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About

The Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies (*JAAAS*) is a peer-reviewed gold open-access journal which provides an interdisciplinary space for discussions about all aspects of American studies. The journal functions as a forum for Americanists in Austria and the global academic community. Published twice a year, the journal welcomes submissions on a wide range of topics, aiming to broaden the multi- and interdisciplinary study of American cultures.

Aims

Interrogating the notion of "America" and looking at the U.S. within its transnational and (trans-)hemispheric interconnections, *JAAAS* seeks to challenge disciplinary boundaries by bringing together original and innovative work by scholars who focus on topics as diverse as literature, cultural studies, film and new media, visual arts, ethnic studies, indigenous studies, performance studies, queer studies, border studies, mobility studies, age studies, game studies, and animal studies. Apart from offering insights into trans- and international American literary and cultural studies and offering European perspectives on America, the journal also solicits scholarship that deals with history, music, politics, geography, ecocriticism, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, law, and any other aspect of American culture and society.

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Soundscapes, Sonic Cultures, and American Studies

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Soundscapes, Sonic Cultures, and American Studies

Introduction to the Special Issue

What happens when we imagine the sonic worlds of literary texts, when we focus on voice in film, or when we study the sound of social protest? How can we integrate sound studies into our academic practices? How does sound relate to space and place? How can American studies scholars understand the link between sonic and social relations? Music, voices, noise, and silence are constitutive elements of phenomena that we as American studies scholars regularly investigate. However, in contrast to the well-established prominence of visual culture studies, sound features less prominently in our field's research—an over*sight* (pardon the pun!) this issue of *JAAAS* seeks to remedy.

The essays presented here originated with the 42nd annual convention of the Austrian Association for American Studies, which was held at the University of Graz in November 2015. The conference theme, "Soundscapes and Sonic Cultures in America," invited speakers and listeners to contemplate how the variegated concerns of sound studies resonate with our interdisciplinary field and its numerous outlooks and theories. Speakers discussed sounds such as human voices, performed music, as well as naturally produced and technologically based noises; they also analyzed the characteristics and functions of silence. They contemplated how such sounds relate to a particular space or place and its inhabitants, and how this relation can be interpreted from perspectives within American studies. Furthermore, presenters explored the poetics of sonic cultures in order to address the particular functions of sounds in culture formation and cultural practice defined—for example—by region, ethnicity, gender, age, or musical taste. As the selection of essays in this special issue demonstrates, research on reception- or listener-oriented soundscapes was brought into dialog with research on production- or producer-oriented sonic cultures.

With this conference theme, the Austrian Association for American Studies acknowledged the growing bandwidth that the study of sound has been acquiring within the field of American studies and beyond. As is characteristic of the field, American studies has drawn on a wide range of disciplines, theories, and method-

ologies to analyze issues of sound and culture. Publications in this area reflect the wide-ranging concerns of understanding sonic phenomena within specific disciplinary imaginaries. The journal *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* has featured numerous articles on American films and popular music, and the American Studies Association's *American Quarterly* published a special issue on sound studies.[1] For the past decade, the open-access weekly *Sounding Out! The Sound Studies Blog* has been publishing peer-reviewed articles and scholarly conversations in myriad formats. As the annual 2019 "top ten" list on *Sounding Out!* amply demonstrates, sound studies-focused research revisits multiple key topics in American studies. Contributions address American popular music, critical race studies, the civil rights movement, Southern studies, new methods in urban studies, and black feminist literary theory.[2] The aforementioned thematic issue of *American Quarterly* appeared simultaneously with a complementary website that provided access to many of the sounds and soundscapes discussed in its featured articles. Seeking to enhance the acoustic dimensions of scholarly research and publication, sound studies has devised pioneering digital and online media formats (as demonstrated by *Sensate: A Journal for Experiments in Critical Media Practice*). Furthermore, sound studies remains closely intertwined with research on other senses, as the breadth of references to scholars, publications, conferences, and resources on the website sensorystudies.org shows. In February 2016, the first issue of *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* was published with contributions by American studies scholars. These examples from a burgeoning field have contributed to firmly situating soundscapes and sonic cultures as essential to the American experience and to American cultural practices and vice versa.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Canadian environmentalist and composer Raymond Murray Schafer began to study how sound (perception) serves as a crucial link between human beings and specific locations. He coined the term "soundscape," which has remained an influential and debated concept in sound studies to date. Adopting a spatial metaphor for aural perception via the allusion to "landscape," Schafer studied specific environments through the entire conglomerate of their audible features. According to him, "The home territory of soundscape studies will be the middle ground between science, society and the arts."[3] Ever since the publication of Schafer's seminal work *The Tuning of the World* (1977), the term "soundscape" has undergone a process of critique and modification that reflects characteristic concerns of the various fields that participate in sound studies (for details, see Mark M. Smith's discussion in this issue). This process has highlighted disciplinary affordances and predispositions which need to be addressed in order to make cross-disciplinary communication effective. Some contributions to this issue engage explicitly with Schafer's term, both with its original, antimodernist version and with more

recent renditions; others employ different critical terminologies. Jointly, the set of articles showcases how scholars of sound shed light on hitherto ignored sonic features that contribute to a clearer sense of both long-standing and more recent American studies concerns: the multiplicity of historical narratives, the conceptualization and practice of core political values, and acts of pushing the envelope in an effort to develop innovative aesthetic forms in particular media as well as medium combinations.

One outlook that fits well into American studies trajectories is the contextualization of each soundscape within an "intellectual-historical milieu" which reveals the soundscape to be "an artefact of a set of dominant ways of organizing sonic space."[4] Fascinatingly, this method facilitates approaching soundscapes from at least two perspectives: first, one can study geographic locations through their sonic characteristics and, second, one can study how composed sounds create or at least evoke specific cultural spaces. In both cases, soundscapes rely on "sociogenesis" in their constructedness,[5] which again indicates the closeness of the concept to a cultural studies perspective on social practices including the creation, distribution, and reception of art(ifacts).

The disciplinary breadth inherent in the forty talks given at the conference and in the contributions featured in this special issue clearly affirm the reciprocal relevance of sound studies and American studies. Accordingly, the essays presented here illustrate that the aural has been emerging as a crucial factor within research on the ways in which experiences are mediated and witnessed. Sounds have thus assumed growing importance within scholars' awareness of the sensory complexity of cultural practices and human-made representations.

As demonstrated in his keynote lecture and his contribution to this special issue, Mark M. Smith's research as a historian, particularly of the Civil War and of the Southern states of the U.S., has been pathbreaking in sensory studies. His work neatly locks arms with current American studies developments such as the necessity of oceanic perspectives. It is not sufficient, he argues, to study soundscapes on land, but—in many historical contexts—scholars must research "aquatic and terrestrial soundscapes" in conjunction with one another.[6] Sound studies across disciplines has, from its beginnings, also challenged long-term hierarchical perspectives that privilege the visual over the aural.[7] This interest in rattling the cage of cultural traditions when it comes to competing sense perceptions illustrates ways in which, again, the social and the artistic intersect and in which multi- and interdisciplinary research is required to unravel the what, how, who, when, why, and to-what-effect of the sonic. As Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld point out, the field of sound studies allows us to scrutinize epistemologies and their possible consequences for the creation of technolo-

gies, for interpretative lines of thought, and for the appreciation of the sonic as an accepted diagnostic and knowledge-generating tool.[8] At the same time, new ways of studying music have been leading scholars away from privileging the aesthetic over the social, and towards acknowledging—as Barry Shank made clear in his keynote and also argues in his contribution here—that experiencing sound goes far beyond the ostensibly metaphysical or at least immaterial dimensions of appreciating beauty.[9]

The papers of the 2015 AAAS conference covered areas such as analog and digital soundscapes, literary and musical sonic cultures, noise and silence, and—in the broadest sense—the ways in which sound-related phenomena resonate with core American studies concerns. Accordingly, the essays presented here provide insights into variegated areas within this broad range of research.

In "Sound + Bodies in Community = Music," Barry Shank demonstrates how cultural studies in general and sound studies in particular have reshaped cultural musicology. Far beyond broadly acknowledging that music is a social art, the questions posed and methods used in sound studies have opened up complex options for understanding the relational intricacies of musical sound, from its locations and conditions of production to the political impact of its reception. Awareness of the physical reality of music then adds to new perspectives on the extended impact of sound in space and time beyond acts of performance or practices of listening. As Shank explains, social traditions of inclusion and exclusion through sonic allegiances deserve further scrutiny, particularly because the dance/party performance context may differ sharply from the struggle-oriented and community-asserting features of, for instance, Sly and Family Stone's "I Want to Take You Higher." Ultimately, the sonic properties of music can forge a physical union which empowers concerted efforts.

Mark M. Smith's "In Praise of Discord: Beyond Harmony in Historical Acoustemology" elucidates the current state of sound studies from the perspective of a sensory historian, sounding a warning as to cul-de-sacs in the field and a clarion call for new directions. By characterizing the boom in historiography focused on aural features, Smith points out that the general thrill of engaging with an outlook that is comparatively new may lead to losing sight of the larger questions. In his "modest manifesto," Smith expresses his pleasure at the fact that sound studies have boomed in the recent past, but also issues a warning about a possible dilution of theoretical rigor. Thus, he calls for a thorough discussion of methodology and a continuous questioning of the status of the aural in historiography. But rather than sowing conflict, the essay exudes appreciation for what historical acoustemology can achieve. The suggested remedy is renewed attention to theory, method, and terminology, among them the very notion of "soundscapes," mentioned in our title and engaged by a range of our contributors.

In her contribution, "Voice, Silence, and Quiet Resistance in Percival Everett's *Glyph*," Nathalie Aghoro traces the possibilities of voiceless resistance against racial determinism through an analysis of the protagonist Ralph's silence. As she points out, voice is a trope for protest and resistance in a number of black novels; and *Glyph*, with its focus on silence stemming from a refusal to speak, both participates in and enlarges the scope of this trope. Here, willful silence is a means of self-protection, a provocation, and a political statement. Beyond that, Aghoro also stresses that the novel constitutes a refusal of essentialist interpretation (as a "black" novel) and instead demands to be seen as a metareferential comment on the role of voice in literature as well as a philosophical intervention in the relation between writing and speech. This is partly realized in the creation of a literary soundscape in which various philosophers and writers engage in vernacular conversations.

In "The Timbre of Trash: Rejecting Obsolescence through Collaborative New Materialist Sound Production," Joe Cantrell places the work of three contemporary experimental musicians, Qubais Reed Ghazala, Curtis Rochambeau, and William Basinski, in a conversation with new materialist theories. The three artists Cantrell discusses make music with discarded objects ranging from cast-off electronic instruments to outdated medical units and aging magnetic tape. Throughout the creative process, these objects assert their own agency, opening up pathways for different, more reciprocal relationships between human beings and things, technology and ecology. As Cantrell argues, these relationships echo and complement the ideas of new materialist thinkers such as Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, and Rosi Braidotti, who encourage a move beyond subject–object binaries and emphasize humans' entanglement with and embeddedness in (rather than mastery of) the material world. Cantrell contends that, by resisting the built-in obsolescence of electronic products, these creative forms of collaborative sound production counteract the drive for the always new in American culture and encourage a more sustainable relationship with the material environment.

In her article "American Studies, Sound Studies, and Cultural Memory: Woody Van Dyke's *San Francisco* as a Sonic Contact Zone," Susanne Leikam carefully listens to the soundscapes of the popular musical film *San Francisco*, whose theme song advanced to one of San Francisco's official songs. She analyzes how the film, a product of the Depression era, sonically memorializes the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, and exposes how the film's sonic imagination offers a highly selective kind of disaster memory. Leikam argues that while the actual earthquake was particularly disastrous for the city's poorer and nonwhite inhabitants, *San Francisco* sonifies a "disaster optimism" that presents the earthquake as "a social equalizer and a patriotic affirmation of American resilience." While the city before the earthquake and fires is characterized by noise, clamor, and tensions between different sonic tradi-

tions, the disaster resolves these tensions and unifies its citizens, who are now ready for Americanization and progress. Leikam shows that, as the song "San Francisco" has remained highly popular, our ears remain attuned to an idealized cultural memory.

Leopold Lippert's article "The Gendered Sounds of Revolutionary American Theater" analyzes the function of sound for the textual operation of a 1774 theatrical pamphlet and a 1777 play—texts that were apparently never performed in a theater and thus are characterized by "virtual theatricality." Through a careful reading of the textual properties (such as punctuation, retorts, genre conventions, and contemporary culture), Lippert endeavors to reveal the impact of "nagging female voices" on textual meaning. This study of the virtual sound of female voices reveals how politics intersects with gendered assumptions and configurations of femininity in early American theater. Grounded in theories and analyses of early American soundscapes, revolutionary and post-revolutionary politics, and gender in comedy, the author convincingly situates the sonic performance in these texts within their literary historical epoch. Furthermore, Lippert points out that an understanding of sound is essential for the reception and interpretation of these plays: depending on whether the reader interprets the female voice as hysterical or reasonable, the text changes from a misogynist to a proto-feminist outlook while it also shifts in its standpoint vis-à-vis the contemporary political landscape.

Roxana Oltean's article "'Language . . . Without Metaphor': Soundscapes and Worldly Engagements in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*" provides a close reading of the soundscapes of Thoreau's *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods* (1854), in which he juxtaposes the sounds of nature with those of industrialization and technology. Thoreau's references to sound let us witness his engagement with modernity, since—as Oltean argues—he ultimately attempts to integrate the sounds of industrialization with those of the pastoral, alternating between harmony and dissonance. This essay invites the reader to think both about the advent of technology through sounds that have no basis in nature and about the human perception of and literary rendering of sound. Oltean's rereading of *Walden* through the lens of soundscapes illustrates synergies between literary studies (specifically on nature writing) and sound studies (specifically the study of sound in a bygone era devoid of recording devices) in the context of American studies.

Ralph Poole's article "'Ta, te, ti, toe, too': The Horrors of the Harsh Female Voice in 1950s Hollywood Comedies" starts out as a close contrastive reading of the films *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and *Born Yesterday* (1950), both of which make fun of an incongruence between vision (the female star's physical appearance) and sound (her harsh voice and socio/dialect). Moreover, Poole elucidates the transition from silent to sound film (and, in particular, the musical), the gendering of voice, an ideology of

cuteness, and later reading strategies. As he argues, through the lampooning of the harsh female voice, the films participate in the substitution of the unruly comedienne deemed to be offensive in the 1950s film business with a cute/feminine type that fit snugly into heterosexual gender roles. The unfitting voice thus represents a self-confident, resistant female personality incommensurate with sound film, as much as the taming or elimination of the unruly character signals the waning reign of female stars. Like the twist ending of a film, Poole closes with an alternative reading which adds a new dimension to the feminist reading.

A. Elisabeth Reichel's "Sonic Others in Early Sound Studies and the Poetry of Edward Sapir: A Salvage Operation" links sound studies with anthropology and literature. Reichel analyzes the "literary acoustics" of two poems by the anthropologist-linguist Edward Sapir in light of early ethnographic constructions of hearing. These early-twentieth-century approaches associated hearing—and the people for whom the aural is supposedly the dominant sense—with an earlier, premodern way of life that was vanishing in a modern age dominated by sight. By suggesting that these people present an earlier stage of human development and by thus denying them coevalness in the present, they enact what Johannes Fabian would call an allochronism. Reichel argues that, while Sapir's scholarship was aligned with Franz Boas's project of challenging evolutionist conceptions of "the primitive," his poems echo the antimodern impulses of early sound studies. Her astute analyses demonstrate how Sapir's poems perform the gesture of a salvage operation that purports to preserve vanishing sounds and, concomitantly, the modern sense of hearing. In the process, however, they silence the voices of those people they claim to save from oblivion.

In his essay titled "The Motion and the Noise: Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape," Matthew D. Sutton analyzes how the changing soundscapes of the American South textured William Faulkner's writings. During Faulkner's time, industrialization and technology made the world louder, disrupting what many white Southerners, Faulkner included, had perceived as a pastoral quiet. The jukebox in particular, Sutton points out, blended European American and African American music, serving "as a repository of affect for the generation who would reject the quiescence." Sutton skillfully demonstrates that the African American character Lukas in *Intruder in the Dust* not only resists white supremacy through his refusal to speak up and defend himself when accused of a murder he did not commit. Lukas also uses a subtle reference to the popular blues song "That's Your Red Wagon" to defy white Southern perceptions of racial integration.

As this special issue demonstrates, the field of sound studies encourages research on the reciprocal relation between (un)composed sounds (and silences) in specific spaces, be they real or fictional. The notion of the situatedness of sound raises ques-

tions regarding the creation and development of sound imaginaries in local, regional, national, and transnational contexts. One corollary of inquiries into defining North American sonic cultures is the question as to how such cultures are perceived from within and from without, and as to how these perceptions interlace cultural stereotyping with sound styles and specific sounds. Similarly, studying sounds associated with ethnic groups, social classes, genders, genres, the production and consumption of commodities, and ever-evolving sound-recording and sound-producing technologies requires attention to the cultural implications of mediated sonic characteristics.

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Notes

1 Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, eds., "Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies," special issue of *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011).

2 J. L. Stoever, "The Top Ten Sounding Out! Posts of 2019!" December 9, 2019, https://soundstudiesblog.com/?s=Top+Ten.

3 R. Murray Schafer, "The Soundscape," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 96.

4 Jonathan Sterne, "Soundscape, Landscape, Escape," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 184, DOI: 10.14361/transcript.9783839421796.181.

5 Ibid., 190.

6 Mark M. Smith, "Why Historians of the Auditory Urban Past Might Consider Getting Their Ears Wet," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 68, DOI: 10.14361/transcript.9783839421796.67.

7 See, for instance, Michael Bull and Les Back, "Introduction: Into Sound," in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), 1–18.

8 Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, "New Keys to the World of Sound," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11–12, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195388947.013.0010; see also Netzwerk "Hör-Wissen im Wandel," ed., *Wissensgeschichte des Hörens in der Moderne* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), DOI: 10.1515/9783110523720.

9 See also Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

Sound + Bodies in Community = Music

Barry L. Shank

Abstract

The analytical framework of sound studies is transforming our understanding of the political force of music. Following the lead of scholars like Nina Eidsheim and Salomé Voegelin, this essay considers the resonating force of listening bodies as a central factor in the musical construction of political community. This essay traces the tradition of African American music from congregational gospel singing through early rhythm and blues up to the twenty-first-century rap of Kendrick Lamar, showing how particular musical techniques engage the bodies in the room, allowing communities of difference to find their rhythms together.

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Sound + Bodies in Community = Music

Barry L. Shank

What happens to music when sound itself becomes an object of cultural analysis? What happens to the fields of popular music studies and American studies when music is disarticulated from the previous understanding of pitches, rhythms, and timbres into a collection of sounds? How does the reconceptualization of sound as a force field of relations change our understanding of the political force of musical beauty? Recent interventions in sound studies are beginning to influence the way that some music scholars, particularly those interested in cultural musicology, think about the relations between music and political subjectivity. The capacity of music to reinforce existing political communities and even to generate the potential for new political communities can be approached from new directions now that sound and all its dispersed resonances shift our understanding of musical sound to the sonic experience of social relations.

The field of American studies began to address directly the agency of sound in the mid-1990s, when scholars such as Michele Hilmes turned their attention to the history of radio.[1] A special issue of *American Quarterly*, published in 2011 (and re-published as a book in 2012), included work by many young (and not so young) scholars who helped establish the significance of the audible components of the cultural history of the United States, building on the already established field of sound studies and setting the stage for much work to come.[2] Ethnic studies scholars have built on this foundation to articulate the sounds of self-recognition. Inéz Casillas has studied Spanish-language radio in the US as a technology of belonging.[3] Roshanak Kheshti's *Modernity's Ear* (2015) demonstrates the links among early anthropology, world music, and sonic otherness.[4] Jennifer Stoever's *The Sonic Color Line* (2016) examines the history of the uses of sound to enforce white supremacy in the nineteenth century.[5] Christine Bacareza Balance has opened the world of Filipino music production to identify spreading networks of sound and bodies across distant geographies.[6]

In the last twenty years, sound studies has become a clearly identifiable field with canonizing efforts such as David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny's *Keywords in*

Sound (2015) and Jonathan Sterne's *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012) providing the required introductory texts.[7] Innovative work such as Marina Peterson's interrogation of the entanglement of sound, space, community regulations, and corporate power in the air over Los Angeles airport and the ground beneath Appalachian Ohio demonstrates the analytical power that derives from focusing on auditory sensation. For Peterson, the key fact is that sound is immanent, inescapable. Sound becomes noise when it occupies the center of legal, political, or cultural disputes.[8]

Of course, music scholarship has been in existence for centuries, grounded in the celebration of the classic composers of the European tradition. It is well known that traditional musicology attempted to isolate musical sound and musical listening not only from other auditory signals, but from all connection to political, social, or cultural determination. This is the origin of the myth of music as a universal language—a secret colonialism of the ear. Biographies of musicians and composers could cross the line from sound to life, but only under the methodological imperative of uncovering the precise intentions and meanings that lay between the ears of the Wolfgangs, Ludwigs, and Franzes who had composed and performed the music. Although it took longer for the musics of non-elites to become legitimate objects of scholarly analysis, they were quicker to acquire social grounding. Traditional ballads became a separate object of study that focused initially on the words, collected as evidence of a coherent folk who could represent the common foundation of the modern, that is European, nation. By the 1930s, folk music scholars, funded by cultural wings of the New Deal, insisted that musical sounds could characterize many types of social categories. With the development of recording devices, collectors in the US reached beyond the traditions of folk music scholarship as a way to study the ancient origins of white nationalism, to build libraries of songs by indigenous and formerly enslaved peoples. Closely connected to the study of folk music, ethnomusicology developed in nineteenth-century Germany. The Society for Ethnomusicology was not founded in the United States until 1953, and its methodological imperatives have shifted significantly since its establishment. But for many decades, the focus in this field followed the assumptions of traditional anthropology—music was directly linked to a particular ethnos, and the music to be studied in this way was the music of others, not western art music.[9]

Cultural studies of music took root in the interdisciplinary field of American studies as early as the 1950s, with David Riesman analyzing the listening practices of college students and early jazz scholars like Martin Williams establishing a canonical history that linked particular musical techniques with cultural traits.[10] By the early eighties, the Birmingham approach to cultural studies gave new impetus to the investigation of commercially produced and distributed music, insisting that the political significance of popular music was not erased by its transformation into commod-

ities. Rather, following the intellectual leadership of Stuart Hall, popular music was understood as a site of political struggle over the pleasures of group belonging.[11] In the 1990s, cultural musicology adopted many of the theoretical and methodological approaches of cultural studies while recentering musical analysis as a crucial starting point, as in the work of Susan McClary, Lawrence Kramer, Tia DeNora, and others.[12]

Throughout this academic trajectory, however, scholars have always assumed that they knew what music was. It was voices and instruments sounding notes in harmonic and rhythmic relation to each other. Genres were established sets of conventions that guided listeners to expect particular notes or timbres following the ones just heard. And this set of expectations, whether immediately resolved, or delayed and toyed with, established the basis of musical listening pleasure. Avant-garde music, noise music, and other extreme forms that resisted the centrality of notes, carved their challenge into the mainstream using the same tools. Even John Cage's legendary *4'33"* (1952) worked on its listeners' expectations of musical sound. When David Tudor lowered the lid on the piano keyboard, the audience's assumptions that they would hear notes led them to either feel cheated and hate the piece, or to hear the ambient sounds in the room as music. Whether the ear engaged with canonical works like John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* (1965) or searched out neighborhood DJs spinning at parties, the entanglement of bodies and sound centered on the commonly accepted components of musical sound: pitch; timbre; rhythm.[13]

The current engagement with sound studies encourages music scholars to think again about the material basis of sound. Where music studies has most often focused on an object—a recording, a score, an individual performance—recent sound studies work identifies its content as, in Sterne's words, "types of sonic phenomena rather than as things-in-themselves."[14] Sound studies scholar Salomé Voegelin insists that centering sound as the material for analysis does not move us fully away from the musical object but demands that we hear the object as fundamentally relational. As she puts it, "The aesthetic materiality of sound insists on complicity and intersubjectivity and challenges not only the reality of the material object itself, but also the position of the subject involved in its generative production. The subject in sound shares the fluidity of its object. Sound is the world as dynamic, as process, rather than as outline of existence."[15] To the extent that the sound object is fluid, the hearer is also fluid. The point of sonic origin is immediately dispersed throughout a field of relations that, in turn, position the listening subject in that field, not in permanence but for a moment in time.

In one of the more important attempts to reorient music studies in the wake of current sound studies, Nina Sun Eidsheim urges us to think about music as "transferable energy." Eidsheim describes music as a vibrational practice. As she puts it,

music is "something that crosses, is affected by, and takes its character from any materiality, and because it shows us interconnectedness in material terms, it also shows us that we cannot exist merely as singular individuals."[16] Following Eidsheim, we can state that sound is always a process and always a relationship. The experience of music, then, is the experience of social relationships through sound. Sound becomes music when it is felt to *be* that experience.

For me, this concept grounds some of the more speculative yet intriguing statements from Jean-Luc Nancy's book *Listening* (2002; English translation 2007). Nancy is mostly known as a philosopher of political community. But his little book about sound and listening extends his interest into the vibratory aspects of music. For Nancy, listening to music

> is a relationship to meaning, a tension toward it: but toward it completely ahead of signification, meaning in its nascent state, in the state of return for which the end of this return is not given (the concept, the idea, the information), and hence to the state of return without end, like an echo that continues on its own and that is nothing but this continuance . . .. To be listening is to be inclined toward the opening of meaning.[17]

It can be hard to understand fully Nancy's gestural writing here. But if you situate those words in the context of recent sound studies, a kind of material clarity appears. Eidsheim asks us to "denaturalize" our musical listening, to think about it again "as action, as materially transmitted and propagated." Music is a vibrational force that establishes a relationship not only between the originating point of the sound and the ears of a solitary listener but among all the bodies—human and otherwise—through which those vibrations pass. "Singing and listening are particular expressions of the processes of vibration. What we understand as sound ultimately reverberates throughout the material body that produces and senses it; it is precisely because sound—undulating energy—is transduced through the listener's body that it is sensed . . ..We do not engage with music at a distance but, by definition, we do so by entering into a relationship that changes us."[18] Nancy's understanding of musical listening as a "tension towards meaning" that vibrates through and across the bodies that are present becomes concrete when we consider Eidsheim's materialist theorizing:

> Music arises in the confluence between the materiality we offer up and the vibrational force that is put forth into the world. As a consequence, (1) to participate in music is to offer oneself up to that music; (2) to put music forth into the world is to have an impact on another; and, therefore, (3) it is as propagators and transductional nodes of that thick event of music—the full vibrational range, including sub- and ultrafrequencies—that we participate in and are privy to music . . .. That is, if music is not something external and objective but is trans-

> mitted from one material node to another, music indeed puts us into an intrinsic dynamic, material relationship to both the so-called external world and each other. Musical discourse then shifts from the realm of the symbolic to that of the relational.[19]

Music is the result of sound vibrating through bodies in community. Those vibrations, understood as music, weave auditory fabric from our social relations.

What are the consequences of this rethinking of the materiality of music? Must we abandon a concern with the musical text? Does the destabilizing of the musical object leave us with nothing musical to talk about? Must our understanding of music's force stop when the particular moment of listening comes to an end?

I do not think so. Instead, this way of understanding musical sound reorients our own listening towards recognizing the musical object as a temporary and temporal instantiation of a set of social relations occurring at a particular historical moment. For example, Jennifer Stoever's *Sonic Color Line* describes the process whereby "Listening became a key part of understanding one's place in the American racial system, viscerally connecting slavery's macropolitics to lived racial etiquette."[20] During the nineteenth century, it became possible to hear racial difference. The ability to hear racial difference became central to debates about music, identity, and authenticity.

The historical moment that Stoever identifies is also the historical moment of the development of blackface minstrelsy. Being able to hear racial difference was central to the double illusion whereby white men could compete with each other to become the most authentic "Ethiopian imitators." Within popular music studies, genres also carried social and cultural associations—a sense that a particular kind of music was made by and listened to by that kind of people. Identifying and categorizing music by the people who made it and identifying the people who were part of that group by the sounds of their music established the intricately repeating loop of music and political identity. In each of these cases—and every other instance where sounds are experienced as music, we experience particular types of sound as an embodiment of the social relations among us. The experience of such a connection is not a guarantee that the relationship is positive. It is frequently said that other people's music is noise. Rethought in line with Eidsheim and Voegelin, other people's music is not so much noise as it is a demand for the recognition of relationship. Of course, this demand can be resisted. But it resounds.

From Anthems to Songs of Insistence

In her beautiful chronicle of the anthemic music of the African diaspora, Shana Redmond states, "Black anthems construct an alternative constellation of citizenship—

new imagined communities that challenge the 'we' of the 'melting pot' or democratic state, yet install new definitions of 'we' in its place."[21] The power of the anthems Redmond studies is at least in part an effect of the social movements that take them up and use them as solidifying performances. A complex pleasure in collective self-recognition supplements and supports the aesthetic power of these songs, creating a feedback loop where musical beauty feeds political force, which then reaffirms musical beauty. While Redmond's book focuses on the work these anthems achieved when linked with social movements, she also speaks of the power they retain after their initial historical moment: "The ways in which the music continues or fails to illicit comment and/or action in the Black United States and beyond is a commentary on the continuing legacies of Black political action and self-determination at the closing of the twentieth century and the opening of the twenty-first."[22] Through their connection to the long Civil Rights Movement, Black anthems remain the model for songs of resistance. Whether the song be "Lift Every Voice and Sing" or "This Little Light of Mine," the presence of dozens or hundreds of bodies singing together amplifies the political force of its musical beauty. They reverberate the solidity of resistance.

Anthems of resistance, however, do not emerge in isolation, but gain force through their connections with songs of insistence that tell "us how people live and love, work and play, survive and die over time," again quoting Redmond.[23] Their musical metaphors extend the structures and habits of black community life to embrace more of the population, helping more of us to lean together towards that new and larger community that marks the only way a larger we, one that embraces difference, will survive. Pop anthems, songs of insistence, can reinforce already existing political communities, but they also do more. The simultaneous comprehension of relations of timbre, rhythm, organized waves of tonal exploration and resolution can generate a recognition of mutual predicament and mutual pleasure. This recognition can permeate the boundaries of the ordinary, slipping through and across intimate publics and knotting together their distinctive threads of difference, rendering nearly palpable the texture of a new political fabric, entraining expanded publics with the sensory capacity to survive dark times.

Music of insistence, centered in private space, can reinforce existing political communities, but it can also do more. It can generate the sense of common feeling that enable populations to reaffirm their political foundation, to reenergize their movements, to reorganize the relations that stabilize an orientation towards the world, to store up the emotional and psychic resources necessary for the long, hard struggle ahead. Songs of insistence might sound like party songs or dance songs or pure love songs. They might drive you to the dance floor. They might force you to pull a tissue from your pocket. Selena's "Como La Flor" (1992) is a song of insistence. Sol-

ange's "Weary" (2016) is a song of insistence. In order to make clear how the vibrational energy of a song of insistence works, I want to listen carefully to one of the great songs of insistence, Sly and Family Stone's "I Want to Take You Higher" (1969).[24]

As many writers have documented, the musical sensibility of Sylvester Stewart, along with that of his brother and sisters, was nurtured in St. Andrews Church of God in Christ in Denton, Texas. After moving to Vallejo, California, the family's skills developed in both sacred and secular settings, with Sly studying music theory at Vallejo Junior College and joining a series of vocal groups and R&B bands. Even in their pop dance anthems, Sly and the Family Stone were producing music of insistence, music that built upon Pentecostal congregational traditions of musicking through a compositionally precise insertion of rock styles. In so doing, they extended the embrace of their insistence and began to train new members of an expanded political community.[25]

Indeed, Sly's most political work does not turn on the evocation of a particular political project but consists of the establishment of a musically performed political complexity. All those voices and horns and organ chords, harmonicas and guitars pulsed forward by kick-snare drive and fluid bass lines enable in his listeners an embodied sense, the vibrational force, of the abstract complexity of a collective of difference. As Ricky Vincent has made clear, "Sly's music created such an open atmosphere of tolerance and truth that the wicked elements of racism were exposed and thrust into the pop dialogue like never before."[26] Through deliberate compositional and performative effort, a political collective of difference was constructed through musical beauty.

In order to illustrate the skill of Sly's vibrational force, I want to quickly focus your ears on one of the more misunderstood songs of his entire output, the song that most of his fans heard as nothing but a paean to intoxication, "I Want to Take You Higher." This was the song that dominated the movie Woodstock and shaped the reception of Sly and the Family Stone among white boomers, reducing the band's and the song's complexity to the ritual of a bong hit or a snort of a line. By the mid-seventies, after every Sly and the Family Stone concert for five years had ended with this song, Greil Marcus deemed it "a stupid lie."[27] It did not start out that way. It began as a reach for transcendence.

At the very beginning of the song, you hear Sly's characteristic blend of rock and funk, with a standard blues pentatonic descending riff settling into a vamp on the tonic A major chord. It almost sounds like Sly's toying with part of his audience saying, "See, I can make even Cream sound funky." The bulk of the song consists of that vamp and demonstrates the band's mastery of one-chord funk. The song never moves off that A chord, but you only become conscious of that if you listen carefully or sit down

to learn it. This speaks to Sly and the Family Stone's status as world leaders at disassembling a simple major triad and changing the relationships among its parts, shifting the emphasis from the tonic to the major third to the tonic to the fifth over and over, and occasionally adding a seventh or a fourth just to demonstrate the flexible capacity of their mode. If you listened casually, as most of the band's listeners did, you were not aware of the real work the song was doing to your ears and to your sensibility. When you listen again to this song, pay attention to the very beginning. As the riff descends, please listen to the horns and the harmonica in the background.

Behind the guitar and fuzzy bass of the riff that goes A-G-E-E-D-C-C-G-A, the harmonica, trumpet and saxophone hit a D above the riff and then slowly stretch it up though the D-sharp to the E that is the dominant of the chord. During most of the riff, these instruments sound a tension created by harmonic dissonance that you can identify only if you are paying attention. But even if you do not notice it, you feel it. Your shoulders rise up and your neck muscles tense just a bit. You know something is not fitting together until the rise is completed. This is the musical meaning of "Higher." There are many ways to think of the desire to go higher and intoxication is only one of them. This song is about determination. It is about an insistence that could grow from spiritual communion. It is directly about the tense hard work of hitting that harmony. The song's refusal of easy harmony continues throughout, always signaled by the horns. During each chorus, as the guitar and bass (and most of the organ) hit on that A, the saxophone and trumpet fall away from it, landing hard on the dominant seventh, G, placed precisely on the off beats. The full insistence of the song emerges from the musical beauty produced from the temporary and impermanent quality of consonance, in the process, performing political complexity.

Sly and the Family Stone were masterful creators of songs of insistence. Beyond "Higher" lay "Everyday People" (1968), "Family Affair" (1971), "Hot Fun in the Summertime" (1970), "Sing a Simple Song" (1970), and others. Each uses specific techniques of pitch, timbre, and rhythm, blending into sonic strategies developed most powerfully in the Black musical tradition, to generate a vibrational force capable of embracing a broadly encompassing political community. I do not mean to paint a ludicrously rosy picture of the sixties. I only mean to highlight the powerfully insistent work done by Sly and the Family Stone's music at the time.

Vibrational Insistence and Bodies in Community

The world we inhabit now, half a century later, is a world where the aspirations for a political community of difference seem impossible to realize. Nationalist movements around the globe are reinforcing the isolation of countries and exacerbating the divisions among people. The United States elected a president who cares only for his

own might and fame. This chaos-monger-in-chief has named acknowledged racists, climate change deniers, and public-education defunders to run agencies whose job it is to protect against racial injustice, to safeguard the environment, and to promote public education. When he gets angry about the way the news represents him, he threatens to drop bombs, fires someone, or simply tweets more outrage.

The possibility for a political community based on agonistic (as opposed to antagonistic) dissensus (or disagreement) feels very far away now. Even before the apparently endless string of catastrophes, we witnessed a state more willing to confront its citizens with violence than engage them via political speech. The two dominant parties in the United States had limited the publics to which they responded, focusing only on those with sufficient cash. Coercion had wormed its way fully into systems of economic domination, which shape so much of everyday life. The rules of finance, the rules of education funding, the rules of health care, the very rules of our political process, have all been bent to the desires of the powerful, as they pull the ladders up behind them. When the disenfranchised cry out against this situation, the response seems to come directly from Rancière's critique of the political order: "If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths."[28]

Now more than ever, we need music of insistence to enable us to survive, to illuminate the networks of relations that connect us. We need vibrational force transduced and amplified by all the bodies around us, bodies that look different and speak different languages, that move differently to different sounds, that move in patterns that shift the sonic resonances just enough to include more and more of us in our political community of difference. Now more than ever, we must expand the category of political music to include the music that enables common feeling, that establishes a ground of shared sensibility, that creates spaces for joy and renewal. Music of insistence centered in private space can reinforce existing political communities, but it can also generate the sense of common feeling that enable populations to reaffirm their politicalness, to reenergize their movements, to reorganize the relations that stabilize an orientation towards the world, to store up the emotional and psychic resources necessary for the long, hard struggle ahead.

What made Sly and the Family Stone's "I Want to Take You Higher" so powerful was its intricate intertwining of different sensibilities, different approaches to time and timbre, different constructions of community, to come together in one musico-aesthetic whole. The complexity of the song indexed the complexity of the political community it brought into feelingful existence. This is the work performed by many of the great albums of the past couple of years—the highly celebrated double

masterpieces of the Knowles sisters, Solange's *A Seat at the Table* (2016) and Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (2016), primary among them. This is music that asserts its political capacities through its meaningful and feelingful organization of difference, its deep knowledge of the internal rhythms of shared being.

A recent example of the vibrational force of the music of insistence is the collaboration between Kendrick Lamar and SZA, "All the Stars" (2018), the first single from the soundtrack to *Black Panther* (2018), and a commanding video that presents an elegantly complex image of a political community of difference. I would like to call your attention to the sonic mapping of space in the song and the way that the visual presentation of social and political space reflects the sounds back, amplifying the vibrational force of the track. As you watch and listen to the video, note the use of hands in the opening scene—hands waving as ocean waves, pushing the boat forward as the track begins. Those waving hands visually reinforce the handclaps that sound throughout the song but that are more forward in the mix at the beginning than elsewhere. Synthesizers map out the sonic space, with the low notes carrying the track forward and the little bubble-popping sound at the top measuring out the tonal range. Throughout the video, Kendrick finds himself in different social or mythical spaces. In each of these spaces, the music suggests its reach, its possibilities, and its limits. As the autotuned singing begins, Kendrick walks slowly through a standing crowd of young boys lined up in front of a queen or a goddess. When SZA's chorus comes in, her hands command your visual attention as your ears hear a synthesizer rise that leads straight to the note that her singing lines begin with. Surrounded by stars, the synthesizer chords fill in the space suggested by the Milky Way that is projected behind her. Stars fill the spaces where the humans were before. The echo on her voice is mixed high in this section, reinforcing the sense of space. Of course, echoes map a space on earth, not the space of the stars, but, as Blesser and Salter argue, reverberation is space the way it is heard, not seen.[29] As Kendrick's rap starts, he is seen to be standing in a village, surrounded by men. You hear a synthesizer drop down, both in volume and in pitch, sounding bass notes that lay the groundwork for the rap on top. But those bubbling top sounds continue, marking time, as the chords carve sharp edges into the musical lines, again marking the edges of the social space within the village. As he walks through a desiccated forest, the synths rise up again filling the space and leading us back to SZA singing in the stars. The next verse is not rapped, but sung, with SZA surrounded at first by women dancing with pink feathers, then men and women posing in cobalt blue, then back in a village setting where once again the chords sharply mark the edges of the social space. The scene shifts again to Kendrick walking through an Egyptian tomb, and the sonic space fills with the full chords on the keys and both voices mixed in, as intensive and extensive as the artistic style stolen or borrowed from Lina Iris Viktor. SZA sings the chorus one more

time dressed more plainly than in any other scene, as the Milky Way is replaced by four goddesses who tower over Lamar, and SZA's hair reshapes itself into the African continent.[30]

Why should one care so much about space in this audiovisual text? If Eidsheim is correct, and musical sound becomes itself as it passes through the vibrating materials that give it resonance, then the visual presentation of space gives us a way of imagining the vibrational force of insistence that connects the persons presented into an imagined political community. Although the conventions of music videos require that Kendrick Lamar and SZA be represented in highlighted form, distinct from the other people shown, the shaping of the scenes, the spacing of the bodies, and the audible fulfillment of those bodies in those spaces position the rapper and the singer as members of a fully political community. The presentation of grace, the depiction of traditions, the use of dress and art and choreography work together to establish aesthetically the legitimacy of the claim to political speech not simply by the stars, who are closer in this video, but all the persons presented in it. The musical beauty of this song is extended by the visual beauty of the video. Together, they present an insistent message. These people are present. They are political. When we join them through the enjoyment of this music, we join into the vibrational force and become co-transducers of the political force of its beauty.

These people are also private. We do not all belong together in the same way. As Kendrick Lamar says in his rap, he hates people that feel entitled, that look at him like he is crazy because he did not invite them. He is not inviting everyone. T'Challa, the leader of the fictional nation of Wakanda in the film Black Panther, does not invite everyone into his home. Some of us must remain spectators or at best the most respectful and dutiful of potential collaborators. But when this music plays, it resounds through all the bodies present and shapes itself to match the space in which it sounds. The sounds of "All the Stars" are the sonic manifestation of the relationships presented in the video, but the potential for further amplification extends beyond those limits to embrace all caught up in its beauty. Songs of insistence take up sounds known for their ability to resonate bodies together and recombine those sounds in an effort to broaden their reach and expand the enclosure within which they vibrate. The force of those vibrations links bodies together in communities of difference and recognition. Thus, we find a way to move forward.

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In Praise of Discord

Beyond Harmony in Historical Acoustemology

Mark M. Smith

Abstract

This piece explores writing on historical acoustemology. It charts the emergence of the field, identifies its strengths and weaknesses, and calls for greater critical engagement amongst its practitioners.

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In Praise of Discord

Beyond Harmony in Historical Acoustemology

Mark M. Smith

Consider this an engaged meditation on the state of the field of historical sound studies or, as some style it, aural history, auditory history, or historical acoustemology.[1] Here, I make no pretense of offering original empirical research. Rather, I wish to ponder what, collectively, historians of sound are doing with their field and, most importantly, to suggest what else they could be doing with it. I am happy to disclose that I have been banging this drum for over fifteen years in various ways. I do so again now because while I am quite thrilled with (and, in very small part, responsible for) some of the work being produced by historians of aurality, I am concerned that without the sort of intervention I am calling for, the field will begin to etiolate.[2]

This is in no way a catholic survey of recent and ongoing work; instead, it is an attempt to offer a modest manifesto. It is a call to practitioners to think about how their field probably needs to evolve if the real interpretive dividends of historical acoustemology are to be realized; to think about initiatives that will help the field flourish profitably and help it avoid slipping into a kind of comfortable comradery which, while valuable in many ways, can unintentionally deprive us of the dialectic necessary for robust interpretive growth. Part of this call—a challenge to us all, myself included—is born of my own particular research interests; most of it is a product of my reading of recent literature and reviews, some of which hint at a growing unease with simply celebrating sound history as "new" and "burgeoning" and a desire to more actively critique the work that is being produced in a way that simultaneously encourages the production of more work but also attends to the core methodological and interpretive issues underwriting historical acoustemology.

We are at an important moment in the writing of historical acoustemology. Over a decade ago, Douglas Kahn described the growth of sound studies—especially the history of sound—as booming; if he was right then, surely it could be accurately described as deafening now.[3] We have an unprecedented number of articles, col-

lected essays, and books on any number of aspects of historical acoustemology. Various sub-disciplines and virtually all areas and periods of historical study seem positively enchanted with listening to the past. We have, for example, deeply impressive work on the subject from scholars of science and technology, students of American studies, historians of all periods of American history, not to mention historians of the ancient world, Australia, and modern Europe.[4] We are now cataloging every conceivable sound, noise, and silence from an incredible range of periods and places.[5]

Consider just U. S. history: Sensory history generally began to capture the interest of American historians in the late 1990s, with a number of monographs appearing in print in the early 2000s. Studies of sound, hearing, and listening led the way with at least four monographs appearing in print in a three-year period, 2000–2003. Why U. S. historians elected to write about sound before turning to the other senses remains unclear. It was probably a result of multiple factors including the availability of much earlier and important theoretical work on soundscapes by R. Murray Schafer; an interest in engaging the "great divide" theory regarding the putative shift from orality to the eye most famously associated with media theorists Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong; the influence of European historiography, which attended first to sound, hearing, and listening, itself partly influenced by the established work of musicologists; and the particular interests of some sub fields—such as the history of religion–which placed an emphasis on the importance of sound as a way to further interrogate key developments in those fields.[6] Regardless of the particular reasons, we saw books published on the history of sound and hearing during the Second Great Awakening in 2000; the auditory history of slavery, free labor, and antebellum sectionalism in 2001; a history of American architectural acoustics and modernity in the early twentieth century in 2002; and the history of sound and acoustemology in colonial America in 2003. Since then, other works in a variety of forms have expanded our understanding of how sound (and silence) shaped a number of developments in American history, from the making of "race" to the settlement of the antebellum West.[7]

I mention this rapid increase in production at some length because I think there is a point to be made central to what I have to say. It seems to me that a good deal of this work is emerging so quickly in a context of relative (although sometimes exaggerated) freshness and disciplinary newness that discussion of the larger interpretive issues at stake in the writing of sound history—or sensory history generally, for that matter—can sometimes be elided, poorly attended to, or even ignored. I say this not by way of criticism of individual works but as a commentary on the state of the field. In other words, we are producing more books and articles than ever on historical acoustemology; we are expanding our empirical reach to include constituencies previously excluded (such as women and slaves and nonwestern societies); and we

are doing so in a roiling, additive fashion that is making the field more popular than ever before. But what we are not doing as much is arguing amongst ourselves about things that any field must discuss: methodology, how to read sources, and the interpretive stakes in doing historical acoustemology.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not asking for internecine warfare among scholars of sound. I like our collegiality and I admire our remarkably supportive environment. What I am asking for is rather more interrogation of our work and, frankly, historians of sound are probably the best positioned to undertake those conversations. Should we not, I do worry about how well the field will mature, how it will refine itself, and whether or not it will slip into easy self-congratulation of the sort that inspires quiet complacency.

It has not always been this way. The inception of historical acoustemology—of sensory history, generally—was rife with the sort of interpretive arguing for which I am calling. None of this early contention was resolved—there was just too little work being done for that to happen. But this early work, replete with its competing interpretive and methodological claims, was important and, I think, is well worth revisiting for the current state of the field. With relatively few exceptions, recent work has not engaged it and I suppose what I am calling for is a resurrection of precisely the sort of thrust and parry some of the earliest writers on sound history thought important.

Am I being unduly harsh? Have I become a merchant of disaffection? I think not, not least because I am not the only observer to raise this issue. Neil Gregor has expressed similar concerns in his highly favorable but probing review of Daniel Morat's edited collection *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe* (2014). Gregor reminds us that the field of aural history "has been around for a little longer than some would like to imagine" and while he endorses calls for allowing the field to continue along its current lines of intellectual openness and creativity (something I heartily applaud), he adds that "it may also be time to open up some more explicit polarities in the debate." "It is," remarks Gregor, "a necessary part of the process of defining a field that its early protagonists support each others' exploratory moves, but, as the earlier dynamics of emergence of fields such as gender history showed, there comes a point where some hitherto submerged disagreements need clearer articulation."[8] In other words, the field, precisely because it is so important, is worth arguing over.

While the theme of discord often characterizes the writing of some sound history, it certainly does not begin to accurately describe the current state of its historiography which is, for the most part, best characterized by an odd, even disconcerting harmony.[9] This has not always been the case. Indeed, some of the earliest work on sound studies and sensory history generally—work we would rightly consider foun-

dational today—emerged by way of both interest in the topic but also in opposition towards even earlier treatments. I am thinking here of some of Alain Corbin's earliest interventions into the field of sensory history and sound history which were not only empirical but also, and importantly, interpretive and methodological. Indeed, for Corbin, how we go about listening to the past is as important as what we listen to. Corbin was not at all shy about debating these issues. In his seminal commentary on how to best approach a history of the senses, he expressed reservations about efforts by fellow Annales historians to practice sound history. In particular, he challenged Guy Thuillier's "positivist" effort to "trace the evolution of the sensory environment." Thuillier, explained Corbin, "has attempted to compile a catalogue and measure the relative intensity of the noises which might reach the ear of a villager in the Nivernais in the middle of the nineteenth century." Corbin believed this approach "by no means negligible": "It aids immersion in the village of the past; it encourages the adoption of a comprehensive viewpoint." But he nevertheless concluded that the entire enterprise of sound cataloging "is based on a questionable postulate, it implies the non-historicity of the modalities of attention, thresholds of perception, significance of noises, and configuration of the tolerable and the intolerable." "In the last analysis," notes Corbin, "it ends up by denying the historicity of that balance of the senses. . . . It is as if, in the eyes of the author, the habitus of the Nivernais villager of the nineteenth century did not condition his hearing, and so his listening." Without a dedicated and careful attempt to attach meaning to what was heard, cataloguing is not only of very modest heuristic worth but, in fact, quite dangerous in its ability to inspire unwitting faith that these are the "real" sounds of the past.[10]

More recently, Ari Y. Kelman has upped the methodological and theoretical ante in discussions about how to "do" sound history by highlighting the epistemological and heuristic shortfalls of the ubiquitous term "soundscapes." Kelman makes the sensible claim that not only was R. Murray Schafer's original framing of the term at once restrictive, often contradictory, and full of tension but that the way scholars from various disciplines (historians included) have applied the term is now so far removed from Schafer's application that the notion of soundscapes, while seemingly indispensable, is also entirely too plastic and lacking in analytic specificity. For Kelman, Schafer's use of the term is prescriptive and limiting, more indicative of Schafer's penchant for training listeners than holding any enduring interpretive value. Kelman shows, convincingly to my mind, how the term "soundscape" has proven seductive yet quite limiting, requiring historians such as Emily Thompson to so redefine the term as to render the meaning of the word muddled and unclear. Kelman believes that Schafer's soundscape—which he considers divorced from the habit of listening and highly decontextualized from place and time—bears little similarity to the way many historians use the term.[11]

In a way, Kelman is quite properly asking how historical sound studies continues to emerge. Does it mature principally through the addition of new work, more work, work on people, places, and times previously unexamined? Yes, of course. But Kelman also seems to be suggesting that for the field to continue to grow it needs to pay attention to theory, terminology, and also interrogate precisely what we mean with the terms we deploy.

To be in praise of discord can help us think more carefully about the presentation of our work and some of the conceits we might unwittingly smuggle into our presentations. In fact, sound historians especially need to think carefully about their method and their use of evidence not least because they enjoy more ready access to public historical consciousness than many of their colleagues in other disciplines and fields. Increasingly, historians of sound specifically, of the senses generally, are invited to advise on museum displays in a loosely curatorial fashion and counsel the tourist and heritage industries. The "rediscovery of the senses has become a highly profitable business," argues Robert Jütte—and he points to not just the world of advertising but also living museums. "Canny exhibition curators," he explains, recognize the appeal of the sensory. A number of historic homes and museums now use soundscaping to heighten the experience of visitors; many use soundtracks to suggest the sounds of the past; and reenactors of wars—especially the American Civil War—go to great lengths to recreate with fidelity the sounds of cannons, guns, and shells in an earnest effort to add authenticity to their recreations of key Civil War battles.[12]

My principal objection to this sort of curatorial trick is that, without due attention to the critical importance of context, we wrongly marry the production of the past to its present-day consumption. While it is perfectly possible to recreate the decibel level and tone of a hammer hitting an anvil from the nineteenth century, or a piece of music from 1750 (especially if we still have the score and original instruments), it is impossible to experience those sensations the same way as those who heard the hammer or music. What was noise, sound, comforting, or chilling to, say, a nineteenth-century ear is not entirely recoverable today not least because that world—how those sounds were perceived and understood by multiple constituencies—has evaporated. The same holds true for all historical evidence, visual included.[13]

Properly framed and contextualized, it is possible for curators to anchor the sensory artifacts they deploy to profile what those sensory experiences "meant" to contemporaries; in the absence of such efforts, we are merely catering to expectations, avoiding our responsibility to educate, and, in essence, surrendering to both larger forces of unexamined acts of consumption and the more corporatist and bureaucratic impetus to make the discipline of history "relevant," a trajectory perfectly evidenced in higher education in the United Kingdom since the mid-1990s (where "rel-

evance" is termed "impact") and elsewhere on the continent, as in the Netherlands where some funding agencies insist on "knowledge utilization."

Museums wishing to deploy historical acoustemology need better advice, it seems to me, as does the public, whom they serve. We can advise curators not only on which sounds to deploy (either newly recorded or archivally reproduced) but also how to deploy them and here I think we need to stress the preeminent importance of contextualizing the sounds that museum visitors hear. Rather than simply feeding sounds to ears, we need to help visitors understand the context in which those sounds were produced and how their reproduction can tell us not only about the nature of the past but about our own intellectual acoustic preferences and prejudices.

I conclude by saying that it is worth keeping in mind Alain Corbin's wise counsel, first offered in 1991 in a book that, when translated into English in 1995, became *Time, Desire and Horror*. That counsel was, simply, that despite the manifest dividends facing historians of the senses generally—historians of sound and listening included—they must be willing to research not just the history of smell, sound, touch, sight, and taste; they must also pay particular attention to meaning, context, method, and be willing to engage in constructive criticism. And this is fundamentally the point I wish to stress. Healthy challenges, disagreements, interventions, all are essential to helping us remain alert to interpretive pitfalls and slippery false starts. This is a lesson being learned by scholars of all the senses but it is one that seems to have been more resonant among historians of smell than among those of sound (histories of taste and touch, while emerging, simply are too few at the moment to have assumed the mantle of interpretive interrogator; they are very much still in their "additive" phase). Not only do historians of smell argue about the legitimacy of, for example, Alain Corbin's claims about the connection between modernity and deodorization but they are, as Jonathan Reinarz has argued, increasingly concerned to disrupt established and unhelpful interpretive binaries currently defining the field (foul versus fragrant, for example) by reconceptualizing smell as far more varied, subtle, and even intersensorial. Despite its deeper genealogy, historical acoustemology is quite a long way from this sort of critical examination.[14]

It is precisely because we care about the field of historical acoustemology that we should not shy away from informed, honest, and constructive criticism. To not do so will impoverish us all and stunt the maturity of arguably one of the most promising fields of historical inquiry to emerge in years.

Notes

1 On terminology, see David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, eds., *Keywords in Sound* (Durham,

NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), especially page 13. I will use these terms interchangeably in this essay.

2 My initial foray was in the form of a debate with Mitchell Snay and Bruce Smith in 2000–02. It is most readily accessed in my edited collection *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 365–404. I have made some of the points made in the present essay before—see, in particular, my "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History* 40 (2007): 841–58, DOI: 10.1353/jsh.2007.0116. My modest influence on some of what is published in the field is due to some extent to my previous position of General Editor of *Studies in Sensory History* published by University of Illinois Press and my current one as General Editor of Perspectives on Sensory History published by Pennsylvania State University Press.

3 Douglas Kahn, "Sound Awake," *Australian Review of Books* (July 2000): 11–12.

4 The list of works is too extensive to note here. A good sense of the range and extent may be gathered from a reading of the journal *The Senses and Society*; Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, *The Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and my own effort, *Sensing The Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

5 See, for example, the almost one-thousand-page treatment offered by Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

6 Smith, *Sensing the Past*, 1–18.

7 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Rath, *How Early America Sounded*. On the sensory history of race making, see my *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

8 Neil Gregor, review of *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe*, edited by Daniel Morat, *Sehepunkte* 15, no. 1 (2015), http://www.sehepunkte.de/2015/01/25587.html.

9 See, for example, Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

10 Alain Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 183.

11 Ari Y. Kelman, "Rethinking the Soundscape: A Critical Genealogy of a Key Term in Sound Studies," *The Senses and Society* 5, no. 2 (2010): 212–34, DOI: 10.2752/174589210x12668381452845.

12 Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 1–3, 8–9. On the Civil War, see my *The Smell of Battle, The Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

13 For recent thinking on museums and sound, see Karin Bijsterveld, "Ears-on Exhibitions: Sound in the History Museum," *The Public Historian* 37, no. 4 (2015): 73–90.

14 Corbin, *Time, Desire and Horror*, 10–12; Jonathan Reinarz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

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Voice, Silence, and Quiet Resistance in Percival Everett's *Glyph*

Nathalie Aghoro

Abstract

This article investigates how the refusal to speak becomes a resonant expression of protest in Percival Everett's novel *Glyph* (1999). It offers a reading of Everett's experimental work as generating a literary soundscape of the quiet voice to reflect on the functions of sonic absence in the politics and aesthetics of resistance. With Kevin Quashie's work *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2012) and Fred Moten's writings on the significance of sound in black radical aesthetics as conceptual bridges, it seeks to establish that *Glyph* explores the boundaries and possibilities of black self-determination in the American socio-political context as it pitches the acoustics of silence and voice against the mute textuality of the book. Along these lines, the explicit refusal of a voice to speak in *Glyph* simultaneously reveals and complicates the dynamics of racialization in literary imaginations and reading practices.

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Voice, Silence, and Quiet Resistance in Percival Everett's *Glyph*

Nathalie Aghoro

How much dissent can a quiet voice express and what objections could its silence impart? This question informs the present inquiry about the apparent paradox of quiet resistance in Percival Everett's *Glyph*—a novel that presents itself in the guise of a deconstruction paper featuring a black protagonist who proudly proclaims his sonic erasure from an obtrusive and noisy world: "I was a baby fat with words, but I made no sound."[1] The stark contrast between the manifest surplus of speech and the obliteration of sound brings to mind both Kevin Quashie's ideas on the agency of the quiet and Fred Moten's take on the intricate connections between sound, vision, and power. For Quashie, "Quiet is the subjectivity that permits the vagary of humanity and that pushes against social identity and its narrow corners," while Moten is "interested in the convergence of blackness and the irreducible sound of necessarily visual performance at the scene of objection."[2] When read together, these two quotations build conceptual bridges between notions of blackness, resistance, quiet, and voice in Everett's literary experiment.

Sounds such as the scream, the voice, or musical improvisation suffuse black radical aesthetics, according to Moten, because they resist the predominance of the visual that black performance is subjected to in American culture. In *In the Break* (2003), Moten seeks out the auditory elements in photography, literature, jazz, and blues that break "the ocularcentric structuration of recognition."[3] Along these lines, the conjunction of the silence of Everett's character in *Glyph*—who reveals his blackness only when it becomes unavoidable in the story—with the excess of words that build up in his small body, making it "fat," connotes a tension, a resistance to the acoustic expression of his thoughts. The sound of his voice remains internalized, devoid of an audible trace. However, the mentioning of this soundlessness alone opens a discursive space for the question of whether he struggles against raising his voice in protest or whether he seeks to quietly sound out his inner life.

Kevin Quashie looks beyond resistance as a paradigm for black aesthetics by introducing considerations on the vulnerability and interiority in African American culture with his book *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2012). He strikes a blow for an academic debate that pays attention to the quiet, contemplative aspects of black literature and art. With his conception of quiet subjectivity, he seeks to widen the scope when it comes to "the politics of representation, where black subjectivity exists for its social and political meaningfulness rather than as a marker of the human individuality of the person who is black." He elaborates that "as an identity, blackness is always supposed to tell us something about race or racism, or about America, or violence and struggle and triumph or poverty and hopefulness. . . . All of this suggests that the common frameworks for thinking about blackness are limited."[4] For Quashie, a potential overemphasis on the function of resistance in black cultural production silences other aesthetic expressions. Like Moten, he turns toward the auditory, metaphorically and literally, but chooses to consider its absence and to posit the notion of quiet as expressiveness. As such, his understanding of the quiet does not oppose the significance of political and civil engagement for African American culture, it rather enriches it with a different pathway to black aesthetics by focusing on its expression of inner life and private subjectivity.

In Percival Everett's work, resistance plays a significant role and even the most explicitly quiet character in his 1999 novel *Glyph* "pushes against social identity and its narrow corners," to use Quashie's turn of phrase.[5] Overall, Everett's experimental, self-reflexive writings resist easy categorizations, stereotyping, and social pressure, particularly in the context of black identity formations. His poetry and fiction combine socio-cultural reflections with critical debates on literary aesthetics—a combination which defies prescriptive stipulations seeking to monitor what African American literary representation should be or look like in order to be considered as authentic—a word that often merely serves as a stand-in for the confirmation of its user's worldview. The editors of *Perspectives on Percival Everett* (2013), Keith Mitchell and Robin Vander, observe Everett's "refusal as an African American writer to be categorized at all" and his advocacy for a broader, less reductive and conventional understanding of American literature with his writing of "counternarratives to what he sees as the myopic vision of mainstream publishers and the reading public."[6] As a consequence, his writings invite readers to reflect critically on the representative functions assigned to African American authors in the U. S.-American literary canon.

Everett's novel *Erasure* (2001) features one of the most resonant examples of vocal resistance to the potentially discriminating classifications on the literary market at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the book, a publisher seeks to explain the lacking success of the fiction written by the protagonist and character-writer Thelonious Ellison, a fictional amalgamation of Thelonious Monk and Ralph Ellison, of

jazz and writing. According to the agent, his works are not marketable and do not appeal to a wider audience simply because he is "not black enough," for which the writer demands an explanation:

> "What's that mean, Yul? How do they even know I'm black? Why does it matter?" "We've been over this before. They know because of the photo on your first book. They know because they've seen you. They know because you're black, for crying out loud."
>
> "What, do I have to have my characters comb their afros and be called niggers for these people?"
>
> "It wouldn't hurt."[7]

Instead of answering to the socio-culturally more relevant and critical question "why does it matter?" the agent suggests that Ellison should conform to dominant expectations that dehumanize his characters and turn them into flat stereotypes for the sake of higher sales figures. As Lesly Larkin observes in *Race and the Literary Encounter* (2015), Erasure "acknowledge[s] the role readers play in seeing or not seeing stereotypes, in shaping the racial meaning of texts, and in being shaped by texts."[8] It does not need more than a photograph of the author to render him hypervisible up to the point that any of his literary expressions not relating to (his) blackness are actively ignored and ultimately silenced by editors, readers, and critics. "Stunned into silence," Ellison decides to protest by writing a satirical, outspoken novel called *My Pafology* with the aim to expose such pigeonholes in the media and on the literary market.[9] Ironically, however, the satire becomes the toast of critics and readers in *Erasure* precisely because its display of mediated stereotypes is misinterpreted as authentic characterization—proving, as Larkin writes, that "reading is a social practice."[10] In other words, *Erasure* illustrates the power of interpretation by recording the encounter of a literary work with the public and exposes the necessity for socio-culturally (self-)reflective reading practices.

When Ron Shaver tells Percival Everett that he considers "*Erasure* … a big protest" in a 2004 *BOMB* magazine interview, Everett objects, arguing that the novel's precursor, his 1999 fictional work *Glyph*, is "almost a bigger protest than *Erasure*. *Erasure* is like describing a rattlesnake's bite. Am I protesting rattlesnakes?"[11] With his terse answer, Everett invites readers to pause and (re)consider their assessment of the novel. If, as he observes, *Erasure* is a description, then what does make *Glyph* a protest? Perhaps, the novel is more of a performance, a fictional protest that begins with a resounding act of resistance: The refusal to speak.

I understand the protest in *Glyph* to reside in the vocal void that occupies its literary soundscape, an aural absence through which Ralph, the character-narrator, seeks to preserve his humanity while exposing himself as a textual construct at the same

time. Ralph explicitly notes early on in the novel that he is and will remain quiet: "I was a baby fat with words, but I made no sound."[12] Fittingly, readers learn that the story takes place during his early childhood. These will, for a long time, remain the only two physical features that the four-year-old child prodigy divulges about himself. Well-versed in philosophy and literary theory, he is hyperaware of his textual and thus inaudible function as a narrative instance; an awareness that is mirrored in his rejection of social norms by his refusal to speak to any of the other characters in the fictional world that he describes. His dual role as a narrator who repeatedly addresses, among others, Wittgenstein's, Barthes's, and Derrida's philosophical discussions on language and as a diegetic character who entertains intersubjective relationships in the storyworld establishes two planes upon which writing is pitched against orality. On the one hand, Ralph exposes the narrative situation as mere linguistic facade lacking material substance. He comments on his existence as a purely linguistic sign and hence invites us to read his narration as an academic novel that scrutinizes critical practices through metafictional play. On the other hand, the repeated references to his silence evoke a literary soundscape that refers to a tangible world. In this (story) world, Ralph's self-chosen silence not only disconcerts his parents, but attracts the attention of "mad" scientists because of his allegedly deviant behavior. As he begins to write, his intellectual capacities come out and he ends up in a prison where government intelligence agencies who view him as a valuable asset experiment on him.

In the following, I will demonstrate that *Glyph* creates a literary soundscape of the quiet voice to reflect on its function in both the politics and aesthetics of resistance. The foregrounded absence of orality in Everett's novel proves that *Glyph* explores the boundaries and possibilities of self-determination in the American socio-political context as it pitches the acoustics of silence and voice against the mute textuality of the book. After considering how *Glyph* establishes a literary soundscape through vocal silence, I will address Ralph's favoring of text over speech and the consequences of his quiet resistance to social pressure. In order to do so, I will focus on the not necessarily linear, but rather diffusive movements from orality to writing and back again that the novel performs in content and form in order to generate an experimental literary space where the refusal to speak becomes a resonant expression of resistance.

Voice and Literary Quiet

In Everett's novel, the quiet voice is an integral part of its literary soundscape and its acoustic absence is the marker for the potential of sound to manifest itself eventually. According to sound studies scholar Salomé Voegelin, "Silence . . . involves listening and hearing as a generative action of perception."[13] In other words, silence draws attention to the auditory because it stimulates the act of listening as it unfolds in a

soundscape. Therefore, silence can be defined as "the dynamic locale of anticipation," as Voegelin observes in her book *Listening to Noise and Silence* (2010).[14] The perceived lack of a sound beckons the listener to expect its sounding as an imminent event. In the special case of a voice—i.e., an animated sound conceptually connected to a living body—the presence of a silent human being can trigger such auditory expectations.

Ralph's parents expect the sounding of the baby's voice as the next step in his cognitive development. They seek to teach him his first vocal articulations from the very beginning because, as the young child observes, "they were what they were, sadly, and that was speakers"; in other words, they believe to recognize human subjectivity in a child by its loud auditory proclamations from an infant's scream to the first linguistic utterance.[15] Their attempts are in vain, but despite Ralph's resistance to fulfilling their expectations, they do not give up: "My parents, . . . clawing at speech like sick cats, could not fathom my lack of interest in parroting their sounds. They put their smelly mouths in front of my face, somehow assuming that without an ability to express offense, it could not be experienced."[16] He believes that his parents equate the abstention from sounding his voice in protest with equanimity or consent and that his resistance to the social practice of sonic interaction and oral demonstrations of an independent will is unthinkable for them.

Since Ralph introduces himself to the readers as character and narrator of a work of fiction, his quiet voice simultaneously elicits and occupies a literary soundscape in the sense of a void that takes part in shaping the sonic layers of his fictional world precisely because of its failure to sound. To clarify that his silence is not a sign for slow development as his father believes, but a conscientious choice, Ralph decides to let his parents know that he has already acquired the capacity to express himself. "By the age of ten months . . . he not only comprehended all that they were saying but . . . was as well marking time with a running commentary on the value and sense of their babbling."[17] Bending the novelistic suspension of disbelief to the extreme, he positions himself as a writer from the start and scribbles a note that will fundamentally change the relationship to his parents:

> why should ralph speak ralph does not like
> the sound of it ralph watches the mouths
> of others form words and it looks uncomfortable
> lips look ugly to ralph when they are
> moving ralph needs books in his crib ralph
> does not wish to rely on the moving lips for
> knowledge[18]

He formulates his discomfort with any kind of corporeal activity that the sounding of a voice entails. The lips, as part of the mouth, represent the final threshold

that a voice could potentially cross in order to become a free-floating manifestation of his presence in the world. Brandon Labelle explains in *Lexicon of the Mouth* (2014) that the mouth "is an extremely active cavity whose movements lead us from the depths of the body to the surface of the skin, from the materiality of things to the pressures of linguistic grammars—from breath to matter, and to the spoken and the sounded."[19] The mouth is thus a location of process and transformation and the lips can be considered as the epitome of a biological exchange between inside and outside, between living environment and inner life, but also between the abstractions of language and the sensory tangibility of the body. Ralph openly refuses to use his mouth to perform the anticipated transformation into a speaking and thinking subject. To affirm that he is not merely trapped in a passive silent condition, he uses writing to reveal the agency and the intellectual impetus behind his abstention from speech and thus contextualizes his silence as an act of resistance. The notion of the quiet reflects this sense of purpose. As a consequence, the disclosure of his preference for the abstractions of writing and his choice to remain quiet represent challenges to the enlightened equation of voice with rational subjectivity both on a metafictional plane and on the level of the storyworld.

Not only does Ralph, the character, let his parents in on his preference of mind over body, writing over speech for the dissemination of knowledge; Ralph, the narrator also cautions the reader that he is a signifier without a referent and "all … [his] meaning is surface."[20] As narrative instance, he stands at odds with the fictional convention of suggesting a body or corporeal instance and his self-referential commentary resist any attempt at essentializing the sound of his voice and, by extension, his body. As Julian Wolfreys writes in his discussion of *Glyph*,

> We should be on our guard against "naturalizing" Ralph . . .. Ralph is an effect of writing, one which transgresses repeatedly through rhetorical devices that contradict their own logic, thereby transgressing the limits of the fictive constitution of the human" and repeatedly exposing his narration as "artifice rather than a natural representation of voice.[21]

Ralph is a linguistic experiment which, in turn, experiments with language in sound and writing. He lays out the scientific questions that he pursues with what he exposes as two related performative acts: His persistent, voluntary silence and the written mediation of his life story.

> The question becomes, especially for one who chooses not to speak, whether there is a phenomenological value of the voice itself, whether it has any transcendence. Does the voice have an appearance? … And does voice, the sounding voice, the speaking voice, carry the same impact as the voice of writing? And can the two work together or against each other, possibly even working to negate meaning altogether? A kind of complicity between sound and sign.[22]

This passage—titled "incision" like several other metafictional digressions from the main story—stipulates voice as the linchpin for a phenomenological investigation of the worlding capacities of literature. It posits *Glyph* as a case study exploring the field of tension in which fictional voice resides. Metafiction and fiction converge in Everett's work to simultaneously display and question connections "between sound and sign" in the auditory imaginary of fiction. The double focus on the speaking voice and the (dead) metaphor of narrative voice in writing expose the elusive insubstantiality of voice that becomes a vehicle between the textual abstractions of language and the concreteness of sonic representation in the storyworld.

Glyph does not resolve the ambiguous status of voice as sound in text; it rather uses language to create the critical distance to the all too familiar that is necessary for a phenomenological examination. This becomes most apparent in poems that Everett's character-narrator writes about the corporeal sites where the sounding of voices takes place: Mouth and ear. The title of the poem "*Labyrinth*" not only refers to the linguistic designation for the inner ear and implies the locatedness of hearing in the body, it is also programmatic for its aesthetics of sound and writing. In the poem, the inner ear is a labyrinth, a "*complex maze, | one puzzle embracing another, | the sound contained in petrous bone*."[23] Language entices the reader into a lyrical world where words resonate like sound waves when they reach a human body of flesh and blood. Sarah Wyman, who analyzes the republished versions of the poems in Everett's poetry collection *re: f (gesture)* from 2006, observes that "through techniques of defamiliarization, the body meets us in an aestheticized version, rendered in a verbal medium that insists we take a second look in our effort to understand."[24] Through metaphor, the familiar body part becomes an accessible, yet mythical space through which sound moves in mysterious ways. Thus, "*Labyrinth*" molds the complexity of the organ and the corporeal processing of sound in writing and, moreover, symbolizes the effort that one needs to make in order to navigate the pitfalls and dead ends involved in the act of listening.

Whether voice has an appearance is the question that Ralph grapples with in a poem called "*Larynx*"—the voice box where human breath turns into sound and speech. The poem deals with the inherently transitory body of voice that is locatable, however, in the corporeal site promoting its becoming.[25] In Wyman's words, this is a poem that "speak[s] the body and the personal connection such bodies enable. They trust the perceptions for gaining knowledge in the human thirst to sensually experience the phenomenal world. The performative act of Everett's observation affirms bodily existence . . ., memorializes human interconnection."[26] The comparison between the mother's and the child's throats in "*Larynx*" connects them through kinship and constructs their corporeal existence through language.

In the novel, embedded stylistic digressions like the poems that function "as elaborate sound-scapes" and self-referential reflections serve as catalysts for the establishment of a literary soundscape that serves as a background for Ralph's absent voice.[27] Thus, the literary quiet in *Glyph* refers to the resonant absence of voice in the soundscape of the fictional world, an auditory specter that never materializes, and to the textual constructedness of the narrative. The novel's peculiar character-narrator "transgress[es] the very margin in which his voice is transcribed, and from which it moves in two directions. The first-person narrator is a shuttle of sorts, a phantasmic weaving device that stitches together two incompatible worlds, the fictional and the real."[28] The two directions that the novel takes are hence simultaneously bound to demystify the over-determination of the connection between world and word and to resist its complete deconstruction. Word and world, excessively exposed textuality and corporeal materiality are inextricably intertwined in *Glyph*. Ralph ceaselessly posits their paradoxical connection as existential: "Writing myself into being? I think not. . . . All too aware, am I, of my large ears and frightening silence, a silence so intimidating that my parents run from me."[29] With a father who "was a poststructuralist" and a painter for a mother, Ralph has an artist and a critic as parents as much as art and theory engendered the glyph from the title that Ralph, the textual element, represents.[30] Navigating both word and world in a "self-referential density," Ralph both performs and embodies the intermedial relation between the textualization of language and speech and the representation of real-world experience.[31]

Blackness and the Social Practice of Quiet Resistance

The human voice reaches out to another with its sounding. As such, it is social by definition. If, in Mladen Dolar's words, "we are social beings by the voice and through the voice," the deliberately quiet voice challenges social dynamics and can be considered as a signifier for a private subjectivity.[32] Quashie's

> notion of quiet is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life . . . [which] is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty.[33]

Along these lines, the choice to remain silent can be understood as quiet resistance to public interpellation. In the case of Glyph's character-narrator who oscillates between word and world, the predilection for the quiet addresses both literary and social conventions, but it also exposes the precarious state of such an existence when the sovereignty of the quiet subject is in the line of fire.

Ralph's refusal to pronounce words and, thus, to interact with others as a speaker causes his startled parents to consider him a troubled child and to seek help from a psychologist. The denial of corporeal sonic expression in combination with his advanced cognitive skills in the fields of reading and writing—which moreover exceed the intellectual capacities of the adult characters he encounters—disturbs the specialist:

> Steimmel, like my parents, was irritated by my refusal to speak. She examined my throat and checked my reflexes with her little hammer. She tried to startle me, hoping to cause me to blurt out something, but I didn't. . . . She pinched me, trying to make me cry out, but only left a silent bruise.[34]

Finally, Steimmel abducts Ralph because she wants to dissect his brain to satisfy her scientific curiosity. This first abduction leads to a series of kidnappings by other scientists and Ralph falls into the hands of a secret government agency that uses him for espionage purposes. Therefore, Ralph's choice not to adhere to the social norms expected from him is considered a capital offense to others who then objectify his body for their own purposes and attempt to break his quiet resistance by radical means.

The world Ralph lives in is governed by the primacy of the visual. This becomes apparent when Ralph remarks that his "readings in genetics and history and current events made it clear that the people on the street were going to find the discrepancy between . . . [his] skin color and . . . [his] abductors' at least notable."[35] He quietly resists mentioning the color of his skin for over fifty pages into the narrative, because it is neither relevant for his textual signification process nor for his self-conception. In the world, however, phenotypes are of acquired importance. Readings give Ralph this insight and he relates this information to the reader, thus exposing the cultural construction of said significance as formed and perpetuated by scientific, social, and historical discourses.

The public significance of visual identification processes turns Ralph's silence into a political act, a purposeful performance of quiet resistance. In his dual role, Ralph links the reality of worldly cultural dominants and their political critique to literary conventions and reading practices influenced by hegemonic discourse. He addresses the reader directly, asking:

> Have you to this point assumed that I am white? In my reading, I discovered that if a character was black, then he at some point was required to comb his Afro hairdo, speak on the street using an obvious, ethnically identifiable idiom, [and] live in a certain part of town . . .. White characters, I assumed they were white (often, because of the way they spoke to other kinds of people), did not seem to need that kind of introduction, or perhaps legitimization, to exist on the page.[36]

With the choice not to advertise his blackness, the rejection of unwritten literary rules, and, possibly, the mere lack of concern with differences in outward appearance, Ralph resists ocularcentric determination. However, when the lack of expressing said resistance could lead to the misreading of a text and the eradication of its political meaning because of learned conventions such as the hegemonic requirement for a "legitimization … to exist on the page," quiet resistance encounters its limitation. For protest to have an impact, it needs to be expressed. Ralph defies racialization in literature, but social and literary norms force him to broach the issue at least to clarify that he seeks to quietly resist and not merely ignore them.

Ralph sacrifices the "sovereignty of quiet" for a moment due to practical reasons, but not without holding the reader accountable: "It is not important unless you want it to be and I will not say more about it, but a physical description of one kidnapped baby would have to be released to the police."[37] The simple fact that his parents are looking for him (he is a baby in need of parental care after all, even if he is a surprisingly eloquent one) forces him to relinquish his non-visual, silent, and private position and to become visible for the reading public. Even so, he is aware that his visibility comes at the risk of readers overemphasizing the relevance of his blackness and measuring his story exclusively in terms of what it relates about "the black experience."[38] He is aware of the "process of 'ethnic overdetermination' … in a politically asymmetrical situation," as Michel Feith has observed.[39] Accordingly, with his comment to the reader, Ralph establishes that "'race' … is neither to be denied nor overemphasized. It is one of the variables in the text, but in no way is it the most important one."[40] Ralph is aware of the impact socio-cultural dynamics have on the subject (i.e., the characters in the storyworld of *Glyph*) and knows that these also shape the reception of his narration. As a result, he even contradicts his own poststructuralist emphasis on textuality with an ironic tone when he remarks that "we do not give the creature *reality* enough credit, choosing to see it sitting out there as either a *construct* of ours or an infinitely regressing cause for the trickery of our senses."[41] However, this reality encompasses both the subjection of the individual to social pressures and the humanity of the person that does not necessarily seek to be considered as a representative of any kind—a humanity Ralph seems to salvage and protect by choosing not to sound his voice.

The public exposure of his rejection of speech in combination with his analytical talents in reading and writing bring him into a position where he cannot avoid contact with a social reality external to the philosophical, literary, and theoretical considerations he spends his time with. Ralph calls characters he encounters in the world he lives in "speakers,"[42] well aware of the fact that they notice his non-conformance to social norms and, therefore, fear and obsess over him. There is "fear, genuine fear" in the voice of one of his abductors whose companion wants to dissect Ralph's brain, a

fate the toddler escapes from by running into the arms of some undercover agents who incarcerate him in prison to turn him into a military asset called "Defense Stealth Operative 1369."[43] Jacqueline Berben-Masi proposes that the reason for Ralph's aversion to speech is that he assigns it "to the realm of violence." She concludes from Ralph's literary expressions in particular that he considers speech to be "an unnatural and unpleasant reaction to forces that escape the subject's control and destroy it."[44] In the reality of *Glyph*'s fictional world, Ralph is indeed subjected to constant control and monitoring by people who consider him being a fascinating asset, and an equally dangerous and useful object of investigation. As Berben-Masi notes, "Whether subject of psychological experimentation destined ultimately for dissection, spy for the military against the industrial complex, love object of frustrated parental instincts or sexual prey, Ralph is never allowed to be just Ralph, never permitted to live out his own personal destiny."[45] He is subjected to the will of others and his (social) identity is assigned to him because the rogue members of academic, religious, and governmental institutions underestimate and objectify him despite (or even because of) his extraordinary faculties.

Ralph's existential struggle is the search for individual freedom, self-expression, and self-determination in a society that assigns him the role of a captive—a struggle that he negotiates in written form and by abstaining from using his voice. Feith refers to the literary references implied in Ralph's captivity when he reads *Glyph* as a slave narrative. He argues that not only the name of Ralph's father Douglas suggests that the "connection with slave narratives may not be fortuitous"—and indeed Frederick Douglass as a namesake would be consistent with the long list of writers featured as characters and references in the novel—but also that "in slave narratives, writing often represents the acquisition of a voice and subject status."[46] Along these lines, I understand Ralph's engagement with literature and philosophy as the steering toward a medium that allows him to explore and to experiment with adequate ways to convey his exposure to a violent and clamorous world of "speakers" who have no qualms proclaiming their opinions to him. With the simultaneous emphasis on his declared refusal to speak, he draws attention to the difficulties entailed in breaking free from his assigned role in such a socio-cultural context and living on his own terms.

On his quest for self-determination, Ralph's quiet voice also challenges the topos of raising one's voice as an expression of agency and political activism well-established in figures of speech. Read in concert with post-Civil Rights literature, his quiet resistance resonates with the auditory imaginaries developed by James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Amiri Baraka, and others who, according to Carter Mathes, use "the political and aesthetic qualities of sound [to] resist the implicit and explicit perpetuations of white supremacy as they are narrated and enacted across the bodies

of black Americans." For Mathes, the usage of literary soundscapes in African American literature after 1965 is "a form of resistance to the political silence imposed on black voices."[47] He recognizes

> an inclination . . . among certain African American experimental writers to conceptualize their work through critical understandings of sound. This approach to sonic narration reflected a desire to imagine alternate configurations of subjectivity and resistance outside the frameworks for social transformation that had generally been reflected in the linearity and hyper-visibility of the Civil Right and Black Power movements.[48]

Everett's novel *Glyph* displays a similar inclination, but also adds other perspectives to these configurations of resistance precisely because of the willful self-silencing of the character-narrator's voice. It is this refusal of a voice to abide by political and literary conventions that reveals the complex dynamics of racialization in social interactions and reading practices described earlier and expresses Ralph's wish for alternate ways of writing himself into being. Consequently, Ralph, the narrator, creates an alternative auditory space when he plays with the literary and philosophical intertexts that inform *Glyph*. In short insertions to the main text, philosophers and writers reflect on universal concerns of literature and aesthetics, which Wolfreys fittingly refers to as "conversational vignettes."[49] The dialogic tone of their fictional encounters suggests that these thinkers are sitting together for a moment to discuss their ideas. Among the famous interlocutors in *Glyph* are Ralph Ellison who meets with Aristophanes, Zora Neale Hurston who talks with Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty who joins Jacques Lacan, and Socrates who comes together with James Baldwin in the following passage:

> SOCRATES: Tell me, Jimmy, how do things go these days?
> BALDWIN: Things go fine.
> SOCRATES: You know, I envy your art. Being able to create a world, build people, lie the way you do so convincingly.
> BALDWIN: I wouldn't call it lying.
> SOCRATES: Very well. But I have a question for you. You create a world and to do that you have to draw on the world we know and then re-create. Is that close to correct?
> BALDWIN: More or less.
> SOCRATES: So in order to render a world as you do, you must fully comprehend the world from which you draw your material and substance.
> BALDWIN: Actually, it is the act of creating the world of my fiction that allows me to understand the so-called real world.[50]

Socrates and Baldwin are represented here as two theoreticians who share an interest in the relation between word and world. Their imagined encounter is anach-

ronistic and thus impossible in the "so-called real world," but the spatial arrangement of their spoken words on the page exemplifies literature's capacity to establish a performative framework where they can exchange ideas even if canonical classifications in literary history may potentially silence their commonalities. The imaginary orchestration of their voices in the literary quiet is written in a non-formal tone that foregrounds the intimacy of the direct exchange and dramatizes its intersubjective dynamics. They function as narrative pauses in which Ralph, who imagines these encounters, establishes an atemporal literary soundscape in which the focus shifts from the particularities of social context to general reflections on the art of writing. The oral exchange between Socrates and Baldwin shows them as individuals actively listening to each other, thus establishing a counterpoint to the frantic policing of Ralph's quiet resistance by his social environment. The result is a utopian literary soundscape where resonant voices transgress the confining dimensions of canonical demarcations and call for a universal ethics of listening.

Voice and Writing—Voice in Writing

Keeping quiet can be a shield against a subject's exposure to judgment, conflict, and external determination. In *Glyph*, the quiet voice represents an act of self-preservation as much as it is a provocation. Ralph's capacity to read and write exposes his silence as a willful act of resistance that does not sit well with the powers at work in his world. Just as he deliberately withholds information from the reader that he later reveals to debunk ocularcentric processes of othering in literary reception, he unsettles the social dynamics in the storyworld because of his non-normative behavior and unmasks the strategies used by institutions and individuals to retain their sense of supremacy.

Overall, voice in *Glyph* expands the possibilities for a literary aesthetics of resistance. Percival Everett's experimentation with the sound of silence in literature demonstrates the broad range and flexibility of the auditory imaginary when one listens to it at what Moten called "the scene of objection."[51]

Notes

1 Percival Everett, *Glyph* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 9.

2 Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134 ; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.

3 Moten, *In the Break*, 68.

4 Quashie, *Sovereignty of Quiet*, 3.

5 Ibid., 135.

6 Keith B. Mitchell and Robin G. Vander, "Changing the Frame, Framing the Change: The Art of Percival Everett," in *Perspectives on Percival Everett*, ed. Keith B. Mitchell and Robin G. Vander (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), xii–xiii.
7 Percival Everett, *Erasure* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2001), 43.
8 Lesley Larkin, *Race and the Literary Encounter: Black Literature from James Weldon Johnson to Percival Everett* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 128.
9 Everett, *Erasure*, 43.
10 Larkin, *Race and the Literary Encounter*, 127.
11 Ron Shaver, "Percival Everett," *BOMB Magazine*, July 1, 2004, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/percival-everett/.
12 Everett, *Glyph*, 9.
13 Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London: Continuum, 2010), 11.
14 Ibid., 93.
15 Everett, *Glyph*, 6.
16 Ibid., 5.
17 Ibid., 6.
18 Ibid., 8.
19 Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1.
20 Everett, *Glyph*, 31.
21 Julian Wolfreys, *In Theory: Tropes, Subjectivities, Responses and Responsibilities* (London: Continuum, 2010), 146.
22 Everett, *Glyph*, 136.
23 Ibid., 98.
24 Sarah Wyman, "Charting the Body: Percival Everett's Corporeal Landscapes in *re: f (gesture)*," in *Perspectives on Percival Everett*, ed. Keith B. Mitchell and Robin G. Vander (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 126. As Wyman notes, part of the poems "initially appear in … *Glyph*" but "the poems differ in *re: f (gesture)* as they are written in the voice of an adult lover" (130).
25 Everett, *Glyph*, 112.
26 Wyman, "Charting the Body," 134.
27 Ibid., 131.
28 Wolfreys, *In Theory*, 146.
29 Everett, *Glyph*, 16.
30 Ibid., 6.
31 Ibid., 95.
32 Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 14.
33 Quashie, *Sovereignty of Quiet*, 6.
34 Everett, *Glyph*, 77.
35 Ibid., 54.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 A parallel between Ralph and his namesake Ralph Ellison suggests itself at this point. In his discussion of Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Moten argues that "the mark of invisibility is a visible, racial mark; invisibility has visibility at its heart. To be invisible is to be seen, instantly and fascinatingly recognized as the unrecognizable" (68). In this sense, the hegemonic overdetermination of phenotypes dehumanizes the black subject by turning her/him into a "black box" exclusively identified as an unknowable other and nothing else. Ralph's quiet resistance is equally threatened by the mark of invisibility when the fascination with the color of his skin overrides his literary and intellectual endeavor.

39 Michel Feith, "Hire-a-Glyph: Hermetics and Hermeneutics in Percival Everett's Glyph," Canadian Review of American Studies 43, no. 2 (2013): 312, DOI: 10.3138/cras.2013.019.

40 Ibid.

41 Everett, *Glyph*, 16.

42 Ibid. 6.

43 Ibid., 89, 139.

44 Jacqueline Berben-Masi, "Percival Everett's *Glyph*: Prisons of the Body Physical, Political, and Academic," in *In the Grip of the Law: Trials, Prisons and the Space Between*, ed. Monika Fludernik and Gret Olson (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 236–37.

45 Ibid., 225.

46 Feith, "Hire-a-Glyph," 307.

47 Cather Mathes, *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature after Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 10.

48 Ibid., 18–19.

49 Wolfreys, *In Theory*, 156.

50 Everett, *Glyph*, 99–100.

51 Moten, *In the Break*, 1.

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The Timbre of Trash

Rejecting Obsolescence through Collaborative New Materialist Sound Production

Joe Cantrell

Abstract

Late capitalist production is highly dependent upon the continuous manufacture of new goods to be brought to market. The idea of obsolescence plays a key role in this process, as more recent commodities replace older, presumably less-effective products. This process is especially prominent in the technological sector, which routinely encourages the deliberate replacement of older devices— even when still functional. Digital audio technologies fall in line with these practices, and are often produced using exploitative labor practices. A serious consideration of these effects poses a difficult question for sonic artists who use electronic and digital equipment in their practice. Specifically, how can sound practitioners begin to account for and push against their tacit contribution to the detrimental effects of obsolescence entailed by the tools of their craft?

This article explores this question through the lens of new materialist discourse, which outlines modes of engaging with the physical world that reject the assumption that objects are static. Instead, they employ an understanding of objects as collective agents in constant active assemblage of shared material actions that include the presence of human bodies as part of a continuum of objects within larger systems of capital, labor, and politics. The electronic audio practices of American sonic artists who incorporate obsolete, broken, and discarded objects in their work will act as case studies for this exploration. Their work helps understand possible collaborative implementations of technological audio production that recognize the collective agency involved in their physical and aural production.

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The Timbre of Trash

Rejecting Obsolescence through Collaborative New Materialist Sound Production

Joe Cantrell

Late capitalist production is highly dependent upon the continuous manufacturing of new goods to be brought to market. The idea of obsolescence is vital to this process, as new commodities replace older, presumably less effective products.[1] Modern American conceptions of obsolescence emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, when mass production permeated the Western world. Previously, the idea of conservation and thriftiness was the norm. To dispose of something before it has completely worn out was a sign of wastefulness, akin to the sin of sloth. The purposeful production of disposable goods during this period cleared the way for radical change in American expectations of consumer products, as common items became more expensive to mend than to discard and replace. Economist Joseph Schumpeter focused on Karl Marx's conception of a continual process of consumption and deliberate waste as one that was necessary to the functioning of capitalism. Using the term "creative destruction," Schumpeter recast it in a positive light. His influence contributed to the contemporary assumption of obsolescence as a requisite part of a healthy economy.[2]

Digital audio devices also rely on obsolescence, falling in line with the production of other technological commodities whose manufacturers seek to increase consumption of their products.[3] Like most electronics, they are often produced in conditions that are environmentally destructive and socially exploitative.[4] This poses ethical questions for sound artists whose practices often demand consistent hardware consumption. How can sound practitioners account for this tacit contribution to the detrimental effects of obsolescence entailed by the tools of their craft?

I contend that new materialist philosophy affords a perspective on the physical world that can shift understandings of technological tools from being objects susceptible to obsolescence and disposal, to ones of self-reflection and respect. Key to this claim are the views of three authors: Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, and Jane Ben-

nett. Karan Barad presents a view of matter that understands the ontology of the physical world as consisting of phenomena, not particles. Her conception of objects complicates the nature of physical boundaries, rendering them as porous and active. In such a cosmology, the borders between humans and objects become moot.[5] Rosi Braidotti's discourse on materiality extends this permeability to resemble global ecological structures, considering technological systems as the ecology of modernity. In other words, technology becomes nature, inclusive of wider systems of power and culture that are embedded in technological objects.[6] Jane Bennett's conception of vital materiality assumes the Victorian notion of an immanent life force within physical things, offering a way of thinking about nonhuman objects that considers them part of the cycle of life and, in a broad sense, as being alive. Bennett describes this embrace of anthropomorphism as an affirmation that "so-called inanimate things have a life, that deep within is an inexplicable vitality or energy, a movement of independence from and resistance to us and other bodies."[7] Collectively, these perspectives contribute to an understanding of technological objects that put them on a more equal footing with human beings, making it more difficult to consider them obsolete and disposable.

The emergence of obsolescence was in part a reflection of the effect of mass production brought on by the industrial revolution.[8] These effects were also mirrored in the sonic arts throughout the twentieth century, and aural reflections of an increasingly mechanized world ran apace with technological developments. Although often violent and sexist, Italian Futurism and Luigi Russolo's *The Art of Noises* (1913) had a clear effect on the conception of sound and objects.[9]

Composer John Cage was introduced to Russolo's works through his connection with Edgard Varèse, for whom Russolo was highly influential.[10] Russolo's fixation on the sonic nature of objects also had a huge impact on Cage, likely contributing to the development of Cage's prepared piano technique, among others.[11] Cage grappled with a sense that music in the traditional sense "could not reliably communicate emotion."[12] Instead, he opted for a methodology that would "let the sounds be themselves."[13] Akin to contemporary new materialist thought, Cage sought to de-emphasize the personal role of the composer and performer, placing them on more level ground with sonic objects. The shift away from authorship and the influence of personal taste was augmented by his interest in the writings of Amara Coomaraswamy, who de-emphasized self-expression.[14]

The rejection of anthropocentrism also led Cage to be suspicious of audio recordings as representations of—or replacements for—sound performances. Instead, he engaged with recorded media strictly as a raw material for sound making.[15] This deliberate re-direction of intended media use is also well documented in the work of

other sound pioneers throughout the twentieth century and beyond. It can be heard in the compositions of Halim El-Dabh, Pierre Schaeffer, Milan Knížák, and Nicolas Collins, to name a few.

It is clear that the broadening of Cage's philosophical horizons had a marked effect on his output. For contemporary electronic musicians, a reconfiguring of perspective similar to Cage's reassessment of sound objects can likewise offer a fresh view on their operation and meaning, specifically in relation to the process of obsolescence. Obsolescence relies on an assumption that objects exist as instruments of human action. New materialism can counter this by troubling the presumption of the dominance of human intentions and the inability of objects to have agency. Instead, it argues that the material world is ontologically made of phenomena—ontology, epistemology and ethics are intertwined.[16] I maintain that new materialism can enable a sense of shared cooperation with objects that allows experimental musicians to push against the process of obsolescence in their practice. I will support this claim by presenting three currently active sound practitioners from the US who exhibit aspects of new materialist tendencies toward obsolete or disposable objects in their work. These artists are chosen specifically for their activity in a field of experimental practice that is increasingly becoming open to the incorporation of critical and philosophical theory as part of the creative process and product.

My examination begins with Reed Ghazala, whose practice of "circuit bending" envisions a sense of porous boundaries between objects and humans. In doing so, he posits technology as a part of the natural world, and technological objects as quasi-living collaborators. The view of technology as cooperative partner is further explored in the practice of Curtis Rochambeau, who utilizes the potential actions embedded within obsolete medical equipment as agential co-authors in his musical creation. Finally, the process of material decay is examined in the practice of William Basinski, who evinces a vitalistic sensibility toward the decaying tape loops in his work.

Qubais Reed Ghazala

American musician Qubais Reed Ghazala is widely known as the originator of an informal practice known as circuit-bending, which transforms disposable or obsolete electronic objects into electronic musical instruments. This is accomplished by deliberately creating short circuits and listening to the results. When an interesting effect is found, the short is noted and later permanently rewired, resulting in bespoke musical instruments crafted from mass-produced devices.

Ghazala stumbled upon the technique as a teenager when a small, open-backed amplifier shorted out onto a metal drawer, producing unusual sounds. He became fixated on creating the shorts himself, expanding the amplifier with components

pulled from any source he could find. This original instrument eventually became enclosed in a custom-made cedar box (Illustration 1). Ghazala describes the original impetus for the craft as one directly related to his social and financial status at the time. Being underage and lacking funds to purchase a synthesizer, he had to rely on the self-creation of sound technology via discarded or extremely inexpensive materials.[17]

Ghazala positions the development of the process as one based on a reciprocal ecology between human beings and things: that it is within human nature to "musicalize" objects.[18] He likens this to coconuts washing ashore on a hypothetical deserted island. When found by human beings, they can be made into all manner of musical instruments depending on the identification of the physical sonic potentials between the object and the human being; a coconut can be fashioned into a percussion instrument, a wind instrument, etc., depending on how one imagines interacting with it. He extends this analogy to electronic waste products as well: "Our society's electronic discards, like coconuts fallen to the sea, collect at the high-tide lines of garage sales and flea markets, second-hand shops and garbage bins.... These circuits are coconuts of our island. Adapt the coconut, adapt the circuit."[19] Ghazala likens the castoffs of obsolescence-driven technological production as the byproducts of the ecosystem of modernity. In this context, the conversion of obsolete objects to personal, creative ends is like the adaptation of any organism to its environment.

Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti advances a similar perspective. She projects a view of the material world in which self-organizing, living matter is fundamentally entangled with non-living inanimate matter, interpreting technological and informational systems as a relational part of that assemblage.[20] In this sense, technological objects and systems become part of what the environment; technology comes to be regarded as part of ecology. This perspective questions predominant utilitarian views of commodified technological objects: "The technological apparatus [becomes] our new 'milieu' and this intimacy is far more complex and generative than the prosthetic, mechanical extension that modernity had made of it."[21] She understands the electronic object as inhabiting a space that is a part of the same systemic process as all living things. She not only projects a kinship with the seemingly obsolete but also imparts technological objects with a sense of living animus.

This troubling of assumed boundaries between the natural and built environments in an auditory sense is not without precedent. In his text *Earth Sound, Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitudes in the Arts* (2013), Douglas Kahn points up the sonic relationship of technological objects and the "audible world of nature."[22] He outlines Henry David Thoreau's observation of the unintended consequences of the global instantiation of telegraph lines in previously untouched forested areas. Although

Illustration 1: Original circuit-bent amplifier.
Photo courtesy of Qubais Reed Ghazala.

the wires transmitted electrical signal, they also acted like aeolian harps and carried physical vibrations—often for miles—of the wind and other environmental actions.[23] In this way, Kahn can be seen as including artificial structures in his consideration of what counts as part of the ecosystem.

Jane Bennett's conceit of vital materialism aligns with the continuing practice of including objects within the ecological sphere, encouraging a strategic projection of anthropomorphism onto inanimate things. She provides a counter to the tendency

for humans to consider themselves as separate from the ecological, political, and economic systems in which they live.[24] Her projection of human qualities into objects is not meant in a strictly literal sense, nor is it intended to promote obscurantism or to replace scientific inquiry. It is done, in part, as an effort to expand the understanding of humanity to a wider, systemic perspective that positions objects on a more equal footing with humans. By doing so, we can begin to include material objects, including technological waste objects, within our personal sense of self-interest: our fate becomes bound up with theirs.[25] With such a view, the conception of casually discarding a fully-functional device for an improved one is similar to disposing of an old friend. Instead, Bennett questions the production of waste and wonders how "would patterns of consumption change if we faced not . . . trash, . . . but an accumulating pile of lively . . . matter?"[26]

Ghazala's comments on his work seem to resonate with this inclusive understanding of electronic objects, identifying certain circuit-bent devices as being "living instruments." Here, Ghazala describes the tendency of some circuit-bent instruments to change over time and cease functioning due to the extreme strain put on their components. He describes this tendency in a way that is inclusive of humans:

> You and I are living instruments. We accept that our voice will change, become deeper over time, quieter in the end, and will someday fail. We accept that our friends . . . will change as they age. However, can we accept this in our musical instruments? Some bent instruments do age and sound different as time passes, as they consume their accelerated timeline. The instrument grows a little older, moves a little closer to early demise, every time you turn it on. Don't play it to save it? Play it to let it sing?[27]

Ghazala likens the electronic device with the bodies of loved ones. The perception of an impending end to the device in question is not one that embraces a disposability regarding the object. Instead, he imparts a sense of reverence and concern for the objects' wellbeing, juxtaposed with his desire to experience their sounds. In doing so, Ghazala seems to embrace a sense of vitality in his instruments that pushes against any easy sense of utility, engaging Bennett's call for "intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things."[28]

An empathy toward technological objects is also reflected in his conception of the direct physical interaction between the components of circuit-bent instruments and humans. Because the human body has resistance properties, it can act as a component in a circuit. By deliberately building metal contact points into a device, sound can be altered by merely touching the device with the human body. This touch-based interaction can be further expanded by contact with other humans, creating a sound situation that can be transformed by touching other people as well as the

object. Ghazala describes this extended instrument as a "BioElectronicAudiosapien," or "BEAsape." He describes the experience of participating in these extended interactions as collaborative and mutually transformative: "I was changed and the circuit was changed, and I had trouble deciding where each of us began and ended. I simply concluded we were something new, and we were one."[29] For Ghazala, this body contact experience is ultimately one that troubles easy boundaries between objects, bodies, and technological waste. His understanding compels us toward a conception, through sound, of a more entangled place in the continuum of objects and being.

The consideration of a diffuse boundary between individual objects and subjects lies squarely within the wheelhouse of posthumanist theorist Karen Barad. In her perspective, material objects are not fixed, stationary, separate entities, but a continually shifting array of constant action. Barad describes matter as "a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than a property of things."[30] This is not merely metaphorical, but a literal condition of materiality. Drawing on particle physics, Barad demonstrates that the hard edges humans tend to see as bounding individual objects actually exhibit a great deal of fluidity. Upon close inspection, the clearly defined boundaries that humans perceive to form the outlines of physical things begin to exhibit the same diffraction patterns that particles produce when behaving as waves—revealing their ontological nature as phenomenal, not static. Their hard edges blur to an energetic, permeable flux, similar to the porous boundaries between objects and humans that Ghazala's BEAsapes exhibit.[31] In this way, Ghazala's practice embraces the technological as part of a natural habitus that includes humans in a shared discourse, where separations between physical objects and human subjects is called into question.

Friedrich Kittler illustrates the complexities of the auditory potential for these diffuse bodily boundaries. When directly intermingling with audio technology, the sonic involvement of the human corpus does not produce results that align with established tonal sensibilities. Far from creating what might be desired from traditional Western musicians' ears, the body itself creates noise when directly sonified. Specifically, Kittler describes Rilke's fascination with sonifying the sutures of the human skull, as he saw the similarities with the grooves of a phonograph record.[32] Of course, if actually played, the sutures would produce irregular, "noisy" sounds. As such, Kittler associates the body with noise, and contemplates the sonifying act as one of transgression.[33] For those seeking to mimic the standards of Western music, such noise is unacceptable—something to be eliminated. Inhabiting a more inclusive stance on bodily soundings, as Ghazala does, instead allows practitioners to meet the body on its own terms in tandem with technology—noise and all.

Adopting this sort of sensibility compels an understanding of technological

objects that affords a more cooperative interaction. This stance pushes against any presumption of obsolescence in favor of a more equitable, respectful treatment of objects. New materialism extends the concept of shared physicality to be also expressed as expansive material assemblages that include the socio-political and economic spheres as well. As matter is enacted by the differential commingling of varying states of phenomena, political and economic power can likewise be seen as being produced by a differential interchange of bodies and objects on a larger scale. Like objects, power is also a "mattering": a doing that is physical as well as social.[34]

Curtis Rochambeau

Experimental musician Curtis Rochambeau creates dense, often punishing sheets of noise. In his performances, he uses a variety of electronic equipment, although many of them were never designed for sonic purposes. Specifically, Rochambeau uses mid-twentieth-century electronic medical devices such as nerve and muscle stimulators to create sound. After receiving an old piece of test equipment from his uncle, Rochambeau immediately began experimenting with the generated voltages to alter the sound and function of his synthesizers. Rochambeau was taken by the heft and history of the unit and was soon scouring online auctions to buy other obsolete equipment to alter his sounds.[35]

Eventually, instead of using the machinery to control the modulation and frequency of his synthesizer, he plugged the output of the medical units directly into the audio inputs of his mixer. The equipment was designed to send electrical impulses over 100 times stronger than standard audio signals. This mismatch of use values embedded in the technological objects produced sounds totally different from those of his audio generators. In addition to the extreme voltage difference, the advanced age of the components in the machines caused them to behave erratically, changing their activity over time and in response to their surroundings.

Like Ghazala, Rochambeau imparts a perception of anthropomorphic agency to the actions of the failing, misused equipment; seeing them as friendly co-workers:

> [They] have a mind of their own . . . I can leave it on . . . go putter about and come back and it's something different. I find that endearing. It is kind of like a trusted bandmate. They are going to do their thing, while I'm doing something else, and it will continue to work itself out?[36]

For Rochambeau, the reactive tendencies built into the obsolete devices he uses become the raw materials with which he molds his aural aesthetic. In other words, his practice is reliant upon the semi-autonomous actions of the misused equipment, which have become a vital part of his creative engagement. By leaning upon the

agency embedded in these devices, Rochambeau is enacting an anthropomorphically cooperative assemblage in which human intention is on more equitable terms with physical objects.

The conception of non-human objects as inhabiting and enacting physical agency in the world is a central tenet of Karen Barad's perspective. For Barad, matter is an agentive factor in iterative materialization and an active participant in worldly becoming. This becoming is based upon a constant differentiation between entangled actions. In other words, the material world is ontologically made of constant movement, and things within it appear as they do because of the difference between the active agential states of objects relative to one another.[37]

If matter is ontologically based on activity, then it enacts influence on, and in relation to everything else. That is, objects have agency because they are made of agency. Extending this understanding of the agential association between objects also changes the relationship of ownership and utility between humans and the material world. Collective agency as seen in this manner transforms objects into doings, calling into question their status as inert possessions and enabling an acceptance that agency is not just human. This is not to say that humans do not have a significant part to play in the physical world, but the role they do play should allow for a conception of the human body as but one site in a constant co-construction of a materiality with fuzzy borders.[38]

Karen Barad's outlook is comparable to the more sound-oriented positioning of Salomé Voegelin's sonic materialism—in which objects move from static and inert matter and become sonic events: things in the noisy process of "thinging."[39] Although closely aligned, Barad contributes an additional subatomic perspective to the mix. In so doing, she grounds and extends Voegelin's phenomenological observance of material interaction into the ontological, projecting action as an inherent physical property of all objects including the human body. As such, both perspectives may be of use as a window into the effects of extended materiality as a collective sonic activity that is inclusive of the agency of bodies and objects.

Rochambeau's practice exhibits these agential boundary-questioning qualities. His performances not only allow for but also rely on a positioning in which human agency is not primary, and highlight the active material state of the machines involved. The inherent drift of the changing physicality of the devices, their advanced age, and their re-directed capacities all contribute to patterns of agential difference that eventually become expressed sonically. At the same time, the boundaries between performer, composer, and musical instrument become blurred as their collective agencies create sound.

Curtis Rochambeau's extension of agency into obsolete equipment highlights

the potential for audio technology to impart its own actions on sound and meaning, which can have a drastic effect on creative practice. In William Basinski's case, this material agency played a crucial role in a years-long process of preservation, memory, and decay.

William Basinski

In the early 1980s, William Basinski began the practice of experimenting with a variety of methods of recording onto handmade analog audiotape loops. With limited funds, Basinski purchased inexpensive tape recorders and began making tape loops from a variety of sources, bouncing the recordings between recorders to create endless layers of dense sound. He describes the process as one that plays with a sense of personal understanding and agency imparted to the materials and technologies that he utilizes. He relates the unexpected qualities of working with physical loops of tape:

> There's something about the sound of analog tape . . .. They have wow and flutter. Sometimes, . . . if it gets a little bit loose, . . . there will be a little bit of a fade out or a drop out[,] . . . it might even pick up the reverse bit that's on the other side of the tape, which I always love. . . . Throw in a little bit of a surprise.[40]

He emphasizes his lack of absolute control in the process as "exciting" and that a major point of the work is a sort of collaboration with the machines themselves, pointing out a milestone in his technique when he "learned how to stay out of the way and see what happens."[41]

He eventually directed his efforts elsewhere and put the loops away, storing them in whatever they would fit into. The loops remained in this state for years until he decided to digitally archive them. During the transcription, Basinski noticed that because of the advanced age of the audiotape, the iron oxide particles embedded on them had started to drop off as the loops were played. As the tape went around, it lost more of its magnetic material and some of its sound as well, fading away until he was left with clear plastic tape that transmitted only silence.[42]

Through the process of physical decay, Basinski gained a new understanding of the materiality of the media, as well as its potential effect on his sound practice. The tapes had exhibited another form of agency he had not counted on. This change reflected not only his own personal archival gesture, but how the results of material action had recombined with the physical traces of his previous creative efforts. Over time, the physicality of the magnetic tape had formed a new type of work, whose operation was not entirely human, nor entirely machinic.

Like Ghazala and Rochambeau, he regards these objects as though they had a sort

of inherent spirit contained within them. When asked if there was a spiritual connection with the technology he uses, he responded:

> Of course there is! That's why I . . . let the spirits come into the work. . . . There's always a spirit within the stuff! There's a spirit within the machine. Last night, my brand new big old Mac studio computer . . . just decided to reboot. There's always spirit in the machines somewhere, even in the crazy digital machines. It might be a nefarious one, I don't know.[43]

Basinski seems to project a friendly spirit onto analog media and a malevolent one onto digital. He intimates a sense of being more closely connected to the analog medium and its tangible physicality. His sense of mistrust toward digital media reflects what he seems to view as a sort of inauthenticity, derived from the failure to recognize the preservational qualities of physical sound recordings. When questioned on whether he felt that digital technology seemed somehow hostile, he projected some misgivings about the totalizing and concentrated nature of digital archiving.[44]

Considering his intimate relationship with magnetic tape, it is not unreasonable that he might take such a stance. Lisa Gitelman contends that historical misgivings about the introduction of new media technology result from shifting relationships to its materiality, and it is this unsteadiness that can make it difficult to fully grasp.[45] Media in general are preservational at their core. Despite this, degradation is intrinsic to recording. Jonathan Sterne points out that the idea of permanence in recorded media is less of a description than an aspiration.[46] This is especially true in light of the difference in the types of decay experienced by magnetic tape and digital files. The changes undergone by analog media are more localized and gradual than those of the digital realm. To similarly damage audio information stored on a hard drive, for example, would likely not allow any sort of material decay to express itself, but instead result in a catastrophic failure of the device and its stored sound data. Basinski's mistrust of the digital and his sense of a living presence permeating analog technology again points to the perception of a kind of embedded animus expressed in part by obsolescent decay.

William Basinski's focus on media entropy contrasts with Curtis Rochambeau's embedded electrical potentialities, and with Qubais Reed Ghazala's more explicit connection with the human body. What they have in common, however, is a prevailing sense of the object as a shared partner in the creative act that complements the boundary-challenging discourse of new materialist thought. These artists rely on their material counterparts for vital support in the crafting of sound, often enacting perspectives that countermand the drive for obsolescence that has for so long been a part of American culture. In aligning these and similar actions with the specific philosophical perspective of new materialism, this sense of creative resistance to obso-

lescence through sound can be augmented by an ethical framework that may act as a catalyst for further creative acts.

Notes

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About the Author

Joe Cantrell is a sound artist and scholar whose work is inspired by the implications and consequences of technology. His practice addresses the incessant acceleration of technology and media, its ownership, and our interactions with the waste these processes produce. Joe holds a BFA in music technology from Cal Arts, an MFA in digital arts and new media from UCSC, and a PhD in Music from UCSD.

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American Studies, Sound Studies, and Cultural Memory

Woody Van Dyke's *San Francisco* as Sonic Contact Zone

Susanne Leikam

Abstract

Each year on April 18, the city of San Francisco commemorates the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire with a series of elaborate and tightly scripted ceremonies. As one of the key events, the ceremony at Lotta's Fountain features, among others, commemorative speeches, the hanging of a memorial wreath, and the ceremonial wailing of fire sirens, followed by a minute of silence for the victims. The acoustic tension building up between the sirens' piercing warning sounds and the ensuing collective gesture of mournful quietude is subsequently resolved by the communal sing-along of the upbeat theme song "San Francisco" from the eponymous Academy Award-winning 1936 musical film. This performance seems to stand in stark contrast to the other events at the ceremony, which are painstakingly staged to appear historically accurate. Nonetheless, the anachronistic inclusion of the triumphant "San Francisco," written three decades after the earthquake and released in the context of a purely fictional narrative, fits the purpose of memorializing the 1906 earthquake, since it sonically embodies the "new" city's founding myth. *San Francisco*, especially its theme song, this article argues, memorializes the 1906 disaster as a social equalizer and a patriotic affirmation of American resilience by portraying the pre-earthquake city as a loud, decadent, and disorderly soundscape that only the earthquake could unite, refine, and ultimately Americanize.

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American Studies, Sound Studies, and Cultural Memory

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Susanne Leikam

Each year on April 18, the city of San Francisco commemorates the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire with a series of elaborate and tightly scripted ceremonies. As one of the key events, the ceremony at Lotta's Fountain includes, among others, commemorative speeches, the hanging of a memorial wreath, and the ceremonial wailing of fire sirens, followed by a minute of silence for the victims.[1] The acoustic tension building up between the sirens' piercing warning sounds and the ensuing collective gesture of mournful quietude is subsequently resolved by the communal sing-along of the upbeat theme song "San Francisco" from the eponymous Academy Award-winning 1936 musical film. This performance seems to stand in stark contrast to the other events at the ceremony, which are painstakingly staged to appear historically accurate. Nonetheless, the anachronistic inclusion of "San Francisco," "a triumphant slice of musical Americana" written three decades after the earthquake and released in the context of a purely fictional narrative,[2] fits the purpose of authentically memorializing the 1906 earthquake, since it sonically embodies the "new" city's founding myth. *San Francisco*, especially its theme song, this article argues, memorializes the 1906 disaster as a social equalizer and a patriotic affirmation of American resilience by portraying the pre-earthquake city as a loud, decadent, and disorderly soundscape that only the earthquake could unite, refine, and ultimately Americanize.

American Studies, Sound Studies, and Cultural Memory

The engagement with *San Francisco*'s sonic imagining of the Bay Area at the turn of the century participates in the recent global surge of research in the field of sound

studies, which Jonathan Sterne outlines as the "interdisciplinary ferment" that, "by analyzing both sonic practices and discourses and institutions that describe them, . . . redescribes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world."[3] Pioneered by composer R. Murray Schafer's study *The Tuning of the World* (1977) and expanded by historians such as Emily Thompson and Mark M. Smith, sound studies has since rapidly gained momentum in the humanities,[4] prompting scholars such as Kara Keeling, Josh Kun, and Petra M. Meyer to proclaim a "sonic" or "acoustic turn."[5] In American studies, the shift to considering the "culture, consumption, and politics of sound seriously" provides a much-needed complement to the field's zealous dedication to American visual culture,[6] highlighting the interconnectedness of all senses in the production, dissemination, and reception of cultural artifacts.[7]

This article pays particular attention to what Richard Cullen Rath calls soundways—that is, "the paths, trajectories, transformations, mediations, practices and techniques—in short, the ways—that people employ to interpret and express their attitudes and beliefs about sound."[8] Accordingly, the focus on soundways exposes the degree to which American popular culture has made use of sound in the first half of the twentieth century in order to geographically and culturally map and, hence, "order" places such as San Francisco, an aspiring city in the far west. It further discloses the integral role that these soundscapes played in the memorialization of historical events such as the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. Through the pervasive destruction of more than one third of the city's commercial and cultural center and a death toll of more than 3,000 people, the earthquake of 1906 constituted a major caesura in the city's history.[9] Understood as "the place and process where past and present interact in instances of individual and communal self-positioning and definition,"[10] the cultural memory of an event is never stable—as Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes in *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), a foundational work of memory studies—but changes over time within cultural communities, more often than not framing the past in ways that cast the present situation in a favorable light.[11] In the continuous processes of renegotiating American cultural memories, popular, often mass-produced cultural artifacts play an integral role through their pervasive appeal and ability to disseminate their narratives widely. That some memory scholars such as Marita Sturken foreground the visual nature of these "technologies of memory" simultaneously attests to the scholarly neglect of sound in memory studies and the still far-reaching underestimation of the affective appeal of sounds.[12]

The time of *San Francisco*'s release in June 1936 marks the transition from a first generation of eyewitnesses to a second generation of San Franciscans, most of whom had only experienced the 1906 calamity vicariously. As a result, the highly successful and popular MGM production *San Francisco* partook in reviving and pro-

moting cultural narratives that strategically shaped the cultural memory of the disaster so as to fit the historical moment. Without the explicit mention of pressing 1930s social concerns, encompassing, among others, the economic hardship of the Great Depression, the political turmoil of strikes, the continuing transition toward an industrial and urban America, and the rise of nativist sentiments on account of mass immigration, the film nonetheless emerges as a cultural product of its time. Its portrayal of the earthquake as a blessing in disguise that establishes "sonic order" in the city and works as a moral corrective to, and purifier for, San Francisco's rough frontier past offered an archetypical template for optimism in the face of disaster and an uplifting affirmation of American ideologies, such as progress and resilience in times of hardship.

This sanitized memorialization leaves out the darker chapters of the 1906 calamity. For instance, the city's high risk of earthquakes and fire damage was well-known at the time, but the city authorities neglected to pass more comprehensive legislation and also skimped on fire prevention measures. Similar failures took place during the calamity when rich neighborhoods were saved from the fires at the expense of poorer districts, and Mayor Eugene Schmitz (illegally) issued a proclamation that read: "The Federal Troops, the members of the Regular Police Force and all Special Police Officers [i.e., deputized citizens] have been authorized . . . to KILL any and all persons found engaged in Looting or in the Commission of Any Other Crime."[13] The long road to full recovery was equally tainted: For example, authorities discriminated heavily against minority groups, especially women, the poor, and the Chinese.[14] By strategically forgetting the many historical failures in the field of disaster prevention, the numerous missteps regarding disaster management, and the countless social injustices enacted during the lengthy recovery process, *San Francisco* demonstrates that "inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence."[15]

Woody Van Dyke's *San Francisco* as a Sonic Contact Zone

Throughout its 115-minute runtime, Woody Van Dyke's musical film *San Francisco* uses sound to embody the heterogeneity of, and tensions between, different sonic traditions, which can ultimately only be reconciled by the deafening rumble of the 1906 earthquake.[16] In so doing, it sonically imagines the city's disaster-induced transition from a small, rugged frontier town to an urbanized American metropolis in the 1930s. *San Francisco* maps the city's different acoustic spaces and sonic traditions and exposes the ways in which these soundscapes presuppose, mirror, penetrate, and contest one another. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the cultural contact zone, which denotes the "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power,

such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today,"[17] the filmic rendition of San Francisco can be termed a sonic contact zone, highlighting the many ways in which sound enacts, mirrors, and, at times, evades affect, relationships of power, and conceptualizations of the Other.

Right from the very beginning, *San Francisco* renders the pre-earthquake city a clamorous and largely arrhythmic place: Showing the New Year's Eve festivities in the public places all over town, the first scene firmly establishes this sonic memory of turn-of-the-century San Francisco by introducing the viewers to a pandemonium of concurrent sounds such as the rattling of street cars, fire bells, the popping of Champagne bottles, raucous brass band music, rowdy laughter, the shouting of New Year's greetings, and the singing of celebrating San Franciscans. These sounds perform the real-and-imagined social and cultural disorder that, according to Barbara Berglund, has been commonly associated with San Francisco's unconventionally rapid genesis as a Gold Rush settlement, ethnically diverse population, predominantly male residents, and unusually frank acceptance of vice and violence.

Later scenes, especially those taking place on the Barbary Coast, San Francisco's infamous hot spot of vice near the waterfront, continue the impression of sonic disorder, interweaving the loud voices (many of them with European accents) of businessmen and servants, rowdy bar fights, vaudeville music, and election campaign slogans. This sonic representation—emphasizing loudness, irregularity, and disorder—needs to be understood in view of its contemporaneous sonic contexts: In the urban centers of the East and Mid-West, especially New York and Chicago, middle-class Americans started anti-noise campaigns—most prominently among them the American Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noise (founded in 1907)—that effected a wide range of ordinances regulating unwanted and unpleasant sounds in public spaces in the time period up to the 1930s. In this context, "noise," as Mark Smith, Mitchell Snay, and Bruce Smith elaborate, was not so much the "rhythmic, ordered sound of progress," which many middle-class Americans saw in the industrial and infrastructural hums and thuds, but the "sporadic, unpredictable noise of the frontier" that—in the eyes of many—signified primitiveness and backwardness.[18] In this manner, the anti-noise movements considered the arrhythmic racket of public urban spaces indicative of "a barbarous civilization" and threatening to the American "belief in progress and faith in efficiency."[19]

In *San Francisco*, however, the din of the streetcars, the loud nighttime open-air music, the racket of the intoxicated partiers—in short, everything that somewhere else might have been classified as noise—is not depicted as undesired or devious but, as the laughter of the revelers and their intimate familiarity with the high noise level show, embraced as positive and constitutive of the spirit of the place. The delight

that San Franciscans in the film take in their purportedly uncivilized noisescape sonically marks the city as different from the contemporaneous American norm, reverberating with romanticized pride in San Francisco's exceptionalism with respect to both its virtues and its debaucheries.[20] The clamor and arrhythmicity of *San Francisco*'s soundscape is punctuated only in a few instances, as for example, when the dialogue moves from the subject of life in the city to that of the characters' innermost emotions or when places such as the local church or the opera house are depicted as sonic enclaves with radically different musical traditions. In this manner, the film's soundscape represents pre-earthquake San Francisco in general, and the Barbary Coast in particular, as a fast-paced, chaotic environment free from middle-class American conventions and restraints.

This sonic characterization of the spirit of the city provides the backdrop for the film's plot. *San Francisco* tells the story of a love triangle that brings different musical traditions and sound practices into contact. In the film, the classically-trained soprano Mary Blake (Jeanette MacDonald), a clergyman's daughter from rural Colorado, moves to the city with the long-term goal of singing at the prestigious Tivoli Opera House. Upon arrival, she finds her new workplace, the Bristol, burnt to the ground. Desperate for money, she walks into the nearby concert saloon Paradise, the "hottest spot on the Barbary Coast," where she is then hired as a singer by its owner Blackie Norton (Clark Gable), a dyed-in-the-wool San Franciscan who—in the words of the film—was "born on the coast, raised on the coast, lives on the coast, and cares for the coast."[21] Despite their genuine disagreement on the politics, aesthetics, and ethics of music, it does not take long before the two develop a mutual attraction to one another. Their fledging relationship is disrupted by Jack Burley (Jack Holt), the affluent and well-connected second-generation Irish owner of the Tivoli Opera, whose musical tastes are akin to Blake's and who seeks not only to hire her permanently but also to marry her.

As the owner of the most notorious, rowdy, and popular music saloon on the Barbary Coast, Blackie Norton epitomizes the American concert-saloon tradition, which constitutes one of the main precursors of large-scale commercial American entertainment formats such as the variety show and vaudeville. Presumably having taken their cue from the British music hall, these combinations of bar and auditorium offered its American patrons the opportunity to enjoy a medley of "light" music and predominantly female dance acts while having drinks, flirting with waitresses, gambling, smoking cigars, and, frequently, engaging in brawls.[22] In accordance with this cultural practice, Norton's Paradise unites drunken debauchery and risqué entertainment, sonically performing San Francisco's pre-earthquake reputation for being "the scene of more viciousness and depravity … than any other area of vice and iniquity on the American continent."[23]

Elaborating on the aesthetics of the performances in concert saloons, Parker Zellers explains that "the early variety show tended to be boisterous and unsophisticated" and "built primarily on the elements of blackface minstrelsy: comic and sentimental songs, jig and buck-and-wing dancing, instrumental solos, and comic skits were the initial ingredients."[24] This ties Norton to a distinctly lowbrow musical tradition, which generally values the presentation of the music more than its aesthetic qualities. *San Francisco* emphasizes, at times even mocks, Norton's neglect of musical finesse in several scenes as, for example, when he responds to Mary Blake's inquiry whether the Paradise is in need of singers with the repeated order to see her legs or, when asked whether he likes Puccini, he inquires whether said Puccini ran "a joint down on Dupont Street."[25]

While Norton is thus depicted as a musical philistine who privileges popular melodies and commercial motives over "art," he at the same time represents a musical tradition that highlights communal belonging and solidarity. This emerges, for instance, in the shared conviviality that arises among the audience during musical performances at his Paradise concert saloon and the fact that he, a professed staunch atheist, anonymously donates an organ—the key instrument of sacred musical practices—to Father Mullin's (Spencer Tracy) church community. This puts him in close proximity to folk music, which, according to Ray Allen, recent scholarly approaches understand "as any music (regardless of style, origin, or age) that is community based and transmitted aurally in small, face-to-face performance settings."[26] Norton's lack of appreciation for refined music is thus contrasted with his concern for the community and its value systems when he decides to run for the board of supervisors for the purposes of, among others, keeping greedy out-of-town real estate developers at bay and establishing stricter fire and building codes to make San Francisco safer. While good at heart, Norton is too enticed by the glittery decadence of the Barbary Coast and political power to fully commit to putting Blake and her career before his goals. Because of this, Mary Blake (temporarily) enters a relationship with Jack Burley, Norton's romantic rival.

In contrast to Norton's position amid the hustle and bustle of the Barbary Coast and his association with popular lowbrow music, *San Francisco* portrays Jack Burley as Norton's (and thus the Barbary Coast's) sonic antipode. Characterized first and foremost by his ownership of the grand Tivoli Opera House (located in close proximity to San Francisco's main artery Market Street), Burley represents the sophisticated sonic tradition of European art music. As a connoisseur of classical music and what has traditionally been referred to as "high culture," he is the first to recognize Blake's extraordinary talent and proficiency as an opera singer and, as opposed to Norton, wants to foster her career and, figuratively as well as literally, show her "another side of San Francisco."[27] The viewers get an impression of Burley's "side of San Francisco"

when Blake enters into a relationship with Burley. In grand style and with much pomp, he features her as the female lead in prestigious European operas at the Tivoli. In order to show how Blake mesmerizes the largely upper-class audiences in San Francisco, the film shows a medley of her singing French arias as Gretchen in Charles Gounod's opera *Faust* (1859) and performing "Sempre Libera" as Violetta in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853).[28]

As the son of an Irish immigrant mother who came into wealth during the Gold Rush, Burley's life story as part of San Francisco's nouveaux riches fittingly reverberates with the intricate entanglements of classical music and class in American history. Unraveling these connections, David Monod chronicles the emergence of elite European-style musical culture in the United States, among others, as a reaction to the rise of music as a popular, mass-produced market commodity:

> After the Civil War America's gentry swelled as a new business elite emerged and married into it. As this new money shed some of its newness it adopted the social pretensions of the old [elites], building monuments to itself such as New York's Metropolitan Opera (the Met) in 1883. The idea that serious music was different because only the initiated could understand it proved to be attractive to this elite in pursuit of self-definition. Although the rich were not the only people attending concerts, classical-musical life was now capitalized by them, and its popularity shrank to involve few beyond the well-to-do.[29]

Classical music, according to Monod, was thus used to reestablish order in the American class system. By labeling the Burleys "San Francisco's aristocracy," the film casts Burley not only as adherent to an elitist approach to music, but also puts him in line with a non-democratic and hence inherently un-American tradition, which, in turn, pits him even more harshly against Norton.[30]

While Burley and Norton represent two very different sonic traditions, they also share pivotal characteristics: As white male proprietors of two successful acoustic spaces in San Francisco, they occupy the very top of the local sonic power hierarchy. Involved exclusively as decision-makers and financiers, they control the musical production processes at their places. Especially at the Paradise, this power divide pits white masculinity against a staff composed largely of women and ethnic minorities, many of them members of the working class. Both Burley and Norton are well-connected to San Francisco's authorities and use their influence to silence—both literally and metaphorically—the other side: Burley successfully bribes the police to shut down Norton's Paradise because of its supposed lack of a proper alcohol license, and Norton plots to enforce his contract with Blake by having her dragged off the stage of the sold-out Tivoli (which he ultimately cannot bring himself to do since he, too, is spellbound by Blake's voice).

In *San Francisco*'s conflict-laden sonic contact zone, Marie Blake plays a crucial role. Through her classical vocal training and her expertise in the cultured European-style music (acquired "from the best teacher in Denver"[31]) as well as her comprehensive knowledge of church music (obtained from her preacher father), she is intimately familiar with Burley's musical tradition. Yet, her previous life in small-town Colorado has further bestowed her with the paradigmatic character traits of the American heartland, such as ambition, kindness, and service to the community, which also connect her to Norton's musical tradition. By analogy with Margaret Connell Szasz's concept of cultural brokerage,[32] Blake can thus be regarded as a cultural—or rather sonic—intermediary who is able to move across sonic borders. On the level of sound, this ability to adapt more and more successfully to very different cultural and musical traditions is demonstrated, among others, through her ultimate success with both Norton's working-class audiences and Burley's upper-class opera patrons. It also emerges in her affiliation with church music and her guest appearances in Father Mullin's church choir, which insinuate the breadth of her sonic spectrum, musical expertise, and moral integrity.

What, furthermore, makes Blake integral to *San Francisco*'s sonic contact zone is her starring role in the vast majority of the film's diegetic musical performances. This also ties her closely to the theme song, whose catchy chorus accompanies *San Francisco* from the opening credits to the film's final tones for a total of five performances on the diegetic stage—each involving Mary Blake. In addition, the fact that Blake, previously a "stranger" to the Bay Area, finds a new "home" in the city strongly ties her to the highly memorable chorus lyrics, which praise the Golden City for its mythologized immigrant past:

> San Francisco, open your golden gate,
> You let no stranger wait outside your door.
> San Francisco, here is your wandering one
> Saying, "I'll wander no more."[33]

Its prominence and frequent repetition make the song, especially its chorus, a leitmotif and keynote sound. In their propensity to "constitute the essence of a place at a particular moment in history" and "help us understand the key values of a given society,"[34] keynote sounds enable glimpses into the cultural fabric and the meaning making processes at play.

Reproducing *San Francisco*'s sonic contact zone, the different recitals of "San Francisco" are central to the representation of the sonic disorder and the memorialization of the 1906 earthquake. On the one hand, the song audibly enacts Mary Blake's development from an outsider to an active and integral participant in the San Francisco community. When Blake first sings the theme song in the Paradise,

for instance, she does so very slowly and in a refined manner in her operatic soprano voice, which demonstrates the extent to which she and the musical tradition she represents are out of place on the Barbary Coast. Ordered by Norton to sing faster and adopt a burlesque style, she complies with his wishes and over time mesmerizes the Paradise's audience but still does not seem to belong. When she, by this point an established soprano at the Tivoli, spontaneously presents the song at a Barbary Coast musical contest in order to raise money for the bankrupt Paradise, she begins to reappropriate it to her tastes and visibly and audibly enjoys singing it. By animatedly belting out the melody in her soprano voice, displaying forceful body language, and varying the melody and lyrics at her discretion, she actively takes possession of the song in the Barbary Coast's Lyric Hall. When the entire audience (including Burley and other upper-class patrons) is swept off its feet and starts frantically singing along, Blake—having bridged the two musical traditions—assumes the position of a choir leader. In the shared act of singing together, the performance at Lyric Hall is also crucial because it closely interweaves the film's theme song with a sense of community and cohesion.[35]

While Blake partly manages to bridge different acoustic traditions, she is unable, however, to unite them. This task is only fulfilled by the sounds of the earthquake, which interrupt the applause for Blake's Lyric Hall performance of "San Francisco." Over the course of three minutes, the film juxtaposes a cacophony of ear-piercing sounds—from the loud, low-pitched rumbling of the ground, collapsing walls and screaming voices to cracking water hydrants—with spectacular visuals of destruction. Literally drowning out the city's sonic disorder, the earthquake's pandemonium of noise is followed by several minutes of silence, only punctuated by the earthquake's resumption, which is, again, followed by silence.[36] This seismic noisescape can be read as an extension of the theme song "San Francisco" since it finally realizes what the song promises, namely to unite *all* people in San Francisco and provide a home—a new, more orderly, and modern home—for them. Metonymically denoting the entire city's purging of moral depravity, un-American elitism, and social disorder, the earthquake kills Burley and effects Norton's religious conversion.

At this point in the narrative, the theme song again assumes a key role in the memorialization of the earthquake. When cries of "the fire is out" finally reach the reunited couple, Mary Blake and Blackie Norton, accompanied by the other survivors of the 1906 earthquake and fires, walk from the hills toward San Francisco's devastated city center, merrily chanting the first and fourth stanza of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."[37] In this moment, the city's heterogeneous soundscape is finally unified and all sonic disorder has disappeared. In the very last seconds of the film, the camera's gaze lets the smoldering ruins morph into the modern—that is 1930s—cityscape of San Francisco,[38] while the final tones of "Glory, glory, hallelujah" merge into

the chorus of "San Francisco."

The blurring of the joyful collective singing of Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic"—the preeminent military anthem of the Union cause during the American Civil War that has since morphed into a more generalized patriotic affirmation of resilience, progress, and the "nation's inevitable triumph over her enemies"—into the tunes of "San Francisco" elevates the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire from a local event into a matter of national import.[39] In so doing, the city's rise from the "wickedest, most corrupt, most godless city in America," to use Father Mullin's words in the film, to an "industrious, mature, respectable" seaport, as the epigraph to *San Francisco* puts it, is depicted as a decidedly American success story.[40] As such, it affirms powerful American ideologies and nation-building mythologies.

The religious diction of the two stanzas of the "Battle Hymn" sung in the film further suggests that the earthquake was a divine blessing that rid America of moral decay, social disorder, and corruption.[41] In the process, it also evokes notions of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism. The fact that San Franciscans from all walks of life do not despair but defiantly join together for the "Battle Hymn" is also pivotal to the memorialization of the earthquake: The collective sonic response to disaster alludes to a post-earthquake San Francisco of democracy and social equality, and, more importantly, paradigmatically illustrates American resilience in times of hardship and crisis. In exhibiting the splendidly rebuilt city, the final glimpse into San Francisco's future confirms viewers' assumptions that the promises raised by the sonic blending of the "Battle Hymn" with "San Francisco" will ultimately be honored and a new and modern metropolis will rise from the ashes. The musical pairing of the theme song with a national anthem that is emotionally charged with American patriotism and the resolve to overcome all hardships further increases the affective potential of the film.

Conclusion

By uniting heterogeneous sonic traditions into a distinctly "American" music, *San Francisco* memorializes the 1906 earthquake and fires as a blessing in disguise that not only worked as a corrective to San Francisco's Barbary Coast decadence, but that also brought forth modern American city purged of vice. Promoted vigorously by politicians, the press, and San Francisco's economic elites in the wake of the 1906 calamity, this narrative was by no means novel in 1936, but it resonated strongly with the zeitgeist. It "offered Depression-weary Americans a portrait of people rescued from calamity through faith in God and their own resourcefulness."[42] For this reason, it became a must-see and rose to become the top-grossing movie of the year in the United States upon its release.[43] The film's spectacular earthquake effects,

which earned it the reputation of being the first American disaster blockbuster,[44] its numerous emotionally rousing musical hits, and its high-caliber production quality further contributed to *San Francisco*'s popularity, resulting in six Academy Award nominations (among others Outstanding Production, Best Director, Best Actor) and the Academy Award for Best Sound Recording.[45]

The film's immense popularity entailed that its keynote sound and leitmotif "San Francisco" was widely disseminated. Over the course of the next couple of decades, the theme song—and with it the fictional sonic myth about the city's refounding—became more and more dissociated from the film. In 1984, it was even adopted as one of San Francisco's two official municipal songs.[46] As an affect-charged, autonomous cultural text that connotes American resilience and communal spirit, "San Francisco" has frequently been sung collectively at official ceremonies and commemorative events, such as the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake commemorations. With every repetition, the traditional form of the sing-along performatively renews the nexus between "San Francisco," its lyrics and its melody, as well as notions of American resilience, progress, and optimism. In this manner, "San Francisco"—a sentimental fictional tune—has entered into collective memory of American disasters and secured its place as a performative gesture of collective remembrance and American resilience. This not only explains the anachronistic inclusion of the song in the annual commemoration of the 1906 earthquake and fires but also the interplay between historical fact and fiction so indicative of American cultural memory.

Notes

1 With very few variations in its key sequences, the quake ceremony program usually specifies the commemorative sound events at Lotta's Fountain as follows: "5:11 am: Announce countdown (start countdown just before 5:12)—5:12 am: Sirens—5:13 am: Minute of silence—5:14 am: Sing-a-long 'San Francisco.'" See Johnny Funcheap, "San Francisco's Annual 1906 Earthquake Ceremony," *FunCheapSF*, April 17, 2016, https://sf.funcheap.com/city-guide/san-franciscos-annual-1906-earthquake-ceremony/.

2 Edward Turk, *Hollywood Diva: A Biography of Jeanette MacDonald* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 183.

3 Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

4 Murray R. Schafer, *Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World: The Soundscape* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994); Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

5 Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, "Introduction: Listening to American Studies," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 448, DOI: 10.1353/aq.2011.0037; Petra M. Meyer, ed., *Acoustic Turn* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008).

6 Keeling and Kun, "Introduction," 446.

7 See, for example, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2008), 55.

8 Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2.

9 Philip Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Gladys C. Hansen and Emmet Condon, *Denial of Disaster* (San Francisco, CA: Cameron & Co., 1989); Susanne Leikam, *Framing Spaces in Motion: Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes into Twentieth-Century San Francisco* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015).

10 Udo Hebel, "Introduction," in *Sites of Memory in American Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Udo Hebel (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2001), x.

11 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," in *American Literature, American Culture*, ed. Gordon Hunter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213–16; Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997).

12 Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 9.

13 Quoted in Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 69.

14 For more details on San Francisco's failure to prevent and mitigate the pervasive damage from earthquake and fires and the far-reaching injustices committed on the long road to recovery, see: Andrea Rees Davies, *Saving San Francisco: Relief and Recovery after the 1906 Disaster* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*; Hansen and Condon, *Denial of Disaster*; Leikam, *Framing Spaces*.

15 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4.

16 *San Francisco*, dir. Woody Van Dyke (Beverly Hills, CA: MGM, 1936).

17 Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 34.

18 Mark M. Smith, Mitchell Snay, and Bruce R. Smith, "Coda: Talking Sound History," in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 366.

19 Raymond W. Smilor, "American Noise, 1900–1930," in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 320–21.

20 David Wyatt, *Five Fires: Race, Catastrophe, and the Shaping of California* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1997), 54.

21 *San Francisco*.

22 Parker R. Zellers, "The Cradle of Variety: The Concert Saloon," *Educational Theatre Journal* 20, no. 4 (1968): 578.

23 Herbert Asbury, quoted in Barbara Berglund, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846–1906* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007),

60.

24 Zellers, "Cradle of Variety," 582.

25 *San Francisco*.

26 Ray Allen, "Folk Musical Traditions," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bonner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2018), http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=650.

27 *San Francisco*.

28 While both operas were staged at the Tivoli in the years preceding the earthquake of 1906 (the *San Francisco Call*, for example, lists both for the coming opera season on January 8, 1905), it is telling that Blake takes on the lead role of two tragic women. In this manner, the intradiegetic operatic narrative foreshadows the failure of her relationship with Burley. Blake's performance of Verdi's "Sempre Libera" takes on an ironic notion since she—trapped in middle-class norms of decency, reliant on Burley's favor in terms of her musical career, and (ultimately) enraptured with Norton—is far from "free."

29 David Monod, "Art Music in the European Tradition," in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. Simon J. Bonner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), http://eas-ref.press.jhu.edu/view?aid=201.

30 *San Francisco*.

31 Ibid.

32 Margaret Connell Szasz, *Between Indians and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

33 *San Francisco*. MGM specifically commissioned "San Francisco" for this movie production from Walter Jurmann and Bronislaw Kaper (who composed the music together) and Gus Kahn (who wrote the lyrics). While the film mostly depicts the singing of the catchy chorus lines, there are two more stanzas, which continue the exaltation of San Francisco as the best possible place to live. Drawing on the city's self-proclaimed exceptionalism, the second stanza, for example, reads: "Other places only make me love you best / Tell me you're the heart of all the golden west." In addition, it evokes a sense of belonging and rootedness when stating: "San Francisco, welcome me home again. / I'm coming home to go roaming no more."

34 Mark M. Smith, "Introduction: Onward to Audible Pasts," in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), xi.

35 The increasing association of "San Francisco" with notions of collectivity and dedication to community is already started in the third performance, which—taking place during one of Norton's campaign events—also constitutes a communal sing-along of the song. As at Lyric Hall, Blake vocally leads the chanting crowds through her soprano voice, enforcing the personal bond between her and the theme song.

36 Below the earth's surface, seismic waves typically have a frequency between 20 and 20,000 Hertz and therefore lie outside of the audible range of humans. As a result, earthquakes have usually been sonified in films through their low-pitched surface rumble or the cornucopia of sounds triggered by the seismic waves. See Timothy Oleson, "On the Web: Shake, Rattle and Roll: What Does an Earthquake Sound Like?" *Earth: The Science Behind the Headlines*, August 8, 2012, https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/web-shake-rattle-and-roll-what-does-earthquake-sound.

37 *San Francisco*.

38 According to the Internet Movie Database, a shot of the Golden Gate Bridge (at the time still under construction) was added to the last scene after the film's premiere. When the film was re-released in 1948, the Golden Gate Bridge had lost its novelty as a symbol for modernization, which is why subsequent versions no longer include this shot. "San Francisco (1936): Alternate Versions," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed January 5, 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0028216/alternateversions.

39 John Stauffer and Benjamin Soskis, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic: A Biography of the Song That Marches On* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

40 *San Francisco*.

41 The first stanza describes how "the Lord" "has trampled out the vintage / where the Grapes of Wrath are stored" and how he "has loosed the fateful lightning / of his terrible, swift sword." The fourth stanza tells of him "sifting out the souls of men / before his judgement-seat."

42 Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 184.

43 Frank S. Nugent, "'San Francisco,' at the Capitol, Is a Stirring Film of the Barbary Coast," *New York Times*, June 27, 1936, https://www.nytimes.com/1936/06/27/archives/san-francisco-at-the-capitol-is-a-stirring-film-of-the-barbary.html; Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 184.

44 See William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *The Great Depression in America: A Cultural Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 509.

45 MGM's musical team included, among many others, composers Walter Jurmann and Bronislaw Kaper, lyric writer Gus Kahn, and musical director Herbert P. Stothart. The production crew comprised, for example, director Woody Van Dyke, screen writer Anita Loos, recording director Douglas Shearer, and producer D. W. Griffith, who, according to the IMDb, also directed some scenes without, however, being credited for it. "San Francisco (1936): Full Credits," *Internet Movie Database*, accessed January 5, 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0028216/fullcredits.

46 San Francisco's other official city song, adopted in October 1969, is "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." See Gladys C. Hansen, "San Francisco's Official Songs," *The Museum of the City of San Francisco*, accessed January 5, 2021, http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/song.html.

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The Gendered Sounds of Revolutionary American Theater

Leopold Lippert

Abstract

This article examines the relationship of sound and gender politics in revolutionary America by reading two late eighteenth-century dramatic texts, the 1774 pamphlet *A Dialogue, Between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse* (written pseudonymously by Mary V. V.), and Virginia playwright Robert Munford's five-act play *The Patriots* (written c1777, published only posthumously in 1798). Even though the sounds of early America cannot be accessed directly, as there was no sound recording in the modern, technology-based sense, and even though neither of the two dramatic texts has a known record of performances, the article sets out to explore how sound and speech were heard and negotiated, and how they reflected on prevailing cultural assumptions about gendered personhood, and the relationship between gender and politics. Arguably, attention to sound in these texts offers specific insights into the joint articulation of gender and transatlantic politics in the larger struggle over the American revolution. As this article shows, both texts, albeit for different reasons, strategically use gendered sounds to stage specific political interventions: By "listening" carefully to these sounds (as they are represented in writing), one can understand in more detail how acoustic environments impacted on the articulation, legitimation and deliberation of political argument in revolutionary America.

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The Gendered Sounds of Revolutionary American Theater

Leopold Lippert

In the 1774 pamphlet *A Dialogue, Between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse, Upon His Return From the Grand Continental Congress*, the pseudonymous author Mary V. V. portrays a scene of domestic strife embedded in the larger politics of the American Revolution. The short dramatic piece, written in verse form, presents two characters, "Husband" and "Wife," quarreling over the efficacy of recent acts of colonial resistance against the British crown. As a delegate to the Continental Congress, the husband has just signed the Articles of Association (presumably, as the year is 1774), a set of economic sanctions against Britain. The wife does not agree with her husband's political positions (or, perhaps more precisely, ambitions) at all, and starts to criticize him immediately. "Good Lord! how magnanimous! I fear Child thou'rt drunk," she cries out mischievously and proceeds to ridicule the political posturing of American patriots like her delegate spouse, exclaiming, "Thou born! thou! the Machine of an Empire to wield?" The husband's retorts are more subdued, and concerned above all with the intolerable loudness of his wife's nagging. "Pray, for God's Sake, my Dear, be a little discreet," he pleads, "As I hope to be sav'd, you'll alarm the whole Street." The references to the high volume of the wife's speech continue: "Don't delight so in scolding yourself out of Breath," the husband snaps, and goes on to complain, "If I speak but a Word, you rave like a Fury."[1]

The dramatic constellation opened up by the dialogue is fascinating for many reasons. First and foremost, the tone of ridicule that pervades the exchange is indicative of how humorous strategies were central to the articulation of political argument and internal factionalism in Revolutionary America, even as armed confrontation against Britain was fast approaching.[2] Moreover, the ease with which large-scale political questions about American independence and national sovereignty are grafted onto a scene of domestic quarrel points to the intricate connection of the personal and the political, of the intimate sphere of the home and the public sphere of transatlantic politics on the eve of the American Revolution.[3] Also, the dialogue

reiterates and reinforces a gender cliché familiar to North American colonial readers, that of the emasculated, "henpecked" husband who is constantly harassed by his nagging wife.[4]

What I find most intriguing, however, is the way in which the dialogue gestures toward a performative dimension related to gendered voice and sound quality that remains virtual, but still carries cultural meaning and historical significance. Even though the voices of the nagging wife and the henpecked husband were written "merely" for the pamphlet page, even though there is no evidence that the *Dialogue* was ever performed in Revolutionary America, and even though such evidence would not be based on sound recording in the modern, technology-based sense, the interpretation of the exchange between husband and wife still depends to a considerable extent on the way we *hear* the wife's remarks. In order to take sides in this gendered verbal battle that so effortlessly links the domains of the household and of transatlantic politics, we need to make sense of how the wife *sounded*, and of whether we hear her arguments as reasonable discourse or rather as loud and trivial clamor that can be easily dismissed.[5] In order to grasp the range of possible political stances about gender and the American Revolution opened up by the *Dialogue*'s connubial back-and-forth, we need to ask ourselves in what ways *listening* to the wife's scolding at a high volume helps us understand whether we can take her seriously or not. In order to recognize how sound makes meaning in this gendered exchange, we thus need to engage in what Steven Feld calls "acoustemology," a conceptual conjunction of acoustics and epistemology that allows for the "inquir[y] into what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening."[6]

This essay seeks to examine what is knowable through sound, and more particularly, what is knowable about gender relations and gender politics through sound, by tapping into a curious historical archive. In what follows, I will offer readings of two dramatic texts written in the 1770s, the anonymous 1774 *Dialogue* introduced above and Virginia playwright Robert Munford's play The Patriots (written c. 1777, published only posthumously in 1798), and ask how attention to the dramatic representation of sound and speech may offer more specific insight into the joint articulation of gendered personhood and transatlantic politics in the age of the American Revolution. What do these texts tell us about the ways in which sound was strategically deployed in order to negotiate both gendered behavior and revolutionary politics? How do these texts represent male or female voices in writing, and what do such representations tell us about the combined production of cultural meaning in early America through both (printed) textuality and (vocal) performance?[7]

As will become evident, the answers to these questions remain speculative to some extent, engaging with what is knowable *as well as* with what can be histori-

cally known through sound. On the one hand, any acoustemological project concerned with historical periods that preceded modern sound recording must rely on inferential evidence, such as written descriptions of how particular sounds and voice qualities were heard and meant to be understood. On the other hand, the dramatic texts I am examining were most probably not intended to be performed (and thus to be heard) in the first place,[8] and thus relate to (sonic) embodiment through what I have elsewhere described as "virtual theatricality"—that is, by gesturing toward a performative dimension through (dramatic) textuality.[9] These qualifications indicate that I do not want to propose a definitive historical account of the sonic gender politics of these late eighteenth-century dramatic texts. Rather, I would like to suggest that close attention to sound quality and vocal characteristics in these texts reveals ambivalences in meaning that foreclose such historical definitiveness. If voice, as Gina Bloom points out in her study of gender and sound in early modern England, "is produced by unstable bodies, transmitted through volatile air, and received by sometimes disobedient hearers," it might not be considered the most reliable carrier of fixed historical meaning. Bloom attributes a "generative instability" to the "*practical* performance of language" that defies easy categorization or political functionalization.[10] Following Bloom, to read the politics of gendered speech in the *Dialogue* and *The Patriots* thus means to take seriously the instabilities and volatilities that characterize sound (even if such sound remains virtual), and to make meaningful the ambivalences introduced by sound to the overlapping trajectories of gender and transatlantic politics in Revolutionary America.

Listening to the Sounds of the Past

My attempt to "listen" to the gendered sounds of Revolutionary American theater must be considered part of a broader acknowledgement in American studies that sound, and the cultural politics of sonic phenomena, matter. In a review of Americanist work on sound, Kara Keeling and Josh Kun gladly acknowledge that "the era of sound's marginality in American studies scholarship . . . seems to be over."[11] Over the past few decades, an increasing number of Americanists, with a variety of disciplinary and methodological backgrounds, have explored and critically interrogated what R. Murray Schafer termed "soundscape[s]," or "acoustic environment[s]," as early as 1977.[12] Following Schafer's lead, these scholars have sought to combine acoustic, social, cultural, and aesthetic approaches to sound, and have productively added sonic dimensions to prevailing political debates surrounding race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, as well as empire and nation-building practices.[13]

On a very general level, sound studies, as Jonathan Sterne points out, "takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, [sound studies] redescribes

what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world."[14] This conceptual and analytical emphasis on sonic experience must be considered a reaction against what Bruce Johnson denounces as the "scopic epistemology" of much contemporary cultural theory. Johnson argues that especially in the Anglophone tradition of cultural theory, textuality and visuality have been privileged, and "authority [has been] embodied in information and knowledge conceived of in terms of a visual order: perspective, vision/visionary, envisage/envision, point of view, discover, disclose, observation, speculation, illustration, demonstration, reflections, insights, second sight, revelation, theory (from the Greek word for 'spectacle')."[15] As a consequence, he claims, knowledge conveyed through sound, and aural metaphors to "describe" that knowledge, typically have been devalued or even discarded. Hence, a stronger focus on sound not only would suggest new objects of study for the field of cultural analysis, but also would contribute to a reassessment of those objects of study that already have been examined for their visual and textual characteristics. With respect to gender, this would entail asking more varied questions: What kinds of (cognitive as well as emotional) knowledge about gender are expressed by sound *in particular*? How does sound help articulate and solidify (both dominant and subversive) gender constructs? And is there a gendered relationship between sonic phenomena and (what counts as) cultural intelligibility?

Attention to sound and sonic experience becomes more complex with respect to historical research, as sound is ephemeral, and access to the sounds of the past is generally difficult, if not outright impossible. In the context of early modern soundscapes in particular, scholars simply cannot listen to what they want to analyze, as sound recording technologies were not developed before the second half of the nineteenth century. What is more, historicizing sound amounts to more than merely reconstructing acoustic phenomena through recordings or other archival technologies: historically variable perceptions of sounds must also be taken into account. As Mark M. Smith explains in *Sensing the Past* (2007), "the senses are historical, . . . they are not universal but, rather, a product of place and, especially, time, so that how people perceived and understood smell, sound, touch, taste, and sight changed historically."[16]

In order to approach such historically changing sound perceptions, Richard Cullen Rath, in his *How Early America Sounded* (2003), proposes the concept of "soundways." Rath argues that even though many sounds of the past might be similar to those of today (he refers in particular to natural sounds such as thunder), they might have been understood and been given significance in entirely different ways. By studying "soundways: the paths, trajectories, transformations, mediations, practices, and techniques—in short, the ways—that people employ to interpret and express their attitudes and beliefs about sound," he claims, one can get closer to the meaning sound

held for people in different historical periods.[17] Dramatic texts such as the *Dialogue* and *The Patriots* might serve as soundways in Cullen's sense, as they offer—in writing—clues as to how the (actual) sounds of, for instance, a "nagging housewife" were represented, negotiated, and mediated culturally. Hence, an early modern dramatic text, even though it remains a "mute," printed document, can still provide access to the sounds of the past, as it contains a performative, sonic dimension that may help us trace the cultural work of sounds we can no longer hear.

The performative dimension of the two dramatic texts considered in this essay, however, is more specific in the sense that these texts have no record of actual performance and were most likely written without the intention to be staged in a playhouse. As closet plays, they cannot be considered dramatic scripts merely waiting to be enacted by professional players, but survive as printed literary texts in their own right, entangled in a complex early modern history of the combined development of theatrical form both on the page and on the stage.[18] For the literary historian of sound, thus, the problem posed by the *Dialogue* and *The Patriots* is less related to the empirical uncovering or restoration of a past performativity (or soundscape), but rather revolves around the more theoretical conundrum of implied sounds, and the interpretive weight that can be given to these virtual sonic environments.

Interpreting the Gendered Sounds of Domestic Strife

In *A Dialogue Between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse*, the interpretive weight given to the virtual sounds of both nagging wife and timid husband greatly influences how we read the revolutionary politics of the pamphlet. When the delegate husband entreats his wife, "prithee, Dear, dabble not in our Politics," and the wife retorts, "Prithee! ha, ha, ha, Prithee! my Senator grave!," our understanding of the text's stance on "our Politics" is shaped by how we can *hear* the textual markers that indicate the wife's laughter ("ha, ha, ha") as well as the exclamation marks so generously utilized in the short phrase.[19] As we listen, we actualize the virtual theatricality of the pamphlet—but does that mean we construct a sonic experience in which the wife emerges as a misogynist caricature, as noisy and hysteric? Or is her mocking of the husband's somber rhetoric a form of reasonable argument which readers/listeners are supposed to accept and even endorse?

In his contextual reading of the dramatic dialogue, Benjamin H. Irvin argues that the pamphlet clearly suggests the latter line of argument, and must be read as a loyalist political text that denounces American colonists' aspirations to independence from the British crown. Irvin points out that the *Dialogue* was most likely published in New York by loyalist printer James Rivington, and that both the female author pseudonym, "Mary V. V.," as well as the dialogue's dedication "To the Married Ladies

of America" suggest that "the author signaled his or her sympathy for the feminist or proto-feminist views expressed by the southern wife." Accordingly, Irvin characterizes the wife's arguments as loyalist and sees her as the obvious winner in the domestic conflict: "The lesson for readers was clear," he claims, "the congressman is an impotent man who could not control his wife." For Irvin, the husband is doubly powerless, as he is not only emasculated by the wife's "strong commentary against masculinist assumptions about women's roles in eighteenth-century society," but also helplessly tries to retaliate and as a result turns into a "would-be tyrant" who is at the same time "unmasculine and hypermasculine." In Irvin's reading, the pamphlet's transatlantic politics (American compliance with the imperial legislation of the British crown) are aligned with a progressive, perhaps even "proto-feminist," gender politics that make the (loyalist) wife sound reasonable and the (Patriot) husband ridiculous.[20]

Arguably, such a contextual reading flattens out the complexities of the humorous situation, in which the wife's "strong commentary," complete with exclamation and laughter, could also sound like the inappropriate ranting of an embittered spouse, not to be taken seriously as political argument (about gender and/or about the American Revolution). Closer attention to the tonality and volume of her voice makes the wife's speech much more ambivalent than Irvin suggests, especially since the only way to infer how her voice was heard is through the vicious retorts of her husband. Unsurprisingly, these retorts invoke late eighteenth-century masculinist commonplaces about the (im)proper (vocal) conduct of women. Replying to the wife's laughter cited above, for instance, the husband claims, "that Horse-laugh is all feign'd," and reminds her that for women, "'Tis really indecent to be in such Passion."[21] Later on, he denounces her speech, contending, "Such Rant, and Bombast, I never heard in my Days."[22]

A feigned, indecent rant: This clearly biased characterization of female speech nonetheless taps into prevailing cultural assumptions about irrational femininity, and thus must have seemed perfectly reasonable to early American readers. The designation of speech as rant was (and is) a well-established rhetorical strategy used in order to grant/deny persons access to the public sphere not only along lines of gender, but also of race, class, sexuality, or dis/ability. Evaluating the cultural meaning and political significance of ranting (and accusations thereof), Rath suggests, "First and foremost, [rant] was the sound of 'heated' speech: foolish, irrational, morally questionable—and, not least of all, dangerous. It could mean a violent scolding, sort of a fit, or, intriguingly, a rim, a margin, or a border, like the half-wild place at the edge of a cultured field."[23] Hence, if speech was heard and designated as rant, it could be dismissed as not-yet-civilized, as culturally marginal or politically unintelligible.

Rath argues that in early America, much political speech was in fact considered in this way: "If we listen to the soundscapes [of colonial New England and Pennsylvania]," he points out, "we will hear contentious, plural, squabbling civil societies that had not yet been drawn into a public sphere."[24] By invoking the rant, the husband thus associates the sounds of his wife's speech with the unintelligible "squabble" of populations that were deemed not articulate enough to participate in political discourse. As he calls out his wife for ranting, the husband designates her speech as noise, and implies that she is unable to exercise vocal control in such a way that her argument might be comprehensible as a properly political point of view. However astute the wife's commentary (on both gender and transatlantic politics) might be, listening to the sounds of her voice (and to the way in which these sounds were heard and denounced as rant) makes the *Dialogue* a more ambivalent text: Even though contextually (and perhaps also textually), it can be read as loyalist argument, attention to its virtual theatricality reveals that the female vocal sounds that impart that very loyalist argument are consistently—and in line with dominant negative perceptions of ranting and other "overemotional" forms of speech—framed as not-yet-political, and thus, as not worthy of attention.

Moreover, the *Dialogue* must be read in the light of representational conventions related to female performativity in comic genres. As Frances Gray points out in her pioneering study *Women and Laughter* (1994), comedy traditionally objectifies women, and creates humor out of their bodies and bodily sensations. For Gray (who does not focus on early American culture specifically, but draws a long historical trajectory from ancient Greece to the twentieth century), "comedy positions the woman not simply as the object of the male gaze but of the male laugh—not just to-be-looked-at but to-be-laughed-at—doubly removed from creativity." In comedy, she argues, the female character is typically the "handmaid of laughter, not its creator."[25] If we read the *Dialogue*, as early American readers must have done, as a comic form, then simply by virtue of comedy conventions, the wife's body and her speech will be always already marked as the object of laughter, as the butt of a joke not to be taken seriously. As a consequence, any (loyalist) argument the wife brings forward will be heard *against* readerly and cultural expectations that female performativity in comedy—her bodily comportment, the sounds of her voice—is intrinsically, by nature of the genre, funny.

This line of reasoning—that the wife's (vocal) performativity may turn her either into a noisy, pre-political ranter or into a generic object of laughter—is complicated, however, by gendered expectations concerning vocal control. As Bloom argues, the idea of vocal control meant different things for men and women in the early modern period, as men were expected to discipline their voices in ways women were not. "The inherently unmanageable nature of vocal matter," she points out, "becomes a

greater problem for men than women. . . . Early modern male subjects (on and off the stage) who try to assert mastery of the voice sometimes suffer a disadvantage in comparison to vocally marginalized subjects, like women and boys, from whom less vocal discipline is expected." For Bloom this imbalance challenges the straightforward relationship between voice and agency, and she argues that "female characters who embrace, instead of attempting to overcome, their unpredictable vocal flows are able to elude patriarchal regulation and exercise less obvious forms of vocal agency."[26]

One such "less obvious" form of vocal agency, for instance, is central to Mercy Otis Warren's well-known revolutionary pamphlet *The Group* (1775). The Patriot farce, which circulated in various printings in the American colonies (and possibly in Jamaica as well),[27] revolves around the corruption of British colonial officials and features an all-male dramatis personae—with the exception of the final lines, spoken "in mournful accents" by "a Lady . . . reclined in an adjoining alcove." Here, seemingly "unpredictable" female vocality is figured as a lament for "virtue's sons"—Patriot soldiers killed in the early battles of the Revolutionary War. Warren's Lady describes "painful scenes . . . hov'ring o'er the morn," and uses the sounds of female speech in order to stage an act of mourning, as well as to issue a warning call, claiming that "British troops shall to Columbia yield."[28] In this concluding lament to *The Group*, female vocal agency is exercised not primarily through rational political argument, but through the sounds of a performance of wailing. At the end of the *Dialogue*, the wife exercises a similar self-affirmation of vocal agency, and likens her own voice to that of Cassandra, the mythical Trojan princess whose accurate predictions were met with stubborn disbelief. In her final dialogue lines, the wife tries to reconfigure her ranting as prophecy, and thus attempts to legitimize a vocal performance that otherwise would have been heard as pre-political noise. Admonishing her husband to listen to the "advice of us Women," she cries out: "Oh! My Country! Remember, that a Woman unknown, / Cry'd aloud,—like *Cassandra*, in Oracular Tone, / Repent! or you are forever, forever undone."[29]

My point in this analysis is not necessarily to legitimize or delegitimize retrospectively particular gendered sounds such as these loud warning cries; I also do not want to make a definitive case for their relevance or irrelevance as political speech in a theatrical pamphlet debate over American independence from Britain. Rather, I would like to point out how attention to the sonic dimensions of this Revolutionary-era dramatic dialogue exposes an ambivalence in political meaning that is not so easily reducible to the factionalism of revolutionary politics. While Irvin's classification of the *Dialogue*'s political message as loyalist is perfectly conclusive from a contextual point of view, the gendered sounds of this domestic quarrel, and the various discourses of ranting and lamenting, laughter and misogyny they allude to, suggest that the conjunctions of gender and transatlantic politics in the late eighteenth cen-

tury were, in fact, more unstable and inconclusive.

Female Warmongers: Robert Munford's *The Patriots*

The relationship of gendered sounds and revolutionary politics is somewhat differently configured in Robert Munford's comedy *The Patriots*, most likely written in 1777, but published only posthumously by Munford's son William in 1798.[30] The play, unlike the short *Dialogue*, is a fully-fledged dramatic text in five acts, and is modeled on the genre of the English Restoration comedy, which was highly popular in the American colonies throughout the eighteenth century. Moreover, *The Patriots*' political plot, which revolves around the overzealous transactions of a Revolutionary Committee of Safety in the Virginia backcountry (Munford himself lived in Mecklenburg County), cannot be easily placed along the factional line of Patriot versus Loyalist, a line that so clearly seems to separate the husband from his wife in the *Dialogue*.

Rather, as Zoe Detsi-Diamanti points out, *The Patriots* "captures . . . the essential distinction between the political and social changes brought about by the Revolution." For Detsi-Diamanti, the play shows how the ideological struggle for liberty and democracy intersected and often conflicted with existing social divisions and class hierarchies; from a political point of view, Munford articulated an early conservative critique of the dangers of popular sovereignty in the United States in the play. Detsi-Diamanti argues:

> In *The Patriots*, the British are no longer the easily identifiable "other" that threatens the security and viability of a unified American nation. Rather, the real danger comes from within the fissures in the social structure of American society, from the essential discrepancy between a strong political tendency to maintain order and control and an ideological openness that encouraged inclusiveness, mobility, and a new concept of social democracy.[31]

It would be problematic, therefore, to read *The Patriots* in the context of Revolutionary propaganda plays, which comprised most American dramatic texts written during the 1770s, and which circulated in the Revolutionary-era public sphere as promotions of either the Patriot or Loyalist cause.[32] In fact, *The Patriots* is much closer in thematic outlook to later, postwar texts such as the mock-epic poem *The Anarchiad* (collectively published in twelve installments by the "Hartford" or "Connecticut Wits," David Humphreys, Joel Barlow, John Trumbull, and Lemuel Hopkins, in 1786–87) and Hugh Henry Brackenridge's multivolume picaresque novel *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815), which are concerned with the wide-ranging social and cultural changes brought about by the popular vote, vernacular politics, and what Dana D. Nelson calls "commons democracy"; that is, "the political power not just of the 'many,' some abstract 'majority,' but specifically of ordinary, poor—*common*—folk: the people."[33]

As *The Patriots* is a comedy, however, its central political dilemma is short-circuited by several romantic subplots that cross (or seemingly cross) party and class lines. Whereas two love plots (between Trueman and Mira, and Pickle and Melinda, respectively) end "successfully" in marriage, a third involving Isabella (who is mocked as "a female politician" in the dramatis personae) and Col. Strut (a cowardly member of the local Committee of Safety) is abandoned at the end of the fourth act. It is this abandoned love plot that offers further insight into the gendered sounds of early America: as I argue in the course of this section, Isabella can be *heard* as a character who is positioned uneasily at the intersection of gender and political agency. Isabella is introduced in Act 1, Scene 3 as a friend of Mira and a female patriot with particular expectations concerning her future husband. While Mira daydreams about Trueman, Isabella announces stubbornly, "I am in love with nothing but my country," and claims that she is "determined never to marry any man that has not fought in battle."[34] Isabella's patriotic zeal is meant to be funny: As Michael A. McDonnell points out, unlike Mira (and Melinda), Isabella is primarily a comic figure, a female object of ridicule who "allows Munford to lampoon the worst excesses of the Revolution and to demonstrate the potential consequences of such an upheaval."[35]

At the same time, however, Isabella's eager patriotism provides her with a certain degree of agency that potentially transcends her configuration as a comic character: As a "true Patriot," she occupies a moral high ground that allows her to manipulate men into action, and to embarrass them if they do not comply with her demands. In Act 4, Scene 3, for instance, Isabella tries to provoke a fight between her suitor Col. Strut (who she desires to enlist and fight in the Continental Army as a prerequisite for marriage) and the recruiting officer Captain Flash. When the men do not immediately attack each other, Isabella becomes frantic. "Was there ever such a paltry coward!" she fumes at Strut, and takes up arms herself: "Give me the sword. *(takes the sword and runs at Flash.)*." Even though this phallic empowerment is rendered in a comic register, and even though Isabella's violent attack is immediately ridiculed by Flash's mock-fear exclamation, "A man in petticoats, by God! . . . *(runs off.)*," the scene still hints at the possible subversion of male authority: Isabella points to the hypocrisy of members of the Committee of Safety who are unwilling to fight for their patriotic ideas, and thus tries to wield some degree of influence over the politics of enlistment in the Revolutionary War.[36] Moreover, by driving Flash off the stage, Isabella not only oversteps the boundaries of her gendered sphere, but also reconfigures masculine power in the process. As McDonnell points out, "Munford's satiric depiction of Isabella . . . expresses his fears over the destabilization of traditional authority."[37] As a consequence, *The Patriots* configures the overlapping of gender and transatlantic politics quite differently than the *Dialogue* does: While in the latter, the assertive woman lambasting her husband (supposedly) articulates a reasonable loyalist politi-

cal argument against a set of stereotypes about gender-appropriate performativity, in the former, these very stereotypes are used to disqualify Isabella and her claim to female political influence in the American Revolution.[38]

While picking up a sword to drive the men from the stage makes quite a blatant spectacle out of Isabella's claim to phallic power, her subversion of male authority also takes place on a more subtle, structural level. In particular, Isabella's quick perception of the gendered soundscapes of late eighteenth-century America allows her to manipulate and play with conventional female vocality in order to make a political point. Listening to the sounds of Isabella's speech, then, helps explain why she is read as being so menacing to male political authority that she is literally silenced at the end of the play: After she threatens Captain Flash with a sword in the fourth act, she takes his coat as a trophy, and walks proudly off the stage—never to return, never to marry.

But how does this manipulation of gendered sounds work? Isabella first enters the stage in Act 1, Scene 3, when she comes into Mira's drawing room and interrupts her friend's solitary singing. Mira is longing for Trueman, her future husband, and has begun to intone a love song dedicated to him:

> So the maid, that's join'd to thee,
> My lovely Trueman, blest would be
> Thy virtues would attune her breast,
> To constant ease, to perfect rest.[39]

Obviously, we cannot *listen* to the tune of Mira's song, as the quality of her singing voice remains virtual in a dramatic text that was never actually performed. At the same time, we can infer from the domestic setting and romantic theme that it must be a gentle tune, an appropriately gendered set of intimate, "feminine" sounds performed to fill the private space of the drawing room. What's more, we can safely say that Isabella *hears* Mira's sounds along those lines, as she interrupts Mira to perform a song of her own that is decidedly at odds with Mira's tune of domestic intimacy. "There's a song for you," she announces and starts to sing:

> But ah! is this a time for bliss,
> Or airs so soft as these?
> While all around, we hear no sound
> But war's terrific strain,
> The drum commands our arming bands,
> And chides each tardy swain.[40]

As Isabella perceptively picks up and plays with Mira's affectionate tune, she turns a love song into a song about revolutionary politics. In the private sphere of the drawing room, Isabella reminds Mira that women should not restrict themselves to the

sounds of intimacy, but also be concerned with transatlantic politics and the ongoing Revolutionary War. By means of a song, Isabella exchanges "soft airs" for the beat of the drum; she turns a tune of female longing for a future husband into a form of political speech, and thus problematizes the assignation of certain sounds to particular notions of gendered personhood. Through a form of sonic gender politics, Isabella argues that even in a domestic setting, women should care about the struggles of the Revolution; rather than yearning for domestic bliss, she insists, they should use their voices to articulate political arguments.

In a subsequent scene, Mira seems more preoccupied with the Revolutionary War, but can refer to it still only in the form of traditional female vocality: through the sounds of mourning and lament. "I have a fit of the horrors, Miss, whenever I hear of a battle," she complains to Isabella, and conjures up a mourning performance that echoes the Lady's final lament in Mercy Otis Warren's *The Group*: "Victory is attended with the widow's lamentations, and the orphan's tears; I cannot rejoice at any thing, that sounds with funeral dirges, or makes joy smile in the face of affliction." Isabella remains unimpressed, and immediately counteracts Mira's easy evocation of female lamentation, thus questioning her gendered legitimation of the sounds of wailing: "Was I to be made a widow by every victory," she replies, "I verily think I should rejoice."[41] Isabella's defiant subversion of the idea of the female mourner remains ambivalent, as there is no indication in her lines or in Mira's subsequent answer as to whether these remarks are supposed to be comic or represent an earnest declaration of patriotism as something more valuable than marriage or romantic love. We cannot say for sure whether Isabella speaks in jest, as we cannot *hear* her tone of voice and there is no textual sign of laughter. Still, irrespective of whether or not she intends it as comedy, in exchanging the widow's sounds of mourning for those of rejoicing, Isabella alludes to (im)proper vocal conduct in order to make a political claim: She implies that while men's sacrificial death on the battlefield might further American liberty and independence from Britain, it might also set women free from the bonds of marriage and the legal context of coverture—and therefore would be a cause for joyful sounds. Taking issue with Mira's conventional understanding of women's vocal performance during times of war, she proposes a seemingly "odd" response, and thereby troubles traditional gendered expectations of what a widow should sound like.

Finally, at the beginning of Act 3, Isabella voices a political observation about the Revolutionary War that is related to the hypocrisy of the sounds of military masculinity. Alone in her dressing room, she intones yet another song in which she declares that "no sounds but drums shall please my ear," and then goes on to relate a dream she has had the night before. In the dream, she saw her suitor, Strut, her "dear little colonel, bold as a lion, calling out, to arms, to arms! but I was surprised to see the men have clubs and sticks, instead of guns; and my dear little colonel with a corn stalk to

his side, instead of a sword. It was a horrid dream."[42] As she describes her dream, Isabella offers a distressing account of the notorious lack of military resources on the side of the American colonists. She does so, however, by highlighting the incongruity between the martial, "manly" war cries uttered by Strut and the improvised tools and actions that do not adequately match his heroic announcements. Moreover, by referring to Strut as her "dear little colonel," she ridicules military masculinity more generally, and thus casts severe doubts on her own characterization of Strut as bold and courageous. By listening to how Isabella lays bare the empty threat of Strut's calls to arms, we can thus better understand how she addresses the inconsistencies and hypocrisies that have accrued at the intersection of gender and sound in the context of the American Revolution. As before, Isabella seems highly aware of how particular vocal characteristics and sonic phenomena impact the construction of masculinity (and femininity); and as before, she uses that knowledge to deliver some form of political speech. In her brief, and unresolved, comic appearances, thus, she attains through sound a certain degree of agency in the sphere of transatlantic politics—a sphere to which women commonly had only very restricted access.

Conclusion

Both the pseudonymous *A Dialogue, Between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse* and Robert Munford's *The Patriots* strategically use the gendered sounds of late eighteenth-century America in order to stage political interventions into the larger transatlantic struggle over the American Revolution. Even though we cannot access these sounds directly, as neither of the two dramatic texts has a known record of performances and no description of their sound experiences exist, we can still examine how sounds were heard and negotiated within the text itself, and how the representation of sounds and the way they were perceived might have reflected on prevailing cultural assumptions about gendered personhood and the relationship between gender and politics. Furthermore, by "listening" carefully to these gendered sounds (as they are represented in theatrical writing), we can begin to understand how acoustic environments impacted the articulation, legitimation and deliberation of political argument. The relationship of gender, sound, and revolutionary politics is invoked for slightly different purposes in the two texts at hand: In the *Dialogue*, the loyalist political opinions of the wife, as coherent as they might appear from a (con) textual perspective, are still ambivalently positioned vis-à-vis a set of misogynist sonic stereotypes that make it very easy to dismiss them as clamor or ranting, as female noise that is not yet politically intelligible. Because of this ambivalence, the politics of the pamphlet cannot be easily attributed to either the Patriot or the Loyalist positions. Instead, the sounds of the *Dialogue* show how the political factionalism of the Revolutionary years complexly intersected with gender relations and

gendered expectations concerning vocal control. In *The Patriots*, it turns out that Isabella's obvious, and overblown, patriotic opinions are not the primary reason why she emerges as a "dangerous" character whose threat to political authority has to be contained by the comic mode. Rather, she destabilizes the dominant masculinist order because she understands and shrewdly plays with the relationship of gender and sound in order to score political points. In both texts, attention to the sonic environment of early America opens up new complexities of meaning: By listening carefully, we can hear that gendered sounds were put to use, exploited, manipulated, and negotiated, and thus significantly shaped the literary struggle over the American Revolution.

Notes

1 Mary V. V., *A Dialogue, Between a Southern Delegate, and His Spouse* ([New York?]: [James Rivington?], 1774), 7, 1–2.

2 For two exemplary analyses of the role of humor in the context of the American Revolution, see Philip Gould, "Wit and Politics in Revolutionary British America: The Case of Samuel Seabury and Alexander Hamilton," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 383–403, DOI: 10.1353/ecs.2008.0020; Alison Gilbert Olson, "Political Humor, Deference, and the American Revolution," *Early American Studies* 3, no. 2 (2005): 363–82, DOI: 10.1353/eam.2007.0028.

3 This connection between the intimate sphere and the sphere of (trans)national politics is usually observed in the context of the sentimental novel, or of sentimental culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries more generally, but is not typically a concern when it comes to ridicule and other humorous practices. See, for instance, Bruce Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4 On the henpecked husband, see, for instance, Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 268–69; Benjamin Irvin, "Of Eloquence 'Manly' and 'Monstrous': The Henpecked Husband in Revolutionary Political Debate, 1774–1775," in *New Men: Manliness in Early America*, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 195–216. Irvin writes specifically about the *Dialogue*.

5 Historically speaking, the relationship of reasonable speech and volume is complicated, as highly emotionalized, loud, or passionate speech was, in fact, highly valued in eighteenth-century America—as a sign of naturalness that did not have to rely on the artifice of rhetoric. Describing an "elocutionary revolution" that accompanied the American revolution, Jay Fliegelman explains that early Americans sought "an oratorical ability, not merely to persuade by rational argumentation, but to excite, animate, motivate, and impress." "Those verbs," he argues, "also register the period's antirationalist preoccupation with ruling passions, desire, and an involuntary moral sense, all of which are more effectively excited by powerful delivery than by rational argumentation."

Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 28, 36. At the same time, however, such "natural" speech was still seen as a skill to be mastered and exercised *properly* by men and women alike: As Carolyn Eastman points out in an essay about elocutionary education in late eighteenth-century America, "Both sexes were taught to begin their speeches with modest and self-deprecating rhetorical gestures. Writers grounded these rules for speaking by asserting that it was not 'natural' for either sex to exhibit ambition, pride, or ostentation, since those qualities inhibited the speaker's ability to persuade—and they saw nothing ironic in needing to *learn* 'naturalness.'" Carolyn Eastman, "The Female Cicero: Young Women's Oratory and Gendered Public Participation in the Early American Republic," *Gender & History* 19, no. 2 (2007): 265, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0424.2007.00475.x.

6 Steven Feld, "Acoustemology," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 12.

7 Sandra M. Gustafson points out that in early America, writing and speech were part of the same meaning-making process, which she calls the "performance semiotic of speech and text." For Gustafson, the written nature of archival records should not let us forget the performative dimensions of any linguistic event. She warns, "The translation of the elusive performance into textual form creates a stable point of reference that can be misleading if taken as a full and authentic account of the oration as event." Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xvi, xxiv.

8 The historical reasons for the non-performance of plays in early America are complex and vary considerably from colony to colony. They range from religiously motivated anti-theatrical prejudice to settler colonial economies of scarcity that could not accommodate the expenditures of the theater, from anti-British cultural bias to the simple lack of proper theatrical venues and skilled players. It is likely, though, that dramatic texts were read in private gatherings. For a book-length survey of the highly heterogeneous theatrical landscape of early America, see Odai Johnson, *Absence and Memory in Colonial American Theatre: Fiorelli's Plaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

9 Leopold Lippert, "Virtual Theatricality, Transatlantic Representation, and Mercy Otis Warren's Revolutionary Plays," in *Approaching Transnational America in Performance*, ed. Birgit M. Bauridl and Pia Wiegmink (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016), 57–73.

10 Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 3, 14.

11 Kara Keeling and Josh Kun, "Introduction: Listening to American Studies," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 446, DOI: 10.1353/aq.2011.0037.

12 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1977), 3.

13 Keeling and Kun, "Introduction," 446–48.

14 Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

15 Bruce Johnson, "Sound Studies Today: Where Are We Going?" in *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory, and the Senses*, ed. Joy Damousi and Paula Hamilton (New York: Rout-

ledge, 2017), 11, 9.

16 Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3.

17 Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.

18 In her monumental study of the relationship of print and performance in (early) modern Europe, *Theatre of the Book, 1480–1880* (2000), Julie Stone Peters points out that "the printing press had an essential role to play in the birth of the modern theatre at the turn of the fifteenth century. As institutions they grew up together." For Peters, the notion of "closet drama" is central to this integration of print and performance, as it points to the cultural ease with which spectators could turn into readers (and vice versa). She argues: "The coinage of the rubric 'closet drama' (as shorthand for what had previously been referred to variously as reading plays, dramas not meant for the stage, plays for the closet, and so on) may have reflected less a literary withdrawal from the commercialized stage than a literary response to the large body of play readers for whom dramatic form on the page was no longer alien." Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book, 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1, 74.

19 V., *A Dialogue*, 6.

20 Irvin, "Of Eloquence," 207–10.

21 V., *A Dialogue*, 6, 7.

22 Ibid., 12.

23 Rath, *How Early America Sounded*, 136.

24 Ibid., 144. Ultimately, Rath's argument is an aesthetic one, and revolves around the separation of speech from noise. Though not explicitly, *How Early America Sounded* thus echoes Jacques Rancière's more general reflections about the changing relationship of politics and aesthetics in the course of the eighteenth century, and his famous claim that politics is about the "distribution of the sensible." For Rancière, "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time." Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 7–8.

25 Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 9, 21.

26 Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, 11.

27 *The Group* was published anonymously, and in partial form, in the *Boston Gazette* on January 23, 1775, and in the *Massachusetts Spy* on January 26, 1776. This partial version, which did not include the female character cited in the main body of my essay, was reprinted in both New York and Philadelphia as pamphlet, also in 1775. Curiously, the Philadelphia pamphlet of *The Group* claims to be a reprint of a Jamaica version, which is not extant. A 1775 Boston pamphlet version, finally, represents a longer and apparently complete version of the play. It is this version that I use for my argument. For a detailed overview of how the various print contexts shaped the content of Mercy Otis Warren's plays, see Sandra J. Sarkela, "Freedom's Call: The Persuasive Power of Mercy Otis Warren's Dramatic Sketches, 1772–1775," *Early American Literature* 44, no. 3 (2009): 541–68,

DOI: 10.1353/eal.0.0077. For an extensive cultural commentary on Warren's belated acknowledgement of authorship, see Gay Gibson Cima, *Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117–23.

28 Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group* (Boston, MA: Edes and Gill, 1775), 22.

29 Ibid, 13–14.

30 There is no record of a performance of *The Patriots* in early America, and given the absence of theatrical infrastructure in the Virginia backcountry where Munford lived as a landowner and slaveholder, it is unlikely that the play was ever produced in his lifetime. However, as Munford also served as a legislator in various political bodies in Virginia, and thus spent part of his life in Williamsburg, he is likely to have been familiar with the capital's theatre scene and the plays performed there. For biographical information on Robert Munford, see Rodney M. Baine, *Robert Munford: America's First Comic Dramatist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1967); for an examination of the theatre landscape in colonial Williamsburg, see Johnson, *Absence and Memory*, 17–39.

31 Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, "Homogenizing the Masses: American Republican Ideology and the Threat of 'Intemperate Democracy' in Robert Munford's *The Patriots* (c.1777)," *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 18 (2010): 40, 33.

32 For an overview of the cultural work of the propaganda plays during the American Revolution, see Shaffer, *Performing Patriotism*, 138–65. For broader arguments about the role of propaganda in late eighteenth-century America, see Russ Castronovo, *Propaganda 1776: Secrets, Leaks, and Revolutionary Communications in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

33 Dana D. Nelson, *Commons Democracy: Reading the Politics of Participation in the Early United States* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 9–10.

34 Robert Munford, *The Patriots*, c1777, in "Robert Munford's *The Patriots*," ed. Courtlandt Canby, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1949): 453, 452, DOI: 10.2307/1919986.

35 Michael A. McDonnell, "A World Turned 'Topsy Turvy': Robert Munford, *The Patriots*, and the Crisis of the Revolution in Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2004): 252, DOI: 10.2307/3491786.

36 Mumford, *The Patriots*, 489.

37 McDonnell, "A World Turned 'Topsy Turvy,'" 254.

38 For two authoritative accounts of how the American Revolution changed the lives and political influence of actual women, see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Zagarri avers, for instance, that the Revolution "profoundly changed the popular understanding of women's political status and initiated a widespread, ongoing debate over the meaning of women's rights" (2).

39 Munford, *The Patriots*, 452.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 467.

42 Ibid., 470.

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“Language . . . Without Metaphor”

Soundscapes and Worldly Engagements in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*

Roxana Oltean

Abstract

Henry David Thoreau has been celebrated for his observation of the natural world. While noting Thoreau’s skills of observation in relation to the natural world and his responsiveness to sensory experience, scholars have, however, tended to privilege sight over sound. Even though Thoreau was recognized by musicians such as Charles Ives and John Cage for having an exceptionally fine ear for the symphonies of nature, sound still remains a neglected aspect of Thoreau’s *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*. This article is a corrective to this status quo, as it reads *Walden* as a transmedial project in which Thoreau frequently tuned in to the sounds encountered during his sojourn in nature in order to figure the essential parameters of his experiment and to relate to the entire world of experience. The complex soundscape of Walden engenders a multifaceted awareness of modern space, as sounds of nature, sounds of progress, and the clamor of people intersect. Accordingly, this article explores how Thoreau uses a vast array of sounds to relate to the world; how he apprehended, and even appreciated, not only the harmonies of nature, but also dissonance—within nature, as well as between nature, modernity and rurality. In doing so, this article proposes a reading of Thoreau’s auditory experience as a reflection on, and negotiation with, a multifaceted world where the pastoral and the industrial coexist.

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"Language . . . Without Metaphor"

Soundscapes and Worldly Engagements in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*

Roxana Oltean

American transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau frequently tunes in to the sounds encountered during his sojourns in nature, acting, as Murray Schafer might call it, as an "earwitness" to the industrializing nineteenth-century countryside and advancing what Sterne has called the "ensoniment" as a counterpart to the Enlightenment.[1] In fact, *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods* (1854)—the text inspired by Thoreau's two-year retreat in a self-built hut near Walden Pond, Concord (July 4, 1845–September 6, 1847)—presents a sense of the world as naturally speaking the language of "music and poetry":

> If we respected only what is inevitable and has a right to be, music and poetry would resound along the streets. When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence,—that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality.[2]

Drawing on Schafer's original definition of soundscape as "any acoustic field of study" and acknowledging later modulations by scholars such as Emily Thompson who have suggested that soundscapes are auditory or aural landscapes that include both the physical environment and its perception,[3] this article will focus on Thoreauvian "soundscapes" in *Walden*. I will pay particular attention to the chapter "Sounds," in which Thoreau records what he can hear over the course of an entire day. The descriptions of the vast array of sounds and their interpretations not only demonstrate the writer's manner of engaging with the world, but his words become modes of apprehending the "language which all things and events speak without metaphor."[4]

Thoreau's acoustic alertness has drawn the attention of literary and sound studies scholars alike, although in manners that suggest a discontinuity between approaches. Turning to Thoreau from the perspective of sound studies, Jeff Titon has argued that "literary and cultural critics seldom have discussed the significance

of sound and music in Thoreau's writing"; if Thoreau's attentiveness to sound is mentioned, it is merely described as good listening.[5] It should be noted, however, that, in the transcendentalist or general American literary canon characterized by "nature writing," Thoreau currently enjoys a prominent position precisely because of his powers of observation (including listening).[6] This aspect has been recognized as indicating sensory involvement in nature to a degree of intensity and level of subtlety that the more theoretically inclined Emerson fails to engage with.[7] Nevertheless, there is indeed a tendency to subordinate Thoreau's listening to his wider "renewed sensuous awareness" or to his interest in "nature as such," in line with a new epistemology.[8] On the other hand, sound studies approaches remedy this neglect by insisting on the valuable corpus of sounds documented by Thoreau and by highlighting the salience of Thoreau's auditory perceptions.[9] Titon, for example, forcefully argues that Thoreau's use of sounds shows an "underlying epistemology" that is "relational and phenomenological."[10] And yet, sound studies readings tend to privilege Thoreau's connection to nature,[11] viewing it as disrupted by the noises of modernity.[12] To adopt this stance means to only partially reflect the richness of Thoreau's engagement with his environment.

This article aims to bridge the gap between literary and sound studies perspectives by drawing on both to propose a reading of Thoreau's auditory experience as a reflection on, and negotiation with, a multifaceted world where the pastoral and the industrial coexist. I will thus argue that Thoreau grasped, and even appreciated, not only the harmonies of nature, but also dissonance within nature, as well as between nature, modernity, and rurality. This fresh investigation of the Walden soundscape re-contextualizes Thoreau's writing as a point of reference for a new and complex mid-nineteenth-century relationship to nature and technology.

Hearing Natural (Dis)Harmony

Interestingly, musicians have often foregrounded Thoreau's auditory perception. In his "Essays before a Sonata" (1922), Charles Ives presents Thoreau as remarkably attuned to the sounds of the world. Ives insists that the writer "was a great musician, not because he played the flute but because he did not have to go to Boston to hear 'the Symphony'"; Thoreau "was divinely conscious of the enthusiasm of Nature, the emotion of her rhythms and the harmony of her solitude," while "the rhythm of his prose" alone would suffice to "determine his value as a composer."[13] Another example is John Cage, whose "Lecture on the Weather" (1975) comprises a collage of Thoreau texts, including *Walden*,[14] and who can be placed in the same American tradition as Thoreau with respect to experimentation or nature politics.[15] Cage regards the writer's sensitivity to sound as a continuous openness not clouded by "vision": "Other great men have vision. Thoreau had none. Each day his eyes and ears were open and

empty to see and hear the world he lived in. Music, he said, is continuous; only listening is intermittent."[16] Sound studies scholars have documented and explored these specific affinities between Thoreau and certain musicians in view of the former's auditory sensibility toward the world.[17] At the same time, sound studies approaches have also occasioned ample reflection upon Thoreau's contribution to a modulated understanding of the world as perceived through sounds. For example, Titon has argued that Thoreau's attention to sounds signals awareness of the "more inclusive and significant category" to which music belongs and has highlighted how Thoreau promotes an understanding of "sound's enabling co-presence and a relational, subjective epistemology" to set up "an ecomusicology in opposition to the dominant subject-object economy."[18]

Testifying to Thoreau's profound commitment to auditory perception is the fact that *Walden* indexes all three kinds of listening identified by Chion (causal, reduced, and semantic listening). A special feature is Thoreau's ear for the neglected sounds of nature, for example in the passage describing bean-hoeing in "The Bean Field," where "sounds and sights" "anywhere in the row [of beans]" are "part of the inexhaustible entertainment which the country offers."[19] Generally ascribable to causal listening, or listening to gather (supplementary) information about the source of sound, the descriptions also evince examples of reduced listening, for instance, when the narrator in "Baker Farm" documents the manner in which sounds are perceived ("some faint tinkling sounds borne to my ear through the cleansed air, from I know not what quarter").[20] In fact, there are numerous examples of sounds which are not invested with meaning: descriptions of noises occasioned by natural development or by organic growth, such as those produced by minute movements of the frozen landscape in "Winter Animals" ("the whooping of the ice in the pond," "the cracking of the ground by the frost") or those heard in late spring in "Sounds" ("a fresh and tender bough" suddenly falling "like a fan to the ground[,] . . . broken off by its own weight"). The text is also punctuated by instances of the hearing self phonetically transcribing the sounds of nature: the hooting owl or the chickadees in "Winter Animals."[21]

Semantic listening is, perhaps, most amply developed in *Walden*, extending Chion's definition of listening for meaning (such as when listening to someone talk) to the act of listening to appreciate not just the music, but the language of nature.[22] If some music—for example, Haydn's—is akin to landscape painting, the reverse is also true for the Walden setting, where nature is a concert hall. What is more, the Walden landscape seems to exemplify an Apollonian view of music as "external sound, God-sent to remind us of the harmony of the universe," "exact, serene, mathematical, associated with transcendental visions of Utopia and the Harmony of the spheres."[23] Schafer's own endeavor is described as finding the "secret of that tuning," with the earth as the "body of an instrument across which strings are stretched and are tuned by a

divine hand."[24] Interestingly, this perspective rhymes with Thoreau's aforementioned declaration of principle at the commencement of the chapter "Sounds," where listening to nature means access to the supreme language:

> But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. . . . Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.[25]

Returning to Ives's perception of Thoreau's "susceptibility to sounds" ("probably greater than that of many practical musicians"), the former intimates that Thoreau "sang of the submission to Nature, the religion of contemplation, and the freedom of simplicity," evincing "a philosophy distinguishing between the complexity of Nature which teaches freedom, and the complexity of materialism which teaches slavery."[26] For Thoreau, one might add, hearing is explicitly linked to emancipation. The stance of tuning in to the "language which all things and events speak" is exemplified in a famous passage about how the first summer was spent not only hoeing beans instead of reading books but also, more importantly, "rapt in [a] revery" that ultimately leads to an awakening. The state of dreamily taking in the Apollonian harmony of nature occasions all three types of listening, but it privileges semantic listening, as it allows the narrator access to "language without metaphor."[27] The "revery" thus means immersion in the "bloom of the present moment" "amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs" and is conducive to "undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house."[28] Moreover, the "revery" entails the experience of a natural temporality measured by bird trills, not ticking clocks. Birdsong is interestingly indexed by Schafer in view of its symbolic importance "for both music and the soundscape" as "rich and varied, without being imperialistically dominating."[29] Indeed, for the narrator, birdsong measures a time and an existence outside social norms of productivity and expresses an alternative standard, for the day passes quickly and "nothing memorable is accomplished." What is more, it provides a language to voice opposition to normative views of time and labor: "As the sparrow had its trill, sitting on the hickory before my door, so had I my chuckle or suppressed warble which he might hear out of my nest"; what is "sheer idleness to my fellow-townsmen" is appraised differently in nature's terms, for "if the birds and flowers had tried me by their standard, I should not have been found wanting."[30]

And yet, it is not only the harmony of nature's music and its lesson of emancipation from normative modes of being that Thoreau is able to hear; he also demonstrates awareness of—and appreciation for—the disharmonies of nature. The Dionysian vision of music, which Schafer describes as "internal sound breaking forth from the human

breast,"[31] thus expressionist and chaotic, is discernible through Thoreau's idiosyncratic response to discord, and this complicates readings of Thoreau as solely listening for Apollonian harmony. In fact, Thoreau is, one might argue, particularly drawn to the "thrilling discord" in which he can detect "elements of a concord such as these plains never saw nor heard," evincing a modern ear for disharmony as yet another form of music. A salient example is his appreciation of the owl's screech, transcribed phonetically in "Winter Animals."[32] Celebrating what one might associate with the Dionysian, the passage also exhibits unique instances of acousmatic listening (implying the separation of "sound from its 'source'" and "the idea of a reproduced sound's 'fidelity' to its source").[33] At the same time, attesting to the richness of Thoreau's auditory imagination, the description is illuminated by the observation that listening occurs within the mind,[34] and Thoreau's transcriptions of owl screeches are intermingled with a range of literary and emotional associations and imaginary outpourings of affect which do not, however, obscure fidelity to the sound as perceived by the ear. Thus the screech owls "take up the strain like mourning women their ancient u-lu-lu"; likened to "wise midnight hags," with a "dismal scream" that is "truly Ben Jonsonian," they sound "no honest and blunt tu-whit tu-who of the poets" but a "most solemn graveyard ditty," apprehended as "wailing, . . . doleful responses" which evoke the "dark and tearful side of music, the regrets and sighs that would fain be sung." As striking articulators of Dionysian modes, they therefore attest to the "variety and capacity of . . . nature," which speaks eloquently of disharmony, and their screech is translated into a language that rhymes with an imputed "restlessness of despair": "*Oh-o-o-o-o that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n!*"[35]

Tuning in to Modernity

If the ear for discord is what makes Thoreau attuned not only to the Apollonian but also to the Dionysian music of nature, it is the noises of industry that most interestingly reveal Thoreau's complex awareness of the polyphony surrounding him. In "Sounds," the narrator turns from nature to the perception of modernity, which coalesces around the train that irrupts into the natural landscape. Trains, as Schafer observes, invoking J. M. W. Turner's painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844), occupy a privileged space in the nineteenth-century soundscape: "Of all the sounds of the Industrial Revolution, those of trains seem across time to have taken on the most attractive sentimental associations."[36] In fact, Thoreau's perception in this regard can be understood as an instance of what Sterne calls thinking "sonically," a type of thinking that highlights relationality. Awareness of the soundscape entails cultural inquiry, for to "think sonically is to think conjuncturally about sound and culture"; thus, one might argue, Thoreau can be added to the galley of thinkers who, according to Sterne, "have used sound to ask big questions about their cultural moments and

the crises and problems of their time."[37]

Literary scholars have commented upon Thoreau's attitude to modernity as, at best, ambivalent,[38] while, as indicated above, sound studies readings tend to highlight Thoreau's dislike for the noises of modernity. From the direction of sound studies, however, Smith proposes to go beyond the classical view of "the pastoral" as an "escape from the ravages—aural included—of modernity." To this end, Smith puts forth the concept of braiding, or "an understanding of the way that pastoral sounds were cobbled onto and braided with factory sounds," mentioning Thoreau, in passing, as a Romantic who both "grimaced" when hearing industrialization, yet who was also capable of "hearing nature in modernity." If Smith, in fact, views the train described by Thoreau as a "transgressive" technology that "literally pierced" the countryside, my reading will build upon Smith's notion of the "braided" soundscape to reveal complexities in the Thoreauvian relation to modernity, including the famous train itself.[39]

Interestingly, immediately prior to the oft-quoted passage in which the train whistle startles the narrator, the presence of the train is described as flowing continuously, if not seamlessly, into the natural soundscape:

> As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons . . . gives a voice to the air; . . . and for the last half hour I have heard the rattle of railroad cars, now dying away and then reviving like the beat of a partridge, conveying travellers from Boston to the country.[40]

A little later in the chapter, the train—with its "whistle" which "penetrates" the woods all year round—strikes a harsh note in the soundscape. However, if the train sound expresses brute force, it is akin to what is found in nature, for the train whistle is likened to the "scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard."[41] Not only is modernity thus "braided" into the world of nature (hawk) and rurality (farmer), but both train and hawk, in effect, irrupt into the harmonious soundscape of nature, and can be assimilated to the aforementioned "thrilling discord" that is an integral part of the music of Walden.

The train, it might further be argued, is also inscribed into a new mythology of modernity. An emblem of industrial progress connected to the world of commerce, the train signals "that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side."[42] Rendered through a process of transduction (which Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld define as the conversion of sonic information into visual information[43]), the train is apprehended through its whistle and is amplified visually as a "travelling demigod," "with its steam cloud like a banner streaming behind in golden and silver wreaths," taking "the sunset sky for the livery of his train." An "iron horse," it transforms into a supernatural creature, exerting power over nature in a manner that is both intrusive and alluring, with

the landscape of modernity reconverted into a fantastic world:

> When I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils (what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the new Mythology I don't know), it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it. If all were as it seems, and men made the elements their servants for noble ends!

The narrator is indeed aware of the extent to which the railroad regulates human existence, for he comments a little later that "to do things 'railroad fashion' is now the by-word." He also acknowledges its potential (auditory) violence when noting that he wished to avoid the encounter with the train so as not to have his ears "spoilt by its smoke and steam and hissing." However, the fascination with the train and the invitation to speculate whether "men made the elements their servants for noble ends" suggests an even deeper engagement with modernity. Thus, the supernatural soundscape associated with the train (later enhanced by "snow shoes" and "giant plough") raises issues pertaining not to the extent to which modernity disturbs the natural soundscape, but to the worthiness of people to reign in and direct its power. Thus, when awakened "at midnight" by the "tramp and defiant snort" of the snow-plough fronting "in some remote glen in the woods[,] . . . the elements incased in ice and snow," or hearing "at evening" the train-horse "in his stable blowing off the superfluous energy of the day," the narrator wishes "the enterprise were as heroic and commanding as it is protracted and unwearied."[44] What is more, moral attributes are actually inscribed into the modern soundscape in the musings on the operation of the snow-plough during a snowstorm. Schafer's indexing of the sonorous world of an imaginary North associates the "jamming of snow-ploughs and snowmobiles" with the "destruction of the quiet northern winter." These noises mark "one of the greatest transmogrifications of the twentieth-century soundscape, for such instruments are destroying the 'idea of North' that has shaped the temperament of all northern peoples and has germinated a substantial mythology of the world."[45] By contrast, in the Walden soundscape, the snowplow figures a "three-o'-clock-in-the-morning courage, which Bonaparte thought was the rarest," and which is denoted by the "muffled tone" of the "engine bell" announcing "that the cars are coming, without long delay, notwithstanding the veto of a New England north-east snow storm."[46]

In fact, Thoreau's soundscape also attests to the disturbing potential of literary production, borrowing from Philipp Schweighauser's history of literary acoustics the notion that literature not only reproduces noise but, in itself, can be a noise capable of disturbing cultural production. In this sense, the narrator's equivocal response to the train is usefully contextualized by wider considerations of the power drive inherent in transcendentalism in general and in Emerson's writings in particular. Drawing

especially upon the "Prospects" chapter of *Nature*, where Emerson launches a tirade against humans becoming dwarfs, Buell substantiates the theory that Nietzsche drew inspiration for the Übermensch from that essay,[47] while Cornel West argues that certain passages of Emerson's aforementioned writing constitute "a panegyric to human power, vision, newness and conquest."[48] If the sonorous world of Walden resounds with, and actually constitutes, a disturbing force of American transcendentalism—the power drive, and the question of developing a superior humanity to match technological advancement—its imaginative extensions also testify to the commodification of nature in a manner reminiscent of Emerson's writing. This is discernible in the description of the soundscape of the train as including the clamor created around an intense exchange:

> Here come your groceries, country; your rations, countrymen! . . . And here's your pay for them! screams the countryman's whistle; timber like long battering-rams going twenty miles an hour against the city's walls, and chairs enough to seat all the weary and heavy-laden that dwell within them.[49]

Through the commerce effected by the train, the Walden soundscape comes to include an auditory and olfactory mindscape that reaches out from New England across the whole globe. When "the freight train rattles past," the narrator is "refreshed and expanded" and is able to "smell the stores which go dispensing their odors all the way from Long Wharf to Lake Champlain," bringing in to the world of Walden "foreign parts, . . . coral reefs, and Indian oceans, and tropical climes, and the extent of the globe."[50]

Braiding nature and modernity, the Thoreauvian soundscape suggests a polymorphous space of which the narrator is richly perceptive and toward which he positions himself ambiguously. Ostensibly a signal of an invasive modernity, the train thus attests to the connectedness of the perceiver to a continuous soundscape comprising both harmonies and as well as discords. Significantly, these are all inscribed not only in the immediate natural surroundings but also in the force of industry and the bustle of world commerce.

Connecting to Village Life

Adding to the complexity of the Walden landscape is the liminal character of the experiment itself, which falls short of a complete break with society. While Thoreau's insurrectionist ethos has been at the center of readings focusing on his more overtly polemical writings,[51] a sense of radicalism is traditionally also tied to the Walden experiment.[52] Nuancing this view, Milette Shamir posits Thoreau as a writer not so much of nature but of suburbia, who expressed the nineteenth-century version of a "fantasy of man's return to nature," rather than the enactment of a mission into the

wilderness. In this sense, for Shamir, Walden delineates the space of the suburb as a proximate nature, where the myth of masculinity and the independent man can be lived out and where, "by owning and controlling a space of isolation and privacy," the masculine subject "wards off the threats imposed by both domestic womanhood and his peers."[53]

Thus, one might note, it is not just nature and modernity that are indexed in the Thoreauvian soundscape, but also a third space, rurality. Most saliently, this third space is articulated through the bells of "Lincoln, Acton, Bedford, or Concord" heard on Sundays, "when the wind was favorable." Significantly, it is included in a quasi-natural soundscape ("sounding a faint, sweet, and, as it were, natural melody, worth importing into the wilderness") with which it resonates,[54] in an image strikingly similar to Schafer's vision of the world as a universal instrument. These bell sounds are usefully contextualized by Alain Corbin's analysis of the role played by village bells in the nineteenth-century French countryside—social and cultural differences notwithstanding—in point of the manner in which rural spaces, such as the village, should be understood in terms of soundscape (the distance over which bells could be heard) rather than administrative or natural boundaries. More precisely, Corbin argues that church bells played a key role in establishing an enclosure corresponding to the mental and symbolic space of the village, hence the protests from those who could not hear their chimes. This consideration of the area covered by bell sounds as mapping out the space of the village links productively to readings of Thoreau's retreat as a partial—rather than complete—break with civilization.

Enriched by the soundscape of the bells prolonged into the music of nature, the Walden experiment thus emerges, one might argue, as at least partially inscribed by rurality. In fact, the rural and the natural world merge into each other, and—in what may be regarded as another instance of transduction—the narrator perceives the forest as vibrating to the sound of the bells. In a description finely attuned to mechanisms of sound propagation, the narrator tells how, "at a sufficient distance over the woods," the bell sound "acquires a certain vibratory hum, as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept," with distance producing a "vibration of the universal lyre"; the "melody" reaching the narrator's ears is "strained" by the air and, modulated and echoed by elements "from vale to vale," has "conversed with every leaf and needle of the wood." The Walden soundscape is, in fact, permeated by a host of noises—or melodies—of rural life (wagon, cart). Particularly expressive in this sense is the "distant lowing of some cow in the horizon," which brings in "sweet and melodious" tunes of a rurality that has its own "cheap and natural music" and, in turn, reminds the listener of the minstrels' "serenade," a comment not so much on the youths' singing as on the fact that they too are an "articulation of Nature."

Bringing together the different strands of sounds identified above, the closing noises of the day again interweave rurality, technology, and nature, and are all filtered by the ordering intellect. Showing the process of transduction by which an aural world is transposed into an evening landscape, the latter comprises the "vespers" of "whip-poor-wills" immediately following the "evening train," the "distant rumbling of wagons over bridges," "the baying of dogs," sometimes "the lowing of some disconsolate cow," "the trump of bullfrogs," to which the writer pays particular attention.

Imaginary sounds also substantiate the reading of *Walden* as a continuing negotiation with a complex threshold space. Carved out between juxtaposed perceptions of nature and modernity, and crossed by rural sounds, the Walden soundscape is thus enriched with an imaginary note, that of the chanticleer: "I am not sure that I ever heard the sound of cock-crowing from my clearing, and I thought that it might be worth the while to keep a cockerel for his music merely, as a singing bird."[55] The desired sound of the chanticleer brings in a temporal dimension akin to that revealed by the archaeology of the soil in "Former Inhabitants," for it is remembered as a "once wild Indian pheasant." If, as has been argued, awareness of former civilizations highlights the perception of a layered present,[56] it also enriches the soundscape, rather than disrupting the experience of present habitation. Moreover, in the case of the chanticleer, the latter seems to be invested with the very substance of the Walden experience. Firstly, the sound of the chanticleer is expressive of the entire adventure, as it figures an excursus into a surrogate wilderness, signaling the potential of naturalization without domestication: "If [this bird] could be naturalized without being domesticated, it would soon become the most famous sound in our woods, surpassing the clangor of the goose and the hooting of the owl." Secondly, the chanticleer song overtly carries moral attributes, potentially putting "nations on the alert," for "who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and earlier every successive day of his life, till he became unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise?"[57] These attributes are connected to the purpose of the book itself—the latter is figured as a chanticleer song promoting alertness and, in describing his experiment, the narrator proposes to "brag as lustily as a chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up."[58]

Through the negation of a soundscape of domesticity, the chapter ends on a note which returns the Walden experiment to a space of poignant critique towards—and observation of—a "civilized world" that is neither wholly embraced, nor wholly rejected. The chapter "Sounds" closes with an absent soundscape signaled through a series of negations ("neither dog, cat, cow, pig, nor hens," "no cockerels to crow nor hens to cackle in the yard"), and it also references the absence of companionship explicitly figured as female and familial ("neither the churn, nor the spinning-wheel, nor even the singing of the kettle, nor the hissing of the urn, nor children crying, to comfort

one"). This "deficiency of domestic sounds" projects Walden as a space of otherness, and the emphasis on imaginary sounds, and absent sounds, is as telling as the painstaking description of the sounds of nature, modernity and rurality. Continuing the logic of negation, the landscape of snows heightens the willed, partial isolation of the dweller: "Instead of no path to the front-yard gate in the Great Snow,—no gate,—no front-yard,—and no path to the civilized world!"[59]

Coda: Sonic Imaginations

Built on attentive notation as well as on imaginative interpretation and underscored by delightful harmonies as well as by thrilling discords, Thoreau's vast composition attests to multiple points of engagement with a complex world, as well as against it, and suggests a nostalgic penchant for nature as well as a modern fascination for power. A relatively underexplored strand of Thoreau's writing in particular and of transcendentalism in general, the latter aspect anticipates canonical early twentieth-century renderings of America as (acoustically) overbearing in its mightiness. For example, referring to H. G. Wells's *The Future in America* (1906), Henry James deplored the U. S. as a "yelling country," a place of "clashing cymbals."[60] Through its integration of a sometimes strident modernity into the continuous soundscape of *Walden*, however, the Thoreauvian model provides for ever-renewed modes of attunement by cultivating what one might call—borrowing from Sterne—a sophisticated "sonic imagination." Building upon T.S. Eliot's "auditory imagination," Sterne argues that the sonic imagination indicates "an openness to sound as part of culture, a feel for it," which can "rework culture through the development of new narratives, new histories, new technologies, and new alternatives."[61] In viewing his milieu in its entirety as a rich source of music, Thoreau indeed reworks culture by promoting new narratives that nurture a deeper sense of engagement with and a wider array of responses to an often-discordant contemporaneity. Given current interests in ways that literature can provide ecological modes of relating, the *Walden* soundscape is worth revisiting for its highly sensitive and nuanced auditory articulation of natural, social and technical strands that can never be unbraided.

Notes

1 Murray R. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 2nd ed. (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 8; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

2 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 398.

3 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 8; Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT

Press, 2002).

4 Thoreau, *Walden*, 411.

5 Jeff Todd Titon, "Thoreau's Ear," *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 145, DOI: 10.1080/20551940.2015.1079973.

6 Philip Gura, "Nature Writing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 408–25.

7 While F. O. Matthiessen's classic study *American Renaissance* (1941) granted Ralph Waldo Emerson the central role in America's cultural rebirth in the mid-nineteenth century, Lawrence Buell makes a case for the canonicity of Thoreau (rather than Emerson) for the "so-called American literary Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century." Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), 6. Similarly positing Thoreau's centrality to the American canon, John Gatta argues that he was among "the first Americans to turn a theology of natural 'development' into poetry." John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137.

8 David Robinson, *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 75. Kristen Case, *American Pragmatism and Poetic Practice: Crosscurrents from Emerson to Susan Howe* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 101.

9 Given the scarcity of documentation for nineteenth-century sounds, Schafer, for example, particularly appreciates Thoreau for providing a valuable corpus for the historian of sounds, and mentions the rich description of the soundscape of Merrimack River. Schafer, *Soundscape*, 18.

10 Titon, "Thoreau's Ear," 145–46.

11 Titon foregrounds the Thoreauvian "wild soundscape" of 1850 in terms of an "acoustic ecology or what aural environmentalist Bernie Krause calls a biophony, the combined voices of living things." Jeff Todd Titon, "The Music Culture as a World of Music," in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples*, ed. Jeff Titon et al., 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 2009), 3. The natural Thoreauvian soundscape is also regarded as essential in creating "second life" versions of the Walden retreat. Phylis Johnson, *Second Life, Media, and the Other Society* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 148.

12 Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) outlines an important theme pursued by subsequent scholars. For example, Thompson casts Thoreau in the company of other nineteenth-century figures who "struggled with mixed emotions about the coming of industry," signaled by the "steam whistle, which announced the arrival of both railroad and factory," and reads Thoreau as "awakened from his agrarian reverie at Walden pond by the screaming whistle of a passing train." Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity*, 120. After indexing elements that point to Thoreau's interest in technology, Titon similarly argues that Thoreau "was not ambivalent about American industrial progress; he despised it." Titon, "Thoreau's Ear," 146.

13 Charles Ives, *Piano Sonata no. 2: "Concord" with the Essays before a Sonata*, introduction by Stephen Drury (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), xxvii.

14 For a description of Cage's reworking of Thoreau and its relevance for the musician's own relationship to the environment, see for example Joan Retallack, "Poethics of a

Complex Realism," in *John Cage: Composed in America*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 248.

15 Christopher Shultis, *Silencing the Sounded Self: John Cage and the American Experimental Tradition* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998); Benjamin Piekut, "Chance and Certainty: John Cage's Politics of Nature," Cultural Critique 84 (2013): 134–63, DOI: 10.5749/culturalcritique.84.2013.0134.

16 John Cage, *Empty Words: Writings '73–'78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 3.

17 Schafer's own understanding of "the world as a macroscopic musical composition," with the "new orchestra" as the "sonic universe" and "the musicians" as "anyone and anything that sounds" draws on Cage's definition, which, in turn, refers to Thoreau: "The definition of music has undergone significant change in recent years. In one of the more contemporary definitions, John Cage has declared: 'Music is sounds, sounds around us whether we're in or out of concert halls: cf Thoreau.' The reference is to Thoreau's *Walden*, where the author experiences in the sounds and sight of nature an inexhaustible entertainment." Shafer, *Soundscape*, 5. Stuart Feder documents the references to Thoreau in Ives's compositions and mentions the chapter "Sounds" from *Walden* as the source of "so many of his Thoreau quotations"; the affinity culminated in Ives's composition "Sunrise," "aural in mode, philosophical in idea, and poetic in imagery, while rooted in the local detail of everyday life." Stuart Feder, "Charles Ives and Henry David Thoreau: 'A Transcendental Tune of Concord,'" in *Ives Studies*, ed. Philip Lambert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 174. Similarly, Jannika Bock dwells on connections between Thoreau and Cage, in particular in view of the latter's "Lecture on the Weather," identifying a point of confluence between the two artists in the belief "in the (artistic) beauty of the ordinary" and "the musical merit of nature's sounds." Jannika Bock, *Concord in Massachusetts, Discord in the World: The Writings of Henry Thoreau and John Cage* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2008), 4.

18 Titon, "Thoreau's Ear," 145.

19 Thoreau, *Walden*, 449.

20 Ibid., 488.

21 Ibid., 539, 413, 538, 541.

22 Michel Chion, "The Three Listening Modes," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routledge, 2012), 50.

23 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 105.

24 Ibid., 6.

25 Thoreau, *Walden*, 411.

26 Ives, *Piano Sonata*, xxvii.

27 This passage is regarded as particularly relevant in approaches to Thoreau as a philosopher of work—see David B. Raymond, "The Importance of Work: Henry David Thoreau and the American Work Ethic," *The Concord Saunterer*, New Series, 17 (2009): 152.

28 Thoreau, *Walden*, 411.

29 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 29.

30 Thoreau, *Walden*, 411–12.

31 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 6.

32 Thoreau, *Walden*, 539.

33 Sterne, *Audible Past*, 25.

34 Chion, "Three Listening Modes," 52.

35 Thoreau, *Walden*, 421–22.

36 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 81.

37 Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne, (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.

38 See, for example, interpretations of Thoreau's statements concerning the role of commerce, technology, and science as both explicit and contradictory: Thomas Claviez, "Pragmatism, Critical Theory, and the Search for Ecological Genealogies in American Culture," in *Pragmatism and Literary Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), 374.

39 Mark M. Smith, "The Garden in the Machine: Listening to Early American Industrialization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 41.

40 Thoreau, *Walden*, 413–14.

41 Ibid., 414.

42 Ibid.

43 Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, "Introduction: New Keys to the World of Sound," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–35.

44 Thoreau, *Walden*, 413–20.

45 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 21.

46 Thoreau, *Walden*, 417.

47 Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 221–22.

48 Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 16.

49 Thoreau, *Walden*, 414.

50 Ibid., 417.

51 See, for example, Lee McBride's reading of Thoreau's views on violence, especially in response to the John Brown case. Lee A. McBride, III, "Insurrectionist Ethics and Thoreau," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 49, no. 1 (2013): 29–45, DOI: 10.2979/trancharpeirsoc.49.1.29.

52 See, for example, F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Joel Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1965).

53 Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 186.

54 Thoreau, *Walden*, 420.

55 Ibid., 420–23.

56 Peter Bellis thus points to the constructed nature of the Walden landscape, and argues that Thoreau attempts to harmonize disparate impulses and local histories, seeking "to clear or demarcate a space in which observation, cultivation, writing, and political or cultural resistance may all find a ground." Peter J. Bellis, *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 14.

57 Thoreau, *Walden*, 423–24.

58 Ibid., 389.

59 Ibid., 424.

60 Henry James, *Henry James Letters*, vol. 4, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1984), 421.

61 Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," 5–6.

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“Ta, te, ti, toe, too”

The Horrors of the Harsh Female Voice in 1950s Hollywood Comedies

Ralph J. Poole

Abstract

Hollywood comedies of the 1950s saw the decline of a specific kind of female comedian, as unruly comediennes in the screwball tradition transformed into silly sexy vixens or tamed into homely sexless housewives. There are, however, some comedies which self-reflectively negotiate this shift. In this article, I would like to suggest that the voice of the comedienne serves as a marker of distinction. My article accordingly explores two pivotal examples of such transformative processes: Judy Holliday as Billie Dawn in *Born Yesterday* (1950) and Jean Hagen as Lina Lamont in *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952). Both heroines feature what critics have called “the horrors of the harsh female voice.” Whereas Billie’s voice “survives” through schooling and refinement, Jean’s voice resists all training and remains shrill and rowdy, leading to the violent expulsion of her character altogether. With the transformation and eventual disappearance of these extraordinary female actresses and their roles, such voices remained silent for a long time, until loud and brassy comediennes of a new generation were allowed to reappear on the silver screen and to raise their harsh and distinctive voices once again.

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“Ta, te, ti, toe, too”

The Horrors of the Harsh Female Voice in 1950s Hollywood Comedies

Ralph J. Poole

Joel and Ethan Coen’s 2016 comedy *Hail Caesar!* centers on a “fixer” who keeps Hollywood stars’ scandals out of the press. The film, set in 1951, includes the character of DeeAnna Moran (Scarlett Johansson), a synchronized swimming actress. Moran unfortunately becomes pregnant out of wedlock, thus causing an ethical dilemma for the studio’s reputation. While still unaware of her predicament, we first see her as she performs in a mermaid costume, starring in a scene reminiscent of Esther Williams in Busby Berkeley’s extravagantly choreographed *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952). Accompanied by a live orchestra, DeeAnna poses, smiles, jumps, swims—and looks gorgeous. Her spectacular appearance elevates her above the water ballet’s chorus girls—but her grandeur disappears once she opens her mouth. Up to that moment, the scene features music only, and then suddenly, at the height of theatricality, DeeAnna blurts out, “Damn it!” The whole scene collapses, the take is spoiled, and while she is pried out of her fish costume (“fish-ass,” she calls it), she continues to unleash more phrases of disgust and fury, ultimately revealing that she feels highly uncomfortable in this tight-fitting, unwieldy costume because she is pregnant.[1]

What makes this scene so hilarious is the discrepancy between the silent image of a beautiful woman and the vulgar sound of her voice. Viewers of classic Hollywood movies have been trained to expect corresponding sounds and images, and the disruption of this expectation causes a break in their fantasmatic projection of what such a scene should convey: splendor and stylishness but, above all, poise and equilibrium. While we can already recognize this scene as a film shoot, drawing our attention to metafilmic features, we are nevertheless taken aback by DeeAnna’s loud Bronx accent and vulgar slang. This incongruence likely prompts laughter. Why is that? Why is a woman articulating her bodily discomfort off-putting and risible? Ultimately, why is this beautiful woman so utterly grotesque?

The scene just described brings to mind two 1950s films and their female char-

acters with similar voice problems. A pivotal sonic moment demonstrating the discrepancy of sight and sound and its gendered implications is the iconic finale of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)—tellingly set in 1927, the year the first talkies appeared. In the film's concluding moments, former silent film star Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) is chased off the stage for being a fraud. Though a skillful actress without recorded sound, she becomes a liability when she has to speak because her shrill voice does not match her looks. In a new production of a musical film, Lina's voice is dubbed by Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), and, since co-star Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) is romantically involved with Kathy, he wants to expose Lina to ruin her career.[2] He succeeds in his scheme during a public screening of the new film as a group of cheering men in the wings celebrate their triumph. During this scene, many viewers presumably laughed at Lina's—the bitchy fraud's—exposure and felt happy for the central romantic couple Kathy and Don to be united in the end.[3]

I would like to take a closer look at what goes on in this and other scenes in the film which reveal Lina as a beautiful but—purportedly—dumb blonde and ask why the film triggers the response of satisfaction with Lina's final humiliation instead of feelings of anger or pity for her and the way she is driven out. What is at stake here is not simply Lina's unsuitable voice but, rather, a certain type of comedienne that is considered outdated and thus objectionable. Just as her shrill voice needs to be silenced and dubbed, the character type that Lina embodies and, specifically, her offensive comicality must be replaced by the subdued cuteness of Kathy. I would like to compare Lina's failure to succeed in the new world of talkies with a closely related example of a similarly comic female figure with a harsh voice: Billie Dawn (Judy Holliday) in *Born Yesterday* (1950).[4] In contrast to Lina, Billie ultimately gains a proper level of refinement, but the happy conclusion comes at a significant cost that, as I will show, must be taken into consideration. The actresses' comic performances in both films certainly are climactic moments in their careers, and yet, they mark a turning point in Hollywood's treatment of unruly womanliness. As their harsh voices need to be trained, so, too, do their coarse personalities require significant taming or absolute elimination. It would be a long time before such loud, brassy comediennes would be allowed to reappear on the silver screen.

The links between the two films include Hagen's stylization of Lina's lower-class-sounding voice, modeled after Holliday's sonic characterization of Billie, as well as both heroines referencing the screwball comedy genre. While the comic female leads of earlier screwball comedies both exhibited witty dialogue and shaped the course of the romance, Billie's unruly sonic and physical agility has to be contained, whereas Lina's has to be eliminated altogether. From the standpoint of the early 1950s, both films shed a critical light on the diminishing power of female (comic) stardom since the silent era. It is the disturbing sound quality of the female voice

that exposes the increasing expectation of an imagined coherence of glamorous appearance and euphonious sound. By foregrounding the split of matching body and voice, both films simultaneously address and participate in the demise of a clamorous and unruly type of comedienne, which in turn underscores Hollywood's stranglehold on shaping and maintaining gendered rules of appearance and etiquette. Since the advent of sound film, Hollywood has demanded the subordination of the sonic, rejoicing in the lasting dominance of the visual. Both films address the vagaries of this hierarchy and disclose the underlying gendered politics of such an aesthetic competition in which sight is favored over sound and male versatility over female unruliness.

The Lina Effect: Silent Beauty—Speaking Comic

Film critics have either treated Lina in a derogatory manner or ignored her altogether, even though she is a character that is crucial for the narrative, visual, and sonic logic of *Singin' in the Rain*. In a particularly cruel review, Douglas Brode, in his companion to *The Films of the Fifties* (1976), calls her "Linda [*sic*] Lamont (Jean Hagen), a moronic, ego-oriented but highly popular blonde bombshell."[5] Here and in many other examples, she is characterized as greedy, vindictive, and, above all, stupid. The question, however, remains whether her characterization as an unintelligent blonde starlet is warranted, or, rather, whether her appearance and performance need to be reappraised. Certainly, there are no doubts as to her fitting the image of a star in terms of her looks. She is always dressed in chic costumes, specifically designed by Walter Plunkett to resemble those of Lilyan Tashman, who was considered "the epitome of chic" in the 1920s,[6] the decade in which *Singin' in the Rain* is set. In terms of extravagant style, no woman in the film comes close to Lina.

At the same time, the film suggests that Lina's glamour belongs to a long-lost era that has been replaced by a new favorite look, namely that of her competitor Kathy, who embodies cute femininity of the 1950s. The gender politics of (dis)connection that *Singin' in the Rain* clandestinely pursues manifests itself in these two opposing female characters: While the contemporary model (Kathy) is never as glamorous as the former one (Lina), Kathy's non-threatening prettiness and compliant personality is a better fit for the male hero. His strategic move from an inauthentic relationship with Lina—a publicity gimmick—to a genuine emotional connection with Kathy mirrors his versatility in leaving the high-drama histrionics of the silent film behind in favor of the natural authenticity that sound films seemingly appear to convey with their synchronicity of sound and image. From the very start, Don is a master of synchronization, grounding his star persona on the illusion created for the public that truth corresponds to what one sees *and* hears. John Belton has suggested that "sound achieves authenticity only as a consequence of its submission to tests imposed upon it by other senses—primarily by sight."[7] After some struggles during

his transition from silent to sound film, Don excels at achieving the authenticity effect—artful synchronicity—that Belton describes. In contrast, Lina's star persona fails to cover the increasing disconnect between her visual and sonic appearances.

The very first scene, the premiere of the "Biggest Picture of 1927" in Hollywood's Chinese Theater, already shows the way in which Lina's star image has been carefully constructed, merging her on-screen persona with her private life in a manner which Richard Dyer has described as the typical blending of "screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances."[8] The scene is also highly metacinematic, as we can observe *in actu* the comic effect that Lina produces. As long as she remains a purely visual, passively silent image, all is well and the public adores her. A female member of the audience, who appears as a representative spectator watching Lina starring in her latest film, is so struck by Lina's visual grandeur that she exclaims: "She's so refined, I think I'll kill myself."[9] Throughout all this, Lina remains silent and lets others speak (for her). As soon as Lina starts to act up and speak out, however, the asynchronicity becomes obvious and the gap between image and reality produces a profound comic effect. For the first thirteen minutes of the film, the diegetic audience watches Hollywood celebrate itself and Gene Kelly (as Don Lockwood) tell a tall tale about his career. While this self-promotion is simultaneously undermined by the mismatching images only we—the audience of the film—see, both we and the diegetic audience remain in awe of silent Lina's visually conveyed stardom. Then, backstage and out of the diegetic audience's sight but distinctly visible to us, she bursts forth, raises her voice, and for the first time we hear her speak in a shrill, nasal voice with a strong vernacular intonation. The leap from beautiful face to unpleasant voice is meant to shock, and the effect certainly succeeds.

This is also the first scene of striking misogyny: This misogyny is channeled here, as throughout the film, via Lockwood's somewhat queer, long-term performance partner Cosmo, who keeps pointing to Lina's deficient femininity with remarks such as: "Lina, you looked pretty good for a girl." Lina, on the other hand, counters in her distinctive, squeaky timbre: "What's wrong with the way I talk? What's the big idea? Am I dumb or something?"[10] The painful silence of the male group surrounding Lina confirms precisely that: everybody believes her to be a dumb blonde.

Although she seems to fit the stereotype of the dumb blonde, her reiteration of the rhetorical question "Am I dumb?" until the next-to-last scene calls for a different reading, not least since such a stereotype's supposedly simple truth is deceptive:

> To refer "correctly" to someone as a "dumb blonde," and to understand what is meant by that, implies a great deal more than hair colour and intelligence. It refers immediately to her sex, which refers to her status in society, her relationship to men, her inability to behave or think rationally, and so on.[11]

In her passive artificiality and bodily stiffness, Lina is presented in stark contrast to Kathy, the cute and agile brunette who knows how to sing and dance in a seemingly natural fashion. Whereas Lina's character and behavior suggest a "chilly, vapid whiteness," which signifies "fakery, cunning, and gloom" according to film critic Judy Gerstel,[12] Kathy is the incarnation of male fantasy, "soft and pliant and girlish,"[13] therefore signifying authenticity and emotionality. The film's plot seems to concur with this verdict when, in the end, Don claims, "I thought there was something cooking under those bleached curls," referring to Lina's secret scheme to have Kathy fired.[14]

Lina's artificial blondness correlates with her perceived cold, cunning, and fake personality. While her audience may adore Lina due to her appearance, no one working with her in the film industry actually likes her due to her character. In contrast, Kathy's cute looks and her amiable demeanor seem to be in sync. Her cuteness relates to the aesthetics and affectiveness of the child. "Like nineteenth-century sentimentalism, with which it is closely allied," writes Lori Merish, "cuteness is a highly conventionalized aesthetic, distinguishable both by its formal aesthetic features and the formalized emotional response it engenders." And because it is "generically associated with the child . . ., cuteness always to some extent aestheticizes powerlessness: often cute figures are placed in humiliating circumstances" and seem to beg for rescue.[15] In this sense, Kathy's cuteness is precisely the sort "that mobilizes proprietary desire, a peculiarly 'feminine' proprietary desire that equates to a moral sentiment: the desire to care for, cherish, and protect."[16] This cuteness, an aesthetic that emerged as a cultural expression in the late nineteenth century, was often linked to dolls and (anthropomorphized, cartoonish) animals, but also to mythic creatures, such as trolls and performers in "freak shows."[17] The popularity of cuteness climaxed with the fame of child actress Shirley Temple in the 1930s and saw a revival in the 1950s with characters such as Kathy and actresses such as Debbie Reynolds. While having "matured" to adult womanhood, Kathy nevertheless remains in a state of girlish cuteness that elicits Don's masculine protectiveness. Kathy—as seemingly natural and authentic as her brunette hair—"represents everything that Lina Lamont is not. She is male-identified, completely dependent emotionally on men's action and moods."[18] The contrast between the two women culminates in the discrepancy between their respective voices: Kathy's soft, melodic voice is starkly contrasted with Lina's harsh shrillness.

But connoisseurs of the film know that such seemingly simple truisms are far from the truth. Unraveling the complex sonic structure inherent in the making of the film reveals that Debbie Reynolds was herself dubbed by Betty Noyes, the woman who sang most of the songs we "hear" Kathy performing. As for some spoken passages of the character Kathy, it actually was Jean Hagen speaking, who had a conventionally pleasant voice and who dubbed Debbie's speaking voice.[19] On top of

these deceptions, it also bears mentioning that Jean Hagen was a natural brunette, another ironic stab at the dumb blonde stereotype seen in her film debut as comic femme fatale in George Cukor's screwball comedy *Adam's Rib* (1949). Bleaching her hair and changing her voice was essential in creating the artificial Lina-effect. This effect was so successful that it garnered Jean Hagen an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress, the film's sole nomination besides Best Original Music Score. And yet, just like her film character Lina Lamont, the actress Jean Hagen had no chance of surviving 1950s' cinematic gender politics.

Teaching Screeching Dumb Blondes

Singin' in the Rain, the musical about the transitional period from silent to sound cinema, appears strikingly mute when it comes to speaking about the era in which it was produced. Many critics agree that the magic of this film relies precisely on its "fundamentally nostalgic, industry-positive view."[20] Nonetheless, Lina's expulsion marks the removal of a model of female comedy in a twofold manner that belies the film's seeming ahistoricity: Lina as a visually glamorous but aurally vulgar star of silent cinema has no place in the new sound film,[21] much as Jean Hagen, the actress, has a precarious status in 1950s cinema. The casting of Jean Hagen is illuminating in this respect, as the screenwriter couple Betty Comden and Adolph Green envisioned Judy Holliday for the role of Lina but subsequently sought a lesser-known actress than Holliday (Lina's was a supporting role, after all), and they found Jean Hagen.[22] But Hagen was, in fact, well-established in the business. Hagen and Holliday both had acted together in *Adam's Rib* and Hagen had performed the character of Billie Dawn in *Born Yesterday* on stage—the role that earned Holliday an Oscar in George Cukor's 1950 film adaptation. Comden and Green deliberately modeled the character of Lina after Holliday's performance in *Born Yesterday*, requiring a similar comic talent to match such a figure.

Moreover, this scripting and casting of the character of Lina Lamont offers more than random similarities to that of Billie Dawn, the comic heroine of *Born Yesterday*. There is a structural analogy between the two female characters (and their actresses), starting with their physical comedy, largely relying on the dumb blonde stereotype and in this case its contiguous implication of vulgar femininity, the ensuing pedagogical program of refinement, and above all the performance of what critic Martin Roth has called the "horrors of the harsh female voice."[23] Besides Lina, he mentions Margaret Hamilton as the bad witch in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and, of course, Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn) in *My Fair Lady* (1964), whose gutter accents make Professor Henry Higgins wrinkle his face in disgust. The beginning of *Born Yesterday* exemplifies this horror. Similar to *Singin' in the Rain*, the opening sequence shows a beautifully stylish but completely silent woman, guided through the scene by various

men until her first horrifying screech, "Whaaat?"[24] As with Lina, the comedy arises from the contrast of glamor and impropriety. Similar to Lina, Billie Dawn has a vulgar demeanor replete with crude jokes and inappropriate behavior. In contrast to Lina, however, Billie is an essentially warmhearted person. In the course of the film and with the help of the William Holden character, Paul, she undergoes a successful transformation in terms of her respectability and marriageability. As a result, Billie's fate is markedly different from Lina's ultimate demise. Billie, instead of being shamefully cast aside, evolves into a soft(er)-spoken, refined woman who reaps her success by ditching her ugly, criminal, and boorish fiancé, Harry, and marrying the learned, handsome, and charming Paul. Kathleen Rowe has described Judy Holliday in her role as Billie Dawn—besides Marilyn Monroe—as the model of the "unruly woman" of the 1950s, whose private life and artistic career cultivated a dumb blonde image that was at odds with the propagandized image of the domestic American woman of this era. Much of what Rowe says of Judy/Billie applies to Jean/Lina, as well:

> Billie Dawn is an unruly heroine more out of the tradition of carnivalesque performance than romantic narrative. Her portrait of unruliness depends largely on the character's working-class background, with its motifs of the impropriety and bad taste that so often cause women to make spectacles of themselves.... Holliday exaggerates Billie Dawn's [class background] through the character's body language, her voice, and her "dumbness." ... Billie's voice is unruly in both tone and language.[25]

Whereas Lina fails in her refinement training, Billie is successfully reborn in *Pygmalion*-like fashion when Harry hires her teacher Paul to polish off Billie's rough edges for the purpose of making her more presentable and thus beneficial for Harry's crooked deals. The plan triply backfires due to Harry's disbelief in Billie's capability for true education. She later beats Harry in his own business and leaves him for another man. In contrast to Billie's adoption of middle-class restraint, Harry remains the working-class, self-made man lacking manners and style, who—like Billie initially—continues to screech verbally. Whereas his behavior suits his character and looks, this is not the case with Billie, and accordingly the duo's respective comicality is of a different nature. Making his millions literally selling junk, "King Junk" Harry is laughable due to his brutish, animalistic ignorance, but also because of the contrast to Paul's scholarly, self-controlled type of masculinity. Billie, on the other hand, is amusing because she is both gorgeous and unruly. In a wonderfully comic scene, Harry sets her up to impress a congressman and his wife, but Billie completely fails at this by unabashedly showing how bored she is, switching on the radio and dancing and scatting to a jazz tune. In another scene, when Paul makes his first efforts at teaching her, she teasingly asks what is in store for him and bluntly offers her sexual services ("Are you one of these talkers, or would you be interested in a little action? ... I got a yen for you right

off."), much to Paul's shock and discomfort but also to the audience's comic gratification. And although she feeds into the dumb blonde stereotype herself by admitting to Paul, "I like being dumb," her keen sense of humor and her ability to change are clear tokens of intelligence rather than stupidity.[26] In truth, as Rowe argues, Billie's portrayal by Holliday "doesn't play dumbness as a joke against women, . . . but as a defense against a world of limited options for a chorus girl, a means of getting what she wants."[27] Ironically then, Billie's self-assertive "dumbness," aurally represented by her lower-class voice, functions as an initial means of securing her social success.

In contrast to Billie's trainable voice, Lina's voice remains stubbornly untamable and comical. While both Lina and Don suffer from the transition to sound films and are initially mocked, only Don effortlessly masters his vocal training. Lina's voice, however, will not relinquish its cacophonic harshness despite the efforts of coach Phoebe Dinsmore, who relentlessly, but unsuccessfully, reminds Lina to use "round tones" for her exercising the phrase "ta, te, ti, toe, too."[28] Dinsmore, "the snooty, incompetent diction coach" who "look[s] like the caricature of a professor excavated from the preceding century,"[29] represents an authoritarian bully, whose old-school voice training relies on anything but naturalness. Her ideal of a round and sonorous chest voice stems from a *bel canto* tradition with voice teachers such as Giulio Caccini and Manuel Garcia as models.[30] Arguably, such a vocal ideal hardly qualifies for the cinematic needs of a spoken voice. The juxtaposition of Dinsmore's affected "round" articulation and Lina's coarse flatness is comical, not least for showcasing the irrelevance of naturalness as a sonic category—Lina's manner of speaking reflects her geographic and class background, after all, and is therefore more "natural" than Dinsmore's dated, trained operatic voice. The scene's comicality builds up to the following sequence, which James Card rightly calls one of the "most mirth-provoking scenes" of the film.[31] As the film team tries helplessly to employ the primitive sound technology, Lina's unintentional or willful stubbornness reaches its peak when the microphone, hidden in a bush, cannot capture Lina's voice because of the noise created by her exaggerated melodramatic head and body movements. She finally erupts and shouts shrilly, "Well, I cain't make love to a bush!"[32] In an attempt to solve the problem, the microphone is then hidden in her décolletage, triggering two consequences: Instead of her voice, we hear Lina's heartbeats. And when producer Simpson enters the studio, he trips over the cable coming out of Lina's dress, causing her to fall backwards and ruin her pseudo-aristocratic outfit. Scenes likes these indeed seem to confirm that, while Lina may look glamorous, she certainly cannot talk like a lady or act and sing like a musical star. This distinguishes her from Don and marks her as an untalented actress

> whose movements are a series of poses for the camera, suitable for the silent films she is accustomed to, but hopelessly inadequate for the birth of the sound film, and especially inadequate for the musical that ultimately will be the solution to the problem facing Lockwood and Lamont's new film, *The Dueling Cavalier*.[33]

The scene, however, may be said to—perhaps involuntarily—serve a threefold purpose. It shows that the new medium of talkies aims for a different style of "realist" acting, whereas silent film derived its acting style from theater and, above all, the melodramatic stage. Once again, Lina, an accomplished expert in the exaggerated melodramatic style, fails to adapt to the call for "naturalness." While this scene highlights Jean Hagen's comic acting skills, her character Lina is not granted a chance to transition from silent melodrama to sound comedy, a genre in which she may have succeeded, as opposed to the musical, for which she is ill-suited. Even though "Lina Lamont's drive can be funny in humiliation but never in triumph,"[34] I wonder whether Jean Hagen could not have had a longer career as screwball comedienne, had this genre not fallen out of favor in the 1950s.

There is a third reason why this scene is crucial for an understanding not only of gender, but also of the more clandestine matters of class, both of which are linked to the film's sonic politics. From the very beginning, Lina's public silence is contrasted with Don's verbal bravado. Even during the silent era, the Hollywood star system had already allowed its protégés to transcend certain limits and handicaps, of which class background was key. As long as stars could look as glamorous as Lina and Don, the façade could be upheld. However, Lina's crude voice betrayed her equally crude social origins. Indeed, as Alan Nadel succinctly points out, "Speech can disguise one's past by giving the appearance of dignity to behavior that lacked it," but "Lina's raw speech threatens to expose the fragile artifice upon which everyone's job depends." If Lina speaks—especially about the shared professional and romantic history of Don and herself—she may ruin their façade, thus posing a threat to their carefully disguised backgrounds as well as to "cinema's capacity to hide indignity in general,… the veneer of stardom, the magic of the magic lantern itself."[35] Certainly, mixing the voice problem with the dumb blonde cliché made for a highly comic package. It also seems to suggest that the conversion to sound was a particularly gendered issue and that women caused more problems than men.

Transitioning: The Difficult Speaking Woman

Paradoxically, in silent film, the female voice had a high standing, precisely because it could not be heard but only seen, i.e., how she *physically* speaks. Indeed, her "absent voice re-emerges in gestures and the contortions of the face—it is spread over the

body of the actor."[36] Accordingly, her manner of speaking, especially in melodrama, was essential for her characterization, placing "a high premium on women's speech as a means of achieving psychologically rounded characters."[37] Lina's successful career is built on such melodramatic acting, and studio head Simpson (Millard Mitchell) is proven fatally wrong in his assessment that it only takes a little training to adapt to the new technology: "You do what you always do. You just add talking to it," he says.[38] The first effort in converting the new Lina-and-Don film into a talkie without otherwise changing the style of the film turns out to be ludicrous and is rejected by viewers at the first showing: "Lamont's and Lockwood's *Dueling Cavalier* uses the new technology crudely, if hilariously, simply adding hokey, impromptu dialogue and overamplified sound effects to the pantomime acting style carried over from silent film."[39] The negative response to this failed adaptation attempt results in the transformation of a talkie melodrama to the fully-fledged musical *Dancing Cavalier*, giving credence to Steven Cohan's claim that *Singin' in the Rain* not only recounts the transition to sound "with its fatal impact on silent films" but also "the musical's emergence as the prime Hollywood genre of the modern sound era."[40]

Before the advent of transitioning from silent to sound film, other technologies such as the telephone had already established an acoustic standard for the female voice: It had to be soft and melodious. Such a female voice was meant to soothe the easily irritable male disposition.[41] Furthermore, the technology itself was tricky. Particularly the Warner Bros. Vitaphone sound-on-disc process, one of two competing technologies and the one referred to in *Singin' in the Rain* "was a technology unfavorable to female silent stars trying to make the transition to talkies because it recorded and reproduced men's voices with greater accuracy."[42] This notion of a gendered quality of the voice also entails the spatial attribution of the female voice. Where, when, how, and for how long a woman's voice was to be heard in sound media relied on "a preexisting ideology that economically and politically predefined how the female voice was to be represented—or whether it would be heard at all."[43] Especially the introduction of sound film led to the notion that there is a "problem" with women's speech and that the "difficult" speaking woman must therefore be contained and put into her proper—largely silenced—place. This conception of what a female voice had to accomplish implied what it should not be: loud and obstinate. Accordingly, the dilemma of containing such resistant voices was continually evident "for when women are disturbingly silent in Hollywood films, the texts force them to speak. Yet when they open their mouths, what often comes out is resistance—which must be suppressed."[44] Amy Lawrence asserts that "when there is a crisis in the representation of women, it often manifests itself as a crisis in the representation of women's *voices*." *Singin' in the Rain*, as a film about the transitional moment from silent to sound film, perfectly exemplifies the claim that such crises are often "expressed

through a representative (and *represented*) crisis in the sound technology," leading to the consequences that, for one thing, "woman's natural ability to speak is interrupted, made difficult, or conditioned to a suffocating degree *by sound technology itself*" and, further, that new technologies such as dubbing are foregrounded and marshalled to "silence women and restore the primacy of patriarchy and the image."[45]

Kaja Silverman also chooses *Singin' in the Rain* as an apt example to show that, in classic Hollywood cinema, female voices are constantly suppressed by male or institutional control. None of the women in the film achieve the "perfect unity" that the new technology of synchronization proclaims. The process of postdubbing radically splits image from sound: While Kathy's voice remains unattached to her image (we only hear her in the new musical production but do not see her), Lina's screen image has no sound (we see her but cannot hear her voice): "Not only must Lina rely upon Kathy for her singing and speaking voice, but at a climactic moment in the diegesis, the voice of Cosmo … is superimposed over her moving lips."[46] In the final scene involving Lina's public shaming, we first see Lina silently move her lips to the words sung by Kathy, who is hidden behind Lina by a curtain. After lifting the curtain—unbeknownst to Lina but visible to the audience—Cosmo steps out and replaces Kathy, who is also exposed and runs from the stage, so that the viewer now sees Lina lip-synching to a male singing voice. The incongruity of the female image with the female voice is blatantly exposed. Here, as in other instances throughout *Singin' in the Rain*, the violation of the "perfect unity" of body and voice is marked as comical.

In so doing, *Singin' in the Rain* cleverly exposes the studio era's creed of "acoustic realism" as a "myth of 'objective' sound reproduction," which ultimately "points toward a deep-rooted desire to naturalize (and thus obscure) ideology."[47] This ideology is inherently gendered and relates to the Hollywood star system's creation of a star's fantasmatic body, which calls for a voice to be anchored in a matching body. This causes a technological predicament, since audiences need to be assured "that post-synchronization as a technique does not necessarily entail substituting an alien voice for a 'real' voice, that the industry does not condone a mismatching of voices and bodies. Thus, the voice serves as a support for the spectator's recognition and his/her identification of, as well as with, the star."[48] The comic backstage scenes in *Singin' in the Rain* reveal that sound recording needed to be perfected to ensure the illusion of harmony, and therefore any disturbing noise had to be reduced and eventually eliminated. The inappropriate (heartbeat) and unpleasant (voice) noises emanating from Lina's body, however, could not be erased, thus causing the rupture of a pleasurable, fantasmatic experience for the spectator that relies on the unification of visual and aural stimuli to create film's illusionary realism. In general, these backstage moments foreground technology as a cinematic illusion, as Jane Feuer asserts, and, in extreme instances such as here, the "demystification appears total; the tech-

nology appears to take over the screen, in the process obscuring the performance itself."[49] As a result in this particular instance, the technological problems that the studio encounters through Lina's "predicament" endanger the "sonorous envelope" that Mary Ann Doane describes as an essential condition "provided by the theatrical space together with techniques employed in the construction of the soundtrack . . . to sustain the narcissistic pleasure derived from the image of a certain unity, cohesion and, hence, an identity grounded by the spectator's fantasmatic relation to his/her own body."[50] And just as any disturbing noise must be avoided, any potential fragmentation and difference needs to be eschewed.

Lina's final image of a female body with a male voice breaks this framework of the sonorous envelope. As uncomfortable as we may feel due to such a rupture, our reaction is most likely laughter triggered by the multiple incongruities—including that of sexual difference—of the situation. *Singin' in the Rain* in general and the film's finale in particular shed a crucial light on the fact that "the selling of sound technology was geared toward exploiting perceived gender roles."[51] Nevertheless, I believe the film is well aware of what it is trying to make us believe, and although the harshness of the satirical take on outdated film aesthetics is softened by the "true" narrative that happily concludes the film with Don announcing Kathy as "the girl whose voice you heard tonight," the "specter of sexual heterogeneity," as Silverman calls it, has been raised if only to "be exorcised, and the female voice 'remarried' to the female body."[52] Although Kathy is granted public display of her vocal and physical "unity"—and rightfully falls into Don's supporting arms, the film's paternalistic, heteronormative logic seems to suggest—Lina as well as Cosmo are left behind, forgotten in the crowd's cheering of Kathy's and Don's kiss. Accordingly, the romantic couple is not formed by combining the best possible match of man and woman (as implied by the standards of the diegetic world) but, as Patricia Mellencamp asserts, "by eliminating the male buddy, Cosmo Brown, from the initial triangle" of Don, Lina, and Cosmo.[53] An earlier screenplay envisioned Lina and Cosmo as a surprise couple in the end.[54] This would have been a truly incongruous, yet highly comic, pairing underlining the anarchic potential of both marginal characters.

(Dis)Appearing Acts: Hail the Loud Comedienne

Whereas Lina's moment of utter public shaming at the end of *Singin' in the Rain* is highly memorable, one tends to forget her two key scenes immediately prior wherein she, for once, is center-stage and the camera remains focused on her instead of Don, who otherwise dominates. In the course of being ousted, she turns into a hard-nosed professional when negotiating her contract, organizing her publicity, and demanding that Kathy continue to be her voice double. To the director's comment, "You'd be taking her career away from her. People just don't do things like that," Lina counters,

"People? I ain't people. I am a [she takes a newspaper and reads]: 'A shimmering, glowing star in the cinema firmament.' It says so . . . right here." When the film screening of *Dancing Cavalier* turns out to be a success, she plausibly argues that her popularity is part of the expected revenues:

> Listen to that applause out there. And wait till the money starts rolling in. You won't give all that up because some little nobody don't wanna be my voice. . . . You're the big Mr. Producer, always running things, running me. But from now on, as far as I'm concerned, I'm running things. . . . A speech? Yeah, everybody's always making speeches for me. Well, tonight, I'm gonna do my own talking. I'm gonna make the speech.[55]

This scene ironically links to silent film star Mary Pickford, who was known as a shrewd businesswoman and yet failed to transition to the sound era. Mellencamp argues that the connection between Lamont and Pickford "should give pause to the comedy of her dismissal and our response."[56] One could say that Lina's misguided decision to go on stage and make a public speech seals her fate and confirms the chauvinist master plan to oust her. In taking a stand against the producer, however, Jean Hagen has one last grand performance as a "dumb blonde," albeit one with shrewd business sense. While Lina has been the butt of every joke during the entire narrative, in this scene she explodes, raises her screeching voice against the men who have been belittling her and thus "crosses the line of power at the studio as determined by gender."[57] It is here that, for once, Lina's high-pitched voice justly matches her high-strung personality, because from her own perspective—which arguably represents a disempowered female perspective fallen victim to the gendered inequality pervasive in show business—she counters the film industry's sexist deceptions and takes hold of her own representation.

This understanding of Lina's "dumbness" as both over the top acting and a debunking of chauvinist conventions recalls Billie's sharp wit in the final scenes of *Born Yesterday*. Although the film ends with Billie's successful education in the arms of mentor Paul, she has not lost all of her aural and visual shrillness by the time she jilts her corrupt lover. In reading Billie's domesticated dimness as representing "an important shift in the representation of female unruliness" from earlier anarchic, eccentric performances by characters such as Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong* (1933) or Katherine Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), Rowe is rather unforgiving when it comes to the film's ultimate logic that "by showing that women need instruction from men, the dumb blonde character-type also bolsters traditional gender roles." Granted, her "liberation substitutes the character's narrative empowerment with a performative loss," as Rowe bemoans, in turn resulting in a decline in our comic pleasure. And, yes, one could argue that the final configuration locates "the once-unruly woman in her

proper place beneath the man," but judging by her voice, which remains harsh in tone even though it is refined in words, Billie has enough resilience to keep Paul on edge even in wedlock.[58]

What is at stake, nevertheless, is the gradual disappearance of comic figures such as Billie and Lina. Accordingly, both films signal "a shift in interest from women to men [which] accelerated through the 1950s and 1960s [and] contributed to the disappearance of strong roles for women."[59] Both actresses and their respective roles reside "in the great tradition of screwball comedy heroines."[60] Especially in the case of Hagen/Lina, the "expulsion represents a reflection, as well, of the screwball genre and the level of female agency it implied."[61] Films such as *Born Yesterday* and *Singin' in the Rain* were based on and made fun of "the belief in the possibility of recreating a natural unity through dream, trick effects, or fantasy, and of finding the 'right' voice for the 'right' body."[62] In *Singin' in the Rain*, this effort fails; in *Born Yesterday*, it succeeds. In either case, the films manifestly present the impossible possibility of an incongruity and therefore strive for harmonizing image and voice. The loss is substantial; "taming" Billie or substituting Kathy for Lina indicates the paradigmatic shift toward an altered understanding of gender roles of the 1950s: "The woman for the new era will never command the same authority or have the same luster as the star she replaced."[63] Kathy may be more properly "congruent" in this gender dynamic, but she will never be as glamorous as Lina. This belief in such necessary, albeit tamed, harmony started to relax only in post-classical Hollywood. Starting in the 1970s, we again find female comediennes with incongruent voices such as Bette Midler (in *The Rose* [1979]), Dolly Parton (in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* [1982]), Melanie Griffith (in *Working Girl* [1988]), Roseanne Barr (in *Roseanne* [ABC, 1988–1997; 2018]), Megan Mullally (in *Will & Grace* [NBC, 1998–2006; 2017–2020]), and Scarlett Johansson in *Hail Caesar!*. The fantasy of the "natural" voice emanating from a suitable body has dissolved and given way to the realization that "every voice is a construction and forms a particular composite with the body. Each actor can take on different voices according to the demands of the role."[64]

Alongside the loss of fantasy, another discourse has arisen in reconsidering such films as *Born Yesterday* and *Singin' in the Rain* and their non-conforming brassy heroines. Gene Kelly remarked in a 1974 BBC interview that many have called *Singin' in the Rain* "the first camp picture."[65] Baz Luhrmann, known for his own camp musical extravaganzas such as *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), asserts that the very first scene of *Singin' in the Rain* "sets up the rules . . . that we're going to wink at you all the way through . . .. You're reminded, really clearly, that you're watching a movie."[66] Reading *Singin' in the Rain* as a campy parody of itself allows for yet another twist in regarding Lina as the secret "real" star of the film.

Steven Cohan stresses that Debbie Reynolds's regional accent had such a "terrible western noise" that she had to be dubbed in those passages that were supposed to come across as cultured and refined.[67] These were primarily the scenes where she is seen dubbing Lina's uncultured speeches. Thus, an invisible, but audible composite was created for Reynolds to accommodate the visible mismatch of Lina's voice and image, which in reality were not mismatched, after all:

> Only at the points when *Singin' in the Rain* exposes the manufacturing of a performance through Kathy's dubbing of Lina is the off-screen engineering of the voice deployed and cleverly acknowledged by the use of Hagen herself to double for Reynolds's speech. With Hagen involved, the circularity detaches the voice from its referent in a body, putting the performance almost literally in quotation marks: the dubbing appropriates Hagen's voice, recycles it in place of Reynolds when the latter is shown dubbing Hagen's character's dialogue, and refers back to Hagen for the joke.[68]

This self-referential dubbing is one of the most remarkable instances of "winking," referring to Lina, the "woman in quotation marks," as an incarnation of recycled Hollywood legends, from silent film stars who could not transition to sound films with brassy female leads such as Jean Harlow, Mae West, and Billie Holliday. As such, both films utilize the problem of the speaking woman to highlight the problem of the self-controlled woman. *Singin' in the Rain*, by displacing this correlation in a different historical setting, offers a scathing commentary on the disappearance of such women from film history, a fact many critics have long ignored.[69] It is above all Jean Hagen's camp performance as Lina Lamont that winks at the technological crisis of transitioning to talkies as being channeled through a problematized woman's voice.

The realization of this makes DeeAnna's performance in *Hail Caesar!* an even campier spectacle. The film was originally set in the 1920s, but its ultimate early 1950s setting marks another transitional moment in the film industry. The studio system was breaking down, television was on the rise, and actors were being blacklisted for alleged communist activities. In *Hail Caesar!*, Hollywood responds to all these dilemmas by creating escapist spectacles such as spates of water ballets with jetting geysers and half-naked nymphs. The ballet is titled "Jonah's Daughter" and scored with an arrangement of Jacques Offenbach's barcarolle "Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour" from his opera *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (1881). The Hoffmann duet can be said to celebrate the female singing voice. While this piece praises the beauty of night and love, DeeAnna spectacularly emerges from a mechanical whale's mouth as a glittering mermaid queen, highly elevated and diving back into the water with an impressive leap. She looks gorgeous until she rips off her crown, tosses it at the orchestra's conductor, and shouts, "Damn it!"[70] Without breaking the illusion in such a crude man-

ner, these spectacles usually deliver erotic messages to the audience, since they are "celebrations of the body and the voice, intensified by the interaction/duplication of visual and aural codes" and therefore "excessively pleasurable moments in musicals."[71] The ballet spectacle—replete with excessive visuals, orchestral sounds, and beautiful unseen female singing voices enhancing the silent aquatic artist's exquisiteness—disrupts this fantasy of unity from the start. Looking more closely, before DeeAnna's rude outburst, we can discern her artificial, wincing grin and the effort she makes to uphold her glamorous posture. Teasing and winking at the audience's longing for unifying identification and erotic fantasies is a blatant feature throughout this film as it was in subtler ways in *Born Yesterday* and *Singin' in the Rain*. In each case the "horrors of the harsh female voice" are the ultimate playful means of shattering those pleasures of harmonious unity and to reinstate the spectacle of the boisterous comedienne as campy pleasure instead.

Notes

1 *Hail Caesar!*, dir. Joel and Ethan Cohen (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2016).

2 *Singin' in the Rain*, dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952).

3 For the remainder of this essay, I will use the first person plural to indicate an implied audience that is familiar with the conventions of classic Hollywood cinema.

4 *Born Yesterday*, dir. George Cukor (Los Angeles, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1950).

5 Douglas Brode, *The Films of the Fifties:* Sunset Boulevard *to* On the Beach (New York: Citadel Press, 1976), 71.

6 Walter Plunkett, quoted in Earl J. Hess and Pratibha A. Dabholkar, Singin' in the Rain*: The Making of an American Masterpiece* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 81.

7 John Belton, "Technology and Aesthetics of Film Sound," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 378.

8 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

9 *Singin' in the Rain*.

10 Ibid.

11 T. E. Perkins, quoted in Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 13.

12 Judy Gerstel, "*Singin' in the Rain* (1952)," in *The A List: The National Society of Film Critics' 100 Essential Films*, ed. Jay Carr (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 266.

13 Martin Roth, "Pulling the Plug on Lina Lamont: Women in Hollywood Musicals," *Jump Cut* 35 (1990): 59–65, https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC35folder/LinaLamont.html.

14 *Singin' in the Rain*.

15 Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 187.

16 Ibid., 188.

17 See Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000); Sheri Klein, *Art and Laughter* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

18 Roth, "Pulling the Plug."

19 Hess and Dabholkar, *The Making of an American Masterpiece*, 68.

20 Amy Lawrence, "Losing Her Voice: Silencing Two Daughters of Hollywood," *Style* 35, no. 2 (2001): 220.

21 Talkies were initially considered vulgar, a fact reflected in the film through the negative audience reactions to a screening of the new medium.

22 See Hess and Dabholkar, *The Making of an American Masterpiece*, 52–53.

23 Roth, "Pulling the Plug."

24 *Born Yesterday*.

25 Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 175–76.

26 *Born Yesterday*.

27 Rowe, *Unruly Woman*, 176.

28 *Singin' in the Rain*.

29 John Mariani, "Come on with the Rain," *Film Comment* 14, no. 3 (1978): 10; Alan Nadel, *Demographic Angst: Cultural Narratives and American Films of the 1950s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 42.

30 See James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 36.

31 James Card, "'More Than Meets the Eye' in *Singin' in the Rain* and *Day For Night*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1984): 88.

32 *Singin' in the Rain*.

33 Peter N. Chumo, II., "Dance, Flexibility, and the Renewal of Genre in *Singin' in the Rain*," *Cinema Journal* 36, no. 1 (1996): 40, DOI: 10.2307/1225594.

34 Nadel, *Demographic Angst*, 56.

35 Ibid., 47–48.

36 Mary Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 33, DOI: 10.2307/2930003.

37 Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4.

38 *Singin' in the Rain*.

39 Steven Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 215.

40 Ibid., 214.

41 Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 10.

42 Richard Barrios, quoted in Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 236.
43 Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 10.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 10, 5.
46 Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 46.
47 Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 20.
48 Doane, "Voice in the Cinema," 36.
49 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 45.
50 Doane, "Voice in the Cinema," 45.
51 Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus*, 14.
52 Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 47.
53 Patricia Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy," in *Explorations in Film Theory: Selected Essays from* Ciné Tracts, ed. Roon Burnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 5.
54 Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 242.
55 *Singin' in the Rain*.
56 Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator," 13.
57 Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 241.
58 Rowe, Unruly Women, 176–78.
59 Ibid., 174.
60 Nadel, *Demographic Angst*, 52.
61 Ibid.
62 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 164.
63 Nadel, *Demographic Angst*, 50.
64 Chion, *Voice in Cinema*, 164.
65 Gene Kelly, quoted in Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 203.
66 Baz Luhrmann, quoted in Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 207.
67 Hugh Fordin, quoted in Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 235.
68 Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment*, 235–36.
69 Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator," 12.
70 *Hail Caesar!*.
71 Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator," 9.

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Sonic Others in Early Sound Studies and the Poetry of Edward Sapir

A Salvage Operation

A. Elisabeth Reichel

Abstract

Characteristically, early research in soundscapes is suffused with a sense of sonophilia; that is, a fascination with auditory perception and sound as the inferiorized Other of sight. Soundscape scholars have thus often conceived of their work as a salvage operation, which is conducted to save what would otherwise be irretrievably lost to a visual regime. This moral impetus to redeem the "sonic Other" is at the center of this article, in which I investigate how notions of sonic alterity interweave with treatments of social and cultural alterity. To explore and interrogate the nexus of social, cultural, and sonic alterity for its political and ethical ramifications, I analyze the acoustics of the poetry of Edward Sapir. Sapir played a key role in the formation of cultural anthropology and the early development of linguistic anthropology. What is far less known is that he is also the author of over six hundred poems, some of which were published in such renowned magazines as *Poetry* and *The Dial*. Focusing on the poems "To a Street Violinist" and "Harvest," I probe the dynamics of an anthropo-literary project that sets out to salvage both non-visual sense perceptions and other-than-modern, Western ways of life.

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Sonic Others in Early Sound Studies and the Poetry of Edward Sapir

A Salvage Operation

A. Elisabeth Reichel

Before Franz Boas entered U.S.-American anthropology to become one of its key twentieth-century protagonists, he had written his habilitation thesis on Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic and conducted geographic research on indigenous migrations. It was in the mid-1880s that his research interests then shifted toward anthropological questions and in particular linguistic anthropology. When analyzing the notes from his first field trip to British Columbia, a three-month stay in 1886, he noticed significant variations in the spelling of individual words at different points in time: What at one point had been transcribed as "Operníving" appeared to sound more like "Upernívik" at another and like "Uperdnívik" at yet a third point in time.[1] Contrary to then commonly held views on "alternating sounds," the patterns that he recognized within these variations bore evidence of his own language's phonetics rather than that of the speech system under consideration. Faced with a serious challenge to the integrity of his data, Boas launched an intervention in contemporary debates whose wider implications would far exceed anthropological linguistics.

Boas's article "On Alternating Sounds," published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1889, posits that "a new sensation," such as hearing an unknown language, "is apperceived by means of similar sensations that form part of our knowledge," such as the sound of one's own language.[2] After careful and rigorous analysis, incorporating evidence from psychophysics, linguistic psychology, and comparative philology—including his own fieldnotes—Boas concludes:

> I maintain that there is no such phenomenon as . . . alternating sounds . . .; that alternating sounds are in reality alternating apperceptions of one and the same sound. A thorough study of all alleged alternating sounds . . . will show that their existence may be explained by alternating apperceptions.

Moreover, if alternating sounds are in fact the result of the observer's own "alternating apperceptions," they cannot be understood as "a sign of primitiveness of the speech in which they are said to occur."[3] Apart from a vexing methodological problem, Boas addressed in the process the prevailing sociocultural evolutionist interpretation, which read "alternating sounds" as inherent in the language under consideration and as "traces of the 'vague,' 'fluctuating,' and still tentative language of paleolithic man."[4] As Brian Hochman notes, "The more consistent the phonetics of a language, the logic went, the higher the stage of its evolutionary maturity—the more advanced its place in the historical continuum from orality to literacy, savagery to civilization."[5]

By revealing his contemporaries' diagnosis of alternating sounds in primitive languages to be the result of their own alternating perceptions and their contingency on one's cultural background and linguistic knowledge, Boas addressed the Euro- and ethnocentrism that remain unchallenged in scholarship at that time; this scholarship is most typically credited with a foundational role in the field of sound studies, that is, R. Murray Schafer's World Soundscape Project, established at Simon Fraser University in the late 1960s, and in particular his 1977 monograph *The Tuning of the World*, which grew out of this project. Crucially, Schafer's early, characteristically sonophilic work in sound and soundscape studies involves distinctions between modes of sense perception as well as groups of people.[6] It thus aligns people other than urban North Americans, on one level, with the sense of hearing per se and, on another, with sounds that are deemed pristine—only to ultimately assign them, on both these levels, to an earlier, premodern stage of human development. However, rather than offering a corrective and a reworking of its flawed premises, as other sound scholars have successfully done,[7] I use Schafer's original conceptualization of the soundscape to show that it is precisely its allochronism on which the poetic soundscapes of early-twentieth-century American anthropologist Edward Sapir are based, as well.

Sapir was among the first of Boas's many students who went on to become influential anthropologists themselves. He remained the only Boasian, however, who continued and developed his teacher's strong early interest in linguistics—manifest in such writings as "On Alternating Sounds"—while this interest became less pronounced in Boas's own, later research. Thus, besides his work within the cultural pluralist and relativist paradigm that formed Boas's principal contribution to American anthropology, Sapir is primarily known today for his accomplishments in linguistics, most famously, as a pioneer of linguistic relativity and the teacher of Benjamin Lee Whorf. What is rarely acknowledged, however, is the fact that Sapir also wrote over five hundred poems, many of which were published in renowned magazines of the time, such as *Poetry*, *The Dial*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*. The other half, Sapir's unpublished poetry, remained in family possession until 2008 and are now held by the American Philosophical Society, which did not catalogue and fully process the

Edward Sapir Papers until 2018.

It is this largely unexamined corpus of published and unpublished poetry written by one of the foremost twentieth-century American anthropologists that I would like to explore in the second part of this essay. More specifically, I probe the dynamics of a project that sets out to salvage both non-visual sense perceptions and ways of life that are not considered modern. Schafer's school of acoustic ecology as well as Sapir's literary acoustics are envisaged as an operation to salvage what would otherwise be lost to a predominantly ocular and cacophonous, modern sensescape.[8] Moving from the urban soundscape of the poem "To a Street Violinist" (1917) to the rural sounds and silences of the poem "The Harvest" (1920), I argue that Sapir's poetry carries Schafer's anti-modern nostalgia for prelapsarian ways of sensing, projected onto people other than urban North Americans, to its logical conclusion—that is, a salvage operation that ends in silence.

In *The Tuning of the World*, R. Murray Schafer unfolds an argument that involves two sensory oppositions, the poles of each dispersed on a linearly progressing timeline: on the one hand, he reiterates the orality/literacy divide, a staple of debates that took place in both anthropology and communication theory in the second half of the twentieth century. Schafer posits that "in the West the ear gave way to the eye as the most important gatherer of information about the time of the Renaissance, with the development of the printing press and perspective painting."[9] Hearing, in this narrative, is placed within an earlier, premodern time, which is regrettably lost. As Marshall McLuhan, the most notorious popularizer of orality-literacy theory, claimed in a *Playboy* interview, "Literacy propelled man from the tribe, gave him an eye for an ear and replaced his integral in-depth communal interplay with visual linear values and fragmented consciousness."[10]

On the other hand, Schafer opens up a distinction between good and bad sounds, between sounds that "truly matter" and those that divert from them. Noting that "there are no earlids," Schafer contends that "of its own nature then, the ear demands that insouciant and distracting sounds would be stopped in order that it may concentrate on those which truly matter."[11] Again, the side with a positive value of a zero-sum equation is situated in the past, as a line of progression—or rather, regression—is drawn:

> The soundscape of the world is changing. Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known. These new sounds, which differ in quality and intensity from those of the past, have alerted many researchers to the dangers of an indiscriminate and imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man's life.... It would seem that the world soundscape has reached an apex of vulgarity in our time.[12]

Schafer's work is suffused with a sense of nostalgia that conjures up a prelapsarian past to criticize the present sensory regime and its acoustic practices in order to correct what he perceives as a neglect of the acoustic in general and of sounds "that matter" in particular. Accordingly, Schafer devises a twofold salvage operation: it sets out to redeem our sense of hearing from ocularcentrism as well as save the last remaining pristine sounds before they fall prey to modern cacophony and "vulgarity."[13]

What is more, both these dimensions of Schafer's acoustic salvage work become imbricated with class and racial hierarchies, as temporal lines of progression are projected onto space. As with McLuhan in some of his most racially tinged moments,[14] Schafer maps the evolution from orality to literacy, and the consequent shift from hearing to seeing that he posits, onto spatial distinctions in the present: "Before the days of writing, in the days of prophets and epics," he asserts, "the sense of hearing was more vital than the sense of sight. The word of God, the history of the tribe and all other important information was heard, not seen." Yet "in parts of the world," he adds, "the aural sense still tends to predominate."[15] He goes on to quote psychiatrist John Colin Carothers on his claim that "rural Africans live largely in a world of sound—a world loaded with direct personal significance for the hearer—whereas the western European lives much more in a visual world which is on the whole indifferent to him.... Whereas for Europeans, in general, 'seeing is believing,' for rural Africans reality seems to reside far more in what is heard and what is said."[16] By thus mapping evolutionary notions of the senses onto geographical space and associating "the western European" with sight and "rural Africa" with hearing in the process, Schafer places coexisting social and racial groups of people in different but sequentially related times: Africans come to live in the days "before ... writing, ... the days of prophets and epics," while Europeans live in contemporary, modern times.[17] This form of disenfranchisement is well known to anthropologists as "allochronism," a term coined by Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (1983). In this landmark contribution to anthropology's *Writing Culture* debate and 1980s' crisis of representation, Fabian identifies an allochronistic treatment of its subjects of investigation, which denies their coevalness by placing them in the past as a core feature of the history of anthropology and one of the discipline's defining characteristics.[18] It should have become clear by now, though, that what Fabian describes as an important strategy historically used by ethnographers to assert their power over people classified as "savage," "barbarian," and "primitive" is not limited to the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology. Early soundscape theory, too, denies the coevalness of certain groups of people by placing them in an earlier, presumably more acoustic time.

Schafer's temporally inflected binarism between good and bad sounds is also pro-

jected onto spatial differences, thereby reinforcing familiar lines of class and racial discrimination. Sounds that are good and worthy of being salvaged frequently pertain to what Schafer terms a "hi-fi" soundscape, that is, a "portion of the sonic environment" that "possess[es] a favorable signal-to-noise ratio," and since "the country is generally more hi-fi than the city; night more than day; ancient times more than modern," countrypeople are moved metonymically into "darker," ancient, premodern times.[19] Apart from local and regional differences, Schafer asserts a broad historical transition from a rural, hi-fi to an urban, "lo-fi" world soundscape. However, to this universal shift, as to the presumed universal shift from hearing to seeing, he again adds some noteworthy present-day exceptions:

> There are many towns still, the world over, where life moves uneventfully, almost by stealth. Poor towns are quieter than prosperous towns. I have visited towns in Burgenland (Austria) where the only sound at midday is the flapping of storks in their chimney nests, or dusty towns in Iran where the only motion is the occasional swaying walk of a woman carrying water while the children sit mutely in the streets. Peasants and tribesmen the world over participate in a vast sharing of silence.[20]

Hi-fi soundscapes, the remnants of a quieter, more idyllic time in this jeremiad, are thus inhabited today by "peasants and tribesmen" in the "poor towns" of Burgenland, Iran, and "the world over." In Schafer's early conception of soundscape studies, whose declared goal is to enhance the world soundscape by salvaging our sense of hearing and select sounds, people other than urban, middle-class North Americans thus serve as foils onto which acoustic desires are projected. Given that what is desired lies in the past, these groups of people are not only construed as essentially different in this way but also placed in an earlier, bygone stage of human development, a stage outside the purview of Schafer's own, modern salvage operation.

To be sure, the field of sound studies has come a long way since the first publication of Schafer's *The Tuning of the World*, with its current practitioners being often acutely aware of the intricate entanglements of ideas about soundscapes with class and racial ideologies. Historians of sound and hearing, in particular, have carefully delineated ideological constructions of sonic alterity in specific contexts and discursive fields. Mark M. Smith's *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (2001), for instance, has shown the reciprocal construction of a "sonic other" on the two opposing sectional sides of antebellum America: While the South conjured up a northern soundscape that resounded with the noises of excessive capitalism, industrialism, and urbanism, the North evoked a southern soundscape that echoed with the fearful silence of a tyrannical system based on slavery.[21] Most recently, and with a focus on discourses in early-twentieth-century Britain, James G. Mansell's *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (2017) has examined claims to modern selfhood

and expert authority that instrumentalize notions of noise to carve out a powerful social position. Introducing this project to his readers, Mansell notes that the earliest sound studies theory from the 1970s at times reproduces the patterns that he observes in British auditory culture between 1914 and 1945.[22] He thus comes to suggest—tentatively and in conjunctive mood—what the first part of the present article has asserted with some certainty, namely that Schafer's approach "impl[ies] the categorization of sound as ideally premodern." Further, the persistent story of modernity's staunch ocularcentrism and its concomitant "nostalgia for a lost world of . . . freedom from the insidious creep of scopic control" also comes with a strong tendency to construe hearing in itself "as un- or premodern," belonging to an earlier, past stage of human development.[23]

Having thus reinforced previous criticism of early sound and soundscape studies for their allochronist tendencies, my interest in the remaining portion of this essay lies with the literary imagination and acoustics of the Boasian cultural anthropologist Edward Sapir. While regularly recognized as one of the most influential anthropologists and linguists of the twentieth century, a critical assessment of Sapir the poet remains a research desideratum. "One thing we need about Sapir is a reappraisal of his verse," proclaims Alfred L. Kroeber, Boas's first doctoral student and first professor of anthropology at Berkeley.[24] And Ruth Benedict, who also published poems in modernist little magazines while working under Boas at Columbia, admonishes, too, that "an appreciation of Edward Sapir is incomplete without mention of him as a poet."[25] Despite such forceful advocates, analysis of Sapir's poetry remains to date mostly limited to biographical and intentionalist readings which reduce the texts to an outlet of personal expression and a conduit for private thoughts. Richard Handler has written a series of articles that position the poems, as well as Sapir's critical writing on music and literature, in relation to the author's anthropological work and in the context of early twentieth-century art movements.[26] Yet while Handler argues for an understanding of Sapir's poetry as more than an anthropologist's "diversion," he nonetheless continues to subordinate Sapir's literary writing to his anthropological work.[27] Handler's relegation of Sapir's poetry from "a body of material to be scrutinized on its own terms" to an "index" to Sapir's anthropology has been found by Brian Carpenter to be the long-standing approach among Sapir scholars.[28]

My present effort to fill this research lacuna proceeds from the observation that Sapir's poetry is characterized by a sustained interest in different soundscapes and the people who inhabit them. The poem "To a Street Violinist" (1917), for instance, portrays a street musician that is drowned out by the "hubbub" of an urban soundscape:

To a Street Violinist

I've often seen you bow your fiddle--
I've never heard more than a jangling scrape;
The hubbub always hid your tune.
Your clothes are torn,
You are bent,
You seem intent
On your fiddling,
And your face is neither sad nor gay.
I wonder--are you blind?
No one listens--
You do not seem to mind.
No one stops to drop a cent
Into your cup--
You do not seem to mind.

I cannot hear your music,
And your fiddling is the saddest
I have seen.[29]

As in Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* six decades later, "To a Street Violinist" puts forward a critique of modern urban cacophony that enlists other people to serve as foils onto which auditory desires are grafted. The intimacy between the speaker and his subject of interest suggested by second-person address and direct questioning is merely imagined and otherwise frustrated by a spatial distance *to* the street violinist (note the title's more distant address). In this imagined encounter, the other appears "bent" and "seem[s] intent" on working hard to make a living while receiving no recognition whatsoever: "No one listens," "no one stops," and no one drops so much as a cent. However, the repetition of the devastating "No one" is countered in equal measure by the reiteration of "You do not seem to mind," which is attached to and demarcated by a dash from the lack of appreciation that it outweighs. We thus witness how the persona, when confronted with the "hubbub" of a modern urban soundscape, conjures up a sonic other that—much like Simmel's blasé metropolitan subject[30]—has learned to stay resolutely detached from and unaffected by the oppressive environment.

In the poem's final tercet, then, the persona amplifies the opposition between good and bad sounds, a violin playing versus metropolitan "hubbub," the second sensory dichotomy that is central to Schafer, namely, hearing versus seeing. Unable to "hear [the street violinist's] music" from a distance through the city's din, the persona is limited to sight and declares the musician's fiddling to be "the saddest / [he]

ha[s] seen." Interestingly, the modern primacy of sight that Schafer assumes is thus presented, not as its source, but as a necessary result of an excess of bad, "insouciant and distracting" sounds.[31] This logic—that a profusion of bad sounds must entail a preference for sight—also explains the persona's bewilderment at the fiddler's disregard for the highly visible indifference of the passersby: "I wonder--are you blind?" Given the excessive noise to which they both are subjected, the persona fails to understand why the violinist does not use sight for orientation just as he does, save that the musician is blind.

In contrast to "To a Street Violinist" and its urban, "lo-fi" soundscape, the poem "The Harvest" (1920) stages an encounter which prominently features the voice of a farmer in what Schafer would classify as a "hi-fi" soundscape:

> The Harvest
>
> Pipe-smoke is floating over his slow speech.
> I love this grizzled farmer's gentle voice;
> It hints to me, "I have known to walk and rejoice
> In the corn, in the hay, where the sun and the sharp rain teach
> By turns; and twelve moons and the weathers, O each
> Has fingered my patient heart, like little boys
> That fondle and batter their silent, submissive toys."
> I love this voice and the pauses of broad reach
> That space his words out like a peaceful village,
> House-dotted on a prairie of full-ripe tillage,
> And smoke-trails weave with the wind along to a bluer
> Height.... We are sitting bent over embers; now fewer,
> Lower, come words.... There comes a snow-wind pillage
> And the black earth is dead, but the harvest sure.[32]

Despite the prominence of the farmer's voice in this poem, the interlocutor serves again as a foil onto which the persona grafts his auditory desires, creating in the process a subject worthy of being salvaged from the vulgarity of the modern world's soundscape that both Schafer's *Tuning of the World* and Sapir's poetry diagnose. Yet even more, I argue, "The Harvest" is also a manifestation of the act of silencing that this operation implies by necessity. For one, while the "slow speech" of the farmer is quoted at great length, taking up five of the poem's fourteen lines, the persona does not engage with the words on a semantic level. The farmer's account of the harsh weather conditions that "fondle and batter" him like a "silent, submissive toy[]" is taken as a mere "hint[]" and reduced to a series of "gentle" sounds, which the persona proclaims to "love" twice in the two lines that bracket the account. The long vowels of "slow speech" help to evoke the soothing nature of this sound. However, just as much as the farmer's voice, the speaker loves "the pauses of broad reach,"

and it is these long silences that dominate the second half of the poem. As the voice slowly fades out, the fact that "fewer, / Lower, come words" is imitated—again by the use of onomatopoeia—through a paratactic syntax interspersed with ellipses. Thus, the poem's words, too, are "space[d]" out "like a peaceful village," creating an aesthetic experience for the reader of the soundscape described. Finally, the farmer's voice falls silent together with that of the persona as "a snow-wind pillage" leaves "the black earth . . . dead, but the harvest sure."

The largely silent exchange that the poem thus portrays manifests a desire for a premodern, hi-fi soundscape that is not merely projected onto a locale but also onto its inhabitants, thereby rendering the "grizzled farmer" a pleasantly silent relic to be salvaged in written text. The farmer is silenced in at least three ways: first, by being used as a foil onto which the persona projects his own desires.[33] Second, since the desire that the persona projects onto him is a desire for tranquility, silence is also the logical conclusion to which Sapir's—but also Schafer's—salvage operation must ultimately lead. In fact, the paradox of a project that has to "black out" the very people that it wants to save in order to be successful is captured in the final image of "The Harvest," the "snow-wind pillage" that renders the field "black" and "dead" "but the harvest sure." David Hendy has also recently expressed concern about Schafer's story "edging into slightly misanthropic territory, as if the world would be better if only the people in it disappeared."[34] However, what has been important for me here, too, is the distinction between different groups of people that this story involves, and which makes some people recede into the past while others—the moderns—are burdened with the task of preserving them.

The point on which I would like to conclude, though, is a different one. The salvage operation called for by both Sapir's poetry and Schafer's soundscape studies must necessarily end in silencing the sonic others that they set out to save, but not solely by projecting a desire for a soundscape that is largely silent onto them. Crucially, only by being perceived as endangered and on the brink of extinction do they first become a subject of interest to be salvaged from the ocularcentrism and cacophony of modernity. Their redemption, in other words, requires the moral impetus that the prospect of their loss generates. By presenting positive sounds and a sensitivity to the acoustic as vanishing remnants of an earlier time, then associating them with racial and class difference in the present, Schafer produces groups of people and sounds whose value is dependent on their imminent extinction. Similarly, the street musician in Sapir's "To a Street Violinist" becomes a subject worthy of being salvaged as he is drowned out by an urban cacophony and ignored by everyone except the speaker. In "The Harvest," in turn, the presence of the farmer is predicated on a "love" for the slowness and gentleness of the old, "grizzled" man's voice, a voice which is on the verge of falling silent and indeed dead by the end of the poem.

It is one of the central ironies of both Sapir's and Schafer's antimodern salvage projects that they mourn the death of prelapsarian quietude at the same time as they take advantage of modernity's disruptive technologies, for instance, when travelling to remote locations to record otherwise inaccessible and yet "untouched" sounds. While these texts thus engage in a circular reasoning which contributes to the vanishing of its subject of interest only to rescue it from its deplorable fate with modern tools, they advance an understanding of the value of certain soundscapes and their inhabitants that is tied to a position of primordiality. Boas's "On Alternating Sounds," to return to the text with which I opened this article, forms an early critique of such arrangements of coexisting sounds and people on an evolutionary ladder from primitive past to modern present. While Sapir's poetry thus falls squarely within Schafer's cultural evolutionist conception of the world soundscape, as my analysis has shown, his anthropology and linguistics is much more closely aligned with Boas's position and, indeed, premised from the start on "On Alternating Sounds." A student of Germanic linguistics at Columbia University, Sapir submitted his master's thesis on Johann Gottfried Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) in 1905.[35] While some scholars have claimed that Sapir did not encounter Boas's work and enter anthropology until after receiving his master's degree, thus "perpetuat[ing a] mythical post-M.A. conversion experience,"[36] the impact of Boas's "On Alternating Sounds" on Sapir's thesis cannot be denied. Sapir is quick to dismiss Herder's claim of a penchant for fluctuations in primitive languages through reference to "untrustworthy reports" and the example of the language of "the Eskimos," the very language family that prompted Boas to write "On Alternating Sounds":

> The oft-asserted and oft-repeated statement of the incredibly rapid change of the languages of primitive tribes is founded chiefly on the untrustworthy reports of linguistically inefficient missionaries; many of the extreme statements formerly and even yet current are absurdly untrue. Indeed, the most startling cases of linguistic conservatism are found among certain primitive peoples, such as the Eskimos.[37]

In the same vein, Sapir also discards the other allochronisms that are implicated in Herder's theory of the origin of language: Herder's "enthusiastic speculation . . . on the singing-speech of primitive man," in other words, his claim of an originally musical character of speech which may be found today in "the accents of many savage idioms" is discarded as "the wildest and most improbable fancy"; Herder's notion that the sense of hearing precedes language and reason is further taken to be, "at least questionable"; and, finally, his conceit that "the oriental often prefers to have recourse to the sense of hearing" fails to be convincing, too.[38] Thus, a marked difference emerges between the approach that Sapir applies to the cross-cultural study of sound as a Boasian linguist and anthropologist, on the one hand, and the literary

acoustics of his own writing as a poet on the other. While the former deconstructs the cultural evolutionist speculations of Europeans and North Americans caught up in a rapid process of industrialization and urbanization, his poetry is also rife with the nostalgia for quieter times that inspires these sonic imaginations. Sapir's literary soundscapes thus extend into the twentieth century the cultural evolutionism that had been characteristic of Boas's adversaries in the "alternating sounds" debate, and which will continue to inform Schafer's 1970s school of soundscape studies.

Notes

1 Franz Boas, "On Alternating Sounds," *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 1 (1889): 51, DOI: 10.1525/aa.1889.2.1.02a00040.

2 Ibid., 50.

3 Ibid., 52.

4 George W. Stocking, Jr., "From Physics to Ethnology," in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 157–59.

5 Brian Hochman, *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 88–89.

6 Sonophilia is the fascination with hearing as the Other to the mode of sense perception that is presumed dominant, as, for instance, sight in twentieth-century orality-literacy theory. On sonophilia in the work of Sapir, see A. Elisabeth Reichel, "Sonophilia / Sonophobia: Sonic Others in the Poetry of Edward Sapir," in *Literature, Ethics, Morality: American Studies Perspectives*, ed. Ridvan Askin and Philipp Schweighauser (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2015), 215–29.

7 See, for example, Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Philipp Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature, 1890–1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

8 I borrow the term "literary acoustics" from Philipp Schweighauser. See Schweighauser, *Noises of American Literature*; Philipp Schweighauser, "Literary Acoustics," in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature—Image—Sound—Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 475–93.

9 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 10.

10 Marshall McLuhan, "Playboy Interview: A Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media," interview by Eric Norden, in *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 240.

11 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 11–12.

12 Ibid., 3. While focusing on *The Tuning of the World* in the present essay, I would like to point to Schafer's pamphlet *The Book of Noise* (1968), which puts this story of decline into even more dramatic words—indeed, nothing short of a battle cry: "There are some who still think the significant battles are being fought in faraway places. But today the significant battles are being fought in the very hearts of our cities. In an attempt to improve or even maintain the quality of our environment it will be necessary to take a strong stand against the problems brought about by the careless use of our technology, because the sounds of our tools and technology are the loudest sounds in our environment. And they are multiplying. The modern city has become a sonic battleground. Humanity is losing." R. Murray Schafer, *The Book of Noise* (Indian River, ON: Arcana Editions, 1998), 3.

13 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 12, 3.

14 See Jonathan Sterne, "The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 2 (2011): 219–20, DOI: 10.22230/cjc.2011v36n2a2223.

15 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 11.

16 John Colin Carothers, quoted in Schafer, *Soundscape*, 11.

17 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 11.

18 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

19 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 274, 43 (also 272), 43.

20 Ibid., 52.

21 Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

22 James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

23 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 10.

24 Alfred Louis Kroeber, "Reflections on Edward Sapir, Scholar and Man," in *Edward Sapir: Critical Assessments of Leading Linguists*, vol. 1, ed. E. F. K. Koerner (London: Routledge, 2007), 171.

25 Ruth Benedict, "Edward Sapir," in *Edward Sapir: Critical Assessments of Leading Linguists*, vol. 1, ed. E. F. K. Koerner (London: Routledge, 2007), 45.

26 Richard Handler, *Critics against Culture: Anthropological Observers of Mass Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 73–122; Richard Handler, "Sapir's Poetic Experience," *American Anthropologist* 86, no. 2 (1984): 416–17, DOI: 10.1525/aa.1984.86.2.02a00240; Richard Handler, "The Dainty and the Hungry Man: Literature and Anthropology in the Work of Edward Sapir," in *Edward Sapir: Critical Assessments of Leading Linguists*, vol. 3, ed. E. F. K. Koerner (London: Routledge, 2007), 289–311.

27 Richard Handler, "Introduction to Sections Four and Five: Edward Sapir's Aesthetic and Cultural Criticism," in *Culture*, ed. Regna Darnell, Richard Handler, and Judith T. Irvine (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 731.

28 Brian Carpenter, "'An Inner Striving': An Overview of Edward Sapir's Poetry Papers," *Paideuma* 41 (2014): 202.

29 Edward Sapir, "To a Street Violinist," August 7, 1917, TS, Edward Sapir Papers, American

Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

30 Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (London: Routledge, 2013), 26–27.

31 Schafer, *Soundscape*, 12.

32 Edward Sapir, "The Harvest," *The Nation* (June 19, 1920), 825.

33 One could even go as far as to suggest that the phrase "It hints to me," by which the voice of the farmer is prefaced, indicates that what follows only exists in the imagination of the speaker. Several of my students have suggested such a reading. In the present essay, I take the passage set off by double quotation marks to comprise direct, quoted speech.

34 David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books, 2013), xii.

35 Edward Sapir, "Herder's 'Ursprung der Sprache,'" *Modern Philology* 5, no. 1 (1907): 109–42.

36 Stephen O. Murray and Wayne Dynes, "Edward Sapir's Coursework in Linguistics and Anthropology," in *Edward Sapir: Critical Assessments of Leading Linguists*, vol. 1, ed. E. F. K. Koerner (London: Routledge, 2007), 109, no. 1.

37 Sapir, "Herder's 'Ursprung der Sprache,'" 134.

38 Ibid., 124–27.

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The Motion and the Noise

Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape

Matthew D. Sutton

Abstract

William Faulkner's dislike of unwanted sound is well documented. The acoustic environment of rural Mississippi amplified irreversibly after the introduction of the automobile, airplane, and automated farm machinery. In his *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), the jukebox and radio absorb pointed criticism for producing "canned" sounds outside of their "proper" environment. The narrowing gap between town square and dance hall signifies encroaching chaos, as noise drowns out the attenuated "harmony" that keeps elite whites in power and *Intruder*'s African American protagonist Lucas Beauchamp out of the hands of the lynch mob. For Faulkner, the shift in the auditory environment presents both a disruption and an impediment to a system built on white bourgeois ideals. However, Faulkner's pessimism is counterpointed by sociological studies undertaken by Fisk University researchers. The Fisk study identifies the emergence of a blues culture in the Delta whose energy and boundary-crossing impulses illustrate the liberating possibilities of an expanding soundscape. By juxtaposing Faulkner's damning descriptions of "the motion and the noise" with the Fisk University researchers' illuminating fieldwork, this essay interprets a transformative period in the constantly shifting soundscape of the U. S. South. In line with Jacques Attali's dictum that "our music foretells our future," *Intruder in the Dust* anticipates the cultural upheaval that would energize the Civil Rights Movement. Both in fiction and in fact, the "noise" emanating from jukeboxes and radios in 1940s Mississippi accelerated social change at a volume much higher and a tempo much faster than Faulkner and other gradualists desired.

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The Motion and the Noise

Yoknapatawpha's Shifting Soundscape

Matthew D. Sutton

After a long period of neglect, the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* in 1946 elevated Southern author William Faulkner's fiction back into prominence. In the years following his critical and popular rediscovery, the author's predilections and idiosyncrasies became public knowledge. One of his more intriguing eccentricities concerned his obsession with silence and aversion to the manmade sounds he deemed to be "noise." Throughout the 1930s and the 1940s, he steadfastly refused to allow a radio, phonograph, or television into his home and private sanctum for writing in Oxford, Mississippi, Rowan Oak.[1] During the same period, he regularly declined to attend concerts and musical performances.[2] Allegedly, his wife Estelle purchased a radio while he was away laboring as a script doctor in Hollywood, only to have him remove the machine from the house upon his return.[3] The owner of a restaurant in Oxford agreed to place an "Out of Order" sign on his jukebox when the author was dining.[4] By 1958, Faulkner complained to his agent Harold Ober that, in contrast to his adopted second home in Virginia, there was not a place within a fifty-mile radius of Oxford where he could enjoy a meal out of the earshot of a jukebox. According to a close friend, Faulkner bristled at the new invention of television, objecting to its supposed "squawking."[6] In sum, the author's irritability with nearly all popular entertainment marked him, in Alan Lomax's words, as "provincial."[7]

What are we to make, then, of the contradictory evidence that shows, in other places and situations, that Faulkner derived pleasure from popular music? For example, we have firsthand accounts of a young Faulkner and his friends enjoying the polished dance music of W. C. Handy's orchestra at numerous mixers at the University of Mississippi.[8] That exposure to Handy's music likely served as the impetus for Faulkner later appropriating a line from the composer's "St. Louis Blues" for the title of his short story "That Evening Sun" (1931). We have accounts of Faulkner barhopping in "Roaring Twenties" Harlem with literati Carl Van Vechten and Bennett Cerf, again indulging in the strains of "St. Louis Blues."[9] Closer to home, he checked in at Oxford country dances and "juke joints" around the Delta town of Clarksdale, Mississippi, in his twenties.[10] It is well established that, before he banished recorded music

from Rowan Oak, Faulkner set up a portable phonograph alongside his writing desk that incessantly played George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" to "set the rhythm and jazzy tone" of his 1931 novel *Sanctuary*.[11] In his fiction, Faulkner could be extraordinarily attuned to sound. In *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Darl Bundren senses the "little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling" still present in his mother's corpse.[12] If Faulkner the artist could intuit the sounds inside dead bodies or explore the subtleties of pastoral silence in hunting stories like "The Bear" (1942), why did Faulkner the private citizen misapprehend the novel sounds of the mid-twentieth-century bursting from the radio, phonograph, and jukebox? Intentionally or not, Faulkner captures the democratization of midcentury culture through his condemnations of sounds that are "out of place" in spaces dominated by Jim Crow. In line with Jacques Attali's dictum that "our music foretells our future,"[13] Faulkner's novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) anticipates the cultural upheaval that would energize the Civil Rights Movement. Both in fiction and in fact, the "noise" emanating from jukeboxes and radios in 1940s Mississippi accelerated social change at a tempo much faster than Faulkner and other gradualists desired.

Simply stated, over the course of his lifetime, William Faulkner's world grew louder. The baseline acoustic environment of northern Mississippi became more industrial and more mechanized, while manmade sounds became closer in proximity. The distinguishing sounds of Faulkner's community reflected this accelerating change. An increasingly mobile population took advantage of more powerful, thunderous railroads and automobiles as well as airplanes that approached the speed of sound.[14] By the 1940s, tractors, flame weeders, and cropdusting planes had become the new characteristic sounds of the southern plantation.[15] The establishment of lumber camps and textile mills in the region disturbed what seemed to be the natural soundscape and the pastoral sense of peace and quiet.[16] Both the plantation and lumber camp were common sites for juke joints, where raucous music, both live and recorded, provided African American laborers both a safety valve for their frustrations and an expressive culture in which they could participate.

Simultaneously, the hybridized forms of popular music and the sound technology introduced while Faulkner was a young man were evolving. Both reflected, as Thadious Davis has pointed out, "postwar [WWI] changes and disruptions in manners, morals and conventions."[17] On record and on the air, contemporary music blending European American and African American styles paid little heed to the prevailing customs of race-based law. Throughout the 1920s, black music made significant inroads in the white-dominated South, especially mediated through the phonograph and the jukebox.[18] Partly owing to the fact that African American music was absent from the airwaves in the 1920s, black tenant farmers' modest homes often boasted costly phonographs bought on credit. Before the Depression virtually decimated the record-

ing industry, estimates of annual record sales among African Americans during the decade reached as high as ten million. Records became a social glue, transported to neighbors' homes, barbecues, and house parties.[19] By 1940, 86% of U.S. homes had radios and listened to programming an average of four to five hours a day.[20] Electric current was not necessary for many rural listeners, who bought radios powered by large batteries and inexpensive phonographs that ran on spring-motor mechanisms.[21] After World War II, sound became cheaper, louder, and mass-produced on an even greater scale. The first television sets went on sale in 1946; transistors, tape recorders, and high-fidelity stereophonic systems quickly followed.[22]

But perhaps no invention recast the acoustic character of towns like Oxford more symbolically than the jukebox. Jukeboxes became a minor but telling obsession with Faulkner in the 1940s. "After the repeal of Prohibition," historian David Stowe writes, "the five-cent jukeboxes placed in bars, cafes, diners, and roadside dance establishments rivaled movies as a source of public entertainment for those with lower incomes."[23] The general public perceived the jukebox less as an exalted modern invention and more as a populist medium and a purveyor of what were then called "race" records. Though overall record sales plummeted in the midst of the Depression, between 1934 and 1940, the number of jukeboxes in the U.S. increased tenfold, from approximately 25,000 in 1934 to about 300,000 by 1940.[24] That number rose to 400,000 by 1942.[25]

Aside from their ubiquity, jukeboxes were unique in that they largely bypassed the established gatekeepers of culture. The telephone, phonograph, and radio were initially designed for oral communication but adapted for personal or musical uses unforeseen by their inventors.[26] By contrast, jukeboxes had one purpose: to play music for the masses, loudly and brazenly. Early phonographs were sold to middle-class families through assurances that "quality" music would enhance the order and peace of the domestic sphere. The jukebox had no such association with gentility. Beginning in the late 1930s, the Wurlitzer Company of Chicago refused to sell outright their jukeboxes to establishments, instead distributing them on a lease basis and urging operators to stock them with popular records.[27] Unlike the radio, jukebox selections were not bound to a standardized playlist, allowing the public to vote with their nickels and choose from a mix of music: old and new, rural and urban, black and white. To be sure, these jukebox operators were not social engineers; they merely followed the money and met the public's changing tastes. Yet, because jukeboxes were programmed by outsiders, the rigid lines dividing North from South and white from black became more permeable.

This "breakdown" of the established order was a long time in the making. As Mark M. Smith explains, generations of white southerners had associated African Amer-

icans and lower-class whites with excessive sound and aural "clutter."[28] These stereotypes died hard. In *The Mind of the South* (1941), W. J. Cash belittled mill workers who spent their meager wages on radios. Cash painted a hellish portrait of the juke joints increasingly found on the sites of Mississippi Delta plantations. In overheated prose, Cash described the sounds emanating from the juke joint as bedlam, marked by the "jungle beat of drums; the wild chanting gibberish of nameless congregations packed in unlighted halls; the rhythmic swell of jazz and stomping feet . . . high, floating laughter; sudden screams, rising swiftly from the void and falling abruptly back into it again."[29] For all its overtones of white paranoia, Cash captured a sense that the jukebox was amplifying and accelerating African Americans' dissatisfaction with the plantation complex.[30] He thus depicted the "schizophonic" disassociation between sound in its original form and its reproduction in a different time and place,[31] a troubling development for defenders of racial segregation in the South.

Sociological studies undertaken by Fisk University researchers beginning in 1941 counterpoint Cash's pessimism. John Work and his team found nine juke joints in Clarksdale, Mississippi, alone, serving a population of only 12,000.[32] Another survey reported that Greenville, Mississippi, boasted the fourth-highest concentration of jukeboxes in the nation. Though intended to find evidence of an enduring African American folk culture, the Fisk study identified the emergence of a progressive-minded blues culture in the Delta whose energy and boundary-crossing impulses conflicted with Faulkner's desire for stasis. This change in the soundscape also represented a type of economic protest, as listeners paid to hear music with cash money, not scrip constantly recirculating through the closed system of the plantation/commissary economy. Based on his fieldwork, Work's associate Samuel Adams wrote, "Specifically the Victrola, the radio, the juke box, the dance halls, the movies and the changes in technology make it possible for plantation Negroes to have a greater access to broader worlds of experience than ever before and this change reflects itself in their present-day expressive life."[33] Surveying the jukebox selections in African American establishments in Coahoma County, researcher Lewis Jones found not only a remarkable mixture of popular crooners (like Bing Crosby), big bands, and blues singers but also several numbers that appear now as a commentary on the Great Migration that drew millions of black southerners north and west between World War I and World War II, such as Count Basie's "Going to Chicago" and Jazz Gillum's "Key to the Highway."[34] Through close observations and closer listening, the Fisk researchers brought to light the jukebox's role as a repository of affect for the generation who would reject the quiescence Faulkner embodied in many of his older African American characters, such as Dilsey in *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) and Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*. While later Faulkner novels like *Intruder in the Dust* crusade for the virtue of silence in maintaining social order, especially in

regard to race, the Fisk study illustrates the liberating possibilities of an expanding soundscape.

In depicting this brave new "louder" world in Oxford's imagined analogue, Jefferson, in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, Faulkner seemed to cling to an equivocation: sound was acceptable so long as it either originated in nature or was bound to dedicated space, for example the strains of African American choirs emanating from rural churches at the conclusions of *Soldier's Pay* (1926) and *The Sound and the Fury*. Just as noise and sound have traditionally been divided into a dialectic, based on "usefulness," any sound overheard beyond these boundaries in Yoknapatawpha registers as noise, particularly sounds breaking out of segregated space.[35]

One of the first forecasts of this change in the soundscape comes in *Sanctuary*, as Horace Benbow, an heir of the old Southern order, encounters Jefferson's town square on a Saturday in May. Drowning out the typical sounds of county-seat commerce, "competitive radios and phonographs in the doors of drug- and music stores" resound. The music radiates from "imitation wood cabinets" and mass-produced "pebble-grain horn-mouths" of Victrolas.[36] Fittingly, these contraptions blare out mechanical and soulless music, made up of "disembodied voices." The artificiality and novelty of this "noise" hypnotize the small farmers and sharecroppers of Yoknapatawpha County who have come into town ostensibly to trade. In Erich Nunn's reading of cross-racial musical interchange in *Sanctuary*, he underscores the Otherness of mass-produced popular music in this context, as it assumes the status once held by orally transmitted ballads and folk culture.[37] A similar disorientation occurs when Temple Drake (a college student raped and kidnapped by a gangster) hears a player piano's tinny, unnatural music in a daze at Miss Reba's Memphis brothel.[38] By likening the uncanny new soundscape of Jefferson's town square to an urban house of ill repute, Faulkner marks the change in the keynote sounds of the square, suggesting its immorality. In both the small-town marketplace and the city's vice district, the clamorous music is not simply foreign and "canned" but as mechanized, impersonal and incessant as any dynamo or industrial machine.

A reader can find dozens of examples of sonic bedlam in Faulkner's late work. The increasing exposure of jazz-influenced popular music in the public sphere, combined with his growing obsessions with privacy and anti-modernity, had affected Faulkner's outlook by the mid-1930s, when, as Tim A. Ryan concludes, "he developed an outspoken antipathy toward music of any kind."[39] As the author's niece Dean Faulkner Wells documents, Oxford's central square remained a uniform acoustic space for generations, made up of the reliable sounds of the clock tower, the idle chatter of the local gentry, and the occasional rumble of a cotton gin.[40] As a young man, Faulkner spent hours absorbing these sights and sounds; friends and acquaintances recall

young Faulkner as peculiarly withdrawn and quiet, especially in public situations.[41] As an author, Faulkner relied on this predictable, relatively quiet auditory environment to draw out raw material for his fiction. As he explained in a letter to editor Malcolm Cowley, "I listen to the voices, and when I put down what the voices say, it's right. Sometimes I don't like what they say, but I don't change it."[42] Faulkner found it essential to recognize and tune into the square's unique soundscape. The "noise" of the modernizing plain folk and the radios and phonographs they desired presented something of an occupational hazard to Faulkner because they drowned out the mimetic sounds and dialogue he translated and transported from Oxford to Jefferson.

The writer's location of this struggle over sound at the town center was probably deliberate, as Oxford's town square underwent major renovations in the spring of 1947 while he was writing *Intruder in the Dust*.[43] Just as the title *Intruder in the Dust* connotes a shift in the physical landscape, a similar disruption occurs in the stasis of the aural landscape, as Faulkner characterizes the square as a cacophonous site of economic expansion, rather than a bustling, carnivalesque marketplace. The novel's numerous narrative digressions about "the motion and the noise" in Jefferson's town square suggest that an implied right to "sonic privacy" is being violated, as the town begins to echo the rising crescendo of the outside world.[44]

Published in 1948 (the year the two major U. S. political parties realigned, largely based on the issue of segregation, and President Harry Truman issued an executive order to integrate the military), *Intruder in the Dust* was eagerly anticipated as Faulkner's grand pronouncement on race relations in the post-World War II South. In the main plot of the novel, Lucas Beauchamp, an older black man infamous in Jefferson for the pride he takes in his blood relation to a prominent white family, is accused of shooting a poor white man, Vinson Gowrie, in the back, based on circumstantial evidence. Too proud to plead his innocence or beg for mercy, Lucas makes oblique hints to a young white boy, Chick Mallison, about the identity of the real murderer. Indebted to Lucas for once saving him from drowning, Chick investigates with the help of an African American companion, Aleck Sander, and a matron, Miss Habersham, going so far as to dig up Gowrie's grave, only to find another body, thus exposing a plot to frame Lucas for the killing. To exonerate Lucas, Chick also enlists his uncle Gavin Stevens, a Heidelberg-educated lawyer and racial moderate who initially expresses skepticism of Lucas's innocence and orates lengthy disquisitions on his "gradualist" beliefs that African Americans are not socially or intellectually prepared for full equality. Along with the local sheriff, Chick and his team hold off a bloodthirsty lynch mob until the murder is exposed as a fratricide and the authorities release Lucas.

Through the evolving portrayal of Lucas Beauchamp, we sense an intriguing variation on the Joycean creed of "silence, exile and cunning."[45] With a surname derived

from the French phrase meaning "beautiful field," Lucas Beauchamp lives peacefully in his cabin without a radio or a phonograph for distraction. Even before he willfully withholds the information about his innocence from Chick and Gavin, Faulkner depicts Lucas as an inherently quiet character, in harmony with the "vast abateless hum" of nature and secure in his self-conception as the mixed-race descendant of an old-money white landowner.[46] After his wrongful arrest, Lucas's silence shows his subjectivity, his refusal to play a demeaning, submissive role in a segregated society (be it the victim of lynching or the benign "Sambo" in Gavin's formulations). In essence, he chooses to be silent in order not to be silenced.

In stark contrast to Lucas's small pastoral domain, Jefferson's town square resounds with unfamiliar, foreign sounds and what we commonly refer to today as "noise pollution." Automobiles, motion pictures and drugstore jukeboxes disrupt the traditional baseline sounds of personal interaction and activity on the square.[47] Cars and radios engage in a struggle for aural supremacy.[48] This intensification of sound, in Gavin's analysis, results in an enervated populace, whipped into a near-frenzy, into a "spurious uproar" by "cheap shoddy dishonest music."[49] The narrator picks up the thread, remarking that the encroachment of noise ensures that "nowhere inside the town's uttermost ultimate corporate rim should man woman or child citizen or guest or stranger be threatened with one second of silence."[50] In another aside, the narrator denigrates the jukebox as a symbol of idleness and wasted time.[51] Such a shift in the auditory environment around Yoknapatawpha County's courthouse, jail and central marketplace presents both an interruption and an impediment to a system that needs "peace and quiet" as well as time to achieve the next stage in race relations. This new, chaotic soundscape deterritorializes the town square, making it the domain of derelicts, demagogues, and the outliers who make up lynch mobs.

Ultimately, the quiet tenacity and reasoning of Chick, Aleck Sander, Miss Habersham and, in time, Gavin saves Lucas from the loud mob. Yet even though they win this battle, the war against noise in Yoknapatawpha County continues. Echoing the criticism of public noise in *Sanctuary*, the narrator comments in *Intruder*'s concluding chapter that Saturday is "radio and automobile day" on the square, with the town buzzing along noisily and pointlessly while Lucas ambles along to Gavin's law office as a newly free man.[52] Similar to the figure of the flâneur conceptualized by Walter Benjamin,[53] Lucas takes in the popular music he hears on the square as part of a larger, immersive sensory experience. In settling his legal expenses with Gavin, Lucas voices skepticism when the lawyer charges him a nominal fee of two dollars. "That don't sound like much to me," Lucas says, "but then I'm a farming man and you're a lawing man and whether you know your business or not I reckon it aint none of my red wagon as the music box says to try to learn you different."[54] Given the steady stream of invective leveled at radios and jukeboxes throughout the novel, it is remarkable to

"hear" the soft-spoken, introverted Lucas invoke a specific popular song transmitted on "music boxes" (jukeboxes) without criticism.

The phrase "that's your red wagon," as glossed by Stephen Calt in his dictionary of blues idioms, essentially means "that's your problem," and implies that the speaker has washed his hands of a controversy.[55] As the phrase crossed over into general slang usage, it was adopted as the title of a song by the Forest, Mississippi-born bluesman Arthur Crudup, recorded in Chicago in September 1946. Through 1946 and 1947, "That's Your Red Wagon," rearranged to reach a wider pop audience, underwent successful remakes by the white western-swing bandleader Bob Wills, jazz drummer Ray McKinley, the Andrews Sisters, and Count Basie and His Orchestra.[56] The jukebox was the nexus for this dizzying back-and-forth-and- back-again racial crossing and likely the medium through which Faulkner overheard one of the few pieces of popular music to enter into his later works.[57]

Within the context of Faulkner's narrative, the reference to the "red wagon" song lyric signifies that, for all his outward impassivity, Lucas is indeed engaged in deep listening during his rambles around the town square, to townsfolk and jukebox alike. The allusion to "That's Your Red Wagon" is a rare instance of Faulkner not simply having what Adam Gussow calls geographic, chronological, and thematic proximities to the blues, but apprehending vernacular music's ability to speak for African Americans.[58] While Gussow accurately notes the sparsity of blues musicians in Faulkner's Mississippi, the evocation of Lucas Beauchamp as a blues *listener* is just as noteworthy, suggesting that Crudup's music and lyrics inform the character's low-key, bemused reaction to slipping the noose of Jim Crow, representing much the same oblique challenge to racial injustice as the more mythologized figure of the bluesman. Although there is no concrete proof that Faulkner was lending an ear to Arthur Crudup as assiduously as, for instance, a young Elvis Presley was, growing up in Tupelo, Mississippi, the crossover popularity (or co-optation) of Crudup's song does reflect the increasing power and reach of African American music in the late 1940s.[59]

Even in its most whitewashed iterations, the song's defiant chorus voices the insouciance of Lucas Beauchamp, who insinuates to Gavin that the curious type of justice that lets an innocent black man go free only through the determined intercession of sympathetic children and elderly women is white (male) southern society's problem to fix; he flatly states he cannot (and will not) "try to learn" Gavin any further.[60] More directly, Lucas's laconic borrowing of the blues lyric strongly suggests that he perceives Gavin Stevens's two-dollar fee as more a gesture of condescension than parity; whatever guilt Gavin feels about coming late to Lucas's defense is solely his "red wagon," free of any burden or obligation on Lucas's part. Like a sympathetic string, Lucas's listening sensibility resonates with frequencies, like those in Crudup's

song, on the same wavelength; though mass-disseminated, the song crystallizes individual experience. The irony and brevity of Lucas's comment to Gavin undercuts the lawyer's long-windedness, his paternalism toward African Americans and the sense of race and class privilege that motivates him to speak on behalf of the entire South.

Moreover, the comment proves that Lucas is more attuned to Yoknapatawpha's shifting soundscape than he appears on the surface, and that Lucas ably distinguishes sound from noise. Lucas and the "music box" transmit the bitter truth about racial injustice on the same "lower frequency" Ralph Ellison would evoke a few years later in *Invisible Man* (1952). It bears noting that in the year of *Intruder in the Dust*'s publication Memphis radio station WDIA became the first radio station with all-black on-air talent and an emphasis on racial uplift complementing the sounds of popular music. This intertwining of music and the politics of respectability on the airwaves carved out a new place in the soundscape for southern African Americans. Faulkner ultimately recognizes the breakthrough of music, specifically the blues, that talks back to Jim Crow via the jukebox, but demonstrates it only through the somewhat detached character of Lucas, instead of voicing this sensibility affirmatively in the book's rather didactic narration or through authoritative characters like Gavin Stevens. By maintaining his composure in the face of a near-lynching, Lucas embodies Albert Murray's conception of the "blues hero," whose adaptive skill, in Murray's words, "affirms his personal equilibrium, sustains his humanity, and enables him to maintain his higher aspirations in spite of the fact that human existence is so often mostly a low-down dirty shame."[61] By the novel's conclusion, Faulkner has transmitted the "low-down" realization that the law is barely one step ahead of the lynch mob and a potential lynch mob is always in earshot in the Jim Crow South. Through Lucas's nuanced characterization, we induce Faulkner's response (however ambivalent) to the call of African American expression. By transporting the wit and economical turns of phrase of the blues lyric from the juke joint to the other side of the color line without resorting to a tone or volume that would alienate the social order, Lucas defies what many white Southerners perceive as a society increasingly unable to distinguish a signal from the surrounding noise.

This perception embodies what Jennifer Lynn Stoever terms "the listening ear," or the apparatus by which those in power judge and enforce the division between sound and noise through custom and law.[62] Such negotiations play out in public space, as the center of Jefferson becomes an "instrumentarium," a "reservoir of sound possibilities . . . used to give substance and shape to human relations and the everyday management of urban space."[63] With sounds in collision, the town square is acoustically remapped as both centralized and liminal space for producing and receiving sound. Significantly, in their final scene, Lucas walks through the sonically remapped

town square, able to interpret sounds and their multiple signifiers, whereas Gavin, self-appointed guardian of custom and law, misses Lucas's sly, teasing reference to the "red wagon" and fixates only on the encroaching "noise."

Though Faulkner's exact intentions remain debatable, *Intruder in the Dust* denotes a sensory breaking point in the aural habitus of Yoknapatawpha County, where there is simply too much sound for traditionalists, and where the "noises" of industrialization, transportation, and media signify the forward motion of progress. Jacques Attali summarizes the relationship between disruptive sound and social change: "Music is a credible metaphor of the real. It is neither an autonomous activity nor an automatic indicator of the economic infrastructure. It is a herald, for change is inscribed in noise."[64] Music and noise herald the shifting soundscape of Yoknapatawpha, foretelling the passage from rural to urban, Jim Crow to equal citizenship, closed society to fluid community. Though *Intruder in the Dust* is largely a narrative of gradualism, its brief evocation of sound's liberating potential reflects an underlying understanding of changes reverberating in the air.

Notes

1 Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 1096, 1291.

2 Tim A. Ryan, *Yoknapatawpha Blues: Faulkner's Fiction and Southern Roots Music* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 191.

3 Meta Carpenter Wilde and Orin Borsten, *A Loving Gentleman: The Love Story of William Faulkner and Meta Carpenter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 103.

4 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 1713.

5 Ibid., 1698.

6 Ben Wasson, *Count No 'Count: Flashbacks to Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 173.

7 Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: New Press, 1993), 328.

8 Wasson, *Count No 'Count*, 64.

9 David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 183.

10 Adam Gussow, *Journeyman's Blues: Modern Blues Lives from Faulkner's Mississippi to Post-9/11 New York* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 133–37.

11 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 754.

12 William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 212. The previous year, Erich Maria Remarque described the sounds of decomposing corpses lying on the battlefield in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. See Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 64.

13 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 11.

14 In 1908, when Faulkner was ten, his grandfather helped pass an anti-automobile ordi-

nance in Oxford due in part to the noise, likely making this the first modern-day noise ordinance in the town. See Robert W. Hamblin, *Myself and the World: A Biography of William Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 18.

15 John W. Work, Lewis Wade Jones, and Samuel C. Adams, Jr., *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University–Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941–1942*, ed. Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 232.

16 William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 138.

17 Thadious M. Davis, "From Jazz Syncopation to Blues Elegy," in *Faulkner and Race*, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 78.

18 James Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 117.

19 Kenney, *Recorded Music*, 129–30.

20 Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12.

21 Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 273.

22 W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 12.

23 David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 114.

24 Kerry Segrave, *Jukeboxes: An American Social History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 1.

25 Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1877–1977* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 278.

26 See Timothy D. Taylor, "General Introduction: Music Technologies in Everyday Life," in *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio*, ed. Timothy D. Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Gradeja (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.

27 Segrave, *Jukeboxes*, 90.

28 Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.

29 W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 318.

30 This paranoia was taken to an extreme when local officials in Memphis limited the number of jukeboxes in the city limits in 1944 and chapters of the White Citizens Council distributed flyers warning white parents to shield their children from black music on the radio and jukebox. See "Memphis Sings New Tune," *Billboard* (January 15, 1944), 63; Jason Berry, Jonathan Foose, and Tad Jones, *Up From the Cradle of Jazz: New Orleans Music Since World War II* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 105.

31 See R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 90.

32 Work, Jones, and Adams, *Lost Delta Found*, 229.

33 Ibid., 251.

34 Ibid., 311–13. Exemplifying how overtly urban blues became the sound of escape for north-

ern-bound African Americans and a siren call for the Great Migration, in Bill Broonzy's 1932 "Brown Skin Shuffle," the singer gives an exact street address in Chicago, specifying to black southern listeners where freedom lies. See John Minton, *78 Blues: Folksongs and Phonographs in the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 64. In *Intruder in the Dust*, the narrator mentions in passing that Lucas's only child, a daughter, has left Mississippi for Detroit. William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 23.

35 See Smith, *Listening*, 11.

36 William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 112.

37 Erich Nunn, *Sounding the Color Line: Music and the Racial Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 156.

38 Memphis, Tennessee, lies about eighty miles northwest of Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi. As the city most proximate to Oxford, Faulkner knew it as a center of commerce, transportation, entertainment and vice. The author employed Memphis's urban soundscape as a foil to small-town Mississippi consistently in his writing, notably in *Sanctuary* and *The Reivers* (1962).

39 Ryan, *Yoknapatawpha Blues*, 191.

40 Dean Faulkner Wells, *Every Day by the Sun: A Memoir of the Faulkners of Mississippi* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2011), 13–14.

41 Daniel J. Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 41; John B. Cullen and Floyd C. Watkins, *Old Times in the Faulkner Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 4.

42 Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944–1962* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 114.

43 Blotner, *Faulkner*, 1227.

44 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 237.

45 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 269.

46 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 129.

47 Ibid., 213.

48 Ibid., 235.

49 Ibid., 155.

50 Ibid., 238.

51 Ibid., 213.

52 Ibid., 235.

53 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 10–11, 14, 21–23.

54 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 245.

55 Steven Calt, *Barrelhouse Words: A Blues Dialect Dictionary* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 244.

56 Larry Birnbaum, *Before Elvis: The Prehistory of Rock 'n' Roll* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 9.

57 According to Patrick Samway's research into *Intruder in the Dust*'s typescripts, Lucas's "red wagon" comment stayed constant during the book's composition, while Faulkner tempered Gavin's anti-Modern comments criticizing the automobile over successive drafts. Patrick H. Samway, *Faulkner's* Intruder in the Dust*: A Critical Study of the Typescripts* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1980), 226–27.

58 Gussow, *Journeyman's Blues*, 132–33.

59 Presley covered Crudup's "That's All Right" as the A-side for his first single, released by Memphis's Sun Records in July 1954.

60 Faulkner, *Intruder*, 245.

61 Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 37.

62 Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 13–16.

63 Jean-Françoise Augoyard and Henry Torgue, "Introduction: An Instrumentation of the Sound Environment," in *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*, ed. Jean-Françoise Augoyard and Henry Torgue, trans. Andra McCartney and David Paquette (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 8.

64 Attali, *Noise*, 5.

About the Author

Matthew D. Sutton holds a PhD in American Studies from the College of William and Mary. Currently, he is revising his dissertation, *Storyville: Discourses in Southern Musicians' Autobiographies*, into a book. His work on U.S. Southern literature, music and sound has appeared in *Mississippi Quarterly*, *Popular Music and Society*, and several edited collections.

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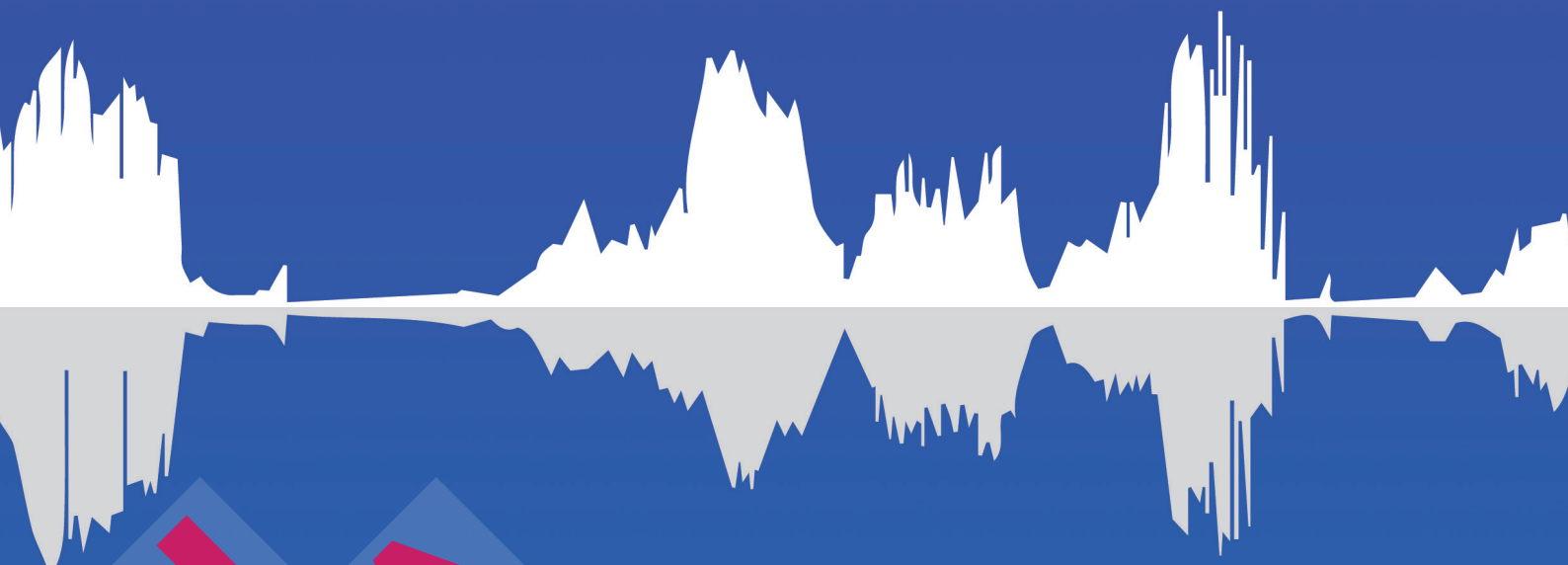

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