in the back next to me entered the debate: “But all the words of songs are about love and all of these things, so that when you go out you think about that rather than think about God. Your ears get used to hearing the songs, until you don't like to listen to the Quran. Well, then songs are prohibited so that at an adolescent age you don't think about things that would lead you to illicit desire [shahawat] and sin [al-dhamb]. Especially in this era and time, when the world is full of seductions that are always seeking to occupy your thoughts [tishaghallak‘ala tuli]. The sermon, on the other hand, makes you think of God, and brings you feelings of humility [khushu‘] and regret [nadam].” She then quoted a verse from the Quran, but the boy immediately pointed out to her that the verse made no mention of music. “Yes,” she concurred, “but it leads you to the reasoning of why music is haram.” The driver nodded in agreement. The boy, not to be defeated, countered, “Love is not haram in Islam.”

This conversation reveals a number of characteristics of a kind of public deliberation that has become increasingly prevalent in Egypt in recent decades. Note, to begin with, the rather unstructured and informal character of this exchange. Situated outside the boundaries of prescribed ritual practice or scholarly instruction, this form of discussion cuts across generational and gender lines in ways not possible within the traditional institutions of Islamic authority. The relationship between the speakers is not that of teacher to pupil, nor of social superior to social subordinate, but rather of co-participants in a common moral project, their speech structured around an orientation toward correct Islamic practice. Importantly, this structure of motivation is less a prerequisite for the exchange than the collective achievement toward which it is teleologically disposed. One acquires the will and capacity to act morally precisely though participating in such conversations: to speak publicly on ethical issues is one of the ways one both hones and enacts ethical knowledge. Moreover, reference to authoritative Islamic sources does not close debate. Instead, the lines of argument pivot precisely upon the proper interpretation and understanding of those sources.

Admittedly, notions of gender equality have played little role in the da‘wa movement. Participants in the movement, and the khutaba‘ who are its most prominent exponents, generally emphasize a certain patriarchal order as essential for the organization of social and individual conduct in a Muslim society. In the field of preaching, for example, arguments about the dangers to male piety inherent in the female voice continue to sanction a long-standing prohibition on women delivering sermons to mixed audiences in mosques in Egypt. That being said, the actual practice of da‘wa has been one area where women’s subordinate status has been relatively attenuated and where many of the arguments commonly used to disqualify women from domains of political and religious authority are not seen to apply. As Saba Mahmood notes in her ethnography of the lives of pious women in Egypt, one of the apparent paradoxes of the da‘wa movement lies in the fact that while its participants generally insist on upholding Islamic edicts that subordinate women to men within social life, the movement itself has been more open to women’s participation than have other currents of the broader Islamic Revival (Mahmood 2005).

The impact of the cassette sermon on gendered practices of public discourse are also important in this respect. Tapes and tape markets have enabled the extension of sermon oratory into dialogic contexts where women are active participants, arguing with men over doctrinal matters, the competency of particular preachers, and social and political concerns addressed in the recordings. On a number of occasions I was told of women having deployed tapes to pressure male kin to uphold their familial responsibilities. Moreover, the fact that women make up a large percentage of sermon listeners has led preachers to increasingly address topics considered germane to women, from the rights women may demand from husbands to the sexual pleasures that await them in heaven.

The exchange among the taxi passengers also points to a new familiarity with bases and styles of Islamic argumentation, evidenced, for example, in the boy’s knowledge of the specific hadith as well as its classification within the authoritative traditions. The advent of modern mass education, literacy, and the wide availability of written texts has equipped recent generations of Muslims in the Middle East with new competencies in styles of scholarly argumentation and their associated textual materials, both classical and modern (Eickelman 1992; Eickelman and Anderson 1999). There is a sense among many young Muslims in Egypt today that adherence to Islam requires a personal knowledge of Islamic ethical and juridical traditions and that one cannot rely on the viewpoints of others in regard to doctrinal issues—a point underscored by the boy. Ahmad and his friend Ibrahim, as well as others I worked with, frequently emphasized the importance of
checking out the veracity of doctrinal claims by seeking out corroborating statements in the Quran or sunna, referring the issue to someone known to be more learned in religious matters, or finding a tape by a reputable shaykh where the topic is addressed. Both Ahmad and Ibrahim claimed that cassette sermons and recorded mosque lessons had enabled them to expand and bolster their knowledge of Islamic ethical and doctrinal literatures during times of the day when the sort of concentration demanded by written texts would be impossible. In short, for many Egyptians today a practical competence in skills of religious reasoning and argumentation has increasingly become part of what is entailed in being a Muslim, a trend indebted in no small way to the proliferation of new institutions of Islamic learning associated with the revival movement, such as mosque study groups, private Islamic institutes, da’wa centers, and a vibrant market in Islamic books and tapes.30

Note that this practice does not map onto the constitutionally demarcated separation of public and private but rather traverses this distinction in a way that is often uncomfortable to those with secular-liberal sensibilities. Da’wa is undertaken in the street, on public transportation, at the workplace, or in the home. From a liberal perspective, da’wa is seen as encouraging an unwarranted intrusion into the privacy of others, especially as it entails entering into what are considered to be personal matters of religious faith. Da’wa in the street is seen as undermining the liberal state's role in protecting the private sphere of individual choice—the modesty of one’s dress, the precision of gesture in prayer, the danger of gossip, and the proximity of unrelated men and women in both the workplace and the home, as well as other more overtly political issues (as I discuss below). For liberals, these issues tend to be viewed as either insignificant (such as precision in prayer, gossip) or, alternatively, as matters of individual preference (such as dress, gender conventions, and so on) and as such protected by private law. Da’wa, for this reason, constitutes an obstacle to the state's attempt to secure a social domain where national citizens are free to make modern choices, as it repoliticizes those choices, subjecting them to public scrutiny oriented around the task of establishing the conditions for the practice of Islamic virtues.

While da’wa frequently takes the form of discussion and deliberation, its paradigmatic speech genre is the sermon. As I discuss in the preceding chapter, the interpretive norms informing Islamic homiletic traditions foreground the capacity of ethical speech—particularly one imbued with the language of the Quran and the teachings of the sunna—to move the sensitive heart toward correct practice. A well-crafted sermon is understood to evoke in the listener the affective dispositions that underlie ethical conduct and reasoning and that, through repeated listening, may become sedimented in the listener's character. Enabled in part by the mediatization of sermons on cassette, some of the norms governing sermon practice have been extended by the da’wa movement to the dialogical context of public discourse.

Within this arena, speech is deployed in order to construct moral selves, to reshape character, attitude, and will in accord with contemporary standards of pious behavior. The efficacy of an argument here depends not solely on its power to gain cognitive assent on the basis of its superior reasoning, as would be the case in some versions of a liberal public sphere, but also on the ability of ethical language and exemplary behavior to move human beings toward correct modes of being and acting. A language ideology foregrounding poetic and affective aspects, sensory modes of understanding outside the realm of semantics narrowly construed, provides conceptual scaffolding here. What joins the practice of delivering or listening to a sermon with that of arguing with a neighbor is a conception of the rhetorical force of ethical speech to shape character, as I outline in the preceding chapter. In other words, if in the earlier tradition the ethical mediation of divine speech required the voice of either the Quran reciter or the khatib in the mosque, now a deliberative public also performs this function. Deliberative and disciplinary moments, in other words, are thoroughly interwoven and interdependent within this arena.

MODERNIZING MORAL DUTY

The contours of a distinctly modern da’wa, exemplified in the taxi conversation, emerged gradually over the course of the last century. Da’wa seems to have received little systematic elaboration from the late medieval period through the early twentieth century. While the “rediscovery” of the notion cannot be tied to any particular figure or institution, its current salience owes primarily to its development within Islamic opposition movements, most notably within the Muslim Brotherhood.32 From the late 1920s, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood, appropriated the classical notion of da’wa to define the goals of the organization, namely, the restoration and strengthening of the Islamic community (ummah) in the face of its increasing secularization under khedival rule (Mendel 1995:295). As previously mentioned, the Brotherhood was particularly critical of the marginalization
of Islamic doctrines and practices within the projects of social and political reform being promoted by nationalist thinkers, and of the failure of the established institutions of Islamic authority to oppose this process. By employing such modern political methods as media campaigns, large-scale rallies, and training camps for Muslim activists, the Brotherhood quickly went from a local grassroots association that encouraged pious conduct to an international organization embodying considerable religious and political power and authority. As elaborated by al-Banna, da’wa defined the mode of action by which moral and political reform was to be brought about. Brotherhood members were advised to go to mosques, schools, cafes, clubs and other public locations and speak with whomever would listen about Islam, the Brotherhood, and the task of building a pious Muslim society. The Brotherhood also encouraged the Islamic practice of isti’dhan, wherein a member of the mosque assembly asks permission to address the gathering on matters relevant to the Muslim community. This practice, which became increasingly widespread during subsequent decades, had the effect of enhancing the dialogical structure of social discourse within the mosque and orienting it within a national political frame, thereby expanding its role as a key site of public discussion. The Brotherhood also pioneered the use of mass media as an instrument of Islamic activism and reformism. Books, short tracts, pamphlets, and flyers by reformist writers, as well as magazines covering national and international events considered relevant to Muslims, were widely circulated and competed with the more secularly oriented publications of the nationalist movement. For da’wa speech and print (and, later, audio) media, the sermon provided a paradigmatic rhetorical form, a practice that stood in contrast to the European models of political oratory increasingly adopted by Egyptian secular nationalists. Al-Banna’s sermons in particular became massively popular in Egypt and other Arab countries and were widely distributed in book and pamphlet form.

In many ways, al-Banna and his followers fell within a long tradition of preacher-reformers within Islamic societies. Speaking to ordinary Muslims rather than scholars, these reformers had to engage the practical and political constraints on moral action in a way that those working within the institutions of Islamic learning and authority did not. As a result, they have often been viewed by their scholarly contemporaries as either dangerous innovators or ignorant popularizers, garnering public approbation at the expense of doctrinal rigor (a charge frequently leveled against al-Banna at the time from within al-Azhar and its affiliated institutions). Such challenges aside, some of the most productive experiments in responding to the ethical challenges of modern political discourse, of which al-Banna’s is an early and influential example, have taken place precisely within this space of everyday practical action and concern opened up by the notion of da’wa. Indeed, one of my arguments in this chapter is that da’wa has provided the conceptual site wherein the concerns, public duties, character, and virtues of an activist Muslim citizen have been most extensively elaborated and practiced.

While the Brotherhood was eventually banned by the Egyptian state in the 1950s and many of its members imprisoned or driven underground, the practice of da’wa itself did not disappear. On the contrary, over the last half century da’wa has increasingly shaped a space for the articulation of a contestatory Islamic discourse on modern society, a discourse embodied in a diversified array of institutional forms, including educational centers, preaching associations, thousands of private mosques, and an expanding network of publishing houses and other media organizations. A wide variety of other activities in some way oriented toward promoting and fortifying the ethical practices that constitute Islamic modes of piety and community have also come to be understood through the concept of da’wa—from providing social and medical services to the poor, to tutoring children at mosques, to selling Islamic books or tapes. Da’wa, in other words, has come to describe a particular way of linking public activism with moral reform. Placed under the rubric of this notion, a wide range of commercial, educational, and welfare activities essential to the reproduction and maintenance of modern society have been assigned moral significance, as contributions to the goal of building a community oriented around the practice of the virtues.

Cassette sermons have played an important role in Egypt since the 1970s in the transformation of da’wa from an organizing principle within specific institutions (such as the Brotherhood or the Islamic welfare associations) to a popular form of public practice and participation. Largely because of the mass popularity achieved through cassette circulation, popular preachers (most notably Shaykh Kishk) became rallying points and exemplary figures within an emerging counterpublic of da’wa practitioners. Many of the young men I worked with explicitly identified cassette sermons as an alternative to the televiusal and press media promoted by the state. As Ahmad, pointing to his cassette recorder, told me shortly after we met: “This is the only mass media [al-‘lam] I need. The [state-controlled] television and the newspapers never discuss the important events and issues. We would
never find out about what is really going on even here in Egypt without these tapes." There now exists, both in audio and booklet form, a substantial number of works offering instruction in the practice of "individual da'wa," understood to be an ethical form of speech and action aimed at improving the moral conduct of one's fellow community members. As a result of the dissemination of such techniques of ethical self-improvement and the establishment of their associated institutional networks, the virtues and skills of the da'iya have come for many to provide a model for the attributes of the Muslim-citizen. These attributes find expression within many different moments of daily life, including the occasional taxi ride.

**PUBLIC ISLAM**

To gather up the threads of my argument so far, the media and associational infrastructure put into place by the da'wa movement has created the conditions for a kind of publicness grounded in the deployment of certain classical Islamic concepts within a context increasingly shaped by the normative modes of discourse of a modern public sphere. That is to say, reformers like Hassan al-Banna and Abd al-Hamid Kishk revived a notion of da'wa as a moral duty, the performance of which, conceptually and historically, had long been defined as a condition for the vitality of the Muslim collective. In its contemporary elaboration, da'wa defines a kind of practice involving the public use of a mode of reasoning whereby the correctness of an action is argued and justified in the face of error, doubt, indifference, or counter-argument. To assume the position of a da'iya (one who undertakes da'wa) is to adopt the rhetorical stance of a member of the Islamic umma acting on behalf of that particular historical project (and thus not simply as an individual concerned for his or her own moral conduct). Although such a da'wa counterpublic has only become possible with the contemporary emergence of a range of public institutions and media practices, it is less an empirical entity than a framework for a particular type of action. Da'wa is constituted whenever and wherever individuals enter into that form of discourse geared toward upholding or improving the moral condition of the collective, as, for example, illustrated in the taxi conversation above.

Deployed in a political context structured by the discourses of citizenship and nation, da'wa has come to fuse what are in effect two models of agency: one ethical, grounded in the Quranic moral psychology I discuss in chapter 3, the other embedded in the liberal notions of public that accompanied the state's attempt to fashion a modern political order. A discourse on the ethical impact of pious speech on the sensitive listener provides the interpretive frame for a public sphere geared to the deliberation of the common good. This attribution of ethical agency to a broader deliberative arena also found resonance with an interpretive trend within modern Islam whereby the consensus (ijma') required to establish the veracity of an interpretive judgment was increasingly seen to necessitate not simply a restricted group of entrusted scholars but the umma as a universal collective body (D. Brown 1996). While the nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars who advocated this view rarely elaborated it in explicitly national terms, their more catholic interpretation of the jurisprudential notion of ijma' clearly draws sustenance from democratic conceptions of a deliberative public. In other words, while the Islamic umma is fundamentally a moral space, the types of action it encompasses and that serve to delineate and sustain it have come to be structured by the normative mode of articulation of the public sphere. Inflected by the discourse on moral action organized under the rubric of da'wa, the new form of public is grounded in the tendency of ethical public discourse toward self-correction, toward an approximation of what is understood to be divinely sanctioned comportment. As politics, both national and global, impinge on the structures of moral life, the ethical discourses of da'wa necessarily extend to political topics. As a type of activity aimed at both revealing and realizing Islamic ideals of moral life through persuasion, exhortation, and deliberation, it is fundamentally a political practice. Indeed, da'wa emerges not at a point of commonality but precisely at one of difference, where a discrepancy in practice makes argument necessary.

**DA'WA AND THE NATION**

While participants in the da'wa movement clearly consider themselves to be Egyptian citizens, they also cultivate sentiments, loyalties, and styles of public conduct that stand in tension with the moral and political exigencies and modes of self-identification of national citizenship. In this sense, they inhabit a counterpublic: a domain of discourse and practice that stands in a disjunctive relationship to the public sphere of the nation and its media instruments. While in practice da'wa often entails an oppositional stance in regard to the state, this type of public does not in its present form play a mediatory role between state and society. In other words, the practice of da'wa does not take place within or serve to uphold that domain of associational life referred to as civil society. When the state acts in ways that foreclose the possibility of living in accord with Islamic standards promoted by
the movement—such as forbidding schoolgirls from wearing headscarves, broadcasting television serials that show behaviors that are considered indecent, or cutting back on the amount of time dedicated to learning the Quran in schools—khutbat use the mosque sermon to publicly criticize these actions, a critique that is then quickly distributed on tape. On some occasions, the broad mobilizations that have ensued have led the state to reverse a decision (as happened with the ruling banning the use of headscarves in public schools).

Having said this, it is important to recognize the extent to which the nation is a political condition of the da'is's speech: the position of utterance he inhabits and the contestatory discourse he articulates have been shaped by the concepts and institutions of national political life. I have used the notion of counterpublic precisely to register the relationship of complementarity and interdependence linking this arena to the nation. While the nation inhabits the da'is's discourse as a necessary object of reflexive self-identification, it is as an object embedded in (and subordinate to) the broader moral project of an Islamic umma. As performatively enacted within da'wa discourse, the nation's claims on loyalty and identity are relativized in light of the demands of this moral project, a project understood to be irreducible to the concepts of territory, ethnicity, and collective historical experience upon which the nation is founded. The da'is's narrative locates itself within the temporal frame of an Islamic umma and in relation to the succession of events that characterize its mode of historicity. The temporality of these tapes, for example, does not index the nation, the daily unfolding of events, or "news," through which the newspaper reader or television viewer participates as national citizen. Rather, the ethical listener sees both recent sermons and those from two decades past as contemporary, and they are combined and interspersed through listening practices. The ethical and political content of these sermons bear on the present—a present structured by the notion of sahwa, or revival, the period of moral renewal that repeatedly succeeds eras of decline and corruption.

As opposed to the national public sphere centered around the press and televiusal media, the da'wa counterpublic reveals a more marked supranational focus, evident, for example, in the considerable attention given in sermons to the plight of Muslims worldwide as well as the interest shown by cassette-sermon audiences in such issues. Sermon tapes often mediate debates on the geopolitical boundaries of ethical responsibility, as in the following conversation that took place in the Karim Coffee Shop in Bulak-Dukrur, a lower-class quarter of Cairo that I visited with Ibrahim one day.

When we arrived, the owner of the shop was wiping down the counters while listening, on his tape player, to a preacher's passionate evocation of the current suffering of Bosnian Muslims at the hands of Serbian aggressors. His three clients, all men from the neighborhood, accommodated to the languorous rhythm of their water pipes as the account of Serbian atrocities and European indifference echoed around them. At a certain point, the preacher, his voice straining with grief, halted his description to ask: "Where are the Muslims?! Where are the Muslims, while Muslim girls are being raped, mosques are being burned?! Where?!" "Enough, O shaykh," the man sitting closest to the counter called out, "They're not Muslims; they're Europeans!" Turning now to the owner of the shop, he continued, "Why all of these tears for the Bosnians? They dress like Europeans, they act like Europeans. There is nothing Islamic about them." "How can you say that; the shop owner retorted as the preacher continued behind him, "Didn't you hear? They have mosques; they pray; they stand in the same line [nafs al-saff] as we do. They worship ..." His client cut him short: "No, no, no. They may have been Muslims once, but they became Westerners long ago [yatagharrabu min zaman]. Whatever little Islam they had was extinguished by the Communists." Ibrahim, who knew the man from previous visits to the café and was visibly irritated by his comment, weighed in: "Shame on you, Samir [haram 'alayk, ya Samir]. Muslims are Muslims, wherever they are. The shaykh is right: the shame is on us that we sit by and do nothing while our brothers [ikhwania] are being slaughtered. The mosques collect a little money, the prime minister says, 'we support the rights of the Bosnians,' and nothing is done." Samir again rejected the argument: "We Arabs have enough problems. Palestinians are being murdered and you want us to save the Bosnians?! Maybe the Bosnians are our cousins, but our brothers, the Arabs—the Iraqis, the Algerians, the Palestinians—they're the ones we should be concerned with."

As the preacher began a collective prayer calling for an end of Bosnian suffering, the shop owner returned again to the theme of Muslim solidarity: "So we should only help Arabs. That's exactly the reason why Muslims are so weak today. That's exactly what our enemies want us to do: 'Those Muslims are different from us; those over there don't speak our language, those there, their clothes are strange.' No. If you say 'There is no God but the one God' then you are a Muslim. That's in the Quran. The Serbs destroy houses of God, full of people praying, and you say, 'It's not my business [ma'lish da'wa]? Listen to the shaykh, Samir." Attempting to bolster the shop owner's argument, Ibrahim now cited a well-known prophetic tradition..."
(hadith) on the equality of Arab and non-Arab Muslims: “No Arab is superior to an non-Arab [‘ajami] except by righteous conduct.” The exchange was interrupted as a boy from the store next door called out for the shop owner to bring over another round of tea. Samir, turning to finish the last of his water pipe, suggested that he didn’t have time to complete the conversation now but would take it up with Ibrahim on their next encounter. Ibrahim, in obvious frustration, turned back to me.

Informal exchanges of this sort, a common element of daily experience for many Egyptians, point to the way tapes have contributed to reshaping contemporary discourses of Muslim solidarity and community. Khutaba’ often address themselves to an Egyptian audience but from a standpoint that takes a universal Muslim collective as its framework of concern, as the category of belonging and commitment necessary to acts of moral and political judgment. When I asked Ibrahim why he had chosen to speak up in the way he did, he replied: “If I am a Muslim, then I must ask myself every day, what have I done for Islam? If I had stayed silent, I would have done nothing for Islam. What would I say to God on Judgment Day, that I was busy, that I didn’t have time? No, da’wa is not a choice, Charles. And that is something that many Egyptians don’t understand.” One effect of the Islamic Revival, in other words, has been to articulate the links between global political issues and practices of moral reform. The stakes here include both one’s own salvation and the moral health and fortitude of the community as a whole.

This concern for Muslims worldwide has also given impetus to new practices of moral reflection. As Ibrahim told me after hearing a tape by an Egyptian khatib on Muslims in the United States, “When one hears these things, that people in the U.S., or in Bosnia, are becoming more diligent in the performance of their religious obligations, one is stirred. You ask yourself, if they are turning to Islam there, how is it that I as a Muslim, living in an Islamic country, am not even committed in my practice? What do they have over me? We are all equals after all. So hearing this moves me toward committing to Islam, and reforming my practice.” Cassette and other media have transformed the political and religious context wherein Islamic virtues are cultivated and practiced, endowing this context with a distinctly transnational dimension. This tendency has been further enhanced, first, by the fact that many of the khutaba’ whose tapes are popular in Egypt are from other Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, but also Jordan and Lebanon; and second, by the fact that the leading contemporary khutaba’ and other significant figures of the da’wa movement participate in networks of mosques and Islamic associations whose reach extends from Arab countries to Europe, the United States, and Canada. These various factors have contributed to the morally inflected cosmopolitanism evident in the comments of Ibrahim and others above.

**SAM’ AND THE CITIZEN**

Cassette technology has played a key role in shaping the social imaginary of contemporary da’wa in Egypt, in fashioning its forms of reflexivity and collective action into what I have called a counterpublic. By dislodging print from its privileged position within the national imaginary of publicness, the cassette sermon, I want to suggest, introduces a rupture into da’wa’s mode of articulation with the normative structures of public discourse. Tapes allow listening to go public, not simply as the figure of an ideal receptivity but as a model on which an emergent notion of the public could be conceptualized and imagined. By replacing print and the image of the private reader with resonant sound and sensitive hearts, the cassette gives new purchase to a history of reflection upon the virtues and specific agency of sound. The faculties of the ethical listener—an appreciation for and attunement to the affective and expressive dimensions of divine speech—now come to define the proper attributes of a public subject. This shift entails not simply the circulation of a discourse on pious affect but the dissemination of auditory practices whereby such ethical dispositions are cultivated and expressed (such as those I discussed in the last chapter), as well as a general revival and renewed interest in such long-standing techniques of ethical discipline as Quranic memorization and recitation.

In their privileging of the listener, cassette sermons have made possible the reanimation of the ethical tradition I discuss in chapter 2. The forms of sensory memory, affect, and expression at the heart of this tradition have often been associated with Islam’s more mystical side, but they also infuse the pedagogical practices of those traditions considered more orthodox. This is not a sensory world at great remove from the experience of the social classes who have formed the backbone of the da’wa movement. Sufism has remained one of the dominant forms of Islam for many Egyptians and continues to be especially influential in many popular quarters, despite the strong rationalist tendencies within Islam’s modernist intellectual currents. Paradoxically, while the da’wa movement has often adopted the anti-Sufi rhetoric of salafi-modernist trends, the techniques of social discipline it has facilitated have privileged ethical and affective dispositions...
historically linked to Islam's more mystical variants. Thus, Sufi poetry and the breathing techniques of dhikr—the vocal practice of giving remembrance to God, often through the extended repetition of the divine names—are frequently employed within the sermons of contemporary khutaba-'du'at. Giving priority to eschatological and thanatological themes and incorporating Quranic repertoires for the acoustic modulation of emotion, popular preachers draw upon this substrate of sensory-emotive experience, one that had been largely circumscribed to specific ritual occasions and circumstances, and effaced from the dominant discourses mediating public memory. These fragments of buried experience have found new coherence and expression within a contestatory movement focused on the ethical, as the nondiscursive background for an emerging form of public reason, virtuous comportment, and moral agency.

The khutaba’ whose cassettes mediate this discourse frequently contrast its passionate and embodied character with the forms of discourse found in state-run media, what the widely popular khatib Muhammad Hassan criticizes as “cold culture [al-thaqafa al-barida] addressing only the intellect [al-adhham],” or “the dead, dry, trivial language of ‘culture’ or ‘history.’” For these preachers, a language consonant with the eschatological drama of human existence must not engage the rational-critical faculties alone but must also address the heart—the seat of ethical sensibility, affect, and will. That said, it is wrong to view the da’wa public as an affective collectivity, a unity galvanized around a rhetoric of shared emotional experience. The intensely passionate character of sermon rhetoric does not address a collective subject of affect. For the affects invoked and refined through sermon audition do not refer to the category of subjective experience but of ethical action: they are actions of a heart properly disposed toward God, actions that accompany and serve to refine practices of moral conduct and reasoning. Rather than standing opposed to reason, they provide it affective-volitional substance—the epistemic and passionate conditions for its proper exercise; not interior states accompanying ethical action but the honed repertoires of expression by which actions acquire moral excellence. For this reason, we might say da’wa public discourse presupposes and performatively ‘enacts not shared affects but a shared moral orientation, one that finds embodiment in a coordination of gestures, bodies, and hearts fashioned as a mode of pious sociability and public engagement.

The da’wa in this sense is not a “sentimentalist,” the term Stokes used in his discussion of twentieth-century musical trends in Egypt to describe the highly subjectivized emotional style of the singer Abd al-Halim Hafiz (Stokes in press). Instead, the da’wa finds his musical correlate in the muṭrib, the performer of tarab, whose accomplishment is at once individual and collective and whose “enchantment” is as much a social relationship as it is a form of experience (see chapter 2). In referring here to divergent musical styles, my point is not simply to elucidate through analogy. My argument, rather, is that the fault lines that characterize Egyptian political life today owe their force to the contrasting structures of affect and subjectivity that traverse contemporary Egyptian political, ethical, and aesthetic practices. Arguments over the appropriate place of Islam within Egyptian social and political life derive their force and meaning not only from the unequal distributions of wealth and power they map onto but also from the way such arguments articulate with sensory habits and with patterns of sensibility, affect, and memory cultivated within daily life.

Within sermon rhetoric, the dynamics of impassioned response are organized around two overarching themes. The first, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, is death: the drama of human mortality and the terror of divine judgment evoke in the sensitive listener a series of affective responses, from fear and sadness to joyful release in the face of God’s mercy. The subject of this progression is the isolated individual, stripped of social and familial bonds and left trembling before an omniscient and all-powerful judge. Vivid renarrations of this scene pervade contemporary sermon rhetoric. The second pole of affective investment within sermon discourse centers on the current plight of the umma, as a historical community now riven with moral corruption and profoundly suffering all forms of injustice, disrespect, and insult. Within the structure of the sermon, this theme reaches its apogee during the supplementary prayers at the conclusion, where the khatib-da’wa calls for prayers for the many Muslim communities currently facing adversity in Palestine, Chechnya, the Philippines, Bosnia, and elsewhere. It is here that the rhetoric of pain—now a collective one—reaches its greatest intensity, and where the entire congregation often weeps without restraint.

**SOUND AND SENSIBILITY**

One of the developments contributing to the formation of the public arena I describe here has been the creation of a pious soundscape. The role of sound (and particularly the call to prayer) in regulating and auditing the social rhythms of Muslim societies has often been noted by anthropologists concerned with Islam (see, for example, Lee 2003). As most of Cairo’s
thousands of mosques broadcast the call to prayer (adhan) over externally mounted loudspeakers, five times a day the city is engulfed in a sort of heavenly interference pattern created by the dense vocal overlappings. These soaring yet mournful, almost languid harmonic webs soften the visual and sonic tendrils of the city, offering a temporary reprieve from its manic and machinic functioning.

The common practice of playing Quran and sermon tapes in shops, cafés, taxis, and buses has also reshaped the moral architecture of such places.24 Sermon and Quran tapes tend to bring with them some of the norms of sociability associated with the mosque: when they are played in a public location, such as a store or a bus, they produce an environment wherein certain styles of speech and comportment become marked as inappropriate and are likely to draw public censure from others present. “Don’t act so rudely in the presence of the Quran”; “Shame on you, while the shaykh is talking about the Prophet.” Such comments, I want to suggest, should not be taken simply as evidence of a more religiously oriented clientele. Nor can they be understood solely as the enactment of a norm (as opposed, say, to similar reprobations given at a mosque, where such a norm does exist). Rather, such responses need be seen in light of the acoustic construction of public space and the affective intensities that such an architecture mobilizes.25 Quran and sermon tapes don’t simply frame space discursively but also shape it sensorially by animating, below the threshold of consciousness, the substrate of visceral, kinesthetic, and affective experience that is integral to the tapes’ ethical reception (see chapter 3). As the intensifying background for practices of embodied sociability and moral discernment, such qualities may give rise to ethical performances, as in the acts of public reprimand mentioned. The presence of this sonic background is also frequently registered in the listener’s lips as they subtly trace the salutation to the Prophet following the khatib’s mention of his name, in the barely audible phrases of supplication uttered when a certain dire event of the eschaton has been described, in barely uttered bits of prayer or in adjustments of posture. These are the motions of the heart, limbs, and will—what Jousse called “the entire human compound”—as they continuously accommodate themselves to the familiar demands of a sonorous moral acoustics.

Such an acoustic unconscious is at work in a wide range of habitual actions. Once, while listening to music at Ibrahim’s house with a couple of friends, I noticed Ahmad get up and proceed to walk over to the cassette player to turn down the music. As the sound of the adhan (the call to prayer) became audible to me, the conversation immediately tapered off, then returned, with hardly a sense that there had been an interruption—all this unfolding with an automaticity and a spontaneity analogous to the reflex adjustments of the muscles of a driver approaching a curve. It was as if no one had noticed, yet everyone had moved, introducing a pause that was not a break but an integral part of the grammar of the conversation. Over time I began to recognize this responsiveness among the men I worked with in many contexts where before it had passed me by unnoticed.

Viewed in this light, cassette sermons emerge as more than just a technology of ethical self-fashioning. Such tapes contribute to the creation of a sensory environment from which the subject draws its bearings, an environment that nourishes and intensifies the substrate of affective orientations that undergird right reasoning, as I describe in chapter 3.26 These forms of embodied action and thought are patterned in accord with a particular form of life, and its repertoires of postural, gestural, and affective expression. Animated or “played” by the rhythms, lyrical intensities, sound figures, echoes, and resonances of the recorded performances, the sensorium acquires a moral orientation. The performances call forth, mimetically, sensory elements at the heart of what I have called the tradition of ethical listening. These elements constitute the affective basis of moral attitudes and dispositions, the embodied attributes of a Muslim public subject.

PUBLIC NOISE

For those Cairenes who are critical of the da’wa movement and its soundscape, the acoustic world I have described here, one that embeds and sustains the practices of the da’wa counterpublic, is a space of noise pollution. Articles in secularly oriented newspapers routinely complain about the “assault on the ears” produced by mosque loudspeakers and cassette recorders, perceived as the violent imposition of religious discourse onto the nonreligious space of public life. “The call to prayer, when I first heard it as a child, was beautiful to hear. It wafted over the city in soft and sometimes musical tones,” notes the Egyptian writer and activist Nawal El-Saadawi in a recent interview. “Now it has become a cacophony of strident voices, a threatening call shot through with violence” (S. Smith 2009). Another Cairo resident interviewed links the amplified call to prayer with religious discrimination:

Each mosque should be allowed their own call to prayer but only in their own voice without the aid of loudspeakers. My neighbourhood sounds like
a rock concert each morning and has become nearly uninhabitable; I now sleep with earplugs. Compounding the problem is that other faiths are not granted the same privilege. Christians are forbidden to ring bells, broadcast Christmas carols or religious songs. As in many Islamic states, religious freedom is suppressed and the verbal onslaught each morning is merely one of many powerful tools used to dominate other faiths. When I was young I used to enjoy the lone, clear voice calling us to prayer but no longer.

(S. SMITH 2005)

For these listeners, as for those who respond positively to such religious media, the experience of the soundscape created by amplified Islamic oratorical performances is deeply visceral, more a result of aural sensibilities than a reasoned commitment to the liberal notion of religion as private worship. This public space offers little resonance for the kind of subjectivities predicated on the silent interiority of belief and the soft tonalities that accompany and express it in moments of private worship. In contrast, for many of those who participate in the da’wa public, such acoustically configured spaces sustain and amplify the affective-vestigial repertoires of pious civility.

The Egyptian state, for its part, is anxious not about noise but rather about the loyalties and sensibilities of the religious subject being forged within the da’wa movement, and it has sought, in response, to construct a domain of private life to which they might be confined. There is a steady flow of advice and speculation in the government-controlled press about how this is to be achieved. The following editorial regarding the correct use of mosques is characteristic:

We should restore mosques once again to their proper function as places of worship, and provide young people with plenty of other accessible leisure activities, so that they can live like normal young people, studying or working in the morning, going to their place of worship to pray, and then in their leisure time going to the cinema, theatre or library, or taking part in their favorite sport.

(AL-AHRAM WEEKLY 1995)

leisure. Indeed, it is precisely this disjuncture between the kind of public subject fashioned within the da’wa movement and one who will perform the role of national citizen inhabiting a private domain of unconditional immunity that has made “culture” into a site of considerable struggle. For khutaba’ and their audiences, the danger of Western cultural forms and popular-media entertainment lies in the fact that they engender emotions and character attributes incompatible with those that in their view enable one to live as a pious Muslim. As my preaching instructor Muhammad Subhi told me, echoing a widely held opinion, “The enemies of Islam use art [har], literature [adab], culture [thaqafa], and fashion [muda] to attack Islam,” a comment explicitly acknowledging the Western and secular genealogy of these categories of discourse and practice. Much of the criticism found in cassette sermons is directed at media entertainment, film stars, popular singers, and television serials. Thus, some of Shaykh Kishk’s most well-known sermons are his critiques of popular singers, while the khutab Umur Abd al-Kafi is best known for having convinced a number of famous film actresses to give up their acting careers. Muhammad Hassan, in a sermon entitled “al-Shahawat” (The illicit desires), takes issue with a religious scholar who has recently stated that it is permissible to listen to popular music (al-ghina’). To emphasize his point, Hassan mentions a music tape that was quite popular in Egypt at the time, noting:

We all know that cursed tape “Luna.” It has sold more than eighty million copies, and there is nowhere you can go to escape from it. Young people listen and sing the words. It puts these words full of illicit desires [shahawat] into the mouths of the young people until they go out and commit sins [ma’as]. It pulls them to the disco, boys and girls, where they engage in evil, filthy dancing. Muslims! Our young Muslim sons and daughters!

For these khutaba’, popular music, and much of television and film, corrupts the heart or soul, instilling desires in people that lead them to take up un-Islamic activities.

What is at stake here is not simply a case of political criticisms being deflected onto the safer realm of culture. According to many khutaba’ in Egypt, most of the programs presented on state-controlled television engage and direct the senses toward moral dispositions, states of the soul, that are incompatible with the virtues upon which an Islamic society rests. In response, proponents of da’wa have sought to develop and encourage the use of alternative, Islamic forms of popular diversion. There has been a
proliferation of Islamically suitable songs for weddings, Islamic summer camps for children, “Islamic theatre” based around stories of early Muslim historical figures, and various forms of Islamic literature. Khutabā frequently recommend to their audiences the use of anashid (epic stories performed to music, often based on the lives of heroes from early Islamic times) or sermon tapes as media practices suitable for Islamic gatherings. These recommendations and practices, I suggest, are part of the revival’s attempt to create an ethically sustaining lifeworld.

PIUS SOCIUS

The development of the da’wa counterpublic depended crucially on the way the circulation of cassette-mediated discourse articulated with practices of embodied sociability and corporeal expressivity that were concurrently being nurtured by the new assemblage of mosque-centered institutions. As mentioned in chapter 2, the arrival of the cassette sermon in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the recuperation of the mosque as a center of public life within many of Cairo’s popular quarters. With a weakening of the state’s ability to provide education, health, and welfare services in the context of the economic liberalization programs of the 1970s (Sada’s program of infiṭah), many mosques began to take on the character of community centers, offering an array of moral and material resources for the neighborhood communities they served. Larger mosques, and the Islamic welfare associations that frequently adjoin them, now offer free supplementary courses for schoolchildren in all subjects, funds for individuals who cannot afford medical treatment, and even assistance locating jobs. The growth of open-air markets set up adjacent to mosques on Fridays has further served to centralize community activities around the mosque. One effect of the growth of these networks of self-defined Islamic institutions has been to give these neighborhoods a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state. Indeed, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, some mosques, including those of renowned khutabā Abd al-Hamid Kishk and Ahmad al-Malhawi, came to be explicitly identified by those who frequented them as “counter-states” (Kishk 1986; al-Malhawi 1991). While only a small number of mosques in Egypt adopt such a radical posture, many have become centers and agents of neighborhood revitalization.

When the young men I worked with wished to indicate the positive effects of da’wa, most of them referred to specific popular neighborhoods where, in their view, the residents’ neighborly conduct accorded with Islamic ethical standards: assistance was provided to the sick and poor by the community; those behaving improperly (for example, drinking, swearing, fighting, dressing inappropriately) were readily confronted by community members; and most people prayed, read the Quran, and attended mosque regularly. In short, these were contexts where a general ethic of mutual assistance and collective responsibility prevailed. When describing this character of Cairo’s lower-middle-class neighborhoods, Beha, the taxi driver introduced in chapter 3, emphasized the benefits for the women in his family:

My sister comes home from school on the bus, and then has to walk a long way from the bus stop to get to our house. There are many places in Cairo where I would be worried about her, but not in this neighborhood. If a man insults her, or tries to touch her, people will come right out and confront him. Do you think this would happen in [the elite neighborhoods of] Zamalek, or Mushanbesen? Maybe, but I wouldn’t count on it. Here, in contrast, people are more religious [mutadaayin], so they are not afraid to speak out, even if they may get hurt by doing so.

As Beha’s remarks suggest, one of the most pronounced effects of this agglomeration of activities and associations around the mosque in popular quarters has been the reinforcement of a normative civility, one grounded in the sort of ethical sensibilities foregrounded by popular khutabā but also embodied in a variety of publicly enacted expressive forms. The collective wailing that occurs during sermons, for example, is one such form. While crying has always been part of the pious responsiveness of sensitive sermon listeners, in Egypt it has only been in the last few decades that such intense collective expressions of public sadness and pious fear have become commonplace. The headscarf is, of course, another expression of this public civility, and in popular neighborhoods, a male version of pious dress—the white jallabiyya, or tunic-shirt—has become almost as widespread. In addition, a certain style of personal grooming elaborated on the basis of rigorous ideas of moral and bodily purity, demonstrated in such things as closely clipped fingernails, trimmed facial hair, neat beards, and newly washed and pressed clothing, has become prevalent in these neighborhoods. Men here routinely use musk and other scented oils and perfumes, many of which are sold outside the mosque. Indeed, certain smells carry a strong moral valence, and they are frequently commented on publicly. Moral uprightness, for instance, is understood to bring a sweet smell, one that may remain even after death. Ibrahim once recounted that the mechanic who lived next
to him had been digging up his floor in order to expand his workshop when a sweet smell began to come up from the ground. Taking this as a sign that a pious man must have been buried below, he decided to convert the workshop into a mosque. It is also believed by some that the meaning of dreams can often be uncovered by the smells that accompany them. For example, when Ahmad once expressed anxiety about the significance of a dream in which he found himself tightly thronged by a circle of men in jallabiyyas, Ibrahim suggested he try to recall the smell that pervaded the dream, so as to decipher its correct meaning. Smell, in other words, is a salient perceptual feature of the moral landscape for those who practice da'wa. The mode of sociability that the da'wa counterpublic has created has been crucially enabled by the kinds of embodied practices (of sounds, smells, gesture, and so on) I describe here. This pious sensorium distinguishes this arena, giving it a palpable presence in urban Cairo.

THE VIRTUES OF DELIBERATION

Within da'wa literature and among the young men of my study, the performance of da'wa is understood to be predicated upon a prior cultivation of virtues. As I describe in this section, virtues play more than an instrumental role in relation to the activity of da'wa: as with other obligatory practices—such as prayer, fasting, or alms giving—da'wa has conditions of enactment that include a particular set of virtues. In this sense, it is both an activity that upholds the possibility for the virtuous performance of other Muslim practices and a virtuous act in itself.

As I mentioned earlier, much of the Islamic print and audio media today concerns the qualities the da'iya must possess in order to perform the moral and civic duty of da'wa. Such discourses fall within a long and continuing tradition of Islamic ethical and pedagogical writings on the virtues that uphold individual piety. Where they depart from this tradition is in addressing the virtues, not simply from an ethical point of view but also from a rhetorical one, as conditions for the persuasiveness of speech and action within the public domain of da'wa practice. Virtuous conduct, in other words, is seen by the movement both as an end in itself and as a means internal to the dialogic process by which the reform of society is secured. Although a concern for individual salvation continues to inform the disciplinary exercises of the movement, it is coupled with an emphasis on the construction of an ethical sociability conceived as a vehicle of moral and political reform.

The virtues of the Muslim citizen qua da'iya, as cultivated and practiced within daily life, tend to be understood behaviorally, as disciplined ways of being and acting, ways for which the body’s performances and expressions constitute an integral part (on virtue ethics, see Maclntyre 1984; Williams 1985; Lambeck 2000). They are cultivated gradually through the disciplinary practices I describe in chapter 3, such as prayer, Quranic recitation and memorization, hadith study, and listening to sermons, as well as by undertaking the practice of da'wa itself. Some of the virtues specific to da'wa are addressed within da'wa literature under the term adab al-da'wa (loosely, etiquette of da'wa) and include those qualities that ensure the orderliness and civility of public interaction. Much of da'wa print and cassette media focus on the task of developing these qualities. For example, a recently published book entitled al-Da'wa al-Matha'ira (Effective da'wa) lists among the principles undergirding the character of the public subject the following:

First Principle: Who takes no interest in the affairs of the Muslims is not one of them. Expressing interest in others draws them toward you. To be given concern, one must show a concern for others. This is one of the effective qualities of the Muslim individual, that he be useful to those around him. Thus, one need be skilled at placing oneself in the service of others; and extending a useful hand to others, with sincerity and free from personal interest or egoism.

Fourth Principle: Speak of good or stay silent. This means listening well and saying little. For the hurried speaker is also a hurried listener. Be a good listener and don't interrupt while your interlocutor is speaking. Rather, listen to him as you would want to be listened to. Many people fail to leave a good influence on the souls of those they meet, because they don't listen to them closely with attention and interest.

The da'iya, as figured here, must be an active and concerned citizen, one who, having honed the skills of public concern and careful listening, is able, through example and persuasion, to move fellow Muslims toward correct forms of comportment and social responsibility. The book provides exercises, including a list of questions at the end of each chapter, to help the reader learn and polish the requisite skills.
Similarly, a tape by the popular khatib Wagdi Ghunim, entitled “The Muslim as Da’iya,” provides the listener with a list of thirteen requirements that every individual in his or her capacity as da’iya must adhere to. Among these he includes friendliness, gentleness of speech (al-rifq wa al-lin), temperateness, neatness and cleanliness. throughout the tape, Ghunim provides numerous illustrations of how da’wa should be undertaken, as in the following:

Say we are sitting and speaking with a fellow who then gets upset. I’ll say to him, Oh my brother, may God be generous with you; Oh my brother, may God open your heart and mine [yashrah sadrak wa sadri]. Or say someone is sitting nearby smoking a cigarette, and then comes and offers you one. Take advantage of the opportunity. Don’t try to take the pack of cigarettes away from him. No. Da’wa always entails politeness [adab]. Say to him: Oh Brother, may God restore you to health. I ask God that you stop to smoke. May God protect your chest [sadrak] from the consequences of your act.

The prior cultivation of such virtues as friendliness, temperateness, and gentleness of speech ensures that da’wa, as a public act, is conducted in a calm, respectful manner, protected from the kind of passions that would vitiate the act and the social benefit that it seeks to realize. The adab of da’wa, in other words, entails not a simple suppression of the passions but their moderation or attenuation in accord with an authoritative model of the virtues. A speech devoid of passion—the “cold culture [al-thaqafa al-barida] addressing only the intellect [al-adlhan]”—lacks the rhetorical force to move others toward correct behavior.

The virtues of sincerity (ikhlas), humility (khushu’), and fear of God (taqwa or khawf) are also frequently associated with the performance of da’wa and are given great emphasis in sermons and manuals on the practice. As elaborated within classical Islamic moral doctrine, these dispositions endow a believer’s heart with the capacities of discrimination necessary for proper moral conduct and reasoning. In the rhetorical context of public deliberation discussed here, this understanding has implications for both speaker and listener. For the speaker’s discourse to result not merely in abstract understanding but in the kind of practical knowledge that affects how one lives, it must be imbued with those virtues that enable it to reach the heart of the listener. This was spelled out for me by Muhammad Subhi: “The speaker must soften the listeners for what he has to tell them. This will depend on how well they are moved by the Quranic verses, the tone of the khatib’s voice, by the warnings of divine punishment and the promise of the hereafter. But only if one speaks with humility, fear of God, and sincerity will their hearts open in this way, and the listeners will be moved and want to do good.”

Alternatively, from the perspective of the listener, without having first imbued the heart with the requisite emotional dispositions, he or she will be incapable of actually grasping and digesting what is at stake in the discourse. The virtues, that is to say, are a condition for both the effectiveness of the da’iya’s utterance and the listener’s audition. As affective-volitional dispositions sedimented in one’s character, they form the evaluative background enabling one to act and speak reasonably and effectively within the public realm.

AFFECTIVE REASON

As I suggested earlier, the virtues I have mentioned here are not valued simply because they undergird the protocols of polite speech upon which public argumentation depends. These virtues imbue such argumentation with its proper form, orient it toward its correct goals. Another way to put this would be to say that the practices of deliberation and argument articulated by this concept have goods internal to them and do not simply serve an instrumental function. The internal goods of a practice are those that can only be specified in terms of the practice and are only achievable in the course of undertaking the practice itself. They contrast with those goods that may be realized by means of a practice but that are only contingently or externally related to it. For example, while playing the violin may win one respect or renown, these goals may equally be won through other means. Playing a difficult sonata with fluidity, clarity, and expressiveness, on the other hand, is an accomplishment unique to violin playing, and one that, to some extent, can only be fully judged by those with experience in the practice. The virtues, in this context, refer to those qualities that, once cultivated and refined, enable one to achieve such excellence at a practice.

Let me clarify these points by reference to an event in Cairo that generated considerable discussion within Egypt’s da’wa public, as well as in the national and international media: the case of the Cairo University professor Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who was initially denied tenure on the grounds that his writings showed him to be an apostate. The Abu Zayd affair became a cause célèbre for both liberal and Islamist currents within Egypt: for liberals, the case epitomized what they saw as an ongoing attack on liberal
freedoms, while for Islamists, Abu Zayd was viewed as yet another agent of secularization seeking to undermine Islam from within Egypt’s own educational institutions. Many of the details of the case are now well known (see Dupret and Ferrié 2001; Hirschkind 1995). I want to focus here on how the issue was addressed by those I worked with in the field of da’wa. While many of the sermon listeners knew little about the case beyond the charge, reiterated by many khutaba’ at the time, that Abu Zayd had denied the divinity of the Quran, a few were interested enough not only to follow the debate in the national press closely but even to read some of the published writings of Abu Zayd that were coming out in magazines supportive of his case. Muhammad Subhi expressed his opinion on the matter in this way:

Many of those who dismiss Abu Zayd out of hand must never have looked at his work. For clearly he demonstrates considerable knowledge of the Quran and is doing important work in terms of bringing new theories to bear on its study. We need this. Unfortunately, his irreverent and dismissive attitude toward classical Islamic scholars [al-salaf] is incompatible with serious work in this field by a Muslim. He writes of the Quran without humility [khushu’], respect, or fear of God [taqwa]: while this may be fine for other books, it is not acceptable for a Muslim to do so with the Quran. I don’t think he should be treated the way he has been, but he should be made to understand that such an attitude is injurious both to Islam and his work.

The suggestion made here is that the Islamic virtues of humility, fear, and respect endow the scholar—or the da’iya—with the commitments and orientations that ensure right reasoning and action. Without these qualities, the performance of either da’wa or scholarly inquiry may achieve a kind of technical proficiency but never the standards of excellence internal to these activities as Islamic practices. Another man put the argument to me this way:

Abu Zayd just mimics being a Muslim in order to attack it. The basic foundation that defines a Muslim is belief in his books, prophets, angels, Judgment Day, and fate. Even the mu’tazila who drew on Greek philosophy in their critiques never challenged this foundation. A Muslim should affirm [yu’min bi] these elements—above all the Quran—and not seek to deny them or treat them with cold indifference. Abu Zayd’s work differs little from arguments the mu’tazila made centuries ago, except in one key area. For him the Quran is a book like any other and holds no place in his heart.

Note that the claim being made here is not that Abu Zayd’s argument contradicts scholarly opinion as established within authoritative Islamic traditions (as found, for example, in the exegetical works of al-Tabari or Ibn Kathir). Rather, as in the previous comment, the assertion here is that Abu Zayd’s writing betrays an attitude or an emotional disposition incompatible with and subversive of the intellectual and social good realizable through an engagement with the Quran. We would be tempted to read both of these criticisms in terms of a concern with tone over substance. In framing the matter this way, however, we fail to acknowledge the extent to which the affective register alluded to here is recognized to be of considerable consequence for the scholarly excellence of the work, its potential contribution to the Islamic society wherein it has been produced. In somuch as the reading and recitation of the Quran play a role for Muslims in the shaping of virtues, the text cannot be approached as an abstract statement to be assessed dispassionately. A properly disposed heart—a figure for something like “the right attitude”—is necessary in order to learn from the Quran, to achieve sound judgment in one’s engagements with it as a Muslim. The verb used by the man cited above, “yu’min bi,” from the root “ama” (to have belief in), implies far more than a simple cognitive orientation: it implies an act of submission and resignation to God. It was an apparent lack of this disposition in Abu Zayd’s writings that those I worked with saw as the greatest flaw in his work. In stating this I am not making a claim about Abu Zayd’s inner psychology but pointing to the grammar of certain Muslim virtues. While the words, behaviors, and predispositions that constitute and exemplify a well-disposed heart may be understood to refer to and express such an interiority, in themselves they are “external” and, as such, are subject to observation, comment, and criticism by others. I am not suggesting, of course, that those who criticized Abu Zayd were all motivated by this concern: as in all such media events, petty motives and political opportunism undoubtedly played a significant role in pushing the case as far as it went. My point here is simply to note how, among many of those active in the field of da’wa, of primary importance are the affective dispositions, or virtues, that one must possess in order to achieve excellence in a scholarly engagement with tradition.

I also note that the context of assessment presupposed by the above statements is not the university, with its academic standards largely derived from the Western disciplines it has adopted. Rather, Abu Zayd’s writings came to be evaluated by these men and many others according to criteria internal to the sphere of da’wa practice, and thus as an act directed
but their conformity with a divine model of moral conduct. The field of power brought into existence by this movement has made such actions as publicly expressing affection for someone of the opposite sex, or choosing not to wear the headscarf, more difficult, especially in the lower- and lower-middle-class quarters where the movement is most active. Many in Egypt today resent the social and political pressures that they feel the Islamic Revival movement has imposed on them. And while the da'wa public contrasts with the public sphere articulated by the national media in remaining open to non-Egyptian nationals, Egypt's six million Christians are a priori excluded from participation, despite the fact that this discursive arena has increasingly reshaped the social conditions of their lives.

Although this Islamic counterpublic is far from universal in its scope (neither are liberal publics, for that matter), its boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are not fixed but are continuously redefined by the practices of exchange and argument that constitute the arena. As in the conversation in the taxi, this arena is shaped by disagreements, the outcomes of which are not predetermined by reference to any overriding set of principles or doctrines. This public is not static, a labor of timeless repetition, but involves a historical dynamism derived precisely from the sort of practices of reasoning and argument foregrounded by the da’wa movement, practices that depart from the assumption of an authoritative corpus by which the status of current practices may be assessed but that do not presuppose a prior agreement on how that corpus is to be interpreted. Indeed, many of the da’wa activists I came to know held divergent views on such issues as the proper role of women in social life, the desirability of a national legal system founded on the Islamic shari‘a, and even on the ethics of disagreement itself. Da’wa, in other words, does more than simply enforce a normative moral order. It makes that order dependent upon the activities of ordinary Muslim citizens acting within changing historical circumstances in such a way that mediates against claims to closure and certainty.

GOVERNMENTALITY AND MODERN ISLAMIC ETHICS

For some scholars of the Middle East, the discursive arena I have explored in this chapter is best understood in terms of the norms and practices of a modern consumerist public (Salvatore 1998, 2001b; Schulze 1987; Starrett 1995b). This viewpoint has been elaborated with great rigor and insight by the Italian scholar Armando Salvatore. Focusing on televisuality and print media, Salvatore has sought to document how publicity has increasingly
become a condition of all religious practice in Egypt. For Islamic arguments and practices to remain viable, he argues, they have been forced to remake themselves in accord with the canons of self-abstraction and generality that govern the modern public sphere. In this way, “religious knowledge and modes of disciplining are restyled in public forms through increasingly standardized (and marketable) communicative patterns” (1998:91). The activities of leading *khutaba*, according to Salvatore, no longer anchor Islamic traditions of ethical practice but share of media popularity and regimes of religious consumption:

Actors within the religious field organize their interests, fulfill their functions, acquire their cultural capital and social prestige and reinvest them in the culture market according to dynamics that increasingly involve stakes of public definition along with skilled crafting and marketing of religious services and products. This is not a “free market” but a highly oligopolistic one, however, as the new religious media star (like Mustafa Mahmud or Shaykh Sha’rawi, who migrate through different print and electronic media and are well-established TV celebrities) resembles a media notable who chases after market shares at the same time as having to make show of a personal virtue, of a charismatic energy that is still comparable with the one shaykhs have to use in order to check the loyalty of adepts and clients.  

Salvatore's argument is both insightful and persuasive in regard to the two media figures mentioned above—Mustafa Mahmud and Muhammad Mitwali Sha'rawi. The extent to which it can be generalized to all “actors within the religious field,” however, is less convincing. Among popular religious figures in Egypt today, these two men have been exceptional in terms of the degree of their marketization and television exposure. Moreover, Shaykh Sha’rawi’s popularity must be understood in light of his status as a state-promoted religious figure, one deployed precisely to counter the oppositional impetus of the popular Islamic Revival *khutaba*. Although the preachers of the da’wa movement are also media phenomena, the interpretative conventions and modalities of sensory engagement put into play by the discourses they mobilize presuppose and enable a distinct form of embodied sociability and moral reason whose locus is within the da’wa counterpublic I have described.

Drawing on another theoretical vocabulary, we might say that Egypt’s Islamic counterpublic is inscribed within the governmental rationalities and institutions of national public life but also oblique to them, incorporating orientations and modes of practical reason that exceed or cut across modern normativity. This contradictory relation derives from the fact that in postcolonial contexts like Egypt, the forms of discipline and control undergirding modern governmentality are themselves fractured by historical multiplicity, embedding forms of memory, experience, and practice irreducible to the imperatives and rationalities of the modernizing state.  

Govern mentality, the technical and institutional matrix enabling what Foucault refers to as “the conduct of conduct” (1991), depends on the creation of dense networks of social and individual discipline, many of which remain inchoate and discontinuous within the Egyptian context. Take the mosque as an example. Since the late nineteenth century, as I describe in chapter 2, successive projects of reform have attempted to transform mosques into pedagogical instruments for the training of a modern citizenry, and particularly for narrowing the scope of religious authority within the lives of Egyptian Muslims to matters of private worship. Yet, despite having been rendered an object of bureaucratic organization and expertise, the mosque has continued to encompass modes of authority, practices of association, and sensibilities that stand in tension with nationalist reforms (see the section entitled “Interlinkages” in chapter 2).

Practices of cassette audition similarly extend governmental rationalities and displace them. Sermon audition embeds many of the conventions governing other audio media, in relation to the places and times of listening, the modalities of self-regulated discipline they enable, the linkages they establish between practices of consumption and the organization of religious authority, and so on. In this sense and to this extent, they adjust and accommodate their users to the structures of political and social governance. That being said, inasmuch as the sensibilities that listeners cultivate are oriented toward the structures and practices put into play by the da’wa movement, they diverge from the political and consumerist rationalities characteristic of other media. In short, the Islamic counterpublic must be seen as a contingent assemblage, erected upon a social and political terrain fractured by historical plurality, embedding temporalities and layers of historical experience never fully functionalized or erased by the powers of modern normativity.

**DEMOCRACY, DEBATE, DISCIPLINE**

The kind of public arena that has been created by the da’wa movement in Egypt is both normative and deliberative, a domain for both subjection to
authority and the exercise of individual reasoning. As I have argued, it is less an empirical structure than a framework for a kind of action, one intertwining moments of learning, dialogue, and dispute as practises necessary for the moral guidance of the collective. In this sense, we can see that one does not undertake sermon audition and the associated practises of da'wa with a preformed or unchanging set of interests and goals. Rather, one comes to acquire an understanding of the good and the virtues that enable its realization in the course of participation in this domain. This learning is not simply a process of acculturation or of ideological indoctrination: both of these notions fail to capture the extent to which one’s participation within this arena necessarily involves practises of argument, criticism, and debate. Although some shared orientations and languages are a prerequisite for this type of public engagement, and one participates with the assumption that there is a proper and divinely sanctioned form of life to which one aspires, this does not imply a uniformity of thought and action. Rather, the aim is to uphold those practises understood to be essential to an Islamic society, practises whose proper form, however, must be continuously determined by public acts of guidance, argument, and discussion by all members of the collective.

As I noted earlier, the concept of da’wa has taken on a variety of meanings and institutional forms over the history of Islamic societies. This is also the case today. In contemporary Saudi Arabia, for example, da’wa has been instituted as a kind of moral security apparatus deployed by the state, for the Tablighi Jama’at in India and Pakistan, it authorizes a project of international proselytization; and in Indonesia, the term designates a leading political party. My argument here is that in Egypt, over the course of the last century, da’wa has been elaborated in such a way as to define a mode of public life that incorporates practises of argumentation and debate about the orthodoxy of current practises. The aim of this discursive activity is not “public policy” but the formation of Islamic public virtues. In articulating itself against the modernizing programs of the Egyptian state, the da’wa movement has drawn on the universalist discourses of the Islamic tradition to create a form of community and identity that accommodates and transverses the moral and geographic boundaries of the nation.

Most analyses of emergent forms of public life privilege nationalism as the historical frame within which an account must be located. Admittedly, the discourses and practises of nationalism have also been important in my own account of the rise of da’wa public engagement. While the notion that Muslims have a duty to speak in the face of moral error for the sake of the umma had clear precedents within earlier Islamic societies, the contemporary institutionalization of this notion owes considerably to the idea and experience of national citizenship and the notions of civic responsibility implied in that status. Yet although nationalism changed the conditions within which Islamic traditions could be elaborated and practiced, we should be cautious about assuming that all forms of Islamic activism were henceforth assimilated to the nationalist project or some variant thereof. As I have sought to demonstrate, it would be wrong to understand the practises of public sociability articulated around the concept of da’wa in Egypt as nationalism cast in an Islamic idiom. Although the views and attitudes cultivated within this domain sometimes find application in the public sphere of the nation (as when participants in the movement vote for Islamist party candidates), the concerns, loyalties, sentiments, and practises that da’wa has given rise to presuppose a form of community for which the nation is an essential yet partial and qualified source of identity.

There are, of course, currents within the Islamic Revival movement that can rightfully be called nationalist. To cite one example, Islamist political parties, such as Hizb al’amal (the Labor Party) in Egypt, view the state as the form of agency through which Egyptian society is to be transformed, and they direct their efforts to securing its control through the electoral process. As a type of association presupposing and organizing its activities in accord with the political categories of the nation-state, such parties in my view may be convincingly described as nationalist. It is therefore not surprising that many of those engaged in this sort of political activity find the da’wa movement to be valueless, if not counterproductive, for the tasks that Egyptian society currently faces. As one Hizb al’amal official I spoke with put it, “The da’wa movement produces little more than religious chatter [tharthara dimiyya] about unimportant details of ritual practice. This not only distracts the mass of Egyptians from the real issues of the day such as democracy, political rights, and an Islamic legal code, but leaves them ever more mired in superstition and long irrelevant debates about trivial matters.” Da’wa, in this view, channels social energies in directions that are of no direct benefit to the nation and its goals of development.

Should the public practises of da’wa be seen as yet another product of the intensified global circulation of media, capital, and labor—in short, of globalization? Not in any strong sense, I would argue. Indeed, the very fact that da’wa has been instituted in such diverse ways within different Muslim societies today suggests a much more contingent process than that indicated by the framework of globalization, at least in its more technological
determinist versions. Globalization highlights for us the transnational context of the movement's institutional forms and modes of mass communication but cannot tell us why these features have been articulated as they have. Discussions of the emergent Islamic publics often leave unexplored the specific categories and traditions invoked by the participants, since it is assumed that the true determinations giving rise to these practices lie in the international circuits of media and commodity circulation. It is not surprising, in this light, that such religious movements are understood to be expressions of either one or both of the two models of political organization seen to underlie and be viable with this circulation: the nation, on the one hand, and the new transnational forms of diasporic religious association, on the other.

My argument is that we should not view da'wa as simply an Islamic rendition of the normative structure of the public sphere, one enabled and produced through an incorporation of Islamic symbols and culturally grounded frames of reference. To focus solely on the process through which the concepts and modular institutions of modern liberal democracy have been inflected by non-Western traditions is to fail to explore the often parallel projects of renewal and reform launched from within the conceptual and practical horizons of those traditions. This is not to restate the binary of tradition and modernity but, on the contrary, to point to processes that cannot be adequately analyzed through this opposition. It is for this reason that I find discussions of contemporary Islamic movements unhelpful in terms of the notion of an "invented tradition," as a modern institution in the guise of an ancient one. An approach adequate to the historical form I have described here will necessarily understand tradition as a set of discourses and practices that, while enabled by modern power, nonetheless articulates a politics and a set of sensibilities incommensurate with many of the secular-liberal assumptions that attend that power. Of course, the Islamic tradition is not the only framework within which the actions of the participants of the da'wa movement are meaningful, nor by any means the most powerful.