Sound Acts, Part 1: Calling Back Performance Studies

Patricia Herrera, Caitlin Marshall, and Marci R. McMahon

Let's jam. If performance studies has been a slow dance with "how to do things with words" (J. L. Austin), then we assert that it's way past time to "do things with sound." Austin's performative never imagined the way subjugated knowledges of the body, movement, affect, and sound have been used by minoritarian communities to incite social transformation. We celebrate the long heard resonances of sound in performance studies with a two-part field-defining publication, privileging how the materiality of sound *acts* as a form of aesthetic and political possibility. We come together through the "call back," an intersectional antiracist praxis guided by Black and Latinx feminist destabilizations of white supremacy and its colonialist, racist, sexist, ableist, and transphobic manifestations. In decentring whiteness, we recentre BIPOC and disabled futurity and radical joy.[1] We conceptualize the call back as a citational method of doing and making knowledge collaboratively, with care and attentiveness to receiving, registering, and reflecting radical thought across distance, difference, and time. Calling back is a long-term ethical commitment to interrupting oppression through revolutions in sound.

Most of the essays in this collection are the product of more than three years of organizing sound and performance inquiries that riff on and with sound. We have engaged in continuous "call backs" with junior, emerging, and senior scholars at the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), American Studies Association (ASA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), and US Latina/o Literary Theory and Criticism Conference (LLTCC). These sonic exchanges culminated in a two-day symposium, *Revolutions in Sound*, at the University of Maryland (UMD) from February 28 to 29, 2020, co-organized by Caitlin Marshall and Iván Ramos. With an ASTR Collaborative Research Award and support from UMD and the University of Richmond, we came together to pump up (and keep up) the volume on the sustaining and incisive critiques levelled by women, LGBTQ+, Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian American scholars represented in this first of two linked special issues.

At the symposium, we called back to antiracist luminaries whose works have been formative to our own development: Alexandra T. Vazquez, author of *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (2013), and Christine Bacareza Balance, author of *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (2016). Vazquez and Balance staged a keynote duet that enacted symposium co-organizer Ramos's concept of "listening together," a shared sonic practice that activates care and sustains affinities across differences. In his keynote introduction, Ramos mobilized us to listen together, calling back Vazquez and Balance as mentors who created the conditions of possibility for his research in queer and Latinx studies. The keynote duet and Ramos's introduction modelled an

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attentiveness to the ethics and political commitment of the call back. As our convening unfolded against the brink of COVID-19, the concurrent pandemic of systemic racism, and the renewed visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement, calling back feels heightened and necessary at this moment.

Amid these enraging, traumatizing, and yet galvanizing moments, we found solace in renewed efforts to mobilize in a radical process of thinking and writing. The symposium was our last collective time listening together, and the sheer force of shared thought propelled us through this editorial process. The numerous Zoom calls, persistent text messages, Google document interactions, and email threads continuously called us back to the urgency of this work. Even when there were technological interruptions, the intrusions that occurred with the gendered impacts of pandemic labour, and the difficulty and pain of navigating bodies that moved through illness, injury, and childbirth, we found joy and pleasure in connecting and reconnecting. Despite many dropped calls ("Can you hear me now? . . . Are you there? . . . You're frozen! . . . Can we reschedule? . . . I'm going to be ten minutes late! . . . What time zone are we meeting in? . . . Can we push this deadline?" . . .), we persisted and called back to our commitment to honour this work and one another.

In the spirit of honouring, we call back to scholars whose works have been foundational to our own thinking about sound, yet whose centrality to the fields of theatre and performance studies has been pushed into the acoustic shadows reserved for critical race "specialty." Our call back disrupts white supremacy and the ways it has sought to uphold while simultaneously sideline BIPOC, queer, and crip scholarship. Rather than claiming a new "sonic turn" in the academy, as such a framework signals an entrenched colonial-intellectual doctrine of discovery, we recentre the priorities of the field towards BIPOC, queer, and crip sonic knowledge and production. And while this special issue cannot decolonize the academy, it aims to decolonize knowledge as a site of social transformation.

We call back to trailblazers and mentors in the field, Cherríe Moraga, José E. Muñoz, Dwight Conquergood, Fred Moten, Daphne Brooks, and others, whose scholarship activated the analytic capacities of performance studies by tuning into sonic registers. Chicanx feminist Moraga's "theory in the flesh" (1983) activated the "personal is political," returning the material body to a feminist agenda, challenging the amplification of white feminists' voices above those of queer women of colour. Muñoz revolutionized performance studies by tuning in to the art and aesthetics of life within social stigma, queer of colour world-making strategies, and brown affect (1999, 2009). Moraga and Muñoz's theories created avenues for ensuing critical work on sound and performance. Conquergood activated the field of performance studies with his attunement to subjugated body knowledges (2002). Often ignored, however, is his turn to Frederick Douglass's listening hermeneutics to ground performance studies' academic interventions. Also evoking Douglass's *Narrative,* Moten's groundbreaking work on Black radical aesthetics, *In the Break* (2003), hears Aunt Hester's scream as evidence that "the object resists, the commodity shrieks" (2003, 12–13), positioning sound as an act of refusal and a testament to Black personhood and vitality. Brooks's "sonic blue(s) face" (2010) uncovers and resists the racial mimicry of Black women's voices, overwriting a history of white appropriation with a genealogy of Black feminist performance.

We call back to these Black and Latinx performance studies scholars, whose works have always already been doing sound studies, demonstrating how sound *acts*. Yet this work was kept outside formal disciplinary recognition in sound studies. In the rush to legitimize the study of sound *qua* sound, we witnessed the normalizing trend of sound studies as a white, able-bodied, masculinist, technological, and presentist enterprise. A flurry of formative special issues in the early aughts, along

with the groundbreaking online digital peer-reviewed publication, *Sounding Out!* (2009), pushed back against this hegemonic drift, reasserting the importance of researching critical race and sound. These special issues include *Social Text's* "The Politics of Recorded Sound" (Stadler 2010) and *Punk and Its Afterlives* (Brown, Deer, and Nyong'o 2013), *American Quarterly's* "Sound Clash" (Keeling and Kun 2011), and *Current Musicology's* "Race, Sound, and Performance" (Morrison and Gutkin 2012) and "Black Sound Studies" (Sylvain 2017). These publications created momentum within neighbouring disciplines for full-length monographs on sound and critical difference.[2] In performance studies, the publication of critical race monographs that centre sound as subjugated knowledge has expanded the field. Some of these foundational works include Vazquez's *Listening in Detail* (2013), Balance's *Tropical Renditions* (2016), and Ashon T. Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (2016). These book projects and numerous essays in the field, many by junior and/or emerging scholars, mark a theoretical shift away from sound studies' prioritization of listening and reception and from the borrowed methodological tools of musicology, ethnography, and cultural studies.[3]

"Sound Acts" consolidates these trends and decisively scores new theatre and performance studies methods for *doing sound*. Doing sound shifts the sonic away from the auditory to emphasize that all sounds issue from vibrating bodies—whether those bodies are human, animal, inanimate, and/or abject/object. "Sound acts" as a concept calls back to the material body as a site of shared investment between sound and performance studies, putting the vibrating body back into the theoretical equation. This special issue claims that vibrating bodies *perform*, and that the sonic is a constellation of *acts*. Our attention to how vibrating bodies perform interferes with the longstanding philosophical schisms between audio and visual, and between action and reception. The authors in this special issue demonstrate how sound inaugurates bodies (politic) and power, and how bodies and power in performance produce meanings and significations for sound. We trace out the political vibrations of these bodies in performance to chart new registers for resistance, survival, critique, negation, and world-making.

Authors in the first section, "Hermeneutic Loops: Disrupting the Audio/Visual Litanies," call us back to performances that disrupt white supremacist dichotomies between the audio and the visual. In "Decolonial Echoes," Iris Blake attends to the circular practice of the "echo" in the performance installations of Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore. The essay challenges Western epistemes and political ideologies that frame voicing and listening as discrete. Blake positions Belmore's "echo" as enacting a loop between these practices, restructuring the human sensorium and social relations in service of Indigenous sovereignty. Kristin Moriah's "On the Record: Sissieretta Jones and Black Feminist Recording Praxes" disrupts the audio/visual schisms by demonstrating the feedback loop between the sounds of text and the sounds of performance. Since there are no known recordings of Jones's voice, Moriah listens to the textual medium of the scrapbook to hear Black feminist vocality. Moriah argues that Jones deployed print culture to produce the sonic textures of her vocality and how her voice was heard. In Moriah's essay, material sound—the sound of text and the performing body—mediates the archive.

Similar to Blake and Moriah, Jade Power-Sotomayor, in "Corporeal Sounding: Listening to Bomba Dance, Listening to *puertorriqueñxs*," explores the dialogic sounding performance between dancer and drummer. Drawing from her extensive knowledge and experience as a bomba practitioner, Power-Sotomayor argues that in order to understand the logic of dance, we must figure out how to listen. This Afro-Puerto Ricanx sonic movement enacts a fugitive freedom through the hermeneutic circular space between the dancer, the musician, and the participants. In Shannon Rose Riley's interview with band members Michael Grego and travis of the performance/noisegroup ONO

(short for onomatopoeia), the members unpack the use of noise, poetry, and visual spectacle to make audible the silences of systematic racial violence. Through their live performance practice and the poiesis of the interview dialogue, ONO calls back the spectres of the racial past to exorcise the haunting trauma of the present moment.

Authors in the next section, "Ear Training," amplify the formal aesthetics and properties of sound-making practices oft-overlooked because structural racism, compulsory heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness position them as decidedly *unaesthetic, untechnical,* and *unvirtuosic*. Recognized as a formal technique in Western musical education, the "ear training" rehearsed herein offers new understandings of the technique through attention to Black feminist, crip, and Latinx performance practices. Masi Asare's "Vocal Colour in Blue: Early Twentieth-Century Black Women Singers as Broadway's Voice Teachers" establishes intergenerational Black feminist ear training techniques as key to a citational singing practice she terms "twice-heard." Asare's theory establishes a genealogy of vocal style from blues singing to Broadway belting, positioning Black female blues singers as the foremothers of Broadway's signature sounds. Just as Broadway's sonic legacy relies on disavowed black women's labour, modern drama has relied on queer and disabled subjects for self-narration. Megan Johnson's "Sounding a Crip Aesthetic: Transforming the Sonic in Beckett's *Not I*" explores what crip aesthetics *do* to drama. Johnson's focus on crip performer Jess Thom reveals the dependencies of the avant-garde on marginalized queer, disabled, and gendered subjects. Thom moves beyond discourses of theatrical "accommodation" to reconstitute aesthetic possibilities for queer and disabled theatre artists, recentring the avant-garde around crip performance practices. We also hear the agentive work of ear training in Patricia Ybarra's interview with Micha Espinosa. The interview calls our attention to Espinosa's ear training as a Fitzmaurice Voicework practitioner and collaborator with the performance group La Pocha Nostra. Espinosa *trains* audiences to listen to laments, llantos (weeping and crying) and gritos (a Mexican guttural cry) as Latinx antiracist sonic sites working toward solidarity.

In the final section, "Ethics of Performance and Scholarship," we pause to reconsider sound methods for ethical interactions with the past, power, and subjugated knowledges. This is a reminder that the call back is above all a critical, reflective practice toward justice and equity. In "Mourning the Nightingale's Song: The Audibility of Networked Performances in Protests and Funerals of the Arab Revolutions," Shayna Silverstein reveals how ethnography and digitized sound perform within a listening public. Silverstein positions the circulation of sound on social media during the Arab Spring protests as a performance process that makes audible and coalesces agentive social constellations. Katelyn Hale Wood's "Listening Backward: Sonic Intimacies and Cross-Racial, Queer Resonance" uses queer and critical race theory to put pressure on the ethics of autoethnographic and historiographic practices. Wood, a white lesbian critic, "listens backward" to the sonic archive of the late Black queer comic Jackie "Moms" Mabley. Centring sound recordings, Wood contends, can produce queer sonic intimacies that also complicate cross-racial affinities between scholar and performer. Donatella Galella's interview with playwright Lauren Yee and director Chay Yew of *Cambodian Rock Band* amplifies the ethics of dramaturgical work in a memory play with music. Using the fictional band The Cyclos, the play's music calls back the traumatic memories of the Khmer Rouge. Counter to musical theatre logic that drives narrative with song, *Cambodian Rock Band*'s compositions revive lives and histories lost to genocide, enacting an ethical recalibration of the present to the past.

Over and above a collection of essays demonstrating how vibrating bodies perform, this special issue is a sound act in and of itself. At the tail end of 2020, the world is facing crises of epic

proportions. The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the fault lines of injustice and inequity, fascism competes head-on with democracy, and racial reckonings roil the status quo. If the scale of these catastrophes is new, the oppression and violence at their core are not. Sound acts meet such violence with transformative strategies for survival, restorative justice, ethical practice, and joy. Now more than ever, the vibrational politics of sound *act* as templates for the paradigm shifts demanded by this global Rubicon. Humbly, this special issue works toward such desired utopias with theories and methods for intellectual and institutional transformation.

This special issue attunes to the sonic as part of an antiracist and decolonial practice of recentring theatre and performance studies around BIPOC, queer, and crip knowledge production and aesthetics. Far from claiming all cultural production by minoritarian communities is sonic, and far from reifying essentialist trends upholding sound as liberatory, this special issue nevertheless maintains the sonic, redefined, is an undertheorized site of sustenance, refuge, and possibility. We sign off by emphasizing the "call back" as an invitation for joining together with care, compassion, and commitment to transforming the power structures and hierarchies that have devalued BIPOC, queer, and crip lives. This invitation resonates throughout this special issue, the reverberations of which we hope call you back as active participants to engage with the follow-up linked special issue of Sound Acts forthcoming in May 2021.In offering you sound methods and theories for jamming oppression, we invite you to continue the antiracist work of calling back sound to the material body and centring minoritarian knowledge production and aesthetics in your research, teaching, and mentorship.

Notes

1. Moved by antiracist movements, we take a cue from the BIPOC Project to centre Black, Indigenous, *and* People of Colour alliances, amplifying these communities' shared histories of resistance against white supremacy. With the term, we signal the contributions of multiracial and multi-ethnic communities, including Latinx, Asian American, Pacific Islander Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and others, in the shared fight against anti-blackness and Native invisibility.

2. When we began our own research endeavours, the undervaluation of scholarship on sound in performance studies led us to seek support from neighbouring disciplines. These projects and mentors include Jonathan Sterne's *Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Production* (2003); Gayle Wald's *Shout, Sister, Shout! The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharp* (2008); Dolores Inés Casillas's *Sounds of Belonging: U.S. Spanish-Language Radio and Public Advocacy* (2014); Roshanak Kheshti's *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (2015); Jennifer Stoever's *The Sonic Color Line: Race and The Cultural Politics of Listening* (2016); Nina Sun Eidsheim's *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, & Vocality in African American Music* (2019) and the *Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies* (2019), co-edited with Katherine Miezel; Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Studies* (2020); Julie Beth Napolin's *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (2020); and Mara Mills's *On the Phone: Hearing Loss and Communication Engineering* (Duke University Press, forthcoming).

3. See Iván Ramos's *Sonic Negations: Unbelonging Subjects, Inauthentic Objects, and Sound between Mexico and the United States* (NYU Press, forthcoming). Notably, the following articles are formative to research on sound and performance: Jayna Brown's "Buzz and Rumble" (2010) and "Tricky and the Bug: Dub, Punk, and the Abject" (2013); Caitlin Marshall's "Crippled Speech" (2014) and "Sonic Redface" in *Journal of American Musicological Society* (forthcoming); Elías D. Krell's "'Who's the Crack Whore at the End?': Performance, Violence, and Sonic Borderlands in the Music of Yva las Vegass" (2015); Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, "Reggaetón's Crossings: Black Aesthetics, Latina Nightlife, and Queer Choreography" (2016); Patricia Herrera and Marci R. McMahon, "Oye, Oye: A Manifesto for Listening to Chicanx/Latinx Theater" (2019); Patricia Herrera's "A Sonic Treatise of Futurity: Universes' *Party People* (2020); Summer Kim Lee's "Asian

Americanist Critique and Listening Practices of Contemporary Popular Music" (2020); Tavia Nyong'o's "'Rip It Up': Excess and Ecstasy in Little Richard's Sound" (2014) and "Too Black, Too Queer, Tolly: Why Little Richard Never Truly Got His Dues" (2020); and Megan Johnson and Moynan King's co-edited issue, "Sound & Performance," in *Canadian Theatre Review* (Fall 2020).

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Decolonial Echoes: Voicing and Listening in Rebecca Belmore's Sound Performance

Iris Sandjette Blake

The photographic images of two of Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore's iterative sound art works—*Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991) and *Wave Sound* (2017)—are striking not just for the visual impact of their large conical art objects, but also for how they perform voicing and listening. The similar shape creates a relation across two performances separated by more than a quarter of a century. While both objects are conical in shape, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* emphasizes voicing and *Wave Sound* emphasizes listening. For *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*, Belmore constructed a large wooden megaphone for participants to speak into and address the land directly, and for *Wave Sound*, Belmore created four sculptural listening cone installations in Canadian national park and reserve sites that invited visitors to listen to the land. In a settler colonial episteme, hearing sound and doing sound are seen as discrete practices. Circumventing this paradigm, the similarity of these art objects performs the epistemological loop of relationality between voicing and listening. Together, they can be heard as effecting an exchange that emphasizes how hearing sound and doing sound are bound up with structures of power. In so doing, both works offer interventions into and against colonial interpretive practices by enacting alternatives to understandings of voicing and listening that have centred the human ear and vocal apparatus. I term this interpretive alternative the echo. My analysis of these performances demonstrates how echo intervenes in relations of human/nonhuman sociality as well as in relations of time and space.

In one image of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* (1991), Belmore stands in a grassy meadow during a 2008 performance at Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada. Facing away from the camera, Belmore gestures with her right hand held at her side, palm up, as she speaks through the megaphone, the wider opening of which is directed over a forest of pine trees, toward a rocky mountain with some snow, partially obscured by the fog. What is presently referred to as Banff National Park was "reserved and set apart as a public park and pleasure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada" ("An Act" 1887, 120) by the 1887 Rocky Mountains Park Act.[1] Between 1890 and 1920, the Canadian settler-state forcibly removed Stoney Nakoda people living on the lands newly designated as a national park. Their removal made clear that "the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada" is contingent on the forced removal, assimilation, and legal disappearance of Indigenous peoples.

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Rebecca Belmore, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991). Gathering, Johnson Lake, Banff National Park, Banff, Alberta, July 26, 2008. Photo: Sarah Ciurysek. Presented by the Walter Phillips Gallery as part of the exhibition *Bureau de Change*, July 12–September 28, 2008. Image courtesy Rebecca Belmore and the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Purchased with the support of the York Wilson Endowment Award, administered by the Canada Council for the Arts. Accession #P08 0001 S.

In an image from *Wave Sound* (2017), a person kneels on the grass at Green Point in Newfoundland, Canada, listening through a large aluminum cone directed toward the body of water below the cliff. Located on Mi'kmaq land, Green Point was incorporated into the settler state as Gros Morne National Park in 1973, following Newfoundland's 1949 confederation with Canada. While *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* had not previously been performed at Green Point, it had been performed on Mi'kmaq peoples' lands during the work's 1992 tour, when the megaphone was used on Citadel Hill in Halifax, Nova Scotia—a site where English settlers have maintained a fort since 1749 and where Parks Canada maintains a living history program that invites contemporary settlers to dress in costume, fire a rifle, and become a "soldier for a day," per their website. While the Parks Canada program demonstrates how settler-colonialism relies on continual reperformances, the sonic returns staged by Belmore's two works on Mi'kmaq lands unsettle Canada's claim to possess these "national" spaces, resituating them as Indigenous lands. Especially since the context of *Wave Sound*'s commissioning meant that the three aluminum listening devices were likely to be used primarily by non-Indigenous visitors to the national parks, Belmore shifted the vantage point from speaking to listening for the 2017 installations.

A person listens through Rebecca Belmore's *Wave Sound* listening cone at Green Point in Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland. Presented as part of *LandMarks2017/ Repères2017*, June 10–17, 2017. Photo: Kyra Kordoski. Image courtesy Rebecca Belmore.

Belmore's artistic use of sonic return is epitomized by her choice to use Banff National Park—Canada's *first* national park—as a shared location between *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* in 1991 and *Wave Sound* in 2017. In an interview for *Canadian Art*, Belmore (2017) discussed how selecting Banff as a site for one of the *Wave Sound* installations was intentional, and for her represented a way of returning to and rethinking her work with *Speaking to Their Mother*. I understand this nearly thirty-year return within an analytic framework I term the "echo." Initiated by the act of voicing, echo occurs when sound reflects and returns to the voicing body as the act of listening, a vibrational event that is always multiple (a sonic repetition with a difference). A constitutive component of the difference performed by an echo is a time lag between what is sounded and what is heard, the sounding of a relation between times that is also a relation between spaces. These relations fundamentally redefine "relation" by establishing a sociality between humans and the living but nonhuman bodies of the environment, such as the bodies of water in the image above. Whereas *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* positions land as both listening to and reverberating with Indigenous voices, *Wave Sound* invites all installation visitors to take up the position of listener to each site's nonhuman bodies, including the land and the water.

I enter the hermeneutic loop between voicing and listening that the works coactivate through *Wave Sound*'s 2017 return of the echoes *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* began in 1991. When *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* was first performed, I was three years old, living in Madison, Wisconsin, and being socialized into norms of whiteness and femininity. My presence as a settler would have been

inappropriate at some of the work's iterations. A thirty-year (at least) project, the echo interpolates me now as an adult settler-listener hearing Belmore's echo through the digital presences of *Wave Sound* in videos, documentaries, interviews, news articles, and photographs, as well as an interactive website where I virtually visited the installations. While the settling of history via the archive is part and parcel of the settler colonial project, this settling project—like the settling of lands—is always being reperformed because it is not complete; settler colonial power is always subject to being disrupted. Just as *Wave Sound* disrupts the Parks Canada performance of settled "public" lands, the echo disrupts the boundedness of the archive. For me, the works' digital presences generate a relationality where I become a coparticipant in Belmore's performative echo.

My coparticipation with the echo foregrounds that my embodiment and politics condition what I hear and cannot hear in the works. Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening* engages decolonial and settler practices of listening through the framework of critical listening positionality: a self-reflexive praxis of considering how structures of power, including race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, cultural background, and state apparatuses condition our listening such that we might learn to reconfigure our listening practices (2020, 10–11).[2] My understanding of my own listening as partial and embedded in power is informed by Robinson's work, as well as contributions from feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock 1983; hooks 1984; Collins 1986; Harding 1992) that emphasize how knowledge production always emerges from a particular location/person and works in critical race sound studies that interrogate the racialized and gendered production of the modern listening self (Kheshti 2015). By socially locating me, Belmore's echo enacts a performative intervention on the settler colonial structuration of my listening—sounding the spatial and temporal disjuncture between the performance sites and myself and interpolating me into a critique of colonial regimes of the sensible such that I might identify, confront, and disobey settler practices of listening.

By making listeners both registrants and reflective surfaces of sound—at once audience and coparticipants who shape the performance as it continues to unfold both in person and mediated through the archive—the echo becomes a mode of transformative action. This relational work of the echo to restructure epistemic and sociopolitical relations is decolonial work. My use of decolonial is informed by Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018), who theorize decoloniality as praxis that requires delinking from coloniality and the presumed universality of Western theoretical constructs, such as the modern nation-state.

I argue that the echo across these performances decolonizes not only conceptions of nationhood by delinking from the nation-state as exerted through national parks/reserves, but also sound performance by delinking from colonial regimes of space/time and voicing/listening—regimes that I will show *enable* the exercise of settler nation-state power and are meant to detract from First Nations sovereignty. Aligning voice with the human has been a central component of the colonial project of modernity. As Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2014) notes in her work on listening and personhood in nineteenth-century Colombia, conceptions of sound and voice were linked to understandings of life itself. Creoles and European colonizers used ideas about the voice to regulate the boundary between the human and the nonhuman (Ochoa Gautier 2014, 5), implementing a power structure under which some would be recognized as fully human, and some would be deemed not properly human and thus outside political life—rendered "voiceless" via colonial discourses (Ludueña 2010, 13). In this colonial interpretive framework, sound becomes a human-centred activity, whether through the evaluative act of listening or the agentive act of voicing. Voice thus became aligned with the sociohistorical production of Man as the human, where the hegemonic

ethnoclass of Man—an ethnoclass that Sylvia Wynter (2003) identifies as secular, white, Western, and bourgeois—has overrepresented itself as the human.

This liberal episteme that aligns voice with Man continues to subtend neoliberalism and the ongoing structure of settler colonialism.[3] Neoliberal policies in both Canada and the United States since the early 1990s have reinvested in producing the category of the voiceless in order to support settler-state extractivism, particularly on Indigenous land,[4] and to dismantle legal protections regarding race, ability, sexuality, and gender that were instituted in response to and in attempts to contain the liberation movements of the 1960s and '70s.

I hear Belmore's Indigenous feminist artistic practice as responding to a neoliberal political context, where the Canadian settler state's supposed commitment to multiculturalism and "dialogue" occurs simultaneously to their disregard for First Nations sovereignty and treaty rights. Belmore herself (2017) situates her interest in embodiment as connected to the rupture of Indigenous languages, where her own positionality of "being Anishinaabe and being a non-speaker of the language" led her to "develop a way of communicating without the spoken word, with the body." Echo, which delinks voicing and listening from the human body to any vibrating body and creates communicative relations that are not dependent on words or oral speech, is a powerful tool with which to intervene in and ultimately bypass this neoliberal framework.[5]

My methodology of listening to how these works echo in the archive is linked to my analysis of how they echo in performance. The sounded and sensory relations activated by the echoes of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* and *Wave Sound* unsettle colonial ideologies of space, time, bodies, and senses—a complex regime of the sensible. Together, these works demonstrate the endurance of performativity such that I might hear an echo begun years ago; the continued unfolding of echo indicates that transformative action may occur felicitously over decades, interpolating additional listeners/coparticipants as the performance shape-shifts. The echo thus becomes a praxis and method for decolonial action in both "live" and "mediated" instantiations. Thinking about performance as an echo, the effects of which are felt across multiple temporalities, spaces, and bodies, both human and nonhuman, allows Indigenous and settler scholars, performers, and artists to think more broadly about what performance can do, and how to align our work with goals of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and resurgence that the institutions through which we move (the university, the museum) obstruct.

Through my analysis of these two iterative performances, I propose the echo as a feedback loop that reconfigures voicing and listening as a set of social relationships between bodies and space/time.[6] The echo in (and across) these performances is a mediating force that facilitates, re-members, and enacts social relationships across bodies, both human and nonhuman. In so doing, the echo suggests alternative orderings of the sensorial that do not reproduce the violences of modernity's sensorial regime.[7] As a vibrational event, the echo disrupts colonial assumptions of time and performance as linear and space as empty, and proposes instead a listening practice that is attuned to how places reverberate with the sense memories of "past" events, demonstrating "past" events as ongoing and places as layered with multiple histories and relationalities.

Voicing Situated Relationality to Land

Belmore conceptualized *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* during a 1991 residency at the Banff Centre. Described by Belmore as a sound installation, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* is an overtly political, iterative performance that features a six-foot-long, seven-foot-wide wooden megaphone as the central art object. Belmore explains on her website that, "This object was taken into many First Nations communities—reservation, rural, and urban. I was particularly interested in locating the Aboriginal voice on the land. Asking people to address the land directly was an attempt to hear political protest as poetic action."

On her website, Belmore situates this piece in relation to the many protests mounted during the summer of 1990 "in support of the Mohawk Nation of Kanesatake in their struggle to maintain their territory," otherwise known as the "Oka Crisis." The so-called "Oka Crisis" involved Mohawk land in the Quebec province that since 1717 had been repeatedly reassigned to serve the political and economic aims of the various settler entities that claimed trusteeship and later ownership of the land. Throughout, the Mohawk nation asserted their land rights by using multiple tactics—petition, armed resistance, and legal challenges, among others. In the summer of 1990, in response to the Oka mayor's announcement that the land would be used for a golf course expansion and housing development, fifty-five members of the Mohawk nation took up arms to defend their land and were met with settler state violence in the form of 2,650 Canadian soldiers (Simpson 2014, 152).

In a documentary by Métis filmmaker and activist Marjorie Beaucage, Belmore (1992) explains that she eventually decided to build a megaphone for and with Indigenous peoples. She elaborates: "And instead of aiming it at the government, and taking it and aiming it at that building or at those people, I wanted to instead take it out to the people, to Native people, and turn it towards the land, so that the people could speak to our Mother, to the Earth . . ." While the colonization of the land has depended on the process of rendering Indigenous peoples and epistemologies "voiceless," this work intervenes in these twinned processes through sound performance: creating the opportunity to decolonize land by "locating the Aboriginal voice on the land." I understand the echo as Belmore's mode of colocating voice and land—this colocating produces relationality as an intervention against state attempts to cleave this relationality. Speaking through the megaphone generates a vibrational echo that confronts the speaker with their own relationship to the land (Belmore 2017), so voice is redefined and reenacted as situated relationality.

An electric handheld megaphone fits into the base of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*'s large wooden megaphone, which can be disassembled into two parts for transport between performance sites. According to Belmore, "The beauty of the piece is that the enlarged size of the wooden form doesn't make the voice much louder, but it does shoot the voice much further so it finds an echo" (O'Rourke 1997, 29). While loudness functions as a neoliberal metaphor for political agency, in the sense of "having one's voice heard," Belmore moves away from that paradigm. Prioritizing the vibrational movement of the echo over the voice's amplification and turning the megaphone toward the land, as opposed to the Canadian government, enacts a refusal of settler state-defined politics of sovereignty. Liberal recognition-based politics maintain colonialist relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state by reaffirming the state's power to recognize Indigenous sovereignty or not (Coulthard 2014). Alternatively, the vibratory politics of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* enact Indigenous sovereignty by bringing First Nations people and the land into relation with one another

through the echo. This reaffirms Indigenous nationhood as autonomous rather than reliant on settler-state recognition.

In redefining voice as a relation of people to land, the echo enables tribal specificity through differences in performance contexts, in the content of what is expressed through the megaphone, and in the modes of expression, where what is offered has sometimes been spoken softly, shouted, or conveyed through music, for example. Since *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*'s initial 1991 performance in Banff National Park, performances have occurred in 1992, 1996, 2008, and 2014 at multiple sites within Canada and the US, including the Kanesatake reserve—the site of the "Oka Crisis" (DeBlassie 2010, 52). In 1992, as settler states commemorated the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing, Belmore began touring the work, hoping to ground her practice by receiving feedback and criticism from Indigenous communities rather than white art critics (Belmore 1992). With project assistants Michael Beynon and Florene Belmore, she transported the megaphone using a cargo van, beginning with a performance at Parliament Hill in Ottawa and subsequently transporting the megaphone to "First Nation communities located on reserve land, towns, cities, and an active logging blockade" (Belmore in Nanibush 2014, 214). For each of the ten stops on the tour, organizers from the First Nation communities Belmore collaborated with selected the location and set the agenda for the megaphone's use (O'Rourke 1997, 29). Given that different Indigenous peoples understand relation to the land differently, this collaborative practice enabled the work to be taken up in ways that exceeded Belmore's initial framing of speaking *to* the land, as communities also used the megaphone to speak *with* or *for* the land, such as to raise public awareness regarding extraction.

Rebecca Belmore, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991). Gathering, Citadel Hill, Halifax, 1992. Photo: Michael Beynon. Courtesy Rebecca Belmore and the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Purchased with the support of the York Wilson Endowment Award, administered by the Canada Council for the Arts. Accession #P08 0001 S.

Echoing allows for the relationalities between human and nonhuman bodies that shape everyday instances of voicing to become audible and sensible as such when the land returns voice to a speaker through the echo. This return constitutes a social relation. For the 1991 performance in Banff—lands from which the settler state had forcibly removed Stoney Nakoda people—Belmore invited thirteen First Nations people, including Stoney Nakoda Chief John Snow, to speak through the megaphone from a meadow (McMaster 91). Their voices echoed off the mountains, returning to them nine times. In Beaucage's documentary, Belmore (1992) describes what it was like to hear her voice echoing off of the land during the first performance in Banff:

> And when I first spoke through it in Banff and it echoed off the mountains and all over the place, and it was my voice, I could hear my voice way over there, separated from my body and bouncing off of and echoing off of Mother Earth, the land. And I really felt that, wow, I felt really humble because I felt so small. I felt that she's really powerful. And I felt my place as a human being as part of the land and as part of her. And that I have to respect. But also I felt really strong at the same time, because I felt that our people have lived here for so long and they're in the ground, and my parents are in the ground, and we have been here for so long, and she's listened to us for so long. It made me feel really good. It made me feel like I belong here. When, you know, that whole, the Bering Strait theory just flew out the window for me. Because I thought, we've been here for a long time, and this is my home. I don't come from anywhere else.

Whereas the settler-state abstracts land to understand it as property, for Belmore, land is powerful, embodied, fleshy, and living. Belmore's comment on hearing her voice "all over the place . . . separated from [her] body" demonstrates the relational materiality of the body, which I understand as a form of (extra/em)bodiment—where the body is not a closed system but rather fundamentally open to and in relation to the surrounding space and bodies, both human and nonhuman. Hearing her voice echoing and bouncing off of the mountains affectively reminds her of her positionality and relationalities "as a human being as part of the land and as part of her," evoking feelings of humility, respect, strength, and belonging, a connection to home that is grounded in relationalities as opposed to an ideology of property ownership and enclosures.

Belmore's description of being humbled and strengthened by this affective awareness suggests that *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* also activates a pedagogical relationship with land, what Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist Leanne Simpson (2014) terms "land as pedagogy": to "learn both *from* the land and *with* the land" and nonhuman beings (7, emphasis original). Distinguishing Anishinaabeg nationhood from the idea of the nation-state, Simpson (2013) describes nationhood as "a web of connections to each other, to the plant nations, the animal nations, the rivers and lakes, the cosmos and our neighbouring Indigenous nations" that is both "an ecology of intimacy" and "a series of radiating responsibilities." The concept of radiating responsibilities reminds me of the way echo moves and connects bodies, where Belmore hears the echo of her voice connecting her to the land and her peoples' history and presence. To extend Mishuana Goeman's work on (re)mapping as a materially grounded discursive practice whereby Native authors refute colonization's ordering of land and bodies based on hierarchies and binaries, and in so doing produce new possibilities (2013, 2–3), the echo effects a sonic (re)mapping of relationships between bodies and space. Returning to Simpson (2013), this sonic (re)mapping of relationalities constitutes a sovereign act of Indigenous nationhood. As the bodies present at Banff—both human and nonhuman—vibrate and absorb the echo to differing degrees, the act of voicing performs a material relationality that holds the potential

to reaffirm social relationships of responsibility and reciprocity, affirming bodies not as discrete but as intimately connected and dependent on one another: an (extra/em)bodied experience that connects to Anishinaabeg conceptions of nationhood, even as Belmore is not addressing her own land.

These reverberations might also be thought of under the rubric of nonhuman ontologies, where rather than the land passively echoing back the human voices filtered through the megaphone, the land becomes an active participant in shaping what Nina Eidsheim terms the "intermaterial vibration" that constitutes voicing (2015, 164). Under this rubric, land is not a passive object to be acquired or a natural feature that can be universalized through a European planetary consciousness (Pratt 1992, 11). Rather, land is a Mother to be engaged, for the peoples Indigenous to the land to voice their desires to, and who possesses the capacity to voice her own desires in return—a distinct departure from the liberal episteme of Man and the fixation on human vocal cords. By including the land as a participant in this circuit of voicing, *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* displaces the human as the universal voicing and listening subject. The performance sites' differing material conditions shape the forms of coparticipation, impacting how voice is both returned to the human body and absorbed by the bodies of land and water. In addition, the act of speaking to the land through the megaphone and feeling the echo's reverberations throughout the body—along with the "touch" of sound that happens when our eardrum vibrates to the sound echoing back to/within us—troubles the human/nonhuman divide. Such a divide adheres to a temporality that values particular forms of life and devalues the possibility of ongoing relations with/to those buried in the ground as a part of relationality to land, or of understanding human being as being part of the land. Belmore's evocation of her ancestors who are buried in the ground during the initial Banff performance recalls that her ancestors, too, become part of this intermaterial relationality across space and time, which I discuss further in the next section.

The vibrational production of these relationalities is functionally true for anyone speaking through the megaphone, whether Indigenous, settler, or "alien"—a fungible category proposed by Iyko Day to emphasize North American settler colonialism as a racialized project and account for migrations of enslaved Africans and Asian migrants based not on settlement but on labour and exclusion (2016, 24). For instance, during the Parliament Hill performance in Ottawa, the first stop of the work's 1992 tour, then-constitutional minister Joe Clark—a conservative white settler politician who had previously been prime minister—spoke through the megaphone at Belmore's invitation (Belmore 2008, 45). However, that does not mean that everyone speaking through the megaphone would or should feel a sense of belonging to the land, such as Belmore described in her experience. In 2014, for example, Belmore and curator Wanda Nanibush (Beausoleil First Nation) brought the megaphone out of the Justina M. Barnick Gallery for use in an Indigenous women-led political action protesting the pollution of waterways. For this performance, the megaphone was transported to Gibraltar Point, a peninsula on the Toronto Islands, and directed across a body of water (Lake Ontario), toward Toronto—lands stewarded by Anishinaabe, Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississauga peoples. As Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson notes, the performance that day was marked by "resounding silences" (2019, 236) from the large audience composed primarily of tourists and art students. Robinson describes how rather than a sense of belonging, speaking to lands on which he is a guest returned to him a sense of his responsibilities to the communities who steward those lands (237–38). I understand Indigenous peoples speaking through the megaphone to their own land as enacting what Beth Piatote (2016) terms sonic sovereignty by vibrationally sustaining intermaterial relationalities that exceed settler-state logics. As Robinson's reading of the Gibraltar Point performance demonstrates, the decolonial echo might enact sonic sovereignty in several additional

ways, including by disarticulating settler connections/claims to land or strengthening Indigenous diasporic speakers' practices of nation-to-nation recognition of the land's caretakers.

Redefining voicing as echo is part of the sonic sovereign work Belmore undertakes. The intermaterial vibrations of the echo, as movement and return, produce a rapprochement between the speaker and the land that constitutes voicing as intersubjective. The vibrational movements of voicing that "return" to the speaker are no longer "their" voice alone—if they ever were—but inflected with the contours of the land, while the land, too, is transformed by the voicings it absorbs: a multiply produced event of voicing. While colonial logics enclose on the body as contained (and human), on space as property, on time and performance as linear, and on voicing and listening as discrete, the echo disrupts the power and directionality associated with colonial epistemes of voicing and listening that assign "voicelessness" to Indigenous communities protesting for the decolonization of their lands. Belmore's use of the echo thus exemplifies her call to "*hear* political protest as poetic action" (emphasis added), where the return of the echo is also about the return of the lands. Under the analytic of the echo, listening becomes the "return" of voicing, a reminder that the past-ness of the past is not settled; rather, the reverberations of the echo mark "past" events as ongoing. I lean more into the epistemological loop linking voicing and listening through the return of the echo via *Wave Sound*, the title of which both rhetorically echoes and inverts the concept of the sound wave and compels listeners to engage water as a sounding body.

Listening for the Echo's Temporal Returns through *Wave Sound*

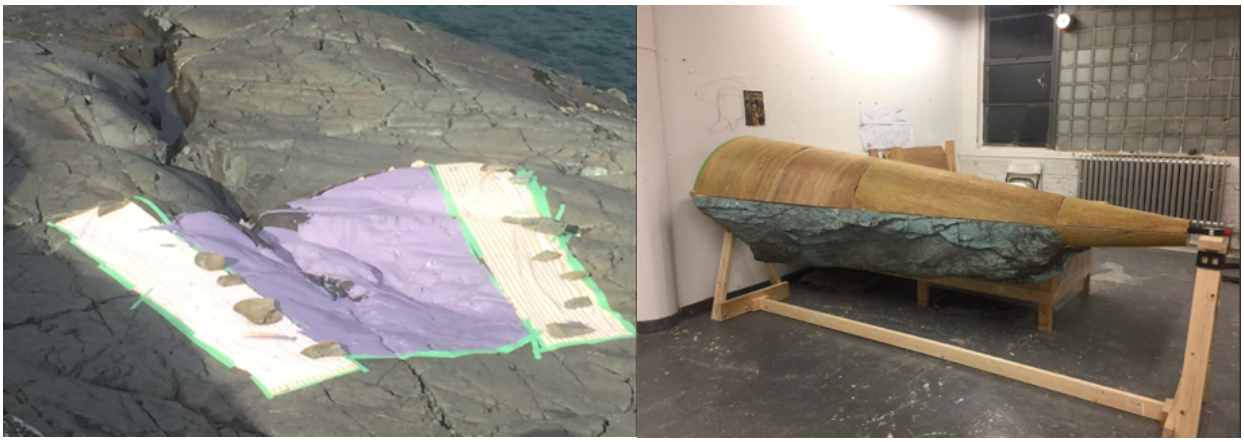
While the echo in *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* emphasizes voicing, Belmore's 2017 installation series *Wave Sound* uses the echo to refigure listening practices. For *Wave Sound*, Belmore and her partner, artist Osvaldo Yero, created four large-scale conical listening devices—three of cast aluminum and one of copper—that invited visitors to the installation sites to listen to the land. The aluminum listening cones were installed in three Canadian national park sites—Banff National Park, Pukaskwa National Park, and Gros Morne National Park—while the copper listening cone was installed on Chimnissing Island, reserve land of the Beausoleil First Nation. The listening devices were positioned with the wider openings facing bodies of water and the smaller openings propped up against rocky outcroppings in some cases, or on a small heap of large stones in others, as in the Banff and Gros Morne installations, respectively. To use the listening devices, visitors crouch or kneel on the ground, placing an ear and the side of their head to the smaller opening.

The temporary installation series *Wave Sound* was commissioned as part of *LandMarks2017/ Repères2017,* a Canada 150 Signature Initiative commemorating the 150th anniversary of Canada's confederation. This initiative involved a partnership between the Toronto-based Partners in Art, Parks Canada, and sixteen Canadian arts universities and featured twelve commissioned artists, including Belmore. According to the project's website, "*LandMarks2017/Repères2017* invites people to creatively explore and deepen their connection to the land through a series of contemporary art projects in and around Canada's National Parks and Historic Sites . . . *LandMarks2017/ Repères2017* inspires dialogue about people, places and perspectives that have shaped our past and are vital to our futures." On the one hand, this initiative seems to flatten relationality to land without accounting for the differential positions of Indigenous peoples, settlers, and aliens. For instance, the practice of settlers "deepen[ing] their connection to the land" is constitutive of settler colonialism.

In addition, while one purported goal of the project is to "inspire dialogue" about these differential histories and presents, this initiative participates in the erasure of First Nations sovereignty because it's commemorating Canada's confederation. "Inspiring dialogue" does not require the state to commit to substantive change. "Dialogue" in this context is a neoliberal euphemism for conversation that assumes the guise and language of equity but actually reifies power relations that benefit the settler colonial state. Moreover, this celebratory, settler-state context implies a limit to the imaginary of how "people, places, and perspectives . . . are vital to our futures"—where the abolition of the Canadian state is not imagined by the Canada 150 funders as one such desired future—and raises questions regarding who is included in the "our" of "our futures." Nevertheless, Belmore's decision to create *Wave Sound* suggests that despite this initiative's colonialist, neoliberal-multicultural framing and funding sources, *Wave Sound* holds the potential to exceed the initiative's performative framework. As a decolonial critique of "dialogue," the echo of *Wave Sound* liberates practices of voicing and listening from the hollow performance of "talking and listening" that neoliberal epistemes rely on to halt substantive change.

In a 2017 interview for *Canadian Art*, Belmore stated that in *Wave Sound*, "it's the body and the ability to listen—to listen well, and experience not what we think is the 'quiet,' but what is the world outside of our bodies. Moreover, it's about listening to the water and the land and all the other beings that live out there, too." This praxis of listening that *Wave Sound* facilitates expands the relationality of the body by registering echoes of the sites' historical contexts. Harkening back to Belmore's remembrance of her ancestors at the first performance of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*, in what follows, I demonstrate how *Wave Sound* registers and amplifies the echo as remembrance and nonlinear time. The nonlinear time of the echo can be activated when the impact an event leaves on a place recurs through remembrance, so the presence of the "past" event is felt in another moment, in a way that represents a simultaneous return to and departure from that past moment, vibrationally refracted by the contours of different ways of remembering.

To make the listening devices for each site, Belmore cast moulds from the features of the sites themselves—imprinted by time, erosion from wind and waves, and human and nonhuman use—thus shaping possibilities for how sound can travel, resonate, and be heard. For the aluminum listening cones, for instance, Belmore and Yero first took silicone casts of rock formations at each site, as depicted below for the Pukaskwa site—land traditionally stewarded by Anishinaabe people. The silicone castings were then used to make positive models, as the image of the Banff positive illustrates. The completed listening devices were placed at their corresponding park sites where the castings had been made, functioning as a material/aesthetic echo not only of the megaphone but of the land where they were installed.



Silicone casting (Pukaskwa) and positive model (Banff) of *Wave Sound* listening cones (2016). Photos courtesy Rebecca Belmore.

For me, this artistic practice and its resulting aesthetics underscore how listening can be defined as a set of social relationships between bodies and space. Rather than a smooth conical listening device, the contours of the land filter the site visitors' sensorial experiences when listening through the cast aluminum cones. This materiality is inseparable from the histories of its formation, including the ongoing structure of Canadian settler colonialism that enables the land to be read as National Park property. Listeners are invited, in part, to hear the history of settler colonialism, since the shape of the cone impacts its acoustics. The shape of the cone both echoes the settler colonial histories of that land and allows for a very specific type of listening to the space that presents the listener with the situatedness of their listening.

The large conical structures of *Wave Sound* externalize what is typically imagined to be an internal process of listening through the human ear to demonstrate listening as situated, relational, and subject to power. The act of approaching the smaller opening to listen through the cone physically demonstrates that listening, too, occurs from a particular location. What I hear will be different from what you hear, not only because of different material conditions, but also because of the different memories, social histories, positionalities, and relationalities that condition our listening praxes as interconnected to our lives. Like voicing, listening is never just about a single sense or a desocialized materiality; rather, listening and voicing are always connected to the social-historical context that produces the conditions to listen, to voice, and that has conditioned understandings of what it means to do so. By engaging the different place-based memories and orientations to this site that *Wave Sound* visitors carry with them (including and exceeding their different positionalities as Indigenous, settler, or alien), *Wave Sound* evokes what may be thought of as spatial-temporal echoes.

The placement of the listening devices close to the ground so that visitors must crouch, kneel, or sit on the ground to use them further facilitates this situated form of multisensory and multi-temporal listening. Such a pose works in opposition to the colonial pose of the surveyor, whose imperial eye scouts the land to map and bring into order/violence. To sit or kneel on the ground near a body of water is a reorientation to the material components of land and water: the listener might feel the slight spring of the ground, the rockiness; they might taste, smell, and feel the lake water in the air and on the grass. Building on Eidsheim's description of voicing as "internal corporeal choreography" (2015, 111), I argue that *Wave Sound* enacts listening as an (extra/em)bodied, relational posture—a listening praxis that remains open to hearing, feeling, and sensing "the world outside of our bodies." While the body here may seem to be posed in opposition to "the world

outside," they are actually contiguous rather than discrete or oppositional materialities. Recalling Belmore's description of her voice leaving her body during *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*'s 1991 performance repositions the body not as an a priori contained entity but as relational, a materiality that extends into the environment and registers the environment beyond her subjectivity. As opposed to the anthropological construction of "thick description" (Geertz 1973) that also animated the imperial eye and early travel writing's practice of cataloguing and anthologizing, visitors are invited to listen across bodies, temporalities, histories, and contexts through the acts of kneeling on the ground and bending to listen through the metal cones.

For Geertz, the ethnographic praxis of thick description involves first grasping and then rendering the complexity of multiple superimposed concepts that he glosses as "at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit" (1973, 10). On the other hand, the echo of *Wave Sound* does not activate an anthropological or ethnographic mode of listening. Rather, the echo proposes an (extra/em)bodied praxis of listening that foregrounds the interwoven complexity of the social and sensorial, yet asks listeners to defer any immediate recourse to grasping and rendering this complexity. Instead, it asks listeners to engage the time lag of the echo as a generative mode of indeterminacy that can encourage a suspension of assumptions about what they are listening to, how listening engages the senses, and what enactments of voicing are worth listening to or "count" as voicing.

Listening through the *Wave Sound* sculptures for "the world outside of our bodies" may also enable us to hear how our own listening practices echo back to us when refracted through the cones' physical amplification of the land's features and social histories. Articulating a relationship between listening and Indigenous nationhood, Audra Simpson questions whether "The very notion of an *indigenous* nationhood, which demarcates identity and seizes tradition in ways that may be antagonistic to the encompassing frame of the state, may be simply unintelligible to the western and/or imperial ear" (2000, 114). Rather than erasing or smoothing over the different social histories of listening that frame each listener's experience or advocating for a return to some supposedly preconditioned state of listening, *Wave Sound* reconstitutes listening as the return of voicing. The looped nature of this performance, where the act of listening is an attunement to alternative modes of voicing, recalls how the echo in *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* returns voice as listening: voicing turns to listening, and listening returns to voice. In this way, *Wave Sound* is also a speaking installation, and *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* is also a listening installation—emphasizing the hermeneutic loop of these practices that the Western/imperial ear obscures.

I propose that, through encouraging such a listening experience, the listening cones of *Wave Sound* allow visitors to experience echo as vibrational, as sonic, as position/posture, and as an orientation to history and meaning. Producing the occasion to listen to the thirty-year return of the decolonial echoes of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan*, *Wave Sound* in particular generates a way to think about the temporality of the echo as durational and nonlinear. The meanings and work of the echo coalesced between these two works but also over a period of at least thirty years. In a sense, it is thus the time between these two pieces through which Belmore establishes the longue durée of the echo as a sustained performance, one that remains necessary for the durational work of unsettling settler colonial power.

Sensing Resonances across Space and Time

By producing the occasion to listen deeply to the continued echo and resonances of these spatially and temporally intertwined histories and presents of settler colonialism, performances of *Wave Sound* and *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* offer decolonial potentialities that not only critique the prevailing settler colonial spatial-temporal-sensorial order, but also "offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism" (Smith 2012, 204). Through Belmore's ongoing artistic practice, she has focused on developing an alternative language of the body in the context of profound losses, including that of ties to language, where using the body becomes a method of voicing (Belmore 2017). Embedded within this practice is a politics of possibility and futurity. A cross-temporal feedback loop between voicing and listening, the decolonial echo enacts intermaterial relations across and between bodies and land to produce alternatives to settler colonial frameworks of voice and voicelessness that anchor neoliberal democracy. Through its mediated return, the echo situates voicing and listening bodies in relation to one another, and as capable of learning from and through that relationality. In this way, the echo is a kind of reimagined language of the body that can enact decolonial options for voicing and listening when ties to spoken language have been foreclosed on, and when coloniality forecloses on possibilities for meaningful relationalities through its violent assertion of governance, epistemologies, and borders based on binaries and hierarchies. Rather than treating settler colonialism as fait accompli, the longue durée of the echo can orient us—Indigenous, settler, and alien listeners—toward Indigenous survivance and decolonial praxes as requiring sustained engagement and political work over time.

As a settler listener whose body was not present at the performance sites, I cannot speak to how my body might have affectively registered the echo's activation of intermaterial relationalities with the specific Indigenous lands and nonhuman bodies at the different sites. However, thinking with and in relation to the echo of these works has impacted my critiques of and embodied departures from the normative colonial framing of voicing and listening. I began to question these concepts as a vocalist at a Western school of music—where ear training and music theory courses were certainly invested in inculcating practices of hungry listening (Robinson 2020). While pursuing that arc of questioning enabled me to come into my queerness and feminist politics, the decolonial echo of *Wave Sound* and *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* interpolates me into the performance as a settler to divest from colonial praxes of listening and voicing that attempt to possess, hypostatize, or depoliticize sound performance. In emphasizing the specificity of relationalities between bodies and space/time, the echo interpolates everyone differently.

While my experiences of *Wave Sound* and *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* have been through their digital, photographic, sonic, and narrative iterations, at the Revolutions in Sound symposium, I had the opportunity to be in conversation with Dylan Robinson, who visited the *Wave Sound* installation at Gros Morne in addition to participating in the Gibraltar Point action and performance of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan* discussed earlier. Robinson explained that rather than the sound of the waves, he heard only "the intersensory experience of the ground alongside [his] body" and the wind moving through the cast aluminum: "What I wish I heard in *Wave Sound* is the echoes of the land and sovereign territory of Mi'kmaq people. And yet perhaps it merely marks the very point at which I do not / cannot know how to listen to this history that is already there."[8] Robinson's account of his listening experience foregrounds how the longue durée of the echo and its power begins across the bodies of specific listeners in relation. *Wave Sound*'s evocation of a generative indeterminacy—of being confronted with that which is not (yet) heard or known—demonstrates the false promise of

the rush to "dialogue." Whereas dialogue presumes a shared language—the terms of which are overdetermined by coloniality—the echo repositions listening and voicing as modes of transformative action, returning to the listening body a sense of the ongoing work and responsibility to decolonize by delinking from colonial regimes of the sensible and advancing Indigenous resurgence against settler-state extractivism and colonial power. Finding the echo might take a long time, but it's offering us the tools to get there eventually. In this way, the vibrational gesture of the echo may be understood as decolonial in that it orients us away from the art object as enclosure and toward the way that the echo—the epistemological loop between voicing and listening—acts on and through bodies over an extended period, expanding our relationalities for a futurity that's not yet heard, but will be.

By resituating voicing and listening as interconnected acts that articulate a relationality to land and power, the echo functions as an alternative language that can be a tactic for the politics of sovereignty. When understood as an alternative language, the echo is also outside the speaking/listening duality that has been such an immense roadblock to substantive change, particularly when the neoliberal Canadian settler-state mobilizes dialogue as an end in and of itself. As a project that has coalesced over a period of thirty years and continues to resonate in the bodies of listeners, the decolonial echo of *Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* and *Wave Sound* enacts a nonlinear durational politics of relationality that models the long duration of decolonial politics and also allows for the long duration of a certain type of imaginative work. Pursuing and enacting decoloniality is a long-term project that requires persistent, sustained, difficult, and sometimes unexciting/unglamorous work, attention, and commitment. The longue durée of the echo speaks to the longue durée of Indigenous survivance (Vizenor 2008) and the politics and possibilities of the decolonial echo.

Notes

1. As Binnema and Niemi (2006) note, in 1885, the Canadian government "reserved" land surrounding a hot spring with an eye toward resource extraction and capitalist development. The 1887 Rocky Mountains Park Act expanded the reserved land to include Lake Minnewanka (a *Wave Sound* installation site) and designated it as Canada's first national park. The 1876 Indian Act, which codified both who would be recognized as an "Indian" and what would constitute a "reserve" according to the newly confederated Canadian settler state, was revised in 1886 to divest Indigenous peoples from their hunting and fishing rights on nonreserve lands. In 1890, following park superintendent George Stewart's assertion that "Indians should be excluded from the Park" (cited in Binnema and Niemi, 729), hunting was banned in Banff National Park, and the settler state began forcibly removing Stoney Nakoda people from the park to serve the interests of tourism and sports hunters.

2. While works engaging Indigeneity and sound have primarily focused on the dynamics of settler colonialism (Brady 1999; Rath 2003; Tomlinson 2007), a growing body of literature in Indigenous sound studies prioritizes Indigenous epistemologies, theorizing, and praxes regarding sound and the senses. These works engage Indigenous modernities (Levine and Robinson 2019), centre Indigeneity within American music studies (Perea and Solis 2019), theorize sonic sovereignty via performance (Reed 2019) and listening (Tahmahkera 2017), and address ecological stakes of Indigenous sound art (Galloway 2020).

3. Following Patrick Wolfe (1999) and Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016), I understand settler colonialism not as an event but as an ongoing structure.

4. Melamed (2015) identifies racial capitalism's constant expropriation of natural resources as a method of ongoing colonialism as up to 50 percent of existing natural resources are on Indigenous land.

5. Sound studies has recently invested in unsettling sound from the ear by attending to vibration. Musicologist Nina Eidsheim (2015), for instance, demonstrates the relational and multisensory dimensions of sound that may be produced by any vibrating body, Eidsheim (2019) resituates the vibrational practice of voicing as produced by a community of listeners, and Michele Friedner and Stefan Helmreich (2012) engage work on low frequencies that are heard by feeling vibrations in one's body.

6. My understanding of the social is not bounded to the formation of the human. In dialogue with Mel Chen's (2012) attention to queer socialities between humans, nonhuman animals, and objects, I define the social as encompassing relationships between humans and land, between human and nonhuman bodies, and between time and politics; in effect, I understand relationality as inherently social.

7. I understand modernity's sensorial regime as the partitioning of the senses and the body, where hearing, for instance, is configured as discrete from vision and associated with the ears, and where the Cartesian perspective separates the body from the mind. For the colonizing work of this sensory order, see Robinson (2020) and Classen and Howes (2006).

8. Dylan Robinson, written response to the author, February 29, 2020.

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On the Record: Sissieretta Jones and Black Feminist Recording Praxes

Kristin Moriah

After the spotlights faded, few reporters bothered to note the details of her daily life. So, while Sissieretta Jones might have once been billed America's first Black superstar (among other superlatives), information about her final years is sparse. We know that she retired to Providence, Rhode Island. She sold various rental properties and sundries once the money started running dry. She may or may not have worked as a housekeeper for a wealthy white family in town (Lee 237). And despite her reduced status, eager eyes scrutinized her while she tended her rose garden. Her shadow loomed large for the children in her neighbourhood. Years after her death, those children would reminisce about the theatre impresarios, Black actors, and celebrities who passed in and out of her door (McGetrick 1980). The details of her last days, the contents of her parlour, and the state of the home in which she spent her final days took on a mythological status in their memories and local lore. As such, one of the significant interventions made by Dr. Carl R. Gross, "the primary physician to the black community in Providence for several decades" (Carl R. Gross Collection), and a former neighbour of singer Sissieretta Jones, was providing a detailed depiction of the domestic life of the performer at the end of her career. Describing Sissieretta Jones's home in Rhode Island, Gross painted a picture of opulence:

> Madame Jones spent a quiet life with some of the treasures collected in her former days: a large oil painting of the Grand Canal by C. Valette, a Corot, a Murat, and the "Old Mill" by C. Ruette, all famous artists. The top of her walnut piano was covered with autographed pictures of many artists, notably, Madame Melba,[1] Cole and Johnson with their famous song, "Mudder Knows" and many other pieces of sheet music. Also retained were her two fur coats, her wardrobe of some of the wonderful evening gowns loaded with sequins, some gorgeous airgrets [sic], gloves: and other finery, the three gold medals, her scrapbook, photographs of herself and her parrot which she bought 28 years ago in Argentina. (Gross 1966, 5)

So much can be made of the tableaux. The European paintings illustrate the singer's interest in fine art and her keen aesthetic sensibilities. The juxtaposed photographs of Australian opera singer Nellie Melba and Cole and Johnson speak to the reconciliation between art music and the variety stage that defined Sissieretta Jones's career. In the evocative list of coats, costumes, jewelry, and the no doubt colourful plumage of her exotic bird, it is easy to lose track of something as seemingly mundane as a scrapbook. But Sissieretta Jones's scrapbook is a complex document that provides rich material evidence of the singer's innovations in the field of sound and performance.

Today, Sissieretta Jones's scrapbook is held in the Moorland Spingarn archives at Howard University and remains an important source of information about the performer and her life. Hovering at the margins of both mainstream (read: white) nineteenth-century press coverage and contemporary database search tools, the voice that Jones wanted to be heard is tangible in her scrapbook. Ellen Gruber Garvey (2013) might argue that the scrapbook was "published" once it entered into

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Howard's archives. It was donated to the archives by Carl R. Gross, who explained that he was given "the three medals, scrapbook, photographs, etc.," by "Mr. William P.H. Freeman, a Negro realtor and past president of the local N.A.A.C.P" who, "knowing I was interested in Negro history in Rhode Island, said, when my eyes are closed, these things might be thrown out and lost to posterity" (Gross 1966, 5). The scrapbook is a repurposed Bank of Nova Scotia Canada ledger. Was the choice of material a tacit critique of the commodification of Blackness on the variety circuit? Or was it simply a matter of making the most of what was at hand when she was on the road? We may never know the answers to those questions. But the scrapbook documents Jones's career from 1892 to 1899. It contains over three hundred articles, cut and pasted, often overlapping, which discuss Jones's performances and career. Many of the articles in the scrapbook lack distinct publication information like the titles of the papers from which they were culled. The effect of handling the fragile tome and reading about Jones therein might be disorienting if not for the unending emphasis on the singer's voice. Indeed, in Gross's biographical sketch, despite only having heard Jones sing once (5), he notes that he relied on evidence from her scrapbook to make claims about the nature of her voice throughout her career (1) and includes an appendix of "some quotes from her personal scrapbook about her voice" (6). Gross's fascination with the singer's voice suggests his own curiosity, longing, and sense of loss—feelings that have become a motif for her biographers.

Metropolitan Printing Co. *The Black Patti, Mme. M. Sissieretta Jones the greatest singer of her race.* 1899. Photograph.

Attention to the scrapbook reveals how Sissieretta Jones[2] strategically leveraged her European performance reviews to increase her listenership and wages in the United States. Jones toured Europe for the first (and only) time from February until November in 1895. According to clippings that she provided to African American newspapers, the singer performed at the renowned Winter Garden in Berlin for three months. Jones also claimed that she performed for Wilhelm II, the last German Emperor and King of Prussia, at his palace and was subsequently presented with an elaborate diamond brooch for her performance. Afterward, the classically trained opera singer told the African American newspaper the Indianapolis *Freeman* that she would like to live in Europe permanently. Her biographers frequently cite the success of this trip and its symbolic importance for African Americans.[3] And yet, evidence of these events in the archives of major German newspapers is elusive and contradictory at best, if it exists at all. Nevertheless, after the much-hyped tour, her career would take many twists and turns. Sissieretta Jones became a prototypical turn-of-the-century Race Woman:[4] a classically trained opera soloist who sang in venues like Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden. She was the highest-paid Black female performer of the nineteenth century, and she was a role model and dynamic mentor for future generations of Black performers.

Archival records reveal how sound was central to Jones's understanding of herself as a spokeswoman, quite literally a formal voice for her race in the 1890s. Here, it is important to note that although she performed at the dawn of the recording age, early Black art musicians were rarely recorded. These conditions have resulted in a paucity of audio records of early Black performance. No known audio recordings of Sissieretta Jones's voice exist. But as she laboured in performance, Jones embodied Blackness, reproduced that Blackness for her listeners, and actively recorded it through textual means. This process of recording her sound at a moment in which records of Black lives and deaths were a matter of utmost urgency reflects the political necessity of recording her voice in its true texture and context. What might it mean to "listen" to Jones through the texts that she constructed, limited though they may be? I argue that imbrications of text and sound foster productive readings of Jones's work, and we must approach her life with an ear for sound even as we read. Jones's transnational work reveals the multifold complexities surrounding nineteenth-century African American women's performances and the sound of their voices.

In the course of this investigation, I treat Black women's voices as social objects or concrete rallying points within the African American community and suggest that Black artists shaped the quality of that object for personal and political gains. Sissieretta Jones's performance reviews and interviews, especially those she personally disseminated and collected in her scrapbook, reveal particular attention to the voice as just such an object. My research demonstrates that the transmission and transcription of sound were profoundly important to women like Jones, who often went to great lengths to control their sound and manage their quality. Black women used subversive recording and listening practices to subvert the structural racism that subtended their American performances. While I hope to avoid dwelling too long on what might be considered simple wordplay, I believe that viewing Sissieretta Jones's textual reproductions of her voice as analogous to producing and keeping a race record can help us further understand the nuances of Black performance at the dawn of the twentieth century. In this work, I also consider African American performance in Germany as a complex site for the production of music and acoustical innovation. In simple terms, Germany does something different for Black singers, musicians, and performers. Matthew Morrison points out that the "anti-Black ideologies that shaped both European and American society in the late nineteenth century as musicological discourses took shape" can be traced to musicology's German roots (2019, 782). Identifying Germany as a significant location for African American classical musicians between World War I and World War II, Kira Thurman has argued that "musical

performances occasionally rendered the categories of Blackness and Germanness, long presented as separate in transatlantic discourse, malleable or fluid" and that musical experiences were processed "through a racial filter" (2019, 831). Given these conditions, despite her reputation as a genteel, if not meek, Race Woman, the way Jones deployed her German performance reviews reveals the transgressive social and political uses of sonic records in transnational contexts.

This work extends notable recent contributions to the field of Sound Studies which take the relationship between sound and race as their main focus. I am particularly indebted to Jennifer Lynn Stoever's *The Sonic Color Line*, in which she insists that sound is "a critical modality through which subjects (re)produce, apprehend, and resist imposed racial identities and structures of racist violence" (2016, 4) and reveals "the dynamic relationships between racial ideologies, the development of sound media, and the modern listening practices that shape (and are shaped by) them" (4). Following Stoever, who argues that "sound functions as a set of social relations and a compelling medium for racial discourse" (2016, 7), I argue that Black female performers were acutely aware of the political nature of sound and voice. Nina Sun Eidsheim has termed that particular conflation of race and sound *acousmatic blackness* and defines it as "the perceived presence of the black body in a vocal timbre" (7). Echoes of Alex W. Black's term resonant body can be found here, too. Taking mid-nineteenth-century performers Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield and Mary Webb as his focus, Black's concept "emphasizes the influence a performer's voice had over the way a reviewer saw her body. It also suggests how her voice resounds in descriptions of her body. For these women, to become textualized was not to become abstracted" (2011, 620). Black posits that for women like Greenfield and Webb, "embodiment was realized in print. The voices of these performers call attention to their corporeality. These calls are answered by representations of their bodies that show the traces of their vocalization. The sight and sound of the body in performance, in other words, is remediated as text" (620). Even though she performed during a later period, this is no less true for Sissieretta Jones.

Writing Sound with Scissors

My research begins in the 1890s, also known as the Red Decade, a period in which lynching and racial violence rocked the nation on a nonstop basis. Years of post-Emancipation progress were erased as the United States government retracted many of the hard-earned rights of Black Americans, calling their very citizenship into question. At the same time, as Gustavus Stadler (2010) has shown, the 1890s were a decade in which lynching recordings interspersed with coon songs became popular commodities. Such "recordings were very much in the mainstream of the emergence of the recording industry as a major form of commercial entertainment" (Stadler 2010, 95), eventually helping to "modernize and further capitalize a longstanding fascination among whites with black voices, as well as fantasies about the relationship of black voices to black bodies" (96) that is rooted in racial terror and violence.

The 1890s also saw an increase in the international popularity of Black music. An influx of African American vaudeville performers arrived on European shores. For African American performers, travelling abroad was often a matter of survival, providing an opportunity to work and live in less hostile environments. Several African American variety acts established robust careers in Europe while remaining virtually unknown in the United States and relatively neglected by the Black press.[5] For others, success in Europe formed a repudiation of American racism. Race, recording, and performance were deeply intertwined in this period. Although Germany was the centre of the music

publishing world and sound recording in the late nineteenth century, no recordings of Sissieretta Jones's performances there, or in the United States, have been preserved.[6] The closest that we can get to listening to the singer involves working through the archives to discover accounts of her stage performances by reviewers and in-person interviews by Jones. During her lifetime, written reviews made her performances almost equally accessible to Black and white audiences around the world. Newspaper readers could use these reviews to imagine and approximate her sound.

When we look at nineteenth-century scrapbooks and assemblages of newspaper clippings made by Black performers, we repeatedly see Black women who extracted self-representative text from hostile contexts to shore up their reputations in ways that are strikingly progressive and anachronistically modern. I liken scrapbooking by Black women performers to a deep and at times transgressive engagement with print technology. Through the mechanism of the scrapbook, the women I write about preserved and assembled textual versions of themselves which offered readers alternate views of their lives and works outside of the circumscribed world of mainstream print media. In this area of research, I am preceded by Ellen Gruber Garvey, who has argued that "scrapbook work and the understandings of information that it developed allowed people to see newspapers as extractable data. They mark the path from scrapbooks to our current age of digital information" (2013, 229). Like Garvey, I see value in understanding the ways older relationships to print media continue to impact our current information management and interpretive practices. And so, I argue that the printed word represented a vital technology for new forms of self-articulation that also bleeds into fields like Sound Studies. In other words, through their scrapbooks and clippings, Black women actively reshaped the way their sound would be perceived "live" and in the past tense. Shaping their sonic reception through print culture, they navigated the hostile terrain of early sound technology and media.

Scrapbooking, or what Garvey has termed "writing with scissors," was a critical sound recording method for Black women vocalists in the nineteenth century. Garvey argues that "scrapbook makers' work mirrored the practices of newspaper editors" (2013, 5) and reminds us that "actors were particularly avid scrapbook makers. The reviews and playbills they saved supplied evidence that long-vanished performances had taken place, and they sometimes used their books as a job-hunting aid to show to theater managers" (10). Garvey's claims certainly ring true for performers like Sissieretta Jones, an avid scrapbooker. Furthermore, she notes that

> African Americans and feminists are among those who have sought to create archives that include their history and experience . . . they seek not only to have their material enter into existing archives, but to preserve their own systems for ordering knowledge, and to assert their own systems for controlling access. (Garvey 2013, 209)

Garvey's claims are illuminating when taken into consideration alongside sound theorist Mladen Dolar's conjecture that "the written word has no power if it is not preceded by, and based in, the living voice. The authority of writing depends on its being the faithful copy of the voice" (2006, 109). Collecting, curating, and arranging evidence of her vocal performances placed Sissieretta Jones in the role of editor and sound innovator. Within this framework, Jones's personal scrapbook and public sound curation becomes crucial evidence of her "object voice" and her ability to record, control, and deploy her own sound in public discourse.

Searching for the presence of Jones's voice in the archive, I also seek evidence of her humanity beyond the role of exceptional Race Woman. One of the problems with fleshing out a more three-dimensional version of Jones is that while much was written about her, little was written *by* her. A further layer of complexity is added when we consider that her "official" nickname "Black Patti" was later adopted by a successful record label, one whose outputs Jones distanced herself from. More recently, the name Black Patti has also been adopted by a white German duo who perform acoustic blues of the kind produced by the 1920s record label. Thus, if we are to discover Jones's voice in the archives, we must do so through an unorthodox approach to written text, an artifact that is itself an attempt to visualize her sound. In the absence of any personal written records, archival records, including her scrapbook and its selections, reveal how sound was central to Sissieretta Jones's understanding of herself and her role as a spokeswoman, and formal voice, for her race in a transnational context. The voice that she wanted to be heard remains present in these records.

And yet, Sissieretta Jones's interviews and newspaper reviews are important sonic records and evidence of the way she conceptualized sound. As she laboured in performance, Jones embodied Blackness, reproduced that Blackness for her listeners, and actively recorded it through textual means. This jerry-rigged process of recording her sound at a moment in which records of Black lives and deaths were a matter of utmost urgency reflects the political necessity of recording her voice in its true texture and context. Here, my case rests on the multiple implications of the recorded word and sound in African American print culture. Perhaps, to some extent, all writing is meant to reflect sound or the spoken word, but our understanding and expectations have changed. The process of writing the voice with scissors, or textual sound recording, becomes even more complicated when we consider the intimate relationship between sound, text, and body. Voice and text compete for meaning, although they are not easily separated. As such, as Alexander Weheliye notes, "the voice, even more so than writing, represents the pure interiority and the proper domain of the sovereign human subject" (2005, 27). However, until relatively recently, it was only as a written language, or a record, that the voice could be archived or transcend time and space. The sovereignty represented by the voice was fragile and always temporal for marginalized subjects. The practice of reclaiming that voice through the organizing of text and printed matter pushes back against societal structures that seek to deny Black sovereignty.

Black women who performed art music were formally excluded from early phonographic recordings, but they and their work continued to exist in relation to it. We can apprehend Sissieretta Jones's relationship to textual records of her voice through sound technology, particularly phonography. Lifelong comparisons between Jones and Italian opera singer Adelina Patti marked a through-line between Jones's work and the careers of other Black singers whose nicknames helped readers approximate their sound by way of racial binaries, as with women like Elizabeth Greenfield (aka the Black Swan). Opportunities to hear Sissieretta Jones in concert might have been limited, but one might get a sense of Jones's voice by way of favourable and accurate reviews and recordings of Adelina Patti's voice. She collected and archived such reviews regularly. As Nina Sun Eidsheim shows, the timbre of the Black voice was a concern to both listeners and performers. So, too, was an attention to the ways this racialized sound was recorded and circulated, often in the absence of the audio record. An awareness of the phonograph's early existence as a dictation device further emphasizes the complex relationship between sound and writing. Writing sound with scissors, or curating one's press clippings, provided a means for closing such hermeneutic gaps.

I seek to expand our understanding of the powers of alternate forms of sound recording as a means of restoring the humanity of minoritized performers who have been excluded from audio archives. Read quite literally, records of Black voices and Black presence in their artistic and cultural dimensions are political acts. We must remain cognizant of the fact that for African Americans, the act of testifying, and of recording that testimony, is especially significant. Here, I briefly turn towards Ida B. Wells's *Red Record* (Wells-Barnett 1895) to consider how the act of Black recording was an imperative for Wells, the ways those records exist within different mediums, and the ways Black voices were systematically expunged from the public record. Speaking of the political nature of recording, Wells writes: "It becomes a painful duty of the Negro to reproduce a record which shows that a large portion of the American people avow anarchy, condone murder and defy the contempt of civilization." The racial record that Wells refers to takes numerous forms, including bodily inscription. Highlighting the complex intersection of sex and gender in the recording of these race records, Wells also notes that:

> True chivalry respects all womanhood, and no one *who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South*, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due to the women of his own race or respect for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power. (Wells-Barnett 1895, 14, emphasis added)

Wells's work highlights Black women's unique role in the spectrum of racial violence that rocked America. It also underscores the plasticity of the public record and how the very act of recording is made visible through the Black body.

"Die Wirkliche Black Patti" and the Colour of Sound

I read the press clippings about Berlin that Jones provided to the Indianapolis *Freeman* in the article "Mme. Sissieretta Jones" against a range of primary sources and ephemera, including the sources that Jones chose to omit. We know for a fact that Sisseretta Jones began her European tour in Berlin in 1895. Afterward, she publicly insisted upon her success in Europe and expressed a desire to stay there for an extended period at a future date. The European tour signified a triumph for Jones, the African American community, and the Black diaspora. But my archival research reveals that such claims might not have been entirely accurate. As primary sources compiled by Rainer E. Lotz show, Jones was preceded by a "fake" Black Patti (Lotz 1997, 29).[7] That "Black Patti" was a flop on Berlin's stages, and the negative reception might have tainted Jones's audiences. And yet, Sissieretta Jones's African American readers interpreted her acceptance by German audiences as a true measure of her talent in ways that reviews by white Americans did not. But questions of race and authenticity haunted the performer. In her German reviews, an insistence on her lightness, or a denial of her darkness, seems analogous with praising her musical talent. German reviewers simply could not say that Jones was a good singer while calling her "black." Thus, a reviewer from the *Borsen-Courrier* wrote the following:

> Our trans-atlantic cousins have not exaggerated comparing their country-woman with Patti, but the adjective "black" seems to us unnecessarily impolite. Miss Jones is evidently of Negro blood, but not alone of Negro blood. She is a mulatto of bronzed complexion and pleasant expressive features, with full lips and high forehead and the bearing of a lady, even to the choice of her costume.

But was Jones an authentic representative of African American culture? Or did she merely ventriloquize whiteness? How was her humanity made manifest in performance? Kira Thurman's (2019) assessment of Black performance in interwar Germany resonates here, too. She suggests that "the audience's practice of racial listening thus reflected transatlantic conversations on blackness and proved that Western art music and its oft-touted, supposedly benign message of universality could not escape the politics of race and nation; rather, it had become complicit in them" (Thurman 2019, 834).

In the *Borsen-Courrier* review, Jones's physical description calls the reader's attention. For a readership steeped in nineteenth-century racial theory, Jones's mouth signified "a rather dull gross nature, and of some indolence in the disposition" à la European phrenologists like George Burgess. And yet, astoundingly to some, she was a more than a competent singer. Seeking out degrees of racial purity in Jones, her reviewers supported racial theories by eugenicists like Eugen Fischer, who believed that people of African and European descent "were fairly intelligent" and even "superior to full-blooded black Africans," but still "far inferior to Europeans in their creative abilities" (Weikart 121). People of African descent were unable to labour or create without the guidance of whites. They were machinic and yet childish in their orientation to the world. In the schema Louis Chude-Sokei (2015) outlines, they are reminiscent of automata. On a larger scale, such theories were used to justify forced African labour within the German colonies. In the German concert hall, being Black meant that, for her reviewers, Jones could not produce authentic sounds of her own but merely parrot the sounds of more authentic and talented women of European descent like Adelina Patti. Kira Thurman explains that these characteristics of Black reception in Berlin lasted well past the nineteenth century:

> Audiences routinely resurrected racial barriers in response to black performers' musical attempts (intentional or otherwise) to dismantle them. White listeners' struggles to come to terms with black musicians' performances are proof that musical reception was not a passive experience but rather an active process whereby racial categories were being worked out and renegotiated in interwar central Europe. (2019, 831)

Despite her publicity efforts, Jones was unable to filter out reviews that revealed German fixations on colour. For example, from the oft-cited reviews published in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, likely furnished by Jones and her management, we see that readers of the *Kreuz-Zeitung* were assured that Jones was the "true Black Patti," that "singer of repute in America," but also that she was "a mulatto of pleasing appearance." German reviewers were hard-pressed to overlook the contradictions between what they were hearing and seeing when it came to Sissieretta Jones. Still, Jones subverted racist ideas throughout her performances. Having the bearing of a lady, in costume and comportment, differentiated Jones from the depictions of labouring Black women that were popular on stage and in the surrounding culture. It certainly distinguished her from figures found in piccaninny shows and human zoos, and nothing could have been further from the traditional portrayal of Black womanhood on the popular stage. In her costume and choice of staging, Jones resisted the ethnographic tendencies that characterized typical portrayals of Black womanhood in the United States and on the international Vaudeville and *Varieté* circuits. There are explicit connections between her sartorial choices and the other forms of textual/tactile editing Jones practised.

A BEACON LIGHT: THE FREEMAN—It shines for the humblest as well as the greatest member of the race, and is absolutely FEARLESS and RELIABLE. When you see it in THE FREEMAN, IT IS SO!

The Freeman

A National Illustrated Colored Newspaper

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, MAY 4 1895.

THE ANIMUS OF SOUTHERN

"Greater New York's" Doings

A Weekly Record of the Up-to-Date Doings

MME. SISSERRETTA JONES.

The World's greatest Afro American songstress, now traveling in Europe, takes the land of William and Bismarck by storm. See comment of German Press below.

Miss Sisserretta Jones, known in America as the "Black Patti," made her first appearance in the Wintergarten yesterday. The singer's pleasant delicately bronzed face protests against the first part of this name, but the enthusiastic applause her singing called forth, proved the epithet to be true at least. The first number, Gounod's "Valse Arietta," showed ability to manage the most difficult florid music. "The Last Rose of Summer," showed her decided talent for expression of sentiment. Her voice is clear and true up to the highest tones. The admiration awakened by the singer was not wholly due to her interesting appearance and to her tasteful costume, but was in great part a tribute to her really remarkable ability.—Berliner Fremdenblatt, Wednesday Feb. 20, 1895.

The program of the Wintergarten has been enriched by the acquisition of the American singer, Miss Sisserretta Jones, whose rich flexible voice and admirable musical delivery have earned for her the name of the "Black Patti." The comparison is not a bad one, for we have here to do with a singer, who not only attracts our interest because of her nationality, but whose full sweet voice charms her hearers at once. The impression made upon the audience was so favorable that instead of the one song announced, Miss Jones was obliged to sing five. Beside the fine gifts with which nature has endowed her, Miss Jones has enjoyed a most excellent musical schooling. This is shown in the easy, natural manner of her singing: there is no seeking for effect, only the endeavor to render music and text their true effect. Her voice has power and fire, and the florid passages remind one of the rapid flow of a mountain brook. The Wintergarten has won a fine representation of the art of bel canto in the "Black Patti," and her songs bring an element of true art into the program of this country.—Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung.

Miss Sisserretta Jones, the true "Black Patti," a singer of repute in America, made her first appearance in the Wintergarten yesterday. The lady is a mulatto of pleasing appearance, and soon won the hearty applause of the large audience. Miss Jones possesses great natural gifts which have been well trained. Her singing shows musical ability and her delivery is excellent. She sang the "Valse Ariette," which Gounod composed for Adeline Patti. Her other numbers were two American compositions, and the "Last Rose of Summer."—Kreuz-Zeitung.

Miss Sisserretta Jones, known in her American home as the "Black Patti," made her debut in the Wintergarten last evening. Only half the name fits, but fortunately the better half. "Patti," we may rightly call her, although we protest against the adjective "black." Miss Jones is a young woman of most pleasing appearance, and only her full lips and delicate brown tint of her complexion betrays her mulatto blood. The only thing "black" about her is the beautiful shining hair. Miss Jones is an artist who can stand the test of severest musical criticism. Her well trained voice is of great range and fine carrying power. Her technical ability is admirable, she executes the most difficult florid passages with perfect ease, and the good taste of her delivery shows natural talent developed by careful and well directed study. A certain sharpness in the upper tones may have been the fault of the hall. Miss Jones is, in short, a singer, who well deserves the applause which greeted her every number.—Post.

She is in Europe for the first time, Miss Sisserretta Jones, or the "Black Patti," as she is called in America. The singer must have seen many things to interest and impress her since her landing from the "Ems," and she herself has made a remarkable impression on this, her first appearance before a German audience. Our trans-atlantic cousins have not exaggerated in comparing their country-woman with Patti, but the adjective "black" seems to us unnecessarily impolite. Miss Jones is evidently of Negro blood, but not alone of Negro blood. She is a mulatto of bronzed complexion and pleasant expressive features, with full lips and high forehead and the bearing of a lady, even to the choice of her costume. The American singer wore a tasteful gown of salmon pink silk covered with jet trimmings. She wore little jewelry: the ensemble was in excellent taste. Miss Jones possesses natural gifts which have been carefully trained. This alone would secure her success. And she possesses as well that which no schooling can give, musical understanding and warm feeling. The colored artist sings with absolute purity and perfect correctness: her high notes are of fine power, the deeper tones rich and full, and her management of rapid passages remarkable. She began with the "Valse Ariette," composed by Gounod for Adeline Patti, sang then two American songs and the "Last Rose of Summer," apparently to allow the German audience opportunity to comparison. It turned out entirely to her favor, and the applause which greeted the close of each number was a tribute to a talent which is quite independent of color or nationality, a talent worthy of admiration for its own sake alone, and which can well appeal to an intelligent audience. The "Black Patti" will soon see that her worth is recognized in Berlin, and the manager of the Wintergarten deserves all thanks for offering us the opportunity of hearing this trans-atlantic star.—Borsen-Courier.

What one of Berlin's chief musical critics says of Mme. Sisserretta Jones:

"Scarce had the great 'Adeline Patti' ceased to charm her hearers in the Philharmonie, before Messrs. Dorn & Baron, managers of the Wintergarten, had found us another Queen of Song, Miss Sisserretta Jones, from America, the true 'Black Patti.' I heard her yesterday with great interest and with much pleasure. It is not only the dusky complexion that is real about her, the clear, full-toned voice, a soprano with range of two octaves, has the true ring. The colored singer's voice has been well endowed by nature, it possesses agreeable tone color, and flexibility, her singing shows sensible schooling—the delivery was in excellent taste. The florid passages earned enthusiastic applause. Miss Jones received such ovations that she was obliged to lengthen her program by four more pieces. She sang 'Message d'amour Valse Ariette,' by Gounod, the 'Last Rose of Summer' and two pretty songs by W. Wilson and I. Perry. The large hall was crowded."—Wilhelm Tappert, in Das Kleine Journal.

Front page of the Indianapolis *Freeman*, May 4, 1895. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.

But what are we to make of the fact that Jones provided these racist clippings to the Indianapolis *Freeman*? What sorts of nuanced differences between American and European listenership did they represent to Jones and her African American readers? Jones's description of her German reception signifies stereotypes about German affinities for music and acoustical knowledge and may have functioned as a coded challenge to white American listeners while vindicating African Americans. As such, Sissieretta Jones leveraged Eurocentricism and racial capitalism against American racists on their own turf. Jones's German reviews contradict the ways she framed Europe in the press. In an interview in the Toronto newspaper the *Empire,* later to become the famed *Globe and Mail*, Jones claimed that

> in Europe there is no prejudice against my race. It matters not to them what is the color of an artist's skin. If a man or woman is a greater actor, or a greater musician, or a greater singer, they will extend a warm welcome, no matter whether he be Jew or Greek or Gentile. It is the soul they see, not the color of his skin. (n.d.)

This commentary signifies the interrelated nature of place and sound. Her reviews suggest that foreign spaces contained white audiences who could hear her in ways that were impossible on US soil. When she performed in Berlin, many German reviewers refused to register visual evidence of Sissieretta Jones's phenotypical Blackness even though she was born to two African American parents. All visual materials and photographs of Jones produced during her lifetime depict her as a dark-skinned woman who would have trouble passing for anything other than African American in the United States. Sissieretta Jones's voice produced discordant visual effects, troubling developing German rubrics about Black humanity through performance.

Statements like those found in the *Empire* appear to have been taken at face value by her readers and critics. They matched standard tropes about travelling in Europe while Black during the late nineteenth century. Jones saved a clipping of the interview in her scrapbook. But given Germany's increasing investment in racial hierarchies in continental Europe and Germany's African colonies at the time, her statements are striking. I wonder, from Jones's perspective, what made Germans better equipped than white Americans to see beyond the skin and into the soul? How can we understand the difference that race makes to transnational listeners during the late nineteenth century? How is it possible that the differences in what Germans heard and saw could be used to Jones's advantage? There is a discrepant reading practice at play among the African American reading public. One of the things we witness in Jones's descriptions of her German reviews is an early example of a kind of colourblind ideology that Jones used to bolster her personal project of racial uplift. Sissieretta Jones's insertion of these German reviews into African American newspapers, akin to scrapbooking on a public level, shifts the conversation from a context in which race itself was blinding and threatened to blot out other senses, especially the audial, and quite literally prevented her from being heard by segments of the American public. Jones's German reviews suggest that in Berlin, a place where race was unseen, or at least improperly interpreted, she could truly be appreciated by white listeners. Here, we also see evidence of the German practice of "blind listening," literally looking away from a performer, which Jennifer Stoever delineates in the *Sonic Color Line* (2016, 115). Thus, readers also learn that Jones's voice had the power to blur the colour line. Jonathan Wipplinger suggests that such moments "of misrecognition" carry with them "profound implications in terms of the role of race in the opera's reception" in Germany (Wipplinger 2012, 247).

The focus in Jones's reviews on what German audience members could or could not see and hear also speaks directly to the problem of racial uplift that Black classical musicians sought to address.

African American women who performed classical music in the public sphere had to prove that they had talent despite their appearance and that finely trained voices and Black bodies could be intertwined. It is precisely that which was denied to them in the mainstream American press. Jones's performance of racial uplift certainly made her appear less "black" in the eyes of German audiences. As such, the transnational performances of art music by Black divas that were so central to the project of racial uplift disrupted precisely that which they sought to represent—a more expansive understanding of Black life, art, creativity, and talent. Sissieretta Jones's experiences performing classical musical abroad reinforce opera scholar Naomi André's assertion that

> opera has proved to be a flexible and capacious genre. It can give voice to the experiences that exist outside the mainstream; with the participation of black composers and librettists behind the scenes, black bodies and embodied stories on the stage, and black audience members interpreting the performance, opera compellingly expresses multiple vantage points that have not previously been staged. (2018, 14)

Beneath the Berlin Wintergarten's glittering glass ceiling, Sissieretta Jones sang popular American songs in addition to classical music that was part of her typical repertoire. Some of those popular songs were part of Adelina Patti's repertoire, openly inviting comparisons between herself and the Italian diva. Adelina Patti performed those numbers in Berlin with the Philharmonie only a few weeks before Sissieretta Jones made her debut there. In the reviews Jones circulated, we glimpse how she not only mimicked Adelina Patti but made Adelina's repertoire *sonically* Black. As I have suggested, being in Berlin prompted Jones to experiment with sound and recording praxes in new ways. In contemporary terms, we might think of Jones's treatment of Patti's set as a remix. Popular songs the two divas shared included "Maggie, the Cows are in the Clover," "Comin' Thro' The Rye," "Last Rose of Summer," and "Home Sweet Home" (Daughtry 1968, 199). We know that at the very least, from this shared list, Jones performed "Last Rose of Summer" for her Berlin audiences. In their depiction of a simple, pastoral life, the songs in the divas' shared repertoire are markedly different from the Negro Spirituals that German audiences would have become accustomed to in concert settings that featured Black performers, as with the Fisk Jubilee Singers. These popular songs and ballads are the inverse of Negro Spirituals in their depiction of an uncomplicated and unforced relationship to the land, rural life, and labour. Performing these songs, Jones actively resisted staged representations of Black labour in favour of Black leisure and pastoral innocence.

These popular songs are also free of the overtly religious overtones that characterize the Negro Spiritual tradition. One of the few articles attributed to Sissieretta Jones was entirely about the importance of Negro Spirituals, which suggests that their omission from her repertoire was highly significant. Notably absent from Jones's reviews are any mention of her performance of Stephen Foster's minstrel song "Swanee River," which she regularly sang for American audiences. What's more, popular ragtime coon songs were not part of Jones's repertoire, and that was probably a disappointment for German listeners, too. That is also a glaring omission, given that, even more than the Negro Spiritual, which fuelled the wild success of choral groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers, ragtime coon songs had begun to be recognized across the globe as the most authentic genre of American music (Abbott and Seroff 2003, 3) by the 1890s.

Jones's on-stage refusal of racial stereotypes surrounding Black womanhood distanced her from "Blackness" when it came to white European listeners. To be sure, Kira Thurman notes that "one-

way critics distanced singers of art music such as Sissieretta Jones from popular Black entertainers was by describing these musicians as much lighter in appearance than their African counterparts in Völkerschauen and circuses" (2013, 67). Through Jones's German performance reviews, we see how for white European audiences, African American women's performances of classical music in Germany threatened to destabilize the connection between race and performance. Unlike Sissieretta Jones, Black women typically appeared on European stages in roles that reinforced notions of white supremacy and justified colonial impulses. One way the discrepancies that performances by women like Sissieretta Jones could be reconciled by white European viewers was to deny the presence of their Blackness or to mute it.

Jones also pushed the boundaries of Black performance and sound through her choice of vocal technique. In Berlin, Jones was praised for her use of bel canto. Writing about her own work reconstructing Samuel Coleridge Taylor's Setting of Paul L. Dunbar's "A Corn Song," researcher Tsitsi Jaji (2013) explains how certain styles of vocal inflection can call forth Black diasporic meaning. Of her project, Jaji writes that

> my decision to sing the entire song in bel canto style (and primarily in head rather than chest register) prioritizes Coleridge-Taylor's Afro-British interpretive reading and this emphasizes the gap of the Black Atlantic, whereas if I had chosen to employ such US black vocal techniques as tone bending, greater chest resonance, and a triplet-based rhythmic feel in the section representing slaves in song, the poem's internal tensions might sound more starkly. (2013, 202)

In keeping with Jaji's contemporary description of her artistic choices in her performance of Black diasporic art music from the nineteenth century, I suggest that what we are witnessing in descriptions of Sissieretta Jones's voice from her Berlin engagement is Jones's attempt to demonstrate the ways race influenced her musical style. For instance, a reporter for the *Borsen-Courrier* wrote that Jones possessed "that which no schooling can give, musical understanding and warm feeling." Could the natural musical affinity the writer describes express more than just his understanding of Black music? *Was it the performance of a Black musical style*? Colour and vocal range are so closely intertwined in these reviews it is hard to imagine otherwise. For example, Wilhelm Tappert of *Das Kleine Journal* explained:

> It is not only the dusky complexion that is real about her, the clear full-toned voice, a soprano with a range of two octaves, has the true ring. The colored singer's voice has been well-endowed by nature, it possesses agreeable tone, color, and flexibility.

One must note the repeated insistence that in Jones's voice, there was a tonality that goes beyond that which is human and sensate, or which could be educated. In their insistence that Jones was unconscious of the effects of her voice and artistic choices, analogies can be made between Jones's vocal presentation and the work of the phonograph. For example, *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* readers learned that

> in the easy, natural manner of her singing[,] there is no seeking for effect, *only the endeavor to render music and text their true effect*. Her voice has power and fire, and the florid passages remind one of the rapid flow of a mountain brook. (emphasis added)

For Jones to seek effect, or to seem to seek effect, would be for her to break yet another illusion accompanying the performance of race on the German stage. In denying Sissieretta Jones's artistic agency and reducing her performance to an almost ethnographic demonstration of innate musical talent, these reviewers aligned Jones's performance with a history of unthinking Black labour represented by foremothers on the popular stage like Joyce Heth. And yet, there is strong evidence to support the idea that Jones was aware of the social nuances surrounding the Black voice. She harnessed the power of these nuances to powerful effect long after the curtains had closed.

Conclusion

I have argued here that Sissieretta Jones's use of German performance reviews reveals strong articulations of her voice and demonstrates how Jones positions herself as a global subject whose textual self-construction was resistant to American racism. In her personal scrapbook, in particular, Jones took special care to collect reviews that mention her voice. The reviews she kept do not prevaricate on the nature of her vocal talent. An addendum to the scrapbook, written after her death, also in the Howard archives, is entitled, "Some Quotes from Her Personal Scrap Book about Her Voice" and contains the following: "if Madame Jones is not the equal of Patti, she at least can come nearer than anything the American public has heard. . . . Her notes are as clear as a mocking bird and her enunciation, perfect" (7). Quotes like these emphasize the importance of her achievement on an international level for Jones and the African American community writ large.

Mrs. Sissieretta Jones. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

My analysis relies on an interdisciplinary approach to textual evidence of sound and an understanding of the complexities of these reviews within their historical context. The multidimensional nature of sound and its ability to be read across genres, mediums, and spaces is critical here. In Berlin, Germany, and the rest of Europe, Black women made sound visible through image and text, contributing to the narratives of black culture and diaspora. Despite being on the margins of mainstream audio recording, Black women performers used the foreign stage to perfect their sound and make it a legible aspect of their stagecraft. In doing so, they produced new ways of interpreting the world and bending it to their will.

But what did Jones have to say about her work and travels? An article from the *Louisville Commercial* entitled "Not Pleased: The Black Patti Thinks Her People Not Well Treated" contains a rare interview with the star. Jones expressed displeasure about the segregation of her audiences into white and coloured seats even though there were plenty of vacant seats in the white section, saying quite simply "I think people of my race ought not to be shut out" in that way. Jones also complained about the difficulty she and her accompanist, Mrs. Alberta Wilson, also African American, had finding lodging in Cincinnati: "We had so much trouble at the hotels in Cincinnati. . . . We had to search and search before we . . . could find a nice place." "Not Pleased" ends with a gloss on Jones's plan to pursue music studies in England, "where people of her race are not only received but when attractive by reason of endowment or acquirement in art, letters or science courted." Whether or not this was the case, by writing with scissors on the pages of her scrapbook and in the Black press, Jones created conditions under which this affirmation could be understood to be true. The seeds that she planted impacted Black performance for generations. After failing to find mainstream acceptance and performance opportunities as a singer of art music after her Berlin tour, Jones headed a successful black variety troupe, the Black Patti Troubadors. The Black Patti Troubadors was an incubator for early twentieth-century Black performance: its rotating cast members would eventually include innovative Black performers like Aida Overton Walker, George Walker, Bert Williams, and Ida Forsyne (Lee 2013, 117). In their 1967 study of Black performance, *Black Magic*, Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer claimed that her 1892 performance at Madison Square Gardens was one of "thirty-six milestones in the history of the 'Negro's participation in American entertainment'" (336). High praise indeed. *But* as Carl Van Vechten observed in his notorious 1926 Harlem Renaissance novel, her fame faded with the rise in interest in more popular forms of Black music.

More recently, Jones has inspired Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Tyehimba Jess, whose prose poem "Sissieretta Jones: *ad libitum*" (2016) treats the artist's complicated relationship with Europe, Black performance, and the Black diaspora. Speaking in the first person with a postmodern candour, Sissieretta Jones reveals the inherently political nature of Black performance work: while singing "with one hand smoldering in the steely canon" (Jess 2016, 162), her chorus "swells like a lynched tongue" (162) even as "the nocturnes boiling beneath the roof of [her] mouth extinguish each burning cross" (162). Here Jones's voice is not simply skilled or beautiful; it is a weapon that directly counteracts racial violence and turns its logic on its head. In Jess's poem, Jones knows the complex nature of her work and its ability to signify on issues as far-reaching as the Middle Passage. In a moment of synesthesia, we hear her "voice shimmering up from the Atlantic's hold" until she becomes "a coda of sail song whipped in the salted wind" (162). And how does she reach these heights? She chews Europe up and spits it out. In the opening line, the singer confesses: "I sing this body *ad libitum*, Europe scraped raw between my teeth until, *presto*, *Ave Maria* floats to the surface from a Tituba tributary of *Swanee*. Until I'm a legato darkling whole note . . ." (162). Freely and with expression, she reconstructs the European elements of performance to create something distinctly

Black and distinctly personal. Thus, in "Sissieretta Jones: *ad libitum*," Jones embodies and vocalizes the editorial techniques at play in her scrapbook and the Black press, remaking herself and her life experiences into a transcendent force that awes audiences and readers. It is the stuff of legends.

Notes

1. Born Helen Porter Mitchell in 1861, Nellie Melba was an Australian born soprano who enjoyed international fame up until the time of her death. The *Cleveland Gazette* claimed that during her 1894 visit to New York, Sissieretta Jones sang several selections for Melba, who "immediately told Mme. Jones that her voice was grand and also stated that Mme. Jones should go to Paris and finish under her instruction, and volunteered her services at the benefit for the same." Melba herself had trained in Paris; thus, the career advice that she gave to Jones was kind of advice that she had personally benefitted from. The *Gazette* also reported that Sissieretta intended to take Melba's advice and that "in a short time one of the greatest concerts ever given in New York will take place. The main artist will be Mme. Melba and the proceeds will be to finish the musical education of Mme. Sissieretta Jones in Paris." Unfortunately, according to Jones's biographer Maureen Lee, there is no evidence that this meeting between Nellie Melba and Sissieretta Jones ever took place or that Melba gave any benefit concert to pay for Jones to study abroad (Lee 84).

2. Sissieretta Jones was born in the bustling shipbuilding city of Portsmouth, Virginia, in January 1869. Her parents had emigrated there from North Carolina, another former slave state. Sissieretta began singing in local churches in Portsmouth at a young age. She began her formal musical training at the Providence, Rhode Island Academy of Music in 1883. Her formal entrance onto the popular stage took place in 1885 when she appeared at the Armory Hall, in Providence, with the legendary singer Flora Batson. In the United States, Jones embodied the potential for African Americans to master traditional European art forms and was celebrated in the African American press. After making her New York debut in 1888, Jones soon became an international sensation, touring the West Indies, South America, and Europe, in addition to the United States and Canada.

3. For example, Carl R. Gross wrote, "Morris Reno, president of the Carnegie Music Hall Association of New York, engaged her for a concert tour of the United States and Europe. She made her first appearance in Berlin, Germany, and the Berliner Zeitung said, "no sooner had the real Patti departed than a most worthy substitute appeared in the person of the Black Patti from America—The European engagement lasted eight months and no singer was ever received with more enthusiasm than Madame Jones. She received a royal command to appear before King Edward while in Britain and that popular monarch expressed the unqualified delight with her performance" (1966, 2).

4. According to Cooper, "any true race woman must be concerned not only with the moral and social character of the race, as the ideology of true womanhood dictated, but also with the intellectual character of the race" (2017, 13). For more on African American Race Women, see Carby (1987) and Cooper (2017).

5. See Lotz (1997).

6. This situation is not unique to Jones. Notable among the Library of Congress's "Lost Recording List" are a number of African American performers who performed in Germany to great acclaim, including the 4 Black Troubadors, Belle Davis and her Pickanninnies, the Darktown Entertainers, the Georgia Piccaninnies, H. M. (Henry Make) Johnson, Isabella Fields, Roland Hayes, and the Will Garland Negeroperette.

7. Citing the *Berliner Zaitung* [sic], a source Sissieretta Jones made a point of to sharing with the Indianapolis *Freeman*, "no sooner had the real Patti departed (Berlin) than a most worthy substitute appeared in the person of the Black Patti from America" (3).

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Corporeal Sounding: Listening to Bomba Dance, Listening to *puertorriqueñxs*

Jade Power-Sotomayor

This article explores the danced sounding practice of Afro Puerto Rican bomba, the oldest extant music and dance form from the archipelago. This centuries-old practice that both celebrates the sacred and registers the quotidian comprises improvised drumming, dancing and singing that takes place in the *batey*—the Taíno word used to denote ball courts as well as the ceremonial space of the *areito* and today commonly used in Puerto Rico to refer to a space that is communal nonetheless separated from the outside world. The big barrel drums, representative of not just conduits to memory and ancestral knowledge but also the lifeblood of the many ancestors who made possible their survival through generations of brutality, sit at the centre of the *batey*, awaiting the flesh in whose service they will sound. While many Afrodiasporic traditions link dancing to drumming and drumming to dancing, bomba is notable for the particular way the dancer's moves are marked with rhythmic synchronicity by the lead drum. What follows below is a sustained reflection on this unique aspect of bomba practice. I offer a reading of the specific ways this exchange necessitates a practice of listening that is both resistive and restorative and, as such, maps a relational praxis that effectively reroutes both nationalist filiations and liberal investments in individual agency and liberation. The many notes that frame this text are part of this map and serve as the guiderails that help deliver this story.

Learning to Listen

Sometimes you don't know you have something to say until you start saying it. Sometimes you don't realize you have something to say until you notice that you are being listened to, being heard. Then it all comes out, flowing, torrential, or drop by drop, squeezed out to the point of silent exhaustion.

It was the inauguration of San Diego's House of Puerto Rico (HPR) in 2005, the long-awaited day that would celebrate the completion of this "casita" and small cultural centre that joined the other "International Cottages" peppering the city's iconic Balboa Park. Our bomba group, Areito Borincano, had been invited to perform outside. This invitation was notable because the group's director, a Black Puerto Rican from Guayama, had made clear his tenuous relationship with the largely conservative, hispano-centric, pro-military, pro-statehood leaning board at the HPR. This entity was also, as is too often the case among Puerto Ricans of all shades and walks of life, both overtly and subtly anti-Black. Nevertheless, the experience of diaspora (especially for West Coast Puerto Ricans) forges unconventional alliances, and we had been invited to perform and duly accepted. I had recently returned from a summer spent in Puerto Rico being trained as a bomba

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dancer by master teachers so that I could, at the petition of our director, help to carry on *la tradición* three thousand miles away. In full folkloric garb—red billowy blouse, white skirt, white petticoat with red bows, red head-wrap and white character shoes—this would be my first experience dancing *piquetes,* an improvised sequence of movements interpreted by the lead drum, as part of a performance. Until that moment, I had only performed *bomba* choreographies. I was very nervous and felt horribly unprepared despite many hours spent embodying the dance language. In this moment, I was not prepared for how I would ultimately become a musician, a maker of sound, a crafter of space and relation through the drum-sounding my movements would elicit. I was not prepared for how it would completely resignify my gendered experience as a visual dance-object into a different kind of pleasure: that of moving my flesh in the service of sounding, pricking up the ears of those around me through my deep-in-the-time gestures, drops, slides, rolls. I accurately perceived the power of improvised, space-taking solo dance that I activated as a woman often denied such sustained public protagonism. But I did not yet understand that this power emanated precisely from how I would inhabit and stake claims in sonic space, fleshing the sonic, not singularly in a free-form expressive solo, but in, and because of, a radical relational accountability. A radical relationality that is feminist, anticolonial, and disruptive to logics of modernity and white supremacy. It would be many years of practice and study (and terrible performances) before I would reconsider the standard of the costumed racial folkloric image and drop into the "sonic subalternity" offered by this music and dance from my island, the archipelago of Puerto Rico (Brooks and Kheshti 2011, 333).

As a lifelong dancer and West Coast Boricua, I had always admired *bomba* but, like many of my generation, had never had the opportunity to learn it, to be immersed in it, and had really only ever encountered it on a stage. Not to mention that I did not identify as Afro-Puerto Rican. Despite having African ancestry and Black(er) family members, like the vast majority of Puerto Ricans, I move through the world as a light-skinned/white Rican. When I finally did get a chance to begin learning the particularities of the gestures, its protocols and subtleties, I felt I had finally found a dance that suited both my movement-style—already infused with other vernacular Boricua and Caribbean dance languages—and my personality. I relished the luscious feeling of a skirt unfurling and snapping across the body with the simple opening of the arm, the angling of the head to create dramatic tension as the body moves in a slide step toward the drum, the strength and precision required to make the shoulders shrug and drop with force. I enjoyed the permission to curve my lips, pursed and proud, in relation to a brow deeply furrowed with joy, pain, heart, *rabia*. I loved the rhythmic syncopation and the singer's voice piercing the space. I especially valued the Diasporican sense of togetherness produced through the communal suspension of time and space, collapsing the ancestral and the immediate, arcing toward and claiming a still-yet-to-be-determined and increasingly threatened future, enacting what José Muñoz refers to as performance's ability to allow minoritarian subjects to "take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names" (Muñoz 1999, 74). I was deeply aware of how I had arrived at something that had long been taking place, folding subjects in need of healing and belonging into the embrace of its circle. All of *this* was clear to me. It was the part of making the drum sound that was still murky and vague as I was trying to dance *to* the music, not *to make* the music. That felt like an altogether different responsibility.

I remember that the performance was almost called off just minutes before we were scheduled that day at the HPR. The organizers, neglecting to note the tight relation between the bomba dancer and lead drummer, had given us some microphones posted on a lumpy grassy mound where the dancers could barely move. Apart from what this revealed about their lack of regard for and knowledge of the island's "Black music"—the imagined whiter *jíbaro* music was always the primary feature at their

events—my performer sensibilities were offended. How would we be able to *show* our dancing with such limited space? In the end, we did our thing, the drums and the singing elevated our spirits, and we exchanged coy smiles and hollered at each other from the sidelines as we strutted our stuff in the haphazardly created centre. I strung together a series of steps that more or less resembled what I thought an improvised solo should look like. No one fell. Today, I might reconsider this moment. I might look to this as a chance to disrupt our ocular-centric estimations of dance, an opportunity to turn away from the spectatorial fetishization of danced blackness. Instead, whether draped in the costuming replicating late nineteenth-century domestic servant attire[1] or sporting my urban street clothes, I would bear down on my sound-making potentialities and mark the way we are pulled into relation through the sounding of a drum responding to and alongside moving, speaking, space-taking flesh. I would, of course, try to channel the style and grace of my bomba foremothers and forefathers, but also their attention to the spaces, the waiting, the silences around the corner of the slap alerting us of presence, the breath inhaled in preparation for the life-announcing exhale and release, the rehearsal for freedom, for fugitive escape, the listening that happens as an also producer of sound. In short, I would instantiate bomba dancing's capacities as a sound act as much as—if not more than—a dance act.

* * *

This article explores how bomba dancing "(re)sounds" that which perhaps cannot be spoken or shown (Brooks and Kheshti 2011, 333),[2] bringing into being racial, colonial, and gendered Puerto Rican subjectivities through a sonic-scape that challenges dominant conceptualizations of "music" and "dance" and "performance." In looking at variants of complex sounding, including that which is marked on the *contratiempo/las alzadas*, I argue that bomba's growing popularity on the island and in the diaspora is a measure of its capacity for "listening to flesh," "listening to flesh speak," underscoring how this particularly addresses and is attuned to a subaltern, racialized, femme-identified flesh. My focus here on Puerto Rican women and femme bomberxs activates what Chicana feminist Cherríe Moraga calls a "theory in the flesh," attending to how "the physical realities of our lives . . . all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 23). The bomba worlds I discuss in this article coalesce around and respond to the necessity for Puerto Ricans—specifically Black Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican women—to be heard, seen, and understood, not just by colonial forces, but by each other. They demonstrate the power of occupying sonic space corporeally. As a co-produced aesthetic sound practice, bomba ultimately requires and structures a relationality that interrupts the colonial, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics that viciously feed each other and ultimately contain Puerto Rican life.

The fundamental importance of dancing flesh to the sounding of what is most often imagined a "musical" genre reveals the insufficiency and failure of these categorizations and their reliance on the same structuring logic that transforms flesh in all its presumed excess and messiness into an ordered modern subject. In this way, bomba also helps us think about the relational potentialities of what Black feminist theorist Hortense Spillers (1987) has theorized as "flesh" and serves as an example of Rican futurity made possible through flesh, a sonic Ricanness marked in and by flesh. By "listening in detail"[3] to how these women move, speaking to each other through flesh—a physicality at the level of skin and sinew—I demonstrate how bomba is both theory in practice and a practice in theory-making. As such, bomba is an important case study in examining the intersections between sound studies and performance studies, blurring clear distinctions between listening to and *doing* sound.

Bomba's Choreosonicity and the Making of "Otherwise" Worlds

Bomba is a Black practice of communality and maroonage born of plantation and counter-plantation worlds, carried into the twenty-first century by networks of Black kinship, and which, despite morphing and radically shifting throughout its roughly four-hundred-year history, retains at its core a facility for refusing the categorical distinctions between music and dance.[4] A collection of musical embodiments organized around drumming, it is what Ashon Crawley (2017) calls a "choreosonic" performance tradition that was varyingly used as a form of collective communion to escape harsh social realities and to enact shared belief systems—both sacred and secular. Noting its potential for disruption and resistance, the powerful (from slave owners to colonial elites to upwardly aspiring middle classes) have sanctioned, controlled, erased, derided, reformulated, and co-opted bomba's fleshy potentialities. In his book *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility,* Crawley presents us with the portmanteau "choreosonic" to describe the way that choreography and sonicity, movement and sound, are constitutive, inextricably linked, and have to be thought together. Foundational to Enlightenment thinking, he argues, this categorical distinction produced the conditions for "complex modes of fleshy disembodiment that are called blackness" (Crawley 2017, 28). Thus, by thinking the choreo and the sonic together, we recuperate the potentialities of what Spillers has theorized as "monstrous," "ungendered" flesh which offers—as opposed to "the body" that as coherent, stable identity is emancipatable and thereby enterable into civil society—the capacity to "get us there," to "a liberative position" (Crawley 2017, 23). The choreosonic, circumventing the drive toward an inclusion/recognition conditioned by logics of containable enclosure, invests in flesh as "preparation" for maroonage, for potential change, fugitivity, the production of "otherwise" realities, "otherwise ecologies." Though vehement denials aimed at legitimizing and "elevating" bomba to the status of "cultural object" would instantiate a binary between the "secular/cultural" and the "religious/ritualistic" aspects of Afro-Caribbean dance and music practices, it unequivocally follows in this tradition of producing what Crawley calls "otherwise worlds":

> Otherwise is a word that names plurality as its core operation, otherwise bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped. . . . Otherwise names the subjectivity in the commons, an *a*subjectivity that is not about the enclosed self but the open, vulnerable, available, enfleshed organism. (Crawley 2017, 24)

The particular choreosonic properties of bomba as practice and as aesthetic open up onto otherwise worlds where listening to dancing flesh, and in turn dancing to re-sound, activates radical relational possibilities, actualizing links across ancestral planes and allowing for a "togetherness" not defined by the terms of colonial containment and the subsequent production of race, or even in resistance to them. Thus, it is instructive to look at the sounding capacities of bomba dancing flesh as central to the genre's long-term survival across centuries. Importantly, the unique role of the dancer as musical protagonist is in large part responsible for the recent repopularization with generations of Puerto Ricans who are experiencing an increasingly violent colonial dismantling of the social fabric that has ensured their survival thus far. Furthermore, despite the many ways that folkloric framings of an Afro/Boricua past have flattened bomba, its choreosonicity inherently destabilizes representational attempts to narrativize Black history as a "root" existing outside of the here-and-now. While Black Puerto Rican cultural expressions have long been the matrix from which national and cultural identity is produced, blackness itself has unsurprisingly been buried or integrated into a fictitious

harmonious whole and rampant anti-Black racism on the island—violence, poverty, mis/underrepresentation—has been obfuscated or vehemently denied.[5] Though contemporary bomba practice is not free of these currents of power and is often directly and indirectly responsible for reproducing them,[6] for the most part, it nonetheless insists on blackness as *living* and *present*, not a fetishized object of the past, underscoring the continued value of, and the increasing necessity for, the relational aesthetics bomba practice instantiates.

Bomba Dance as Self-(dis)possession

As bomba has increasingly found life away from the folkloric stage, and communities across the island and the diaspora activate its expressive possibilities, creating bomba performance groups, events, and entire communities of belonging, dance, I insist, has been the key to broadening participation and audience.[7] More specifically, as discussed below, dancing women and femme folks have especially played a central role in cultivating interest in bomba and reimagining its political and community-building potentials.[8] In this formulation, the dancer is an audience-participant that momentarily enters the music-dancing space and returns to the edges of the circle to hold and create the space for the next dancer. The particularities of bomba's choreosonics give dancers unprecedented musical and aural responsibility and agency, upending gendered hierarchies about music-making versus dance-making. The sonic scaffolding provided by the drums and chorus provides entry to a much broader demographic less likely to see themselves as music-makers. Dancers, who have learned how to be *in* the music, are often unprepared for the sensation of the sounding that ripples out and around their movement choices. Dancing to make music, to be *heard*, not just *seen*, challenges both patriarchal distinctions between dancer and drummer and a Eurocentric overinvestment in form that places emphasis on the visual spectacle of dancing. Prying open the exclusivity of the music-making space, bomba's proverbial "return to the dance floor" (following a period of folklorization) extends the music-making as long as there are dancing bodies present. And there are. Patiently—and sometimes impatiently—waiting their turn. At *bombazos* across the bomba world, bomberxs, women especially, hearts often racing with anticipation, nonetheless bolstered by a sense of urgency and excitement, wait for their turn in the *batey*—the cypher-like space around which drums, singers, dancers, and community gather. They wait to take their moment of being seen and heard, claiming space and sound, occupying time and place, listening to find the rhythmic gaps into which their flesh can be sonically inserted.[9]

Bomba dancing is an improvised solo—the mechanics of the specific drum/dance relationship require that it be danced solo—yet it is an inherently social practice.[10] It both requires and produces the sociality to which the sound and movement attach. Like streamers crisscrossing the overhead space of a party, the interconnectedness of gaze, embodied syncopation, and aural signification holds the space together and pulls the *batey* into being. For the dancing exchange to be successful, it requires acute attention and listening, the reading of cues, and the simultaneous appeal to kinesthetic intuition and memory while remaining aware of one's place within the greater musical exchanges. This is not an individualist endeavour. As musicologist Ángel Quintero Rivera writes, "es muy significativo que en el tipo de sociedad donde emergió esta música, su ritual símbolico comunicativo sea que el colectivo *manda* y el individuo *florea*" (it is very significant that in the type of society out of which this music emerges, the symbolic communicative ritual is one in which the collective is in charge and the individual embellishes their directive) (2009, 42).

Thus, bomba dance engages in a corporeal sounding that tests the limits of expressive resistance through the achievement of individual agency. On the one hand, the ability to dance and "be heard"—not just seen—invites and holds space for a unique sound-enacting agency typically only ascribed to "musicians." On the other hand, however, sliding too deeply into agential expression of the "self" threatens the possibility of what Crawley describes as the "subjectivity in the commons" and what Fred Moten refers to as the party of the "non-self-possessive anindividuals" (2018, 189). As a practice born of and borne on Black bodies, bomba enacts and relies upon disinvestment in the individual, a "party of the ones in whom the trace of having been possessed keeps turning into this obsessive compulsive drive for the total disorder that is continually given in continually giving themselves away" (189). A dancer or a drummer overly invested in the logics of liberal individualism as the promised pathway to a liberative position—hear *me*, see *me*—leads to an unravelling of bomba's aesthetic integrity: the *co*-production of the choreosonic. A bomba reliant on the logics of the liberated self effectively morphs into some other expressive practice embodying instead the logics of selfhood and domination upon which the colonial state is founded. Indeed, as Joshua Chambers-Letson writes, "freedom is not only colonized by liberalism, it is a discourse through which liberalism justifies colonial and imperial violence" (2018, 6).

Furthermore, Patricia Ybarra signals the multi-pronged failure of the impulse to privilege a "liberal subject formation as the primary mode with which to narrate Latinx experience and identity," a formation that relies on a realization of the individual as the pathway to survival, recognition, and ultimately designation of worthiness for inclusion (2017, 13).[11] The corporeality at the genesis of the drum-sounding works against currents of fetishization seen in so many other Afro/Latinx musical genres. Bomba, grounded in a set of enfleshed intimacies and embodied protocols, inherently resists the commercialization—and neoliberal inclusion—that so often comes from engagement with the recording industry.[12] Although different entities, from politicians (San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz) to pop musicians (Luis Fonsi of Despacito fame) to veteran artists (Spike Lee in his *She's Gotta Have It* remake) increasingly cite and/or appropriate bomba for its capacity to simultaneously signal political resistance, blackness, and tropical heat/Caribbeanness, these decontextualized representations are often extractive and fail to portray the dynamics of bomba's *batey*. Actually creating bomba requires relationship building in real time and space and relies on a larger ethos of sociality to provide the canvas for giving and receiving the sounded and enacted gestures that define the genre.

As with other improvisational musical forms, bomba music-making relies on listening and sounding that is both creatively expressive and also attentive to maintaining a grounding rhythmic centre. As such, the bomba dancer must listen to the sound being used to interpret their movements in order to make choices about their next moves. While there is a general standard for how certain moves are sounded (for example, moves made with two hands get two slaps, quick pattering steps are marked with a drum roll, etc.), it is ultimately a stylistic choice on the part of the drummer, and a dancer must be prepared to engage in various ways of "conversing" depending on who is marking their moves. An effective dancer does not "sound off" at will, but rather, through attentive aural and corporeal listening, responds to and builds upon the sounding of the drum. A bomba *primo* drummer (the more high-pitched drum interpreting the dance and thus taking the lead musical voice) must be acutely attuned to not just foreseeing the direction and speed of the projected dance moves, but also to the types of rhythmic patterns most likely to be executed and any "surprises" or "challenges" to this predictable structure as issued by the dancer. An exciting conversation between dancer and drummer is one where the drummer has to "work" not to miss any moves and where the dancer is "speaking" in phrases that, while complex, are still intelligible so as to achieve the effect of the

synchronous moving-sounding. It is imperative for both parties to be locked in deep communication, and although not necessary, it is something that is amplified by relative levels of experience and long-established relationships and familiarity between dancer and drummer. Fundamentally, however, this exchange necessitates mutual respect and acknowledgement of the value of the labours they each provide regardless of their abilities. Through attentive listening and receptiveness, they together home in on the place where skill levels overlap.

These relationships brought into being in the *batey* enact a critique of colonial logics of containment and silencing by using sounded gesture, a choreosonics, to produce alternative ways of being and relating not captured through language.[13] In the two examples that follow, I examine the performatively enacted relationship between dancer and drummer, sustained through careful practices of listening, practices that claim not space itself, but a relation to space and place. Dancing-sounding flesh takes over sound and space, radically and unapologetically staking a relation to each other and to place.[14] In the embattled rhetorical and political struggles to realize a Puerto Rico free of not just a colonial government and centuries-long relationship of extraction and exploitation, but also of corrupt and self-serving local elites, the masculinist logics of nationalism, romanticized celebrations of a Hispanic past, and the disregard for Black lives, reimagining a relationship to land, to place, based not on ownership and domination but a cultivation of and respect for its life-sustaining gifts is more necessary than ever. Bomba practice labours to produce a space in which Puerto Rico's bodies—here understood beyond the bounds of nationalism—can uniquely cultivate and sustain life. By sounding a moving flesh into relation, the terms of a racial colonial capitalism extended into indebtedness are deactivated and rerouted, at least for the moment.

Syncopated Togetherness: In and Because of the *ba*tey

While important men have long been celebrated and honoured for having preserved bomba from being driven entirely underground by the mid-twentieth century, it is unsurprising that women have been by official accounts relegated to supporting roles as spouses, dancers, and sometimes singers.[15] In what follows, I cite examples in which women take on unprecedented roles as bomba percussionists while also expanding the expressive precision of the dance as a way to activate the radical relationality I have described. The women I engage with here are not only fiercely talented but also act as custodians of a contemporary bomba practice that is redefining the norms for new generations of Puerto Rican women. They form part of a larger movement of queer, feminist, and antiracist Puerto Rican activism taking on the many assaults on Puerto Rican futurity.

The first video I discuss features master dancer Ivelisse "Bombera de Corazón" Díaz, pioneer Marién Torres López playing the *primo*—until very recently played exclusively by men—and the revered composer and singer Lero Martinéz Roldán. These bomberxs represent some of the most influential and powerful bomberxs of the younger generation responsible for bomba's renewed popularity on the island and in diasporic communities throughout the US. Following in the footsteps of bomberxs from the late 1990s who first insisted on the defolklorization of bomba, bringing the *batey* off the stage into the social nightlife and the quotidian spaces accessible to wider communities of Puerto Ricans, they have been leaders in their respective geographical locations: Chicago, San Juan metro area, and the island's western coastal town of Mayagüez, an important historical site of bomba practice. These three and others in the video explicitly and purposefully frame bomba practice as a site of antiracist, anticolonial, antipatriarchal *living* cultural resistance instead of the festive, re-presented fetishized object of the past used to "celebrate" a distant

ancestral trope.[16] The activation of bomba as a site for corporeally and aurally enacting survival in/as protest to the continued conditions of poverty and violence has become even more starkly evident in a post-Promesa, post-Hurricane María, #RickyRenuncia world.[17] Bomba has served as a cathartic release and communicatory vehicle of lament, and perhaps most importantly, provided an expansive network and cultural infrastructure that was key in bringing people together and delivering much-needed supplies in the days and weeks after the hurricane, and most recently in response to incessant earthquakes with no end in sight.[18] In other words, for these communities, bomba and the relationality it ultimately produces has served as a "way of life" that disrupts the conditions imposed on Puerto Rican futurity, alleviating the often-unbearable weight of the present. This video was filmed in March 2018 at one of the bomba events surrounding the larger 8th annual Encuentro de Tambores in Puerto Rico, an event that brings together hundreds of drummers and bomberxs more generally. Until recently, it was organized by the late bomba elder, professor, and folklorist Norma Salazar and is now spearheaded by Marién Torres López. As stated in the video caption, moments before, Torres López had danced and then challenged Díaz to dance while she played.[19]

The sixty-second video captures many important dynamics of the twenty-first-century *batey*: the spatial arrangement, the barrel-drum *buleadores* holding down a basic rhythmic pattern accented by the *maraca* and the *cua* (two sticks here played on bamboo), the call and response communal choral singing, the casual, contemporary clothing style, the space as both spectatorial and social, the dancer's use of a scarf instead of a skirt, the hyper-vigilant, leaned-in, at-attention stance of the *primo* drummer, the purposeful exchange of eye-contact between *primo* player and dancer and the dancer's directional movement towards and away from the *primo*, rapid-fire gestures juxtaposed with stillness and poise, the dancer's reliance on opposition while using feet, shoulders, hands, head, and face, the building of suspense through a silent pause, and the satisfying intensity of a crescendo of sounded movements. The 6/8 rhythm being played is the powerful *yubá*, traditionally reserved for the elders, used to cleanse the community and express the pain and strength of the ancestors.

I would like to draw attention to two specific moments of sounding here: the first between the 0:17 and 0:20 marks and the second in the last steps in the final four seconds of the video. While they also appear elsewhere throughout the dance, these are both examples of the play with the *contratiempo*, the upbeat, or in other terms, the 2 and the 4 as opposed to the 1 and 3 downbeat. As with many other African diasporic musical genres and especially Afro-Caribbean forms, bomba accomplishes its rhythmic dynamic through an *improvised* syncopated play with the downbeat, moving in and out of the repetitive and predictable rhythmic pattern. Jazz is the most exemplary form of straying away from the comfortable and predictable—here both in terms of tone and rhythm—only to land again "on the one," having created suspense, emotion, and interstitial, fugitive possibility in the meantime. Because of the necessarily and specifically linked gesture to sound, bomba can tend to stay away from this highly syncopated sounding. Simply put, due to the unpredictability of improvised syncopation, too much syncopation in bomba movements can make it difficult for the *primo* player to follow the dancer, thereby rendering a parallel process of soloing, not one of unison.[20] Yet, the dynamics of this simultaneous improvisation are produced in part by the unpredictability and the ability to create rich musicality nonetheless.

In the first example, we see Díaz dropping her scarf one level at a time, a weighted floating and landing, marking five consecutive beats before turning back toward the drummer and asking for the quick-paced twelve beats gestured from her chest outward. Notably, she starts and finishes this dropping move on the upbeat. As she turns back to face Torres López on the drum before issuing the next twelve beats, Torres López pauses briefly to smile, ready in an instant to catch the next

steps. She seems pleased at co-producing this upbeat sounding as she uses one hand to adjust her drum and follow the conversation where it is going. After another series of sounded syncopated single steps, at 0:46, Díaz pauses between movements, issuing a simultaneous smile and eyebrow lift. Her face signals satisfaction, playfulness, and possibly even an embodied articulation requiring sounding (a soft slap is heard), activating what dance scholar Sherril Dodds (2016) calls "the face as choreographic device." The final steps in the video, which unfortunately does not capture the complete exchange which would have commenced and concluded with a bow of reverence to the lead drum, drive a repetitive series of sounds that also play with the upbeat. Here, as before, the upbeat is repeated, forecasting the next step to the drummer, giving a chance for the pattern and thus synchronicity to be established before likely breaking it again.

Buoyed by Martínez Roldán's melodic voice, the bass of the *buleadores*, the punctuating march of the *cua,* the steady shake of seed against the *maraca*'s gourd-like higüera*,* the dependable arrival of the chorus again and then again, the generous and entertained crowd and passersby, Torres López and Díaz have sounded and listened to each other. In doing so, they have relied not on recognition from an outward source—the Puerto Rican state, the official gate-keepers of institutionalized "Culture," colonial powers, or in this case, the male gaze—but rather from each other, actualizing self-realization and independence from within the context of community. Independence *as* interdependence.

The second video was filmed in October 2018 at the Bomplenazo in New York, a biennial gathering of bomba and plena performers across the island and diaspora that recently celebrated its twentieth year.[21] The organizers in 2018 deliberately chose to bring artists only from Puerto Rico (not the diaspora) as a way to provide much needed financial and moral support to many cultural workers who remain dedicated to their projects on the island despite the scarcity of resources and daily infrastructural challenges. This video differs from the one above in some key aspects. Firstly, it is a stage performance framed through a proscenium presentation, professional lighting, and an ensemble sartorially unified in specific aesthetic choices. In addition to this, the group—La Raíz Mayagüezana—comes from the western port city Mayagüez, where bomba styles vary significantly from those in the now metropolitan Santurce, the maroon village Loíza, and the more geographically isolated southern towns of the island. As part of a recent resurgence of interest in the rich variety of bomba styles from across the island, members of this group have engaged in extensive ethnographic research and practice to recuperate and identify not just the oral histories and songs but the aesthetic and stylistic specifics of bomba practice in Mayagüez. In terms of dance, they claim that "las bomberas de Mayagüez no levantan mucho el vestido,"[22] and footwork is privileged over the more aggressive skirt throwing and snapping commonly seen in the highly codified Santurce style. Or, as bomba elder Nellie Lebrón states in the comments on the side of the video, "she uses the skirt as an accessory to her dance not as the principal instrument." The dancer in this video, Ángela Vázquez, exemplifies bomba Mayaguezana—a style that in its own right has been increasingly codified through Jamie Perez, the city's primary bomba school instructor, seen here playing the *cuas*. The *primo* is played by the gifted Christian Galarza, who is also Vázquez's husband. The singer, butch-presenting Maria Cristina Alfonso Mangual, is a treasured elder who is one of the few living people who maintains a bomba singing style relatively free of the now ubiquitous rumba and salsa influences.

In addition to the obvious stylistic differences of posture and affect, I draw the reader's attention to the sounding relationship between Vázquez and Galarza. As the person directing the sounding choices that Galarza skilfully interprets through the drum, Vázquez not only plays intensely with the

contratiempo but also resists the predictable patterns of marking 4/8/12/16 beats. On a few occasions, she repeats a step for six beats but mostly relies on single percussive movements preceded or followed by two or three linked beats, one of which typically is marked on the upbeat. A good example of this can be seen from 1:00 to 1:10. At times, however, Vázquez's syncopated sounding on the *primo* pushes against the limits of the synchronicity between the song, the *buleadores, cua,* and *maraca.* The sequence from 1:40 to 1:46 marks almost every step on the upbeat, and we feel and hear the rhythmic strands start to pull apart just before she punches on the downbeat again, twisting us back into the smooth and seemingly effortless coordination of the multiple sound sources. Taken to an extreme, this kind of sounding can produce a kind of "typewriter effect" where the steps are all successfully discretely marked but without ever building the energy through a crescendo of recognizable patterns.[23] This sounding style also requires deep attention and skill from the *primo* player, and, noting the long-term intimacy between Vázquez and Galarza, prior exposure to a dancer's rhythmic patterns goes a long way in successfully sounding the precision of the moving flesh. Their co-produced dancing-sounding also emblematizes the exchange between dancer and drummer as a site for multi-directional learning. In listening, they learn from and about each other.

Through their respective styles, Vázquez and Díaz offer important insights about contemporary bomba practice and the corporeal sounding they produce. Both use the *batey* as a site for self-expression that draws on the particularities of bomba language, uniquely exploiting the ability to elicit sound with the flesh of their gendered bodies in a social and cultural climate that allows for challenges to gendered norms of public comportment. They flesh a sound that destabilizes both white supremacy and colonialism and, in its rebuke, opens a path to a future as yet unpromised. However, they also show us how this would be impossible without careful and thoughtful cosounding and colistening. Díaz, with the strength and vigour of her fully extended gestures, claims, indeed commands the space, unapologetically demanding a sounding that matches the heightened affect of her dancing. By dropping in and committing to repetitive phrases, which she skilfully rhythmically inverts and interrupts, she choreographs the drum's sound in ways that pulls and holds the surrounding visual, aural, affective attentions. Spectators become additional coparticipants as they take the sounded rhythms and gestures into their own flesh, amplifying an awareness of flesh's sounding potentiality. Vázquez engages in an extremely advanced rhythmic complexity and is given the space and patience to speak, to have the subtleties of her expression be heard. Her quieter and more contained moves are another form of self-realization that equally requires careful listening in order to accurately reflect what she has "to say." Both dancers enact a bomba practice that notably differs from versions seen in early twentieth-century footage where couples danced together using much smaller and less clearly marked moves. Though they also clearly depart from staged folkloric depictions made popular in the second half of the twentieth century, their styles nonetheless benefit from the work of the stage to visually amplify the corporeal sounding, rendering a tighter relation between gesture and sound (Power-Sotomayor 2015).

Taken together, these videos illustrate the trend of larger moves producing more aggressive sounding as well as a greater fidelity between gesturing and sounding that reflects the dancer's capacity for musical nuance and texture.[24] In other words, their bomba dancing is distinguished both by energetic power and its rhythmic intricacy. Díaz and Vázquez embody distinct energies, exemplifying bomba's capaciousness and its ability to welcome different personalities, modalities, physicalities, abilities, and strengths.[25] Yet, all bomba dancing relies on the same basic ethos: connection, listening, listening in order to be heard, breath as holding space and suspending sound, sounding in response to listening, tuning into and being with flesh, singularly but together. However, even as bomba enacts fugitive escape and a decolonial way of being through these sonic

enfleshments, it can also alert us to the many dangers posed to flesh—as with the sound of drums carrying across valleys between plantations—setting into relief the violent power enacted on this same flesh.

Slapping Flesh: La contestación de Ausuba

Before concluding, I turn briefly to one final performance that reroutes the sounding of flesh—here the drum's skin—in the service of making public that which is so often silently concealed within gendered and racialized flesh: the mark of violence. While much of this act relies on the narrative that unfolds through lyrics, I include it here as a powerful example of how dancing-sounding flesh demands to be heard, an acute listening that is simultaneously spatial and temporal.

> Singer: "Te voy a dar" (I am going to hit you.)
> Drummers: Slap. Slap. Slap.
>
> Singer: "Te voy a dar"
> Drummers: Slap-slap-slap. Slap-slap-slap. Slap. Slap. Slap.

Thus begins a feminist interpretation of the disturbing misogynist song by the revered and beloved *sonero* Ismael Rivera. Here inverting the machista imperative to domesticate and control "his woman," the members of Ausuba—the all-women bomba ensemble founded and directed by Marién Torres López in 2012[26]—call out the normalization of violence against women. An original composition written with Tito Rodríguez, this is, in the words of Torres López, "la contestación de Ausuba (Ausuba's reponse)" to the promised violence. Far from being a generalized indictment against gendered violence, the verses narrate a story of control and jealousy between intimate partners. The bomba chorus repeats the looming threat "si te cojo coqueteándole a otro" (if I catch you flirting with someone else) aimed at silencing not just her words but her body, her face, her affect. The lead singer recounts the familiar narrative until she ultimately declaratively belts "tu no me pones una mano encimaaaaa" (don't you lay a hand on me). The violent hit, rehearsed and perfected as a technology of control across centuries of plantation slavery and long maintained in service by a culture steeped in racialized misogyny, is here the ultimate promise of erasure and removal.

The song reclaims Puerto Rican women's right to speak and be heard in multiple registers, and more importantly, to access the sociality and embodied communication necessary to communal survival and resistance *without* having to wade through the insecurities of toxic masculinity and patriarchal strictures placed on their bodies in public. In other words, their claim to space and sound with bodies and words must not be silenced through threatened and real violence. The slapping of the drum's skin to signal hand on gendered flesh, as if receiving a slap oneself, stuns the listener into attention, alerting us to the women who sound the drum in alarm. Activating human flesh in the service of sounding as a way to recuperate strength lost in the face of violence, these slaps pull spectators into relation with the women playing, asking us to consider our own experiences of slapping and being slapped, both personal and ancestral. A dancer entering the *batey* to sound with her flesh "slaps back" to this violence not through hand on flesh but by claiming space and sound, embodied relation and communicative power.

Ausuba's performances and Marién Torres López's projects, more broadly speaking, contribute to a larger movement on the island coalescing around the trailblazing work of La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, who tirelessly labour to make Puerto Rico more liveable for its inhabitants, including rebuilding communities after Hurricane María, publicly demanding the government recognize the normalization of intimate partner violence and other forms of gendered violence, and spearheading the protests that ultimately unseated the governor in 2019.[27] Their campaign #NiUnaMenos has brought unprecedented attention to the relationship between murdered women, toxic masculinity, victim-blaming and police violence, underscoring the quotidian behaviours that create this "state of emergency" that the government still refuses to recognize as such. Centring anticapitalist critique and Black feminism along with anticolonialism, this intersectional project has also unsurprisingly privileged the politics of individual and collective embodied pleasures that contest the disciplining of gendered bodies and their relational practices, such as those I have been discussing. Torres López, as the founder and director of multiple projects including the bomba school Taller Tambuyé, has been especially clear in unequivocally naming and continually recalibrating bomba's role in actualizing the imperatives of Puerto Rican liberation, taking aim at that which stands in the way: capitalism, anti-Black racism, US colonialism, debt imperialism, poverty, educational infrastructure, militarism, masculinist nationalisms, environmental abuse and neglect, queer and transphobia, and macro and micro-level misogyny. Bomba is much more than simply a site for "having fun," "representing" Puerto Ricanness and blackness, generating cultural pride, or participating in a trending cultural practice. Rather, it is a performed refusal to disappear or to align bodies to the state.

Conclusion: More Life

In his book *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*, Joshua Chambers-Letson makes a case for performance being "a vital means through which the minoritarian subject demands and produces freedom and More Life" in the face of the promised death of Black, Brown, trans, queer, immigrant, colonial, women of colour subjects. Chambers-Letson focuses on "the party," the "commons," and "our communism," not as politics but as performative interruption of capitalism and a rehearsal for a not-here, not-yet, not-known freedom. His analysis is devoted to understanding freedom not as an achievement, but as a feeling produced in performance/song/dance/embodied interruption, momentary, ephemeral but nonetheless markedly pointing to a "something better than this." As such, his writing deeply resonates—proverbially and sonically—with bomba's actualization of "More Life," gesturing toward the "otherwise" that precedes and precludes the terms of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism. As we daily witness a purposeful and systematic depopulation of Puerto Rico and the disappearance and devaluing of Puerto Rican life, the most effective means of resistance and rebuilding have come via the *autogestión* of individual communities and small-scale organizing. This infrastructure is modelled and replicated through the repeated enunciation of bomba networks scattered across the island and throughout the diaspora. As with the person listening to Ausuba perform "Te voy a dar," bomba spectators, themselves participants in producing the space of the *batey*, come to know/feel/hear the "something better than this." Chambers-Letson writes, "when this sense of freedom is generated across the body and through performance, the body becomes aware that the rest of the time *something*'s missing, *something* better than this is possible and that, *something* must be done" (2018, 7). Bomba is a call for this *something*, for Black Life, for Puerto Rican Life, increasingly for Puerto Rican Women's Life and for Queer and Trans Puerto Rican Life. Bomba teaches us how to listen for freedom, how to listen to flesh. As the dancer sounds the *contratiempo,* goes off and away towards a recognizable pattern and then pivots, she enacts a fugitive freedom even as she calls us into the space with her.

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"What allows the party, or a performance, to serve the will toward freedom and More Life is that another night beckons and it can happen again. And again. And again" (Chambers-Letson 2018, xxii).

The dance is brief, for dancing too long is viewed as indulgent and repetitive. The song ends and another begins. Eventually the drums stop, exhaustion most likely dictating an end. Or a curfew. Or a lover waiting. Maybe they start again. Maybe there is more to be said. Maybe not tonight. But there will always be more. They will always come back. We will always come back, looking to listen and know and to feel and remember and imagine. Conspire. Together. Again.

Notes

1. The relationship to the folkloric costume codified in the twentieth century by the revered intergenerational bomba knowledge holders the Cepeda family can be nuanced and complex for many bomberxs, especially women. While contemporary practice has tended to privilege pedestrian sartorial practices in a move to reclaim bomba from a static racial image, many dancers also take great pride in the elegance and historical import of the traditional dress, celebrating Caridad Cepeda de Brenes' visions and innovations as a designer while simultaneously disidentifying with its stereotypifying effect.

2. Brooks and Khesthi go on to write, "So although in the historical archives we find only a small handful of subalterns who literally speak in the textual format . . . this paucity is overshadowed many times over by the subalterns who '(re)sound' through history using sonic means."

3. I am inspired here by Alexandra Vazquez when she writes that to listen in detail "is to listen closely to and assemble that inherited lived matter that is both foreign and somehow familiar into something new" (2013, 8). In doing so, she questions both the ability and the desire to be able to produce a comprehensive description of Cuban music while focusing instead on an interaction with other details of sound, affect, story, even while maintaining that it is a method not invested in "possession or clarification" (24).

4. Ángel Quintero Rivera (1992) identifies the counter-plantation as a group of subalterns that operated beneath the radar of the surveillance and controlling forces of the plantation society, often forming maroon communities. Quintero Rivera describes the dialectic of the plantation/ counter-plantation as a dynamic tension between these two worlds. Bomba, though a documented part of plantation society, was developed in the spaces that (mostly) avoided censorship and control, its sonic capacity for travel linking communities across geographic divides.

5. For scholarship on the long history of anti-Black racism in Puerto Rico and the specific ways that blackness circulates both as a distinct marker of cultural "exceptionalism" and/or that which is excisable from Puerto Ricanness as a whole see (Torres 1998; Lloréns, García-Quijano, and Godreau 2017; Godreau 2015; Román and Flores 2010; Rodríguez-Silva 2012; Dinzey-Flores 2013; Abadía-Rexach 2012; Rivero 2005). Notably, much of this urgent and unprecedented scholarship has been written by Puerto Rican women, many of whom identify as Afro-Latina.

6. See Abadía-Rexach (2019).

7. For more discussion about the dynamics across the stage and the twenty-first-century "soberao" see Power-Sotomayor (2015).

8. Below, I discuss women's work in the *batey*; however, it is also important to point out the critical organizational role that women have increasingly played in bomba worlds, envisioning, creating and sustaining numerous projects from founding schools to crafting performances and inter-diasporic networks, spearheading research endeavours and activist work.

9. While I focus here on women-identified dancers, there are many inspiring men that dance bomba, both virtuosic and amateur. In scrambling and resignifying the gendered norms of different dance movements and styles, many women have drawn on the "male dancer" vocabularies and, while less common but nonetheless significant, some men have learned to dance with skirts embodying femme aesthetics and gestures. Given the gendered divides of music and dance making, however, many women first approach bomba through dance, whereas men are more likely to enter via singing or percussion *despite* the commonly touted protocol that one begins bomba practice through dancing before ever picking up an instrument.

10. The formulation in which a singular dancer's moves are marked by the *primo* drummer is a more recent development that has crystallized in contemporary bomba practice. In popular settings throughout the first half of the twentieth century, multiple dancers would enter the space in front of the drums in pairs throughout the song and, at different moments, the men would have a chance at soloing for the drum as they moved in front of the lead drummer. Women did not typically solo dance. The current practice is in part influenced by the solo dancing used in stage performances, where often two people would enter the stage batey in a heterosexual pairing with each partner getting a turn to *pedir piquete*. The singular dancer has also become normalized for how it allows for a broader expressive movement vocabulary but also challenges the containment of women in accessing sonic and gestural improvisatory power.

11. See also Leticia Alvarado's (2018) powerful argument against the politics of respectability and liberal inclusion that drive Latinx desires for visibility.

12. There are indeed multiple important and widely circulated bomba recordings; however, the number is still relatively limited in large part because of the difficulty in capturing the sonic quality and texture of the deep bass of the *barriles*. Bomba has thus more often been present in recordings that combine the rhythms and the instrumentation with other forms. Ismael Rivera was the first to do this. Other examples are William Cepeda and, most recently, Loíza's very popular La Tribu de Abrante, which combines bomba (along with other local genres like plena) with a second-line brass-heavy sound.

13. In writing this, a beloved member of the West Coast bomba community, *primo* drummer Nelson Piñeiro, struggled through his final days of metastatic cancer. Following his wish, we organized a group of bomberxs to gather with him at the beach with the drums. Almost unable to form sentences or to even speak, and overwhelmed by the energies of many people wishing to direct their words of love at him, he was still able to mark the different rhythmic patterns with a stick, locked into the collective conversation that more accurately expressed and encapsulated the decades-long peri-linguistic shared relationship of fleshy listening.

14. Given the loud bass of the *barriles* used to play bomba, it is no overstatement to say that they do "take over" sonically, thickly permeating the air, pouring out windows and travelling across city blocks, a sonic "take-over" that follows a long history of drums resounding across valleys to neighbouring plantations, choreosonic messages delivering encoded meanings.

15. These men include patriarchs Don Rafael Cepeda and Don Castor Ayala and lesser-knowns like Domingo Negrón, Pablo Lind, Eustacio Flores and many others. See Melanie Maldonado's considerable work to recuperate the histories and erasures of women in bomba, not only naming and detailing the lives of many of these women—La Ponchinela, María Texidor, and Salome Villodas, among many others—but also excavating material practices such as the sewing and designing of elaborate underskirts as a way to frame the micro and more meta ways that women asserted presence and agency in bomba's male-dominated spaces (Maldonado 2019).

16. For more about folkloric blackness as presented in festivals in Puerto Rico, see Godreau (2015).

17. The 2016 "Promesa bill" has created an "emergency management" board appointed by the US Congress that effectively makes dramatic fiscal austerity decisions, dissolving local democracy along with whatever vestiges of autonomy granted the island through Puerto Rico's 1952 designation as a "Free Associated State." #RickyRenuncia refers to the widespread popular uprising in July 2019 that ultimately removed the island's governor Ricardo Roselló after the leak of a series of chats in which he displayed outrageous sexism,

homophobia, racism and a cold disregard for Puerto Rican life, including the many lives lost to Hurricane María.

18. See Jervis (2017). Also, Amarilys Ríos, the island's leading female bomba percussionist, shared with me how in the weeks following the hurricane, her drumming classes were fuller than ever before, even though she held classes in the dark. San Juan musician and cultural worker Tito Matos held free outdoor workshops for children unused to being "unplugged" from technology. Taller Kenuati, makers of artisanal bomba instruments on the west coast, similarly held workshops for children while parents waited in line for food, gasoline, or other supplies. Colectivo Umoja in the south of the island where the earthquakes have been strongest collected and distributed many thousands of dollars' worth of supplies to families in need via bomba networks in the diaspora.

19. Though I was not present for this live performance, I have made bomba with and enjoyed watching these same bomberxs on many occasions, such as the one here captured in the video.

20. Historically, the relationship between the dance and the drum, while clearly linked, did not require the kind of exactitude seen today. Moves were marked in more broad strokes. Increasingly there is a close attention to the minutiae of the dancer's movements and the drummer's ability to mark them.

21. I was an audience member at this performance.

22. "Bomberas in Mayagüez don't lift their dress much" is the chorus of a song written by Kily Vializ (2020).

23. Thanks to bomba sister Ines Mangual Cabassa for the useful image of the "typewriter."

24. It should be noted that this sounding is deemed by many older generations, including many of those who initiated bomba's return to the *batey,* to be far too loud and thus missing subtle dynamics. Younger groups increasingly have a very loud, very strong, and muscular style of playing the *barril*.

25. One way to imagine the distinction between Díaz's and Vázquez's styles is by looking at the orishas Ogun versus Ochún, one being a warrior and spirit of metalwork and the other the fierce but coquettish and pleasure-loving river goddess. To be clear, the bomba dancers are *not* invoking Yoruba religious practices; rather, I use this here as a performative point of comparison.

26. Grupo Nandí, the first all-women bomba ensemble in Puerto Rico, was founded by Oxil Febles in 2006. Ausuba members Torres López and virtuoso drummer Amarilys Riós were a part of this group and as such have been leaders in creating new spaces and modalities for women in bomba. Primarily relying on a cis-hetero framing, only more recently has their work begun to attend to an actual queering of gender in bomba. For more about queer and expressly trans and nonbinary bomba projects, see Julia Cepeda and Denise Solis's Taller Bombalele in Oakland, California.

27. For the Colectiva's manifesto, see "La Manifiesta—Colectiva Feminista En Construcción" (n.d.). Following feminist interventions across the Spanish-speaking world, one of many interruptions they perform is to resignify gendered language, such as changing the grammatically "correct" "el manifiesto" to "la manifiesta," or instead of "los cuerpos" they write "las cuerpas." For more on their activism, see Jackson (2017, 2018) and Santiago Ortiz (2020).

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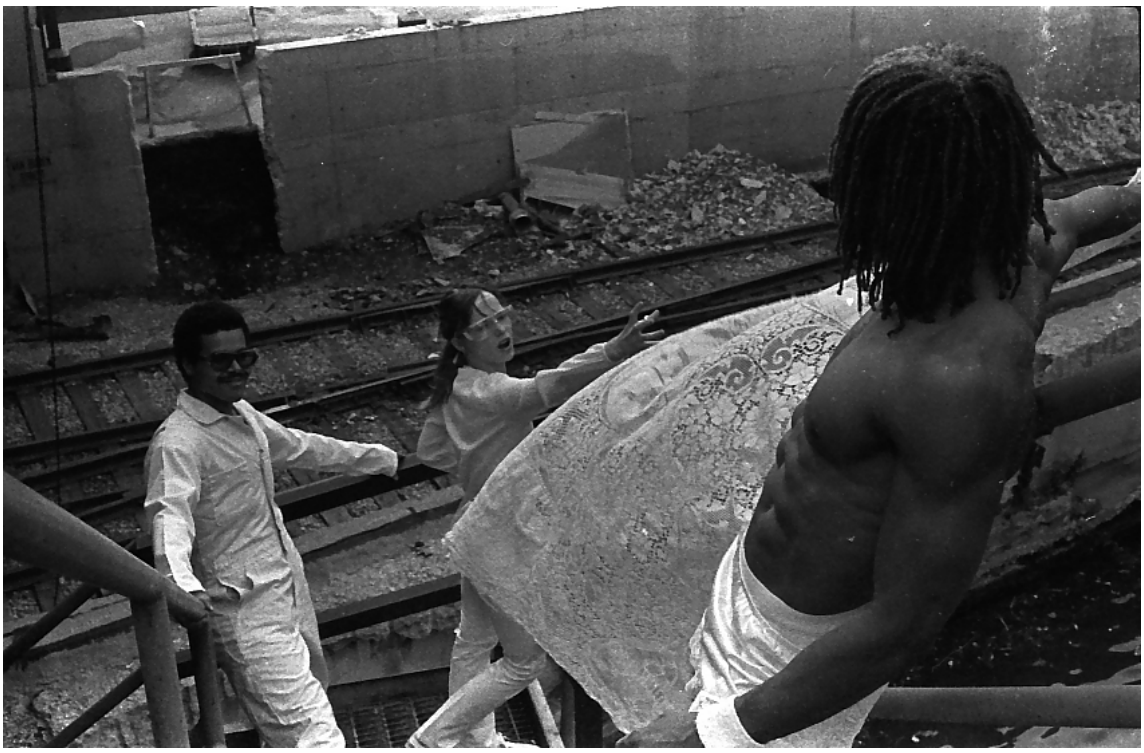
ONO Epistemologies—Resounding the "Bleeding Haints": A Noisy Conversation between P. Michael Grego, travis, and Shannon Rose Riley of ONO

Shannon Rose Riley, travis, and P. Michael Grego

Introduction

ONO, short for Onomatopoeia, is an intergenerational, interracial performance/noise group based in Chicago—its call to arms is "onomatopoeia before music." Established in 1980 by P. Michael Grego and travis, ONO is an "Experimental Performance, NOISE, and Industrial Poetry Performance Band; Exploring Gospel's Darkest Conflicts, Tragedies and Premises" (ONO, n.d.).[1] P. Michael, a well-known Chicago musician, aimed to provide soundscapes for travis's poetry—a poetry haunted by his experiences as a Chickasaw-Black hu/man growing up in "pre-integration, pre-electricity, pre-indoor plumbing" Itawamba County, Mississippi as well as his experiences of racial and anti-queer violence, especially while serving in the US Navy in the late 1960s (Alamo-Costello 2016). As a signifier, "ONO," also refers to ***O****rganized* ***No****ise; travis's "self-definition" of Onomatopoeia is "to Maximize Flexibility, to Act Out Various Punishments Derived from Verbal Inference, Cognition and Reinforcement, And To Vigorously Distinguish (ONO) Organized Noise From Music" (travis, email to Shannon, February 2020).[2] I joined P. Michael and travis in ONO in late 1980.[3]*



ONO (left to right: P. Michael, Shannon, travis), June 20, 1981. Photo by Dave Magdziarz, courtesy of the photographer.

Shannon Rose Riley is professor and chair of the Humanities Department at San José State University. **travis** is retired and writing on "Moral Evil," which includes trips to Portugal, Spain, and slave forts Ghana and Nigeria. **P. Michael Grego** is client and data services manager at AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

travis of ONO (with Steve Krakow), 2017. Photo by Sarah Jane Quillin, courtesy of the photographer.

For each ONO performance, P. Michael creates a "clearly-defined Premise" using travis's poetry and selects the set list. travis then considers the range of characters he will embody and the appropriate conflict for each. His sartorial choices come out of this pre-performance process and become embodied live as he follows the "spine" of each character as they navigate the stage space. The sources for his costumes include gospel singers, both male and female; opera and ballet costumes; military uniforms; Black folks' burial garb; his Mother and Grandmother Stegall; and several "Scandalously and Outrageously Dressed Aunts" (travis, email to Shannon, February 2020).

Through the use of poetry, noise, visual spectacle, and performance, ONO engages a sonic subaltern practice (Brooks, Kheshti, and Anderson 2011, 333). Subaltern studies theorizes "erasures in the colonial project" and is "concerned with the condition of being erased from the mainstream public spheres of civil society" (Dutta and Pal 2010, 364). While the subaltern cannot speak, perhaps they can resound (Brooks, Kheshti, and Anderson, 333); indeed, the "cultural work of the sonic subaltern" is precisely to sound out against silence and erasure (Marshall and McMahon 2017).[4] Noise, in particular, has useful resonances with sonic and social disruption—i.e., making noise—and can serve as a tool for what travis calls "testifying." Noise also expresses the utterly unsaid and unspeakable. As P. Michael suggests below, words alone fail to describe the trauma that People of Colour have experienced over time, so ONO uses a sonic vocabulary that includes found sound and noise, sound generation, and the modifying, recycling, and reclaiming of riffs, beats, and samples. These strategies resonate with travis's costumes, which are also reclaimed, reappropriated, fashioned, and remixed.

ONO does not so much speak its truths as it performs and re/sounds the intertwining of personal and national histories and the ways that racism and violence haunt the nation. What travis calls "bleeding haints" are spectres not only from his own past but from largely untold shared pasts that haunt our present; a haint is a ghost, a haunting, and when they bleed, they seep through to reveal themselves. No words, just scream.

Audio file 1: "Invocation" (ONO 2015b)

> I bring you Greetings / Greetings from the prison plantation
> Greetings from Black Death / Brownsville slumlords; Murder Inc.
> Greetings from the arrest ride / Greetings from the morgue
> Greetings from Chicago SouthSide [*sic*] / I bring you Greetings!
> Greetings foreseen from Rimbaud's "Nigger Queen!" (ONO 2015b)

When travis performs "Invocation" live, dressed in a fine frock that doesn't quite fit, that gapes in the back—that exposes traces of the punk, the vet, the sculpted, ageing Black male body (a queer Black man in his '70s in South Chicago, itself a kind of miracle)—then perhaps, the sonic subaltern performs. And as in most ONO pieces, the rhythm and tone shift abruptly, and a beast of a beat drives the poetics outside of language and into the body, into the sonic space of the vibrating, live ONO performance. ONO album tracks are also consistently multiple, broken, stilted, thwarting—and they are long, resisting the form and closure of music or song.

To resound means not only to make a loud, prolonged sound but also to send the soundings back—whether to their source(s) or to other listeners, as if in a kind of dialogical loop. In what follows, P. Michael, travis, and I engage in a resounding conversation on the performance practices of the sonic subaltern as exemplified in our work as ONO. We discuss "bleeding haints," "ghosted tracks," and how our work resounds/re-members erased histories. We also begin to flesh out what travis calls "the colors of Noise" regarding how the Black body is always already a kind of "Noise upon the USAmerican landscape." These are ONO epistemologies.

Soundscapes, Noise, and the Schizophonia of the Sonic Subaltern

Shannon: I used the term "soundscapes" in the Introduction to describe ONO's work, but we have never used it—we use "noise." Soundscape theory emerged in the late 1970s (Schafer 1994); the term was initially created to be analogous with "landscape" and referred to the sonic/acoustic environment—"noise" was considered the "enemy" of sound (Samuels et al. 2010, 331). Growing noise pollution in urban and industrialized areas constituted part of the rupture of sound and scape that Schafer called *schizophonia* (Schafer, 124; Samuels et al., 331). Given this, I imagine we would avoid the term "soundscape." ONO is partly of the city, of the industrial parts of subcultural Chicago—we might say that we came together in that space of rupture between sound and scape. Perhaps *schizophonia* (literally, divided or split voice/sound) more closely describes our commitment to noise and many of our sonic and performative methods, which seek to point out the historical and personal spaces and places of fracture, rapture, and rupture.

P. Michael: Yes . . . layered sound clash and environmental poisoning . . . Noise pollution . . . our Sonics are layered and diegetic; we take the sounds already present in the environment in which we appear, build on them, enhance them, and ultimately overtake them. Like the nascent beast in darkened horror film awakened from sweet repose—violently slashing its way through a village.

travis: I am comfortable with silence, wherever I find it. My proposal of ONO Noise first arose from the power of internal, dialogical Noise then moved outward. My Black, male body represents Noise upon the USAmerican landscape.[5] Reconciling my words, as well as my vocality, with or without accompaniment, creates Noise. . . .

I use "soundscapes" to manipulate meaning and materials, to explore linguistic conflict, and to expand exploration of sonic invocation/evocation; sound qualities, sonic purpose(s) and sonic relationship(s) to Noise. In this, I invade the "colors of Noise."[6] From birth, 23SEP46, throughout most of my pre-teens, I spent most of each year with my maternal grandmother, Finous Mary Magdalene Walls Stegall . . . in a shotgun house off Hwy 25, in deep country . . . Itawamba County, MS. . . . Shotgun, Dogtrot, and other vernacular house types were separated from the nearest neighbors by ½ mile and more of heavily wooded swamps, hollows (*holla's*/hollers) and deep forest. Here, day-to-day survival depends upon acute listening, hearing, and identification. No doctors. No telephones. No post-war technology. No industrial drone, whatsoever. Days pass without uttering a single word; hearing forms overlapping brush. But in the evening, old folks rocked back-and-forth on the porch. Nearby, the stars, the moon, and the sky converged where smoky rags soaked in "coal oil" fought off mosquitos and other wild life. Native squalls disguised transatlantic cries as Chickasaw voices hummed deep, mournful African drums. Each "call" answered itself and simultaneously received a pulsating "response" echoed porch-to-porch, amplified across the vibrating *holla*', and communicated up to a mile away in any direction; transmitting unchallenged sonic images of surface contours/density, climate/weather and spatial cohesion along its many relationships and points of contact. . . . You may have heard me revisit many of the same tonal "places" in ONO performances. Somewhere around seventh grade I wrote and recited a poem about echoes escaping New Chapel Cemetery, where I spent an unhealthy amount of time alone as it was also across another *holla*' . . . and closer than our nearest neighbors. I titled the poem "Sound Escapes." Yet, I never escaped. Within the thickets of onomatopoeia performance, my dissociated body reclaims that terrain with sustained immediacy.[7]

The remainder of the year, and more when Mother moved there, I spent thirty miles south, first in Quincy, and later in the Carter's Chapel section of Amory, MS, with my paternal great-grandparents, Jennie and Neely Carter. Neely was Chickasaw and after our "great fire," he never spoke or made eye contact with anyone but his wife.[8] . . . After the Quincy fires I stopped speaking, and developed respiratory ailments, including acute asthma. An emotional ritual cured my asthma for the rest of my life. The ritual was very formal. Female "Saints" only. All dressed in white cotton, color of death and transfiguration. First, a series of voice-only hums and other chanted sounds, without entreaties, during a ritualized herbal baptismal ceremony, induced a bronchial detox and dilation. Sweat, mucus and violent expectoration. A second cleanse. Next, I ingested mixtures of herbs, homemade vinegar, and eggshells (calcium). Pause, accompanied by ever-increasing chanted sounds. And then, at fever pitch, speaking in tongues. This Communion of the Pentecost was held at midnight in Carter's Chapel Church. It remains fresh to this day, and the emotional commitments I formed there are intrinsic vocal instruments underpinning each ONO performance, which may be seen as a form of "testifying."

Re-sounding Erased Histories: Bleeding Haints and Ghosted Tracks

Shannon: As noted above, while the subaltern often cannot speak, perhaps they can resound against silence and erasure. The sonic subaltern also remains concerned with rewriting history from below, and this is very much in alignment with travis's description of ONO performance as a kind of testifying. Daphne Brooks describes how "sound and corporeal gestures and aesthetics travel and transmogrify across time and haunt our present-day lives" (Brooks, Kheshti, and Anderson, 330). Can you both say a little about this theme of haunting? How is ONO invested in resounding alternate/erased histories? We've spoken a bit about bleeding haints and *holla's* as haunted

repetitions—but what about ghosted tracks? They seem to be a sonic technique that performs like a bleeding haint—they bleed through, making noise.

P. Michael: Ghosted tracks [are] counterpoint beats and sounds [produced] in the final mix-down . . . the producer and I would mix from one set of [tracks] to the other . . . there would be some bleed through of sound and also some doubling of what's heard—a sort of ghosting of sound you could say. . . [You can hear some of this ghosting effect at points when the rhythms fall apart and regroup in **Audio File 1**.] Ghosted tracks [also refer to] the CIA or Ghosts referenced throughout the entire LP, *Spooks* (ONO 2015c).[9]

Shannon: When I first mentioned the sonic subaltern, travis's response was, "Not only have ONO acted out the 'Sonic Subaltern' call from day one, years ago, we retranslated its latent festivity performatively via *Diegesis*" (ONO 2014). Please say more, travis.

travis: I am Chickasaw/Yoruba. I am the White Voice of the walking Dead. Black communities are Invisible to political power, Invisible to economic power, Invisible to religio-philosophical power. The bombardment of [sonic] overlays possessing *Diegesis* disconnect, disorder and disgorge the colonizer's life in pictures. Each headline denies authenticity, denies magnanimity, denies body count. By colonizing its festivity, we address "How Does the Subaltern Learn?" . . .

Shannon: I can think of several pieces on *Diegesis* that tell erased histories and expose bleeding haints. Let's take "CQCQCQ" (ONO 2014a). Of course, "tell" is the wrong word—there is minimal historical information in text or sound; we do not aim at textual or sonic "representation" of subaltern historical events. Instead, we use what we might call "onomato-poetics" and "schizophonic sonics" like P. Michael's "ghosted tracks." Why are these more deconstructive methods preferred?

P. Michael: the simple answer would be PTSD and the fallout of umpteen years of trauma on POC [People of Colour] bodies. Mere words could not emphasize the pain and horror, so we seek out differing expressions. Coded onomato-poetic expressions and the sound of terror that we feel.

travis: Re: CQCQCQ: Respecting the nature of my security clearance, historical documents regarding Israel's bombing of USS Liberty are available on-line, in many pop-up missionary flavors. "CQCQCQ" exists as one of a dozen or more pieces written as *travisDjPTSD* to survive high blood pressure, which reached "white coat hypertension" levels after the week of 23SEP65, and remained so for nearly fifty years.[10] Throughout the day, THU 08JUN67, the following weeks, and for many years subsequent, I survived endlessly odious lies of which I am sworn to silence. Lyndon Baines Johnson, Robert Strange McNamara, and many other officials, elsewhere, deceived, disrespected and denied USAmerican servicemen, servicewomen and their families. All this perpetrated during my watch as Communications Supervisor/Traffic Checker aboard USS America (CVA66) during Israel's murder of thirty-four communicators aboard America's newest communications ship. (Note: All communicators forbidden to speak "Details" of the event.) Yet, ONO's fiftieth anniversary USS Liberty performance of "CQCQCQ" astonished fans, Art History students amongst them. One, a thirty-year-old fan whose father served aboard USS America 08JUN67, spent a good thirty minutes discussing the event, as well as the run-up to it, searching for clues to his father's unexplained (and relatively extreme) behavior at any mention of the "USS Liberty Incident." The NSA, fifty years on, maintains an iron fist; a loaded gun; a mouthful of Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, Northrop, et al.

Audio file 2: "CQCQCQ" (ONO 2014a)

Shannon: Our latest album, *Red Summer*, also resounds (with) erased histories—from August 20, 1619, when enslaved Africans were first forcibly brought to Point Comfort, to the Tuskegee syphilis experiments and the anti-Black violence of the Red Summer of 1919 (ONO 2020).[11] Bleeding haints, all.

Black Sonic Marronage

Shannon: In a conversation with Roshanak Kheshti on the social space of sound, Brooks speaks of "black sonic *marronage*," a very compelling concept that joins the concept of escape or flight from enslavement with the notion of Black sonic practices in which performers engage in strategies of appropriation and inversion to make the material suit their own expression and to perform against the grain of societal conventions (Brooks, Kheshti, and Anderson, 332). Would you situate ONO's sonic practices within this kind of legacy? I can think of travis's strategic use of baritone vocalization in the manner of the great Negro spiritual, for example. Would you accept or reject this reading? What about through sampling and other sound-generating and manipulating strategies?

P. Michael: Yes, via the samples used for ONO's many performances . . . they are a mixed bag. Some old, some new, many are truncated, tortured, and changed to fit into the clearly-defined Premise and to invoke a mood.

travis: Yes. But also No. I do not understand the question(s). Are you asking would I, travis, in 2020, "situate ONO's sonic practices" within a legacy of "appropriation and inversion"? Are you also asking if I, travis, strategically use my voice in the manner of "the great Negro spiritual . . ."? Escape or flight from enslavement? If those are the questions, I need narrow definitions. Truth is, my voice is not my own. My body must live and die, monetized "for all perpetuity," and sonically enslaved by what I call the history, the legacy, and the theory of the "false face." Of course, there are cultural truths, relative truths, fugitive truths, et al. Truths of *marronage*, at least those respectable enough to survive the long trot from diasporic deathbeds to mastheads, appear, peripherally, to wed certain Maroon communities with the language of resistance, the strategies of resistance or the technologies of resistance advancing, for instance, the Haitian Revolution or, say, the "Red Summer" of 1919. I suggest an unbroken timeline leading to 21st Century Black impotency. The ONO Statement of Purpose clearly bridges "The Third World" as an influence. You and P. Michael may read a clearer picture than I do, as I am too close to the fallout; I tongue tie the spleen. ^^^ I am slow. I need more context for Brooks' "black sonic *marronage*" curation. Far more than critiquing imposed physical or social structures, every Black body mercilessly critiques the nearest Black body, as if it were a foreign language. I dare ask: Who ever [*sic*] covered Black skin or Black sound with strategy, faithfully or not? Decoding *marronage* is troubling, especially (today). One result of *marronage* is long-suffering, deeply competitive hierarchies, languages, and traditions separating Afro-American descendants of rival African tribes, injected into rival indigenous tribes. Perhaps results do not matter. Perhaps agents of change matter more. Locally, for instance, there are deep, hushed and ghostly divisions between Chicago Blacks and Haitians, Jamaicans and Barbadians. Highly clannish religio-social, linguistic and color-coded rivalries, very similar to "festivities," rule the day; always weaponized, raw and cocked. But if results do not matter, then agents of change matter more. Critical concern: Many undefined issues accompany "black sonic *marronage*" that I have not explored.

Such as explosive sub-cultural worldviews (Colonial/Guerrilla Truths?) referentially repackaged for popular consumption. Where is that, necessarily brutal, engagement of sonic freedom (emancipation from what?) and capital/ism. I have no hope. I have no belief. I have no faith strong enough to penetrate, illuminate, or reflect my Black face. Reflected: "black sonic *marronage*"><"black sonic museum." What must freedom sound like? How shall liberty and justice resound? And here, we take a moment to read, aloud, James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice." Indeed, my (1980) insistence upon "Onomatopoeia Before Music," recognizes sonic pitfalls built by slaves under new sonic slave masters. (Jamaica?) Separation does not require divorce, rejection, or liberation. An argument may also posit that (Memory of the) Moment of sever/cut, reflected at the (Moment of) reporting assumes a constancy of monolithic Black body radiation to penetrate invisible walls. Yet I also onomatopoeia ultraviolet language; performative Contour; countless transatlantic slave ship suicide rebellions. I suspect that during our Haitian missions we both experienced more uncharted haints than black sonic *marronage* permits.[12] So now, forty years on, *Red Summer* invokes the spirit of Cuban, Haitian and Puerto Rican houngans, Jamaican bounty hunters and USAmerican maroons, forced to serve alongside God's own European rapists, heathens and heretics as we explore 1619–1919–2019.[13] Haint the smell of fire-branded Jack, amputated Nat, and castrated Sambo; Black bodies, still burning. Haint, the whisper in the ears of a dead horse.

Shannon: Our use of Dessalines' monologue from William Edgar Easton's 1893 play, *Dessalines, A Dramatic Tale* on the track, "Fleur de Lis," might be considered an example of "black sonic *marronage*" (ONO 2015a)—a kind of critical reclaiming of older Black revolutionary voices:

> What has made me master here? What will make ye masters here? Is his white tainted flesh unvulnerable [*sic*]? Look upon us! I am as black as the shadows of night, with muscles of iron and a will that never was enslaved! What has he that I have not, save the arrogance of the accursed Caucasian blood? What hath these Franks that we are their household chattel—that we are their beasts? . . . What fetich [*sic*] have they that sustains their power to rule and ours to serve? We are ten to one their number now in Haiti—perhaps an hundred [*sic*], it may be. Then is it the strong who rules, or is it the natural sequence of our own inward weakness? (Easton 1893, 13)

Audio File 3: "Fleur de Lis" (ONO 2015a); monologue begins at 6'55"

This monologue has the final word on *Spooks* (ONO 2015c) and is a ghosted expression of resistance: the voice of Jean Jacques Dessalines, leader of the Haitian Revolution, as translated through the pen of a nineteenth-century African-American playwright and politician.[14] In the context of today's ongoing police brutality, growing anti-Black racism, and the Black Lives Matter movement, that voice abruptly and provocatively has the last say on the album. Yet, I am the one who performs it; should it no longer be considered an instance of black sonic *marronage*?

P. Michael: Yes, you, a white woman, perform it . . . but I took your performance and worked with the sound engineer to distort and change your reading of it to make it something else . . . the lowered and slowed down voice see (Chopped and Screwed—a Black rap technique) it is no longer a pure white woman reciting words; the words are still there and clear but it is, you might say, "ghosted or tainted" by our black hands . . .

travis: . . . On the ONO stage, we rethink the living, release the dead. Knowing full well that in the current "Information Age," only informed people can find information. Jim Crow II: For Everyman. White teeth grinning. Algorithms wink-wink. . . .

Dialogue Theory—Toward a Conclusion

Shannon: With both ears and an open heart attuned toward the "co-optive possibilities" of dialogue as a "site of control" (Dutta and Pal, 365), I ask you, what erasures or silences have I created in framing and editing our conversation? What else do you want to say?

P. Michael: [silence]

travis:

1. Where does theory depart from Plantation Chapel hierarchies?
2. Where does "spirit possession" intersect subaltern theory?
3. . . .

Notes

1. Capitalization in original. travis legally dropped his surname and uses a lowercase "t." See also travistravis.com.

2. travis's capitalization is critical. He capitalizes nouns, as was common in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English, but also pronouns, verbs, etc. Borrowing and exaggerating a practice from an era of bloody colonization is a critical appropriation strategy and reclamation. In refusing to capitalize his name but choosing to capitalize Noise or Premise, travis inverts the rules of a language that he describes as not his own.

3. In 2007, ONO regrouped after a long hiatus. Since then, we've produced five albums, two film soundtracks, and an impressive performance portfolio. In addition to P. Michael, travis, and me, current members are Rebecca Pavlatos, Dawei Wang, Ben Karas, Connor Tomaka, and Jordan Reyes.

4. The notion of the sonic subaltern builds on Gayatri Spivak's well-known 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

5. As noted, "noise" was positioned as the enemy of "sound" in early soundscape theory, which was grounded in an analogy to landscape. Where the soundscape was whole, noise was pollution, disruption. Here, travis reframes the same analogy to make the critique that the Black male body is noise in/on the USAmerican landscape.

6. In an email correspondence to Shannon titled "Noise Defined," travis states that his work "explores NOISE! White Noise, Blue Noise, Red Noise, and especially the *fear* of Black Noise: Silence!" The colours referenced in his response fit within the larger argument about the Black male body as noise on the white USAmerican landscape. Invading those particular "colors of Noise" is his work as an artist—when one's life is perceived as disruption/Noise and situated within Noise, i.e., static erasure and spatial racism, one may prefer to reclaim Noise as a weapon.

7. All emphases in original.

8. When asked, travis confirms that the "Great Fire" and the Quincy fires are the same event(s). He was not more forthcoming, and I did not pry.

9. The *Chicago Reader* ranked *Spooks* (ONO 2015c) number 13 of the top Chicago albums of the 2010s. https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/music-best-albums-2010s-decade-ranked-records/Content?oid=77394291.

10. *travisDjPTSD* is a solo sound/performance project of travis's.

11. You can stream the album on *The Wire:* "Listen: ONO's Red Summer," *The Wire*, April 2020, https://www.thewire.co.uk/audio/tracks/premiere-hear-ono-s-album-in-full. See also Berlatsky (2020).

12. With "our Haitian missions," travis refers to his time in Haiti while in the US Navy in the late 1960s and to Shannon's first trip to Haiti in 1980–81 as a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

13. Regarding "forty years on," ONO's first performance was January 5, 1980.

14. For a discussion of Easton's play, *see* Riley (2016), 173–210.

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Vocal Colour in Blue: Early Twentieth-Century Black Women Singers as Broadway's Voice Teachers

Masi Asare

The Twice-Heard Voice of Broadway

Broadway belting is a much mythologized vocal sound, one whose force flows in no small part from beliefs that it is both natural and dangerous. In my experience, students who seek to learn to belt out show tunes often come to lessons with the strong fear that singing in such a powerful way may damage their voices. Certainly, many voice teachers within the classical tradition impress this idea upon their students. By contrast, rising dancers may study ballet, jazz, and modern dance, as well as tap, yoga, and African dance forms, for example, without confronting the unforgiving assertion that using one's body to express certain genres will ruin it forever for others. In music conservatories, it is quite a different story; classical singers and jazz singers train in segregated tracks that remap the lines of racialized genre and style. Young classical singers are fiercely protected from the potential contamination of pop music vocalization on the grounds of preserving vocal health. Within this context, musical theatre has the potential to be a productive zone of miscegenation where singers train and perform in multiple technical modes. Professional musical theatre singer-actors sustain proficiency in both belt numbers and light classical repertoire, the latter referred to, in a telling phrase, as "legit" songs. But the flourishing of interleaved vocal styles in Broadway music is secured, I submit, by the narrative that the quintessential Broadway belter is, and always has been, a white woman. In fact, listening to a performer such as Ethel Merman has been touted as no less than "listening to the voice of Broadway itself" (Miller 1998, 108).

My project here is to complicate the premise of the implicit whiteness of the Broadway woman belter's voice, and further, to attend to the racial histories borne in vocal sound. To these ends, I will trace a line of historical singing lessons that locate blues singers Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Ethel Waters in the lineage of Broadway belters. Contesting the pervasive notion that black women who sang the blues and performed on the musical stage in the early twentieth century possessed natural and "untrained" voices, I argue instead that singing is a particular form of sonic citational practice. In the act of producing vocal sound, one implicitly cites the vocal acts of the teacher from whom one has learned the song. And, I suggest, if performance is always "twice-behaved" (Schechner 1985), then the particular modes of doubleness present in voice point up this sonic citationality, a condition of vocal sound I name the "twice-heard." I listen across this profoundly underacknowledged lineage of musical theatre vocality for the ways that early twentieth-century singers' voices are twice-heard, across racial lines, up to and including Ethel Merman's Broadway belt.

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The Listening Singer

For singers, the acts of listening and producing sound are conjoined and co-present. One listens to one's own sound, and to the sounds of others; within and across this field of listening, one's own voice takes sonic shape.[1] Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015) has argued for a move away from thinking sound as a fixed, external object to be apprehended, and rather, sound as practice experienced multiply at the level of apprehenders' material experience. Consider the various ways that bodies cradle sound beyond the curl of the ear. Singers' listening encompasses the awareness of how vocal sound vibrates in the bones of the breastplate and the skull; how the muscles in the abdomen, the neck and across the back ripple into motion as the voice climbs; the textural feel of subtle shifts in one's throat, nose, and mouth; the pressure of air rushing past the vocal folds as they draw close and draw apart. All of this is listening that, like the performance of a responsive pianist, accompanies vocal sound. It is typically said that a piano accompanies a voice and not that a voice accompanies a piano. Similarly, the act of voicing is generally understood as the main attraction, beyond the singer's multiple acts of listening that underscore it.

And so, the singer may not be circumscribed by the overemphasis on listening and reception that has been detected in sound studies scholarship by the authors of this special issue (Herrera, Marshall, and McMahon 2019). In fact, the practitioner-driven voice science and voice pedagogy literatures manifest an attunement more likely to privilege the production of sound, articulated in anatomical terms, with *less* attention to singers' acts of listening. Within this literature, there is also a pervasive narrative that black women singers of popular music such as the blues have always been "untrained" (Woodruff 2011), in possession of voices that sprang forth fully formed, just by "feeling it." This dismissive view—even when cloaked in tones of admiration—reduces black women singers to the category of vocal production only, making no provision for the ways in which such artists have listened to and studied with one another, sculpting their voices over time. This article offers a double intervention by engaging black women singers of the musical stage as highly trained producers of vocal sound as well as voice teachers in their own right. In so doing, I refute the assessment of such black voices as "untrained" and assert that beyond personal, musical, or cultural *style*—often a euphemism for racial essence or the celebrated aestheticization of black suffering—early twentieth-century blues singers possessed and deployed robust vocal techniques.

The following analysis draws on archival sources, close readings of recorded and documented performances, and my more than two decades as a singer, songwriter, and voice coach in the musical theatre. As I consider how performances of vocal sound replicate and transmit knowledge, I take the "singing lesson" as a key site of performance for analysis. Unlike the stories of classical singers (Story 1990; Eidsheim 2019), the archive is largely silent on lessons or training that early twentieth-century popular singers, in particular black women singers, used to gain their technique. What it does present, by contrast, are lessons of content—the ways and contexts in which singers learned particular songs. Thus the singing lessons I examine are largely occasions having to do with the shared experience of learning repertoire. It is these singing lessons and their implications I wish to consider here. By singing lesson, I mean, primarily, a particular scenario in which a singer learns a song and polishes its delivery by working with another singer or voice coach. Thus, I engage the learning of song repertoire as a specific scenario (Taylor 2003) of both listening and vocalizing by which the transmission of technique registers in the archive.[2]

Ma Rainey's Singing Lesson

Let's begin with Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Rainey is widely regarded as the "Mother of the Blues." And yet, it is difficult to claim full maternal rights to the form for Rainey when she herself spoke of learning her first blues number from a young woman in 1902 while working the tent show circuit in Missouri; the point of black maternal origin proves unlocatable. In her one known interview, Rainey shared the anecdote with the black musicologist and choir director John Wesley Work, Jr., who later related:

> She tells of a girl from the town who came to the tent one morning and began to sing about the "man" who had left her. . . . The song was so strange and poignant that it attracted much attention. "Ma" Rainey became so interested that she learned the song from the visitor, and used it soon afterwards in her "act" as an encore. (Work 1940, 32)

Three-quarters of a century earlier, white performers such as T. D. Rice were described by contemporaries as having drawn material from the "peculiarities" of street and stable-yard performances by black men to craft blackface minstrelsy. Rice is said to have taken up the song that would make him famous for the number "Jump Jim Crow" as the result of a simple hearing, a chance encounter with a street performer, and the reported decision on the white listener's part to elevate a performance by taking it to the stage (Lott 2003, 57). In Ma Rainey, by comparison, we have an example of study in which the soon-to-be Mother of the Blues studied and learned a particular song, taught by one black woman to another, with all its strangeness and poignancy.

What does it mean to learn a song? What does it mean to share a repertoire between teacher and student, between an originary singer and the one who listens and sings back, in a process of learning to put the song into her own body and voice? Descriptors such as "strangeness" and "peculiarities" call up notions of technique; specifically, techniques thus far unfamiliar to the listeners in question, whether Rainey or Rice. From my work as a songwriter and voice teacher, I know that any song makes certain technical demands of the singer. One must be able to sustain this note, execute that leap, navigate such and such a rhythm. Yet while the song, with its particular configuration of pitches, intervals, and rhythms, may provide a map to technique, the singer must animate this map in performance, imbue it with a series of choices about how to deploy the breath and flesh of the vocal mechanism.

Bessie Smith's Shout: Learning the Vaudeville-Blues

Listening to "Poor Man's Blues," a song Bessie Smith authored and whose lyrics Angela Davis has lucidly analyzed as containing an incisive social protest (Davis 2011, 97), I take in the slides in Smith's voice, each a caressing or easing over the many surfaces of a given pitch with all its curves. I hear the gravel in her sound, the majestic, muscular ripple of vibrato, and the ring to her tone. There is a sweetness underneath the grit and growl that comes, as the metaphorical landscapes of anatomy and acoustics would have me believe, from a particular technical posture, holding the throat in the position of a laugh, or a sob, or both simultaneously. The affective arrangement of body for voice is a performance in its own right. The shape contains an ambivalent multiplicity that in itself evokes the blues. As James H. Cone writes, "The blues were living reality. They were a sad feeling and also a joyous mood. They are bitter but also sweet. They are funny and not so funny" (Cone 1992, 122). I

hear this doubleness in the colour of Smith's voice, the physiology and phonic materiality of double entendre, an enfleshed performance that means more than one thing at once.

The way that Bessie Smith delivers a song has to do with more than just the timbre of her voice, and more than its grain, understood as a kind of frictive beyond-timbre—what Roland Barthes calls "the body in the voice as it sings" (Barthes 2012, 508). Although, as far as grain is concerned, Steven Connor usefully cautions that the body does not "upload" cleanly into voice, and voices may also ventriloquize the rooms in which they resound (Connor 2014, 28). Further, in the crack of the voice, the cut of the grain, as Fred Moten teaches, a black singer's vocal sound may thwart both the accusation of incompleteness and assumptions around "the soft, heavy romance of a simple fullness" (Moten 2003, 107). Beyond timbre, consider Bessie Smith's phrasing, consider improvisation, consider her stage presence, reportedly commanding, and the fact of the songs she penned herself. But I am after the vocal *sound* and what it bore, what it continues to bear. How did Bessie Smith learn to shout, and with her particular sound?

It has been suggested, and sometimes refuted, that the Tennessee-born Bessie Smith learned to sing from Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and certainly, the two did perform together early in Smith's career. Smith's entrée into show business came when she was hired to work mainly as a dancer with a travelling company in 1912 at the age of eighteen and soon after appeared in a troupe with "Ma" and "Pa" Rainey. Yet Maud Smith, Bessie's sister-in-law, commented, "Ma and Bessie got along fine, but Ma never taught Bessie how to sing," and Smith's biographer Chris Albertson insists "Ma Rainey may well have passed on to the younger singer a few show business tricks, and she probably taught her some songs, but Bessie was, by all accounts, a good singer before she left Chattanooga" (2003, 14). What is interesting about these comments is the way they seem to suggest that learning to sing is an on/off switch—you've learned or you haven't—when, in practice, technique develops over time. There is also a sense of defending Smith's legacy, as if having learned anything at all other than "a few show business tricks, and . . . some songs" robs Smith of her authenticity, somehow diminishes the force of her talent. The anti-theatrical investment in the authenticity of blues performers, as Paige McGinley (2014) has documented, disavows the technique—whether theatrical or, as I discuss, musical—that such artists developed and displayed. Of course, the impressiveness ascribed to black singers often flows from the mysterious and magical sense in which they are supposed to be those who are never taught but just "feel it" all along.

However, in contrast to the on/off switch model of singing training, where "on" perpetuates the myth of authentic, unlearned, natural black talent—and off is, well, just *off*[3]—I contend that learning to sing, which is always learning to sing in a certain way, generally has a slow rise to it. To the above assessments, then, I argue for the validity of continuing to learn. Even once a singer has grasped the basics of vocal production, even if she knows "how to sing," she can continue to learn and grow in her technique. It is impossible that Smith could have learned nothing from Rainey as they shared a stage; the assertion that she would not have studied and in some aspects emulated the more successful singer eight years her senior, is, far from preserving her legacy, only an insult to any self-respecting performer who aspires to be a star. Sharing a stage, singing together, and learning songs from another singer certainly constitute scenarios that fall within the category I consider here as "singing lesson." And then, if the learning of repertoire is what we are after, what is to be made of two singers who write a song together?

The song "Don't Fish in My Sea" was co-written by Rainey and Smith, as documented by Davis (2011, 213), and recorded by Rainey in Chicago in 1926. The tune is a straightforward 12-bar blues

that works up to a woman's assertion of the boundaries, value, and territory of her body over and against the actions of a philandering man: "If you don't like my ocean, don't fish in my sea. . . . Stay out of my valley and let my mountain be." There is a smoothness to Rainey's sound, a forswearing of overexertion. This is an easy sliding over notes, with pickups, those quick notes between phrases, thrown away almost to the side instead of straight ahead. Her sustained tones are burnished with warm vibrato, the low notes sound as though she's leaning right in to make her point. It's as if a blue note sounds blue because she can't be bothered to reach all the way up to it . . . the way a queen should not be expected to work too hard, with a languid elegance that calls up hot and humid air. The recording consists only of Rainey's voice and Thomas Dorsey's upright piano playing, which prances along behind her, lilting and dipping into tremolos at every occasion. After the second verse, however, there is a brief spoken line before the sung melody resumes:

> He used to stay out late, now he don't come home at all
> He used to stay out late, now he don't come home at all
> [Spoken] Won't kiss me, either
> I know there's another mule been kickin' in my stall
> (Davis 2011, 213)

Angela Davis speculates, "The speaking voice sounds to be that of Bessie Smith, who may very well have been present at this recording session on an informal basis" (Davis 2011, 256). It's hard to tell. The line comes close on the heels of the last sung note, and it could have been difficult for Rainey to have finished singing and managed to spit out the line as quickly and casually as it sounds; I can understand why Davis hears this as the voice of a second woman in the room. And it does have some of Bessie Smith's inflection: "Won't kiss" as two dotted quarter notes of emphasis, like two firm shakes of the head with a certain flash of indignance; affect aside, the rhythm, bend, and articulation of such a two-note phrase reverberate throughout Smith's own recorded repertoire. What I enjoy about this acoustic riddle are the generative implications of the two interpretations that seem most likely. If the spoken line is Rainey herself, then the fact of its being mistaken for Smith's (whose body of recorded work is more extensive than Rainey's and thus more familiar to the listening historian's ear) only points up a strong similarity between the two women's voices. In this event, the case for the younger Smith having learned a hefty portion of vocal technique from the older Rainey is strengthened. And if the interjection is in fact Smith's voice? Imagine her scenario of listening, envision her sitting silent in the room next to Dorsey's piano while Rainey sang into the recording horn, taking it all in and perhaps holding her cowriter accountable to sing the song in the way the two had agreed.

The scene of Rainey and Smith's collaboration reimagines the scene of teacher-to-student repertoire learning as one of shared repertoire creation, in which a new song is borne out in the voices and embodied performances of two black women as they sang and wrote the blues together. I picture the two bent over a hot piano and a fresh sheet of paper, backstage at one of the theatres at which they performed together, companions in song and in travel on the black theatre circuit of their time. Singing the tune back to one another, ensuring its viability in its twice-heardness.

Blues Shout as Show Tune

As blues singers, Smith and Rainey before her are widely and deservedly credited as artists who cleared the way for the traditions of recorded jazz that would follow them. But the two women's connections to the theatre world deserve consideration as well. Of note, in the 1930s, Rainey owned and operated the Lyric Theatre in Rome, Georgia, after retiring from her career as a performer (Peterson 1997). This was a theatre on the famed Theatre Owners Booking Association circuit whose acronym, TOBA, was also said by black performers of the day to stand for "tough on black asses." In the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century, Smith and Rainey performed for black audiences across the circuit at many of its nearly eighty theatres, which ranged in size from the five-hundred-seat American Theatre in Houston to the eighteen-hundred-seat Lyric Theatre in New Orleans (Sampson 2013). What's more, in the 1920s, Smith was lauded in the black press as "one of the greatest colored actresses" of the day (*Philadelphia Tribune,* October 27, 1927).

Musicologist Eileen Southern aptly observed that singers like Rainey and Smith were vaudeville artists, noting that scholars "have found it difficult to describe adequately the quality and style of the blueswomen's voices, which ranged from lilting soprano to deep contralto, from expressive, soulful wails to abrasive, gut-bucket groans and moans" (1997, 373). Southern refers to the music these singers sang as "vaudeville-blues," an important intervention in prevailing narratives of musical theatre history. Tracing a history of musicals that listens through black women's voices, then, requires a rethinking of the dominant narrative of blackness via minstrelsy that is subsequently co-opted into white vaudeville innovated by European immigrants and then, via a dash of European operetta, arrives at (white) musical comedy, from which black musical comedy is a separate and "parallel" strain (Block and Graham et al. 2015). The black vaudeville-blues artist, by her very existence, complicates this articulation.

As theatre artists, Smith and her cohort of black women blues singers were performers on the same vaudeville stage widely accepted as an antecedent of musical theatre. But hearing a blues singer like Bessie Smith and her vaudeville-blues sound in the lineage of Broadway belters puts pressure on the oft-stated assumption that white Broadway belters such as Ethel Merman deployed a vocal sound traced to another great lady of show business, the Jewish "coon shouter" Sophie Tucker.

Sophie Tucker's Immigrant "Coon Shout"

The recorded archive bears out that Tucker's is a voice with heft, not sunlit gossamer like the voices of the vaudeville ingénues who were her contemporaries. Hers is an immigrant voice, encrusted[4] with a foreignness that cannot be fully disguised by Negro dialect or ragtime rhythms, let alone the blackface makeup in which she performed at the start of her career. The ethnically marked sign of Tucker's voice is a complex one; scholars have also noted the ways that her repertoire was predicated on and engaged Jewish audiences, who responded with great emotion to the songs she sang in Yiddish, both in the US and abroad (Lavitt 1999; Merwin 2006). Jayna Brown has also noted the fondness with which some black artists of her era regarded Tucker, not least the songwriters whose careers she advanced (Brown 2008, 214). Still, it would have been difficult for a singer like Sophie Tucker to be as legible and widely embraced by her audiences without the figure of the blues singer who ghosts her sound. Regardless, the black women blues singers who were her contemporaries, among them Smith, Rainey, Alberta Hunter, and Ethel Waters, appear nowhere in the pages of her autobiography.

Clearly, these singers crossed paths, as the blueswomen's accounts confirm. Alberta Hunter narrates an encounter with Tucker as follows:

> [White performers] studied us so hard that you'd think they were in class. . . . The white shows used to come in from New York and everybody else was there to see us work, the stars, the chorus girls, Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, everybody. One night I was doing "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and they handed me a little note from Sophie Tucker. She wanted that song, and that's how they were, always trying to get something out of us, always trying to pick up on our little tricks. And what could we do? Only thing we could do was to do those numbers even better—which we did. (Albertson 2003, 21–22)

The above anecdote[5] sheds new light on the assertions Tucker made elsewhere that securing new, original repertoire was the key to success for the aspiring performer;[6] clearly, the goal was to discover material that would be fresh to white ears, a longstanding approach of business-minded musicians throughout the history of US popular song. In another anecdote, the celebrated singer Ethel Waters offers up another scenario of study involving Tucker that stands as a rare example of a lesson explicitly focused on vocal technique rather than, or in addition to, repertoire. Waters recalls encountering Tucker during the late 1920s when Waters performed regularly at the venue Rafe's Paradise in Atlantic City:

> Sophie Tucker was playing at the Beaux Arts that year and she, too, came several times to catch my act. This "Last of the Red-Hot Mammas" was then called a "coon shouter," an expression whose passing from the common language none of us laments. Miss Tucker paid me a little money to come to her hotel suite and sing for her privately. She explained that she wanted to study my style of delivery. (Waters and Samuels 1992, 135)

It remains an open question as to how conscientious Miss Tucker really was in her requested studies; the written and recorded archive attests that her vocal sound was quite different from that of Ethel Waters. As I address below, Waters made her way from the vaudeville circuit and dive cabarets in Harlem to the Broadway theatre and international renown on stage and screen. Along the way, she even took a singing lesson, of sorts, with her contemporary Bessie Smith. Hers was a sweet but powerful vocal sound that gave new meaning to what it meant to sing the blues, and where the blues could take a singer.

Ethel Waters's "Low Kind of Singing"

Of the blues singers I have considered thus far, Ethel Waters is the one most readily associated with the musical theatre; her Broadway shows include *Africana* (1927), *As Thousands Cheer* (1933), and *Cabin in the Sky* (1940), and she remains known for definitive performances of iconic songs from stage and screen musicals such as "Suppertime," "Am I Blue?" and "Stormy Weather." Born in Philadelphia in 1896, Waters, the Queen of the Blues, was just two years younger than Empress Bessie Smith. On the strength of an impromptu performance at a South Philly venue, at age seventeen, she was booked by a touring vaudeville company; even at that time, her voice had, by her own account, a "'sweet, bell-like' tone" (Waters and Samuels 1992, 87). Waters toured as a member of the Hill sisters group and under the stage name "Sweet Mama Stringbean," then performed at the famed Harlem dive bar Edmond's Cellar and in the recording studios and touring company of Black Swan Records before going on to new heights across Broadway, Europe, and Hollywood. Yet, while

a famed blues singer in her own era, today, she lacks the prominence of Smith and Rainey and does not easily map onto the narrative of blueswoman as proto-jazz singer.

The signature blues song of the young Waters's vaudeville days offers a productive site through which to hear and assess some of the reasons why her voice has proved difficult to categorize. Astutely navigating the early structures of music licensing, she wrote the publishers of composer W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" soon after its publication in 1914 and received permission to be one of only two acts and the first woman then allowed to perform the song. Despite the facts that the published sheet music identifies it as both a blues and ragtime tune and that the song's opening section strategically incorporates the tango rhythm all the rage at the time of its writing, "St. Louis Blues" is now considered one of the great blues numbers of all time. Listening to a recording of the song made during World War II (Armed Forces Radio Network, July 14, 1942), I hear in Waters's voice a liquid tone, not without blues viscosity but with some lift to it. She floats out high notes in octave leaps ("to-*mor*-row") but has deep low notes as well and isn't afraid to show them off, vibrato melting the ends of phrases into warmth. She sings through the voiced consonants, the final *n*'s and *ng*'s of things like trains and rings gaining new, extended lengths of expression. When she heads up high ("*Saint* Louis," "*When* you see me leaving"), the sound remains clear but gets thinned out and a bit brighter, maybe nasalized (in the best of senses), the voice's taffy texture stretching out thinner and thinner as it wisps to new heights. She adds in a growl and flutter here and there ("*I'll* be gone), but overall, this is a warm, smooth sound with a lot of lift to it. Lighter in heft and mass of vocal folds engaged, this sound feels less earthbound than those generally employed by Smith, Rainey, or Tucker. This blues singing comes with the Northern accent of the Philadelphia-born singer, not elongated Southern vowels. Yet it's still a blue sound, with backphrasing and the bluing of notes true to style, and that sense of tossing notes away common to all the blues singers.

Around 1918, Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters shared a stage at the No. 91 Theatre in Atlanta. By this point, Smith was already a high-earning star on the vaudeville circuit who called the shots wherever she performed. A respectful Waters deferred to her status, calling her "Miss Bessie" and trying to stay on good terms, later recalling:

> Bessie, like an opera singer, carried her own claque with her. . . . [She] was in a pretty good position to dictate to the managers [and] told the men who ran No. 91 that she didn't want anyone else on the bill to sing the blues. I agreed to this. . . . And when I went on I sang "I Want to Be Somebody's Baby Doll So I Can Get My Lovin' All the Time." But before I could finish this number the people out front started howling, "Blues! Blues! Come on, Stringbean, we want your blues!" Before the second show the manager went to Bessie's dressing room and told her he was going to revoke the order forbidding me to sing any blues. He said he couldn't have another such rumpus. There was quite a stormy discussion about this, and you could hear Bessie yelling things about "these Northern bitches." Now nobody could have taken the place of Bessie Smith. People everywhere loved her shouting with all their hearts and were loyal to her. But they wanted me too. There had been such a tumult at that first show that Bessie agreed that after I took two or three bows for my first song I should, if the crowd still insisted, sing "St. Louis Blues." (Waters and Samuels 1992, 91)

This encounter between Smith and Waters can be understood as a kind of failed voice lesson. The restriction Smith attempts to place on the repertoire Waters may perform does not hold; the lesson

is not attended to. Consequently, Waters establishes herself as a skilful blues singer even in comparison with the greater star she concedes was "undisputed tops as a blues singer" (Waters and Samuels 1992, 87). In this way, Waters models the student who defies the teacher—here, with the backing of the theatre manager and audience—to assert her own technical approach in contrast to the performance held up as definitive. It is not that her performance recreates or supersedes Smith's shouting but rather that she presents a vocal sound with an effective but contrasting mode of delivery. To the voice teacher's assertion that, essentially, "It must be done the way I do it or not at all," the student counters with, "What if I do it this way?"

According to Waters, the two singers made peace after the incident and struck an amicable tone for the rest of the engagement. They had much in common: both were statuesque, powerful women who lived the full-bodied blues life, collecting female lovers as well as male, and not afraid of a knock-down, drag-out fight if they thought their rights were being trodden on. But Smith continued to maintain that Waters had the lesser voice. For her part, Waters recognized the value in her own sound, what she called "my low, sweet, and then new way of singing blues" (Waters and Samuels 1992, 87).

It was this blues sound that carried Waters to cabarets and clubs of New York. While performing at the cramped, dingy Edmond's Cellar in Harlem in the 1920s, Waters sang the blues songs she had performed in travelling vaudeville shows up until that point. At Edmond's Cellar, Waters also took a set of lessons in learning repertoire from piano player Lou Henley, who convinced her that learning popular ballads and Tin Pan Alley songs in addition to the blues would open her up to new career opportunities. Arriving early to her gigs at Edmond's for sessions with Henley, she learned a range of popular ballads and worked out ways to interpret these songs. This mode of study—rehearsing and developing new repertoire with a trusted accompanist—was repeated throughout her career, later during her decades-long collaboration with pianist Pearl Wright.

With Wright, Waters stated that the key to their partnership lay in the fact that Pearl was a singer herself: "An accompanist who can sing knows the effects you seek, and you can feel understanding and help coming out through her fingers, through the piano, to you" (Wright and Samuels 1992, 227). Wright, the black woman singer-as-accompanist, proved an able coach for Waters when she was presented with material by white songwriters that had the potential to transform the blues singer's career. At an audition for Broadway's Plantation Club to replace headliner Florence Mills, the star of the hit, all-black Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*, Waters was asked by Tin Pan Alley songwriters Harry Akst and Joe Young to learn one of their songs. When they performed it for her, "doing it fast and corny" (Waters and Samuels 1992, 184), Waters was dubious. The songwriters encouraged her to work up the song in her own (blues) style. Waters went away and rehearsed the song with Wright and discovered she liked it after all. Returning to the songwriters and producers to perform the number "in her own way" got her the job and her first big hit. The song was "Dinah," which she recorded for Columbia Records in 1925, a recording later inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. It is notable that where Sophie Tucker claimed Tin Pan Alley songwriters as voice coaches, Waters learned and restyled her new repertoire at the elbow of the black piano accompanist who was also a skilled singer. This pattern is repeated with Akst and Young's song "Am I Blue?" and Harold Arlen's "Stormy Weather." In each case, the learning of new repertoire is framed by the singer's suggestion, "Let me take the lead sheet home. . . . I'll work on it with Pearl" (Waters and Samuels 1992, 198, 220).[7]

From Blues to Broadway

Ethel Waters has sometimes been the target of censure from black listeners in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century who surmise that she turned her back on her own race and sought to sound "white." As Faedra Chatard Carpenter has noted, assumptions "about what *sounds black* or *sounds white* in simplified racial terms" have long formed part of US cultural conversations (Carpenter 2014, 195). Like the upper-middle-class black people Langston Hughes critiques in his seminal essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," her too-sweet vocal sound has sometimes been heard as self-loathing, the prim rejection that says, "We don't believe in 'shouting'" (Hughes 1993, 57). In pitting Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters against one other, Angela Davis valorizes Smith as the singer who, with her blues singing, authentically represented her race and heritage, while Waters "consciously cultivated a sound from which many of the unfamiliar and inaccessible elements of black culture had been purged" (Davis 2011, 153). Dwandalyn Reece takes Davis to task for this assessment of Waters's voice and blues sound, pointing out that aesthetic styles and their expression have varied forms and modes; black performance cannot be understood in static, essentialist terms (Reece 2000, 34).

I have gone to some effort to show the extent to which Waters was celebrated by black audiences as a bona fide blues singer in her era, and not as a whitened, lesser imitation of Bessie Smith. Even as I attend to vocal colour shaped by the blues, I want to be clear that there is not, nor ever was, only one way of singing the blues. Further, paying attention to the processes by which singers studied and shifted their vocal delivery over time enables us, as Shane Vogel has elucidated, to understand musical performance in historical terms "as both an object and a process" (Vogel 2008, 97). Without the acknowledgement that singers not only produce but also learn technique and repertoire, adjusting their sound over time, their performative contributions are certain to be denied. In such a situation, the singer emerges merely as the hollow symbol of the race, composer, or genre she is thought to represent.

I submit that this is a key reason why Waters has been so under-celebrated in the pantheon of blues, jazz, and popular songstresses. Her movement from blues to Broadway simply doesn't align with the more familiar blues-to-jazz or blues-to-gospel trajectories of popular music histories. And the blues are not seen as a proto-genre of Broadway in the way that they are in the case of jazz and gospel (and the rock'n'roll these spawned). But listening through the twice-heardness of vocal sound enables a hearing of the Broadway belter's indebtedness to the blues singer, whether her blue sound took the form of Smith's shout or Waters's sweet tone. Nonetheless, popular opinion rewards those who perpetuate the mythology that their talent is so innate that it sprang forth from nowhere; this narrative was certainly espoused by Broadway belter Ethel Merman, and loudly.

Ethel Merman's Belt: Vocal Sound as Knockout

Born in Astoria, Queens, just six years after Ma Rainey learned her first blues, Ethel Merman lives in collective memory as the archetypal Broadway belter—the possessor of a loud, brassy voice that cut clear to the back row of the theatre, carrying over a full orchestra without the need for anything so mundane as amplification. Merman's career break came when she appeared in the Gershwins' 1930 musical *Girl Crazy*. She attests that during intermission of that show's opening night, composer George Gershwin ran up three flights of stairs to congratulate her on her performance of the song "I Got Rhythm." Merman reports of this performance,

> When I held the C note for sixteen bars, an entire chorus, while the orchestra played the melody, the audience went a little crazy. I don't think they were responding to the beauty of it. I think it was the newness. Nobody had ever done it in a Broadway show before. Thank God I was blessed with a strong diaphragm and lungs. Because I had to sing I don't know how many encores. And that was the song that made me. (Merman and Eels 1979, 39)

Gershwin was so taken with Merman's voice that, as she recalls, he counselled her, "Make me a promise. . . . Never go near a singing teacher. Because you have a natural talent. And if you ever go near a singing teacher, then you'll become conscious of breathing . . . and you're going to lose all the naturalness that you have" (Eichler 2015). The great composer's advice not to let conventional voice teachers tamper with her singing is one that reverberates throughout the archive, repeated again and again in the Broadway star's interviews and biographies. Merman wore the alleged "naturalness" of her mighty voice as a badge of honour.

How did Merman learn her sound? To whom did she listen and sing back? Little information is available about Merman's childhood and teenage years. Although she was taught by her father and in high school classes to read music, she is not known to have sung in the school choir or glee club. At the same time, her Queens background must have had a hand in her diction, rendering Gershwin lyrics such as "Who could ask for anything more?" as "Who could ask for anything maw?"[8] She roundly denied assertions by the pianist Al Siegel that he coached her into her own particular vocal technique. But she admired Sophie Tucker, to whom her sound has often been compared, and who was in turn complimentary of Merman's delivery. Reviewers also detected in Merman's voice echoes of torch singer Libby Holman, another Jewish star whom she also respected and whose signature song "Moanin' Low" was a staple of Merman's nightclub repertoire. Even if it is unlikely that Merman would have listened to recordings of blues singers aimed at black audiences, it is known that Holman was an avid student of the blues and modelled her voice on singers such as Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters. A millionaire who lived a life full of scandal—in between Broadway engagements, she was tried (and acquitted) for the murder of her late husband, and she proudly cultivated a string of lesbian relationships—Holman found a trusted voice coach in the black guitarist Josh White, a blues musician who became her long-time accompanist (Wald 2000, 95; Kellow 2007, 17). But despite what she learned from Tucker and Holman, the luminaries Merman claimed as responsible for her career time and again were the songwriters—George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter—of the hit songs she belted out.

The word "belter" itself discloses a scenario of listening. The origins of the word "belt" in reference to singing can be traced to boxing ("Origin of the Musical Verb 'Belt.'" 2014). Correlated with the idea of the "knockout" performance, the image of the singer-as-boxer adds an oppositional dimension to that of the singer-as-shouter by figuring the listener (or opponent) in the word for the act of singing itself. In order for the belter to belt, there must be one who is belted. Thus, the belter is so named because of the way her song is received, the levelling reaction that her powerful sound produces. Accordingly, the scenario of listening that the descriptor evokes is one that is forward-facing rather than back-formed, foregrounding lessons taught rather than lessons learned. The major contribution of Ethel Merman, with all the singers her voice carries, is that her belt voice makes such an impression on many a listener who, once recovered from the shock, picks herself up off the ground, dusts herself off, and seeks to learn to make just such a sound herself. In contrast to this

oppositional encounter, the blues singers who precede Merman teach another way—by activating listening scenarios in which sound takes shape via the studied act of *singing along with* another's voice.

Conclusions

I have argued here against listenings that would filter out the frequencies and impact of black blues singers on the musical theatre belt sound, attending to the specific bodies through which its shouted tones resounded in historical context. My goal has not been to merely catalogue performance traits (blues shouting) that signal blackness and detect them within white performance modes (Broadway belting) where they may have gone previously uncredited. This would be an oversimplification, not least because, as the sounds of Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters show, there is no one "pure" way to sing the blues. The essential signifier of blackness in the voice proves impossible to locate. But I have contested the idea that black women who sang the blues and performed on the musical stage in the early twentieth century (and beyond) possessed "untrained," spontaneously formed voices. Against this notion, I have examined a series of singing lessons that variously map the ways that black women singers learned from and taught one another and their white contemporaries.

I have examined several kinds of singing lessons here. One kind is the lesson that occurs in the context of the professional singer's ongoing practice, challenging the notion that learning to sing can be understood as a sort of on/off switch. Another kind is the lesson in which two women write a song together and teach it to one another. Others are lessons that are disavowed, unacknowledged, ghosts of lessons, denied in some archival accounts and revealed in others. There is also the failed lesson—that in which the student refuses to attend to the teaching and instead goes her own way. Beyond the lesson taught by the teacher who defines himself as a proper voice teacher, there is the one given by the teacher and coach who calls herself a piano accompanist. And in addition to the lesson that the singer disavows, there is the lesson that the Broadway songwriter-as-voice-coach helpfully disavows on her behalf, solidifying a cult of the white belter and her so-called "natural" sound. This last must be attended to, in sifting through the echoes of all the lessons that precede it, because it perniciously recasts the so-called "untrained" voice as nothing short of miraculous, never minding the ways in which its sounds, for all their seeming offhandedness, are already studied, already citational, already twice-heard.

Notes

1. On this point, Nina Sun Eidsheim writes, "By shifting our assumption of the singer from pure producer to producer and listener, we can recognize that he or she is listening to and also assigning meaning to or withholding it from a given labeling of his or her vocal timbre" (2019, 180).

2. Diana Taylor posits the "scenario" as a unit of the repertoire that effects a "once-againness" and stages "the generative critical distance between social actor and character" (2003, 30, 32).

3. Daphne Brooks (2010) has pointed up the fact that present-day listeners are trained by television reality shows to exercise a certain vigilance against supposed intonation problems, standing ready to apply the damning critique of "pitchy-ness" to singers whose performance disappoints.

4. I refer here to the "mixed voice" theorized by Steven Connor: "Like flypaper, the voice gathers things on the way, lilts, leanings, aches, eccentricities, accents" (Connor 2014, 29).

5. In her biography *Alberta Hunter: A Celebration in Blues*, blues diva Hunter also narrates a specific incident in which she was asked to give a singing lesson to Sophie Tucker and declined (Taylor 1987, 39).

6. In her autobiography, Tucker writes, "For all the years I have been in show business, to singers who have asked my advice I have said: 'Get new songs. Pay a writer to write them for you. Get songs that you can make your own. Don't copy other singers. Don't sing their songs. Don't do their stunts. Don't make your act a carbon copy of someone else's. Not if you want to succeed'" (Tucker 1945, 59).

7. Additionally, Waters studied with Jamaican voice teacher Louis Drysdale in London in 1929. The Kingston-born Drysdale relocated to London in 1906, where he studied at the Royal College of Music with distinguished teachers in the bel canto tradition. In the 1920s, Drysdale's studio welcomed students of different races from the worlds of Broadway, cabaret, opera, and British musical comedy in the West End. His students also included Florence Mills, Marian Anderson, and Alberta Hunter.

8. Merman was a favourite of not only George Gershwin but also Broadway composer/lyricists Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, who had nothing but praise for her diction. Berlin is reported to have said of her, "If you're writing for Merman, be sure your lyrics are good, because they'll be heard." See Pleasants (1974, 337).

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Sounding a Crip Aesthetic: Transforming the Sonic in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*

Megan Johnson

"Hedgehog. Biscuit. Cats. Biscuit. Fuck. Biscuit. Cats. Hedgehog. Biscuit . . . Biscuit. Biscuit. Fuck. Biscuit. Hedgehog. Biscuit-Biscuit-Biscuit-Biscuit-Biscuit . . . Biscuit-Biscuit-Biscuit. Biscuit. Oooh! Biscuit." As a shadowy figure is slowly raised into the air, these words ring out in an otherwise silent space. Suddenly, the words shift, though their jagged rhythm continues:

> . . . out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time. . . in a godfor- . . . what? . . . girl? . . yes . . . tiny little girl . . . into this . . . out into this . . . before her time . . . godforsaken hole called . . . called . . . no matter . . . parents unknown . . . In unheard of . . . he having vanished . . . thin air . . . no sooner buttoned up his breeches . . . (Beckett 1986, 378).

These lines are the opening phrases to Samuel Beckett's play *Not I* (1972), and they—along with the repeated words like "biscuit, biscuit, biscuit"—are spoken by UK-based performer Jess Thom, who presented Beckett's play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2017 and then at Battersea Arts Centre in London the following year. *Not I* is a monologue of twisting and fragmented text delivered at high speed and without cessation and is a work known for the physical, vocal, and emotional challenge it presents to performers and audiences alike. While any performance of this play provides substantial fodder for performance scholarship, Thom's rendition is especially significant as she is the first disability-identified performer to take on the role. In her early twenties, Thom was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome—a neurological condition that often results in chronic repetitive and involuntary movements and sounds, called tics.[1] Thom's energy and natural performance instinct make her a memorable presence onstage—a presence further distinguished by her use of a wheelchair and consistent vocal and motor tics. Thom's vocal tics are an especially prominent feature of her personal and performance personas, with some reoccurring vocalizations (the word "biscuit," for example) becoming motifs in her artistic work.[2]

Thom often goes by the moniker "Touretteshero," which refers to her superhero performance persona and is also the name of the organization that she cofounded with long-time creative collaborator Matthew Pountney.[3] Through Touretteshero—which aims to "celebrate and share the creativity and humour of Tourette's in an accessible way" (Touretteshero)—Thom advocates for more diverse and inclusive arts practices for people with disabilities, a focus borne out of her own experiences of discrimination in the theatre. In interviews and public talks, Thom often recounts an experience attending a comedy show where, despite alerting both performer and audience to her presence prior to the show, her vocal tics were deemed disruptive, and she was removed from the audience at intermission and forced to watch the performance from the sound booth. Here, the sound booth was employed for its soundproofing capabilities, used as a means of erasing Thom's

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unexpected vocal tics from the performance space in order to maintain the expected etiquette of the "quiet audience" (Simpson 2018).

This story serves as an example of the ongoing ways that the sonic attributes of performance spaces are tightly controlled and adhere to specific conventions. It demonstrates how "line[s] of exclusion" (Johnston 2019, 21) between normative/nonnormative and acceptable/unacceptable sounds permeate performance spheres, and how, though lack of access is often imagined to be physical or structural, there are sonic spaces that are equally inaccessible. Even at a comedy show, where laughs, jeers, and feedback from the audience are expected, certain sounds and vocalizations fall outside what is deemed appropriate audience comportment. These demarcations around sonic normativity are upheld by ableist structures, practices, and attitudes that then materialize in the continued stigmatization and inaccessibility experienced by disabled performers and audience members.

Thom's frequent invocation of this story marks it as a profound experience that has fuelled her desire to make theatre spaces and practices more accessible and inclusive for performers and audiences (Disability Arts Online 2019).[4] Though she admits that the "experience of exclusion and discrimination . . . made me almost self-select away from theatre totally and turn away from theatre and feel that wasn't a place for me," she has since reclaimed this experience by putting herself onto the stage—the one space in the theatre where she would not be told to be quiet (ADIarts 2016). As a disabled performer taking on Beckett's *Not I*—a canonical work of modern drama with tightly regulated performance standards, a highly virtuosic text, and arduous physical demands on the performer—Thom makes a decisive intervention into the exclusionary patterns whereby sounds are delineated across lines of acceptability and unacceptability.

In what follows, I trace the aesthetic and material changes made to the play in the Touretteshero production, which, in welcoming a wider diversity of sounds into the theatre, work to metaphorically shatter the soundproof glass of the sound booth that would seek to (sonically) constrain nonnormative bodyminds.[5] Specifically, I explore the material changes made to the production in service of increased accessibility for performer and audience, how Thom's vocal tics interact with Beckett's already fragmented text, and the production's innovative integration of sign language interpretation. Together, these changes present a multisensorial experience that extends conceptualizations of what constitutes "the sonic" in performance and also reimagines and reconstructs what I describe as the "sonic profile" of Beckett's play. I elaborate on how these changes constitute a crip aesthetic—whereby artistic works reveal and resist the structures of compulsory ablebodiedness/ablemindedness—and argue that, in so doing, they both illuminate the exclusionary structures that permeate theatrical practice and signal the potential for more inclusive aesthetic approaches.

Disability Arts and Crip Aesthetics

Though disability is often featured in performance as a narrative or dramaturgical device—what Mitchell and Snyder (2000) describe as a "narrative prosthesis"—there continues to be a dearth of casting of disabled performers, particularly in canonical theatre works (Johnston 2016; Sandahl 2008). Beckett's prominence within the modern theatre canon and his status as "arguably, the twentieth-century's most important playwright" (Oppenheim 2004, 1) make Thom's performance a compelling contribution to the production history of the play and the landscape of contemporary disability arts.

The disability arts and culture movement, of which disability theatre and performance is one part, is an important way that disability communities have sought to "address and redress the very idea of disability in the modern arts and, by extension, society" (Johnston 2016, 15). Emerging in tandem and intersecting with the rise of disability activism in the late twentieth century, disability arts and culture champions disabled people as artistic and cultural producers, develops artistic work that rejects disparaging representations and stereotypes of disability, and advocates for increasing accessibility within arts institutions and practices. The movement has helped to coalesce diverse communities of practitioners, advocates, and spectators who seek to articulate experiences and narratives of disability in such a way as to rescript the many negative representations that perpetuate in dominant mainstream art, media, and culture. Though works of disability art often centre experiences of disability and impairment in their form, content, or approach, this need not always be the case. As Eliza Chandler describes, "disability is not always the subject of my art, but claiming myself as a disability artist . . . advances an understanding of myself and other disabled people as creative, political, and full of vitality" (2018, 459).

Chandler's positioning of disability arts practitioners as creative, political, and vital resonates with how we might understand crip aesthetics. In marshalling a crip aesthetic as part of the wider framing of disability arts practice, artists move beyond just centring disability onstage to using performance as a way of illuminating the oppressive power structures that undergird the projects of compulsory ablebodiedness/ablemindedness in both performance and broader social contexts. In this usage, "crip" is released from the pejorative connotation of the word "crippled" to become "a reclaimed word around which [people with disabilities] mobilize identity, community, culture, and scholarship" (Chandler 2019, 8)—the word signals practices of activism and resistance that "spi[n] mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects" (Sandahl 2003, 37).

The crip aesthetic of artists and grassroots activists has helped to foment theorization on "crip" and the development of "crip theory" (Sandahl 2003; McRuer 2006, 2018; Kafer 2013; Fritsch 2016). Much of this work considers the relationship, affinities, and distinctions between queer theory and disability studies, particularly accounting for the way each field maintains a "radical stance toward concepts of normalcy" (Sandahl 2003, 26). Critique of the various models and modes of normativity that operate in social, cultural, and political life has been a central project in disability studies more broadly (Davis 1995; Garland-Thomson 1997) and acquires additional energy in how "*crip* and *queer* mark out, and indeed, flaunt the failures of normativity," explicitly defying dominant culture and dismantling the demarcations and structures of power that uphold normativity (Fritsch and McGuire 2018, vii).

Performance remains an important site for this dismantling. For example, Carrie Sandahl's early writing on crip theory is centred on the autobiographical work of performance artists who sought to claim their queer-crip identity and "expose the arbitrary delineation between normal and defective" (2003, 37). Sandahl describes how these artists used a crip approach to make visible the ableist practices and attitudes that structure performance but are often occluded by their apparent naturalness. I locate a similar impulse in how Thom's performance engages with Beckett's play in ways that expose the ableist structures upon which its performance practice is built. This is particularly interesting because although the aesthetic presented in *Not I* appears revolutionary in how it flouts and disturbs theatrical convention[6]—as Gontarski notes, "dispers[ing] the idea of the literary character and reassert[ing] the primacy of language on stage, of narrative and poetry" (2001, 169)—part of what the Touretteshero production choices make clear is how the play simultaneously

and paradoxically achieves this aesthetic because of its reliance on exclusionary structures. The structures that prevent the work from being inclusive to a diverse range of performers and audiences are illuminated when the play is approached and transformed through a crip aesthetic.

Sonic Profile

While there are various methods by which disabled performers might crip an existing aesthetic (Hadley 2014; Kelly and Orsini 2016; Millett-Gallant 2019), and though disability arts scholarship continues to attend to many of the ableist systems, practices, and ideologies that structure theatre and performance, what has not yet been fully considered are the ways that *sound* is imbricated in these structures. Part of the significance of Thom's performance of *Not I,* therefore, is how the changes made to the production enact a crip aesthetic that reconstitutes the sonic elements of the play, which is already known for presenting a unique aural experience. The play centres on the character of Mouth: a woman who (after years of silence) seems suddenly unable to stop speaking as she delivers a non-stop monologue of disjointed, stream-of-consciousness text filled with confusion, disassociation, and trauma. Mouth's voice is the only sound heard through the entirety of the play, and the torrent of sound that gushes forth from her is intense and unremitting. The audience must strain to comprehend, through the character's "furious venting of words" (Lawley 1983, 408), any semblance of narrative. Though the play does not provide much concrete information pertaining to Mouth's background or identity, an attentive listener can surmise that she was abandoned by both parents, has been unloved and alone for much of her life, and has up until this moment been unable or unwilling to speak.

In analyzing the play, many critics have highlighted the character's disconnected and fragmented sense of self (Brater 1974, 196; Lawley 1983, 411), an interpretation that is in part gleaned from Mouth's refusal to identify herself as the protagonist of the narrative—rather, she insists on relaying the story in the third person: "what she was– . . . what? . . who? . . no! . . she! . . SHE!" (Beckett 1986, 382). However, these interpretations are derived not only from the words of the text but also its sound; Mouth's halting and disconnected speech aurally emphasizes this fragmentation. This attention to the sonic highlights the import of sound as a key method by which theatrical worlds are created. In her formative essay "EF's Visit to a Small Planet," Elinor Fuchs encourages us to "listen for the pattern of the sound" within a play since "every dramatic world will have, or suggest, characteristic sounds" (2004, 7). Despite the centrality of sound and sound design in creating "dramatic worlds," however, it has lacked critical attention in theatre studies. As Susan Bennett describes, until recently, "theatre sound as a critical inquiry was long consigned to a background role, rarely doing more than support the main action of performance research" (2019, 7).

However, this is not to say that sound has been absent from critical discourse in performance research. My thinking around the sonic crip aesthetic in the Touretteshero production builds on performance studies scholarship that has drawn on sound, aurality, voice, and music as a method of challenging the hegemony of the visual as a mode of perception and the resulting epistemological assumptions. This work—evinced in writings by Fred Moten (2003), Alexandra Vazquez (2013), Tina M. Campt (2017), and others—engages with sound as a way of offering theoretical and methodological tools that find new routes into performance and its relationship to subjectivity, culture, history, and community. Rather than assert aurality in lieu of visuality in a hierarchy of sensory experience, these scholars ask what sound can open up for us when it is used as an entry

point into culture, aesthetics, and performance, and consider how including the sonic as a mode of sense perception can provide access to alternative (i.e., non-dominant) experiences and narratives.

Enlivened by the challenge these scholars have levied on the dominance of the visual, I use the term "sonic profile" as a means to summon an expansive understanding of what constitutes the sonic. In this figuration, sound is not only a singular object of analysis or a discrete event but also something that stretches across multiple sensory registers and is deeply linked to material context. Attending to the multisensorial nature of a play's sonic profile disrupts the tendency to elevate one sensory modality over another and instead acknowledges the potential of the sonic to be constitutive of a combination of sensory experiences and abilities (Cachia 2019c; Kochhar-Lindgren 2006b). This term is meant to encapsulate the aural sounds of a performance as well as the concurrent confluence of visual, spatial, temporal, kinaesthetic, and/or material elements. From this vantage point, the crip aesthetic of the Touretteshero production can be located in its transformation of the aural elements of Beckett's play *and* the production's visual and material adaptations. Some of the adaptations made by the production (such as presenting the play as a relaxed performance) frame the context in which the play is "heard," while others (such as the casting of Thom in the role of Mouth and the integration of sign language interpretation) shift the content of the performance itself. Together, these myriad changes work to reconstruct the overall sonic profile of the play—opening up exciting aesthetic possibilities for future presentations of *Not I* while also signalling the ways that sound has been used as a means of enacting and reinforcing lines of exclusion around nonnormative bodyminds.

"Beckett with Biscuits"

People with disabilities are often excluded from performance settings because they are simply not imagined or expected to be there (Conroy 2019, 47; Lobel and Thom 2019, 248). When performers, crew, administration, and patrons are all assumed to be nondisabled, the inaccessible aspects of a theatre's space or a performance's content are more easily occluded, and the ableist structures within performance practice remain unremarkable. Thom's performance in the Touretteshero production, in contrast, imagines a greater diversity of bodyminds (and voices) within the scope of the play and makes explicit the tenets of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. The changes made to the play by this production in order to enact this inclusive ethos are particularly significant given that the Beckett estate is notorious for refusing performance rights to producers who cannot adhere to the playwright's exact stage directions or who wish to revamp the playwright's material in some way.[7] The estate's strict control over the presentation of Beckett's work means that his plays are usually presented within a relatively narrow margin of difference across productions.[8] In this case, the unpredictability of Thom's vocal tics meant that she would not be able to perform Beckett's text exactly as written. And yet when Thom appealed to Edward Beckett (the playwright's nephew) to express her desire to perform the play, she was granted performance rights even though it was clear that, in Thom's words, her rendition would be "Beckett with Biscuits" (Fox 2017). Agreeing to Thom's "Beckett with Biscuits" version of *Not I* meant that the Beckett estate greenlit a production of the play that would be (sonically) distinct from every previous rendition. Securing access to the performance rights was the first crack Thom and her team made in the metaphorical soundproof glass of the sound booth that had previously separated nonnormative bodyminds and voices from this seminal work of twentieth-century drama.

A second crack in the metaphorical glass that also dramatically reshaped the sonic profile of the play was the production's adherence to relaxed performance protocols. Relaxed performance—a foundational part of Thom's advocacy work[9]—refers to the act of making certain (technical, spatial, or attitudinal) modifications to accommodate a diverse cross-section of audience members. This practice acknowledges that many of the codes and conventions that structure performance (for example, the requirement to remain seated and silent throughout) present barriers to diverse bodyminds. It responds by seeking to make performances and performance spaces as accessible, inclusive, and welcoming as possible.[10] Unlike the discrimination that Thom experienced in response to her tics at the comedy show she attended, relaxed performances embrace the possibility that audiences might move, enter or exit the performance space, or vocalize in some way. The approach "invites bodies to be bodies" and opens up the theatre by "breaking down physical, attitudinal, sensory, financial, and other barriers [so that] the theatre space becomes an entirely different experience" (LaMarre, Rice, and Besse 2019, 7). Relaxed performances alter the sonic profile of performances because they reimagine and remake the entire sensory experience. The material and attitudinal adjustments made in these settings anticipate a wider diversity of sensory capacities and preferences and allow for the possibility of an array of audible contributions from the audience. This adds to theatre's inherent liveness and responsivity (Lobel and Thom 2019, 248), reframing how the play is "heard" by spectators in the context of its performance. By cripping the performance space through relaxed performance protocols, Thom's rendition of the play transforms the sonic experience of the performance and draws attention to the ideological framings of ableism that are made manifest through the material, spatial, and sonic configurations of theatre spaces.

The Crip Aesthetics of Touretteshero's *Not I*

Alongside the metaphorical cracks in the soundproof glass that I have highlighted thus far—casting Thom in the role of Mouth and using relaxed performance protocols—there were also material changes made within the production itself that served to shift the sonic profile of the work. These changes likewise enact a crip aesthetic by revealing how some staging and performance approaches in theatre, when left unquestioned, can exclude a diverse range of embodiments.

The fragmented nature of the play text is echoed in the staging of the play, with the stage directions dictating that only the performer's mouth be visible and that it appear suspended in space eight feet above the stage. This leads to the visual of a disembodied, floating orifice that has been described as "one of the most disturbing stage images of twentieth-century theater" (O'Gorman 1993, 32). This visual absenting of the performer's body is one way the play is understood as defying theatrical convention—Mouth evades the presence and solidity that would ordinarily accompany theatrical characters, which prevents her subjectivity from ever being fully located.[11] The methods used to achieve the effect of a floating mouth warrant further attention. In most productions, the performer is positioned on an eight-foot rostrum and hidden behind a wall or curtain that obscures their body, with a small hole in this covering that allows only their mouth to be visible to the audience. A tight spotlight is then trained on the performer's mouth, which requires that they remain extremely still throughout the performance to ensure their mouth remains lit. Remaining immobile while delivering a text of such intensity and speed has proven so challenging that many performers have physically restrained themselves to prevent any involuntary movement. For example, Lisa Dawn achieved the effect by sticking her face into a wooden board and using head straps and a metal bar to hold her head and body in place, literally disabling herself by methods that are reminiscent of the practices of restraint, confinement, and institutionalization that have been forced on people with disabilities for

centuries (Ben-Moshe, Chapman, and Carey 2014). Enduring a similar setup, Billie Whitelaw recounts the "rehearsal agonies" that accompanied her preparation for the role and the lasting physical trauma she sustained from performing the play for two seasons (1996, 125, 131), including "damaging neck tension, hyper-ventilation, and extreme disorientation" (Worth 2001, 53). The binding of the female performer's body in an effort to achieve a specific aesthetic has become an assumed practice for the play—a brutal and misogynistic physical practice but one often valorized for garnering emotional intensity.[12]

For Thom, who uses a wheelchair and for whom maintaining this level of immobility is not possible, adaptations to the traditional staging were needed to achieve the intended visual effect. The production team designed a lift that could accommodate Thom's wheelchair to safely raise her eight feet above the ground. Rather than being hidden behind a curtain or board, Thom's form is obscured by a lack of lighting and entirely black costuming. Instead of the typical lighting set-up of a spotlight fixed on the performer's stationary mouth, Thom wears a dark hood that holds a small light directed downwards. This means her mouth remains illuminated as per Beckett's directives even as her head and body shift. Though this change still evokes the intended effect of the floating mouth, there is some marginal spill from the light that makes Thom's physical form more visible and works to reestablish Mouth's subjectivity (something further developed through Thom's vocal tics, which I discuss below).

Thom sought an equally "rigorous presentation" of the play in a way that "honour[ed] that text and the stage directions" (quoted in Simpson 2018, 10), and yet the crip aesthetics engendered by these changes are critical for how they draw attention to the exclusionary and ableist staging practices traditionally associated with the play. The production achieves Beckett's desired aesthetic effect but does so in a way that acknowledges and reminds us that the usual (and seemingly unquestioned) methods of achieving this effect are (at best) not universally accessible and are (at worst) physically damaging. The Touretteshero production prioritized accessibility in a way that exposed the exclusionary practices that have accompanied the aesthetic of the play and simultaneously refused to allow the production to perpetuate practices that enact control and domination over women and people with disabilities.

Further, framing these staging amendments as part of a crip aesthetic materializes a more complex consideration of what it means for disabled performers to access canonical performance works that have histories of ableist content or production practices.[13] In such cases, the objective may not be to merely obtain "access" to these works, but rather the chance to rethink all aspects of how these works are engaged with. In one review of the production, Jonathan Heron gestures toward this by noting that Thom's performance "articulates an alternative future for Beckett's theatrical aesthetics" in how she "recovers the role [of Mouth] not only for dis/abled bodies, but also for communal wellbeing and inclusion" (2018, 284, 287). Juxtaposing Thom's production choices against the physically agonizing practices undertaken by performers like Whitelaw and Dawn allows us to sense the literalness of Heron's choice of the word "wellbeing." Thom recovers the role of Mouth as a disabled performer, as Heron suggests, and also reveals the ableist structures within the play and theatre writ large that necessitate such recovery.

Text and Tics: Intercorporeality and Temporality

Although I contend that the sonic profile of a performance is comprised of more than strictly sound-based elements, this is not to disregard the ways that the aural aspects of *Not I*—that is, the text and the performer's voice—are also integral to the play's sonic profile. Indeed, the erratic and elliptical nature of Beckett's text is one of the primary markers of the play's overall aesthetic. There is a productive interplay between Beckett's text and Thom's vocal tics, and the relationship between the two emerges as a unique and important contribution to the performance's sonic profile and the production's crip aesthetic in two significant ways. Firstly, Thom's vocal tics presence her as a performer in a way that counteracts the invisibility of the character of Mouth and also foregrounds the lived materiality of disability, and secondly, Thom's tics shift the temporality of the play. These shifts not only impact the play's sonic profile but also contribute to a crip aesthetic by counteracting the overreliance on disability as a narrative device and exposing the temporal norms that often constrain diverse speech patterns.

In addition to the ways the play eschews visual theatrical conventions by obfuscating the body of the performer, it also seeks to break with sonic theatrical conventions. The disjointed and elliptical nature of the monologue (and the speed at which performers are encouraged to recite it) make the play "an unintelligible verbal onslaught" where the sensory experience is dominated by a wall of sound consisting of frantic and almost unceasing oration (Brater 1974, 189). Rather than staging a coherent sonic experience consisting of a discernible text emanating from a locatable onstage presence, *Not I* disrupts convention by presenting a sonic experience awash in confusion and unintelligibility.[14]

Despite this visual absence and sonic unintelligibility, Thom's tics assert her presence as a performer through their audible presence in the text. The sonic presence of Thom's tics diminishes the acousmatic characteristic present in other renditions of the play—where the source of the sound is visually obscured—and fundamentally shifts the audience's aural engagement with the text.[15] Mouth is no longer a disembodied voice that could be attached to any/body and therefore is attached to no/body. In listening to Thom, the audience becomes attuned to how the play text is bound up in relationship to the performer's voice and body; that text, voice, and body co-constitute each other.

Thom's tics are neither fully integrated nor completely separate from the play text. In part, the staccato rhythm of the text allows Thom's vocal tics to stylistically "fit" within the play's aesthetic. At the same time, because Thom introduces herself to the audience at the top of the show (a common protocol in relaxed performances), spectators are aware of her vocal tics and are able to distinguish them from Beckett's text. There is an intercorporeality that becomes apparent as Thom's tics insert themselves in and around Beckett's words: text and tics exist in tandem and become remade in relation to one another. As Thom describes: "what's interesting is, which took me by surprise, is that putting that monologue through my body and through my mouth—biscuit—somehow displaces some of the vocal tics a little bit. So they simplify—biscuit—and they're usually just 'biscuit'" (Robinson 2018, 45:40). The materiality of Thom's voice shifts Beckett's text at the same time as the playwright's words impact Thom's experience of voicing. This corporeal reciprocity evokes Mladen Dolar's assertion that even as the voice exits the body—"detached itself from its source, emancipated itself"—it nonetheless "remains corporeal" (2006, 73).

The presence evoked by Thom's tics affirms Mouth's subjectivity and thereby dismantles univocal readings of the character as absent, fragmented, or lacking agency. This reassertion of subjectivity through presence is especially significant if we consider Mouth to be a disabled character, as Thom did when she first read the play. Thom notes that she immediately understood Mouth as a disabled character because "she experiences barriers because of how her body and mind work" (Robinson 2018, 10:30). Given that, Mouth's visual absence from the stage can be read as perpetuating the paradoxical legacy of in/visibility with regards to disability and performance, whereby representations of disability proliferate in theatre, performance, and literary spheres, but the political, material, and embodied realities of disabled people often remain absent (Lewis 2006; Mitchell and Snyder 2000). Similarly, Ato Quayson observes that "despite the abundance of figures with physical and mental impairments and mobility difficulties in [Beckett's plays]," Beckett scholars rarely account for the phenomenological or material realities of disability in their analysis (2007, 55–56). Instead, Quayson argues, disability becomes "assimilated to a variety of philosophical categories in such a way as to obliterate the specificity of the body and to render it as a marker of something else" (2007, 56).[16]

In contrast, Thom developed her connection to Mouth through an awareness of their shared lived experience, highlighting an experience of disability that is lived and corporeal, not philosophical. For instance, in interviews, Thom highlights how Mouth's line "whole body like gone" directly describes the full-body spasms that Thom frequently experiences, often without warning. So too do Mouth's references to the sensation of buzzing ("the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all the time the buzzing") and "mouth on fire" point to the physical sensations that accompany Thom's tics, which she describes in noting that "what people often don't think about with Tourette's is the physical sensation of tics . . . "mouth on fire"—I know what that means" (Robinson 2018, 9:48). This connection also becomes evident in how Thom asserts her materiality by cripping Beckett's text via her own disabled speech: the sonic presence of Thom's vocal tics foregrounds her bodily presence and asserts the particularity and individuality of Mouth's experience, preventing disability from remaining a "narrative prosthesis" in the play, and instead transforms the way Mouth's narrative is heard (Mitchell and Snyder 2000).

Thom's vocal tics further shift the play's sonic profile in how they temporally displace Beckett's text. They link the rhythm of the play to her individual embodiment, and a temporal adjustment occurs as the vocal tics take up space in Thom's performance and hold the potential to literally extend the length of the text. The length of *Not I*, which is directly impacted by the verbal acuity of the performer, has long been a point of interest for critics and audiences and is one of the primary reasons that the work is considered a formidable challenge for any performer who undertakes it (McCarthy 1990, 455–56). The play ranges in duration depending on the performer's vocal velocity. The speed of the text delivery characteristic to the play can be traced to Billie Whitelaw's well-known 1972 performance of the role, directed by the playwright.[17] Corey Wakeling notes that the delivery speed was "contrary to the acting methodologies popular at the time" (2015, 93) and observes that Beckett's emphasis on voice over text within both the narrative and compositional structure of the play seems to have foreseen a kind of extra-linguistic postdramatic aesthetic (96–97). Whitelaw performed it in fourteen minutes, while Dawn's more recent performance clocked in at a blisteringly fast nine minutes (Masters 2013). Thom's performances fall in between, running about twelve minutes long.

Speaking the text at a high velocity and without missteps have "become aesthetic cues for incarnating Beckett in performance" (Wakeling 2015, 105). How, then, might the extreme verbal

acuity associated with Beckett's work be read as a barrier for voices that are excluded for "not performing within normative parameters" (St. Pierre 2015, 60)? As Joshua St. Pierre reminds us, "parameters of how fast, evenly, and clearly bodies can speak—and are expected to speak—are generated from so-called basic similarities that reflect the dominant able-bodied mode of temporal existence" (53). These modes, he goes on to argue, are straight, masculine, and decidedly heteronormative. The disabled speaking body, however, often presenting "awkward pauses, gaps in signification, and stuttered syntax," disrupts the hegemony of straight-masculine time and thereby "makes temporal movement viscous" (St. Pierre 2015, 54, 55).

Alongside notions of queer time (Edelman 2004; Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009; Halberstam 2005), scholars have described how crip time exists outside of normative and linear temporalities (Kafer 2013; Price 2011, 62–63; Samuels 2017). Queer/crip time disturbs the linear and future-orientated march of normative time and forces a reconsideration of how embodied experience produces varying conceptions of time, pace, and scheduling (Kafer 2013, 27). Thom's performance conjures a sense of crip time as part of its crip aesthetic. The temporal displacement that Thom's tics provide crip Beckett's text through their erratic and unpredictable temporal patterns and make audible an alternative temporal rhythm within the play that would otherwise remain occluded. As St. Pierre notes, "straight time is . . . rendered conspicuous only through disruption: in this case, via stalled or 'fractured' speech" (2015, 59). Consequently, since time is "consubstantial with sound" (Solomos 2018, 97), Thom's tics, through their potential temporal impact on the length of the play, influence and hold the possibility of reshaping the sonic profile of the work. Further, if "the disciplinary power of hegemonic temporalities lies primarily in obscuring its contingency" (St. Pierre 2015, 62), then Thom does more than disrupt the temporality of the piece: she also exposes the contingency of temporal norms through her verbal engagement with the text and thereby evokes a core component of crip aesthetics in how she foregrounds structures that would otherwise remain unmarked.

Access Aesthetics

The final element of Thom's crip aesthetic I want to address is the production's integration of sign language interpretation. In addition to the Mouth, *Not I* features one other character: the non-speaking role of Auditor, who is present as the silent witness to Mouth's verbal outpouring. Described in the play's stage directions as hooded, "fully faintly lit," and existing as "a tall standing figure, sex undeterminable," Auditor stands alongside the floating, disembodied visual of Mouth, remaining stationary throughout the show save for four gestures of "helpless compassion" during which they raise their arms slightly to the side in response to Mouth's narrative. The Touretteshero production took advantage of this secondary character by having Charmaine Wombwell, a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, play the role while simultaneously interpreting the play's text.[18] Thom's tics are also interpreted, meaning that Wombwell's performance of the scripted BSL is partly improvised and must remain responsive to Thom's vocal interjections. By integrating BSL interpretation in this way, Thom's rendition of the play not only provides an important access component, but also expands the relationship between Mouth and Auditor and shifts the sonic profile of the play by extending the auditory elements of the work into a visual and kinaesthetic sphere.

Scholars have offered various interpretations of the role of the Auditor, positing the character as judge (Worth 1986, 171), corrective force (Zeifman 1976, 41), and even as goad to Mouth's narrative (Brater 1974, 197). Katherine O'Gorman's feminist reading of the role highlights how the placement

of Auditor dictated by Beckett's stage directions—"shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on Mouth"—works to symbolically position Auditor as representative of the "masculine structure of seeing" (1993, 34). Auditor observes Mouth with a "scopic aggression," thereby situating Mouth in the role of the given-to-be-seen female other (O'Gorman 1993, 41). In the Touretteshero production, however, Wombwell's integration reconstitutes the dynamic between the two characters. Mira Felner notes how Wombwell's position and full visibility onstage transform the performance from a solo monologue into a duet and make Wombwell into a visual metaphor for Mouth, who has finally found her voice (2019, 12). Similarly, Derval Tubridy describes how Wombwell's gestures emerge in response to Thom's voice, where, rather than remain a silent witness to Mouth's words, Auditor's gestures of "helpless compassion" are subsequently "transformed . . . into a gesture of translation, communication and correspondence between protagonist (Mouth) and audience through [the interpreter's] body" (2018, para. 3). Wombwell faces the audience and gestures in fluid response to Mouth's text, a dynamic that undoes the silent dominating gaze and looming corrective presence of Auditor that O'Gorman describes. By casting Wombwell in the role, the production "is unusual in giving the Auditor an inner life . . . and giving the role some agency"—the duo becomes linked in a way that is more akin to other "Beckettian 'pseudo couples' . . . like Didi and Gogo [*Waiting for Godot*], Hamm and Clov, Nagg and Nell [*Endgame*], Winnie and Willie [*Happy Days*]" (Heron 2018, 286).

This conflation of casting and interpretation serves to undo the conventional way that sign language interpretation is often provided in performance. Here the interpretation becomes theatricalized as a deeply embedded aesthetic element of the production, rather than remaining a purely functional access mechanism set off to one side of the stage. Like many of the other changes made to Thom's rendition of the play, this is an example of how "access aesthetics"—the integration of access protocols at all stages of the creative process—can be a powerful way to transform performance.[19] There is a balance to be struck here, since the heavy aestheticization of sign language interpretation can cause problems of intelligibility, thereby reducing its function as an access protocol (Kochhar-Lindgren 2006b, 106). However, the unintelligible nature of the play text means that, in the context of this performance, unintelligibility within the BSL *is itself a kind of access*. Though the structural and linguistic differences between English and BSL mean that Wombwell's gestures are not a direct translation of the text, the interpretation transposes the aural, temporal, and affective sense of Mouth's monologue into a kinaesthetic register.

Expanding the Sonic

The production's intertwining of the role of the Auditor and the sign language interpreter is also significant for how it encourages a rethinking of the connection between visual, aural, and haptic elements of sound. As noted, a performance's sonic profile includes its many aural aspects (sound design, underscore, spoken text, etc.) but equally considers how nonauditory aspects (space, staging, bodies, technology, visual images, narrative, etc.) contribute to the resultant soundscape. This expansive perspective of the sonic helps to loosen the strict divide between the sensory experiences of hearing and seeing—perhaps uncovering "zones of productive articulation" across "ocular-" and "phono-" centric divides (Friedner and Helmreich 2012, 2)—and also situates sound within a broader sensory, material, and social context. Marked divisions between vision and hearing as sensory experiences with distinct attributes—what Jonathan Sterne describes as the "audiovisual litany" (2012, 9)—fail to account for the diversity and continuum of sensory experience and serve to elevate some sense experiences and abilities over others. Crucially, these "cultural prenotions about

the senses (prejudices, really)" become foundational assumptions that shape theories of vision, audition, and general sense perception (Sterne 2012, 9).

As Wombwell gestures responsively to Thom's speech, these "cultural prenotions" are productively unmade. Wombwell's performance adds a sonic layer to Beckett's play that is multisensorial; uniting the visual, gestural, corporeal, and tactile sensations of sound and thereby making manifest Friedner and Helmreich's call for "zones of productive articulation" between hearing, deafness, and seeing (2012, 2). This shift crips the aesthetic of the play by dissolving the divide between vision and sound and moving instead toward productive reimaginings of the sensory makeup of the sonic as awash in multiplicities. Wombwell's gestures punctuate and reinforce the text, emphasizing Thom's voice on an embodied level and transforming the play's sonic profile by bringing Mouth's voice into another register beyond only the auditory. In this way, the production asks that we listen to the play differently: attending to the corporeal dimension of the play's text and reconsidering how we understand and conceive of the limits of sound.

Thinking of crip aesthetics through the lens of the sonic foregrounds that nothing about the sonic or the auditory is neutral. At the level of the individual, Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren notes the reciprocal nature by which sound practices are reinforced, asserting that "specific sound practices produce the normative modern subject, and, in turn, the modern subject reifies certain sound practices in order to maintain its putative stability" (2006a, 417). Sterne maintains a similar stance from a more macro perspective, contending that "every field of sonic practice is partially shaped by a set of knowledges of sound that it motivates, utilizes and operationalizes . . . We must not automatically take any discourse about sound in its own terms, but rather interrogate the terms upon which it is built. We must attend to the formations of power and subjectivity with which various knowledges transact" (2012, 9).[20] In other words, the sounds we encounter, how we experience them, and how we understand them cannot be conceived as merely neutral building blocks borne of sensory experience but rather must be understood as being constructed through particular power dynamics, subjectivities, and epistemological framings. Conventions of sound in theatre and performance must also be acknowledged as existing within and contributing to wider frames of what constitutes normative sound. Attending to the sonic provides an avenue for unearthing structures that may serve to perpetuate damaging ableist assumptions or behaviours.

Though *Not I* is a play that already disrupts theatrical and sonic conventions through its fragmented text, minimalist staging, and acousmatic speaker, it nevertheless relies on a host of exclusionary practices in order to enact this particular aesthetic. Thom's rendition of this play draws attention to and disrupts these exclusionary practices through a crip aesthetic that reimagines who is invited into performance spaces. This approach enacts material, aesthetic, and attitudinal changes which ultimately reconstruct the sonic profile of the play and encourage the audience to listen to it differently. Thom's performance of *Not I* prioritizes diversity, access, and inclusion and presents disability as generative, creative, and full of potential: a difference that is to be *desired* (Kafer 2013; Fritsch 2015; McRuer 2006; Sandahl 2003). The production does not apologize for the ways that it transforms Beckett's play but rather encourages a reimagining of how diverse bodyminds (and voices) might reconstitute performance in new and exciting ways.

In McRuer's writing on crip theory, he describes cripping as a mode of "collectively transforming" ableist and heteronormative systems in service of "imagining bodies and desires otherwise" (2006, 32). Thom's performance enacts this collective transformation of the many theatrical conventions that remain exclusionary and inaccessible to a diverse range of performers precisely because it

imagines bodies and desires otherwise. Thom's integration of relaxed performance protocols visibly displays her activism and commitment to supporting people with disabilities in becoming both consumers and producers of arts and culture. She continues to pioneer a form of accessible theatre, which "means that you imagine your audience to be as wide a group of people as possible, anticipating that they will use the communicational apparatus of theatre in potentially different ways" (Conroy 2019, 47). So too is Thom's activism exemplified in more subtle ways through the crip aesthetic at work in *Not I*: the embodied presence and temporal rhythm evoked through her vocal tics, the staging and costuming changes, and the integration of sign language interpretation into the aesthetic of the play. Through a crip aesthetic, the Touretteshero production reimagines and reconstructs the sonic profile of Beckett's play and provides us with a multifaceted sensory experience. Beyond only changes to the play's aural elements, this production encourages a complete reconceptualization of how we experience sonic worlds in theatre and performance and emerges as an important contribution to contemporary disability arts.

Acknowledgements

This article has benefited greatly from generous feedback and discussions with the special issue editors (Caitlin Marshall, Marci McMahon, and Patricia Herrera), the participants and attendees of the 2020 Revolutions in Sound Symposium & Editorial Workshop (in particular Katelyn Hale Wood, Aidan Pang, and Danielle Bainbridge), Kelsey Blair, Eliza Chandler, Moynan King, and an anonymous reviewer.

Notes

1. In this article, I use the terms Tourette's Syndrome and Tourette's interchangeably. I also use both person-first language ("people with disabilities") and identity-first language ("disabled people").

2. Thom has written a book on her experience of Tourette's titled *Welcome to Biscuit Land – A Year in the Life of Touretteshero* (2012), and in 2014 she co-created (alongside puppeteer Jess Mabel Jones) a theatre piece titled *Backstage in Biscuit Land*. This show, which premiered at the 2015 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and later toured internationally, also became part of a three-day interactive performance installation at the Tate Modern in 2017.

3. Pountney also directed Thom's performance of *Not I*.

4. Thom's intention to improve disabled people's access to artistic and cultural spheres resonates with scholarship that addresses, for example, the rarity of casting disabled actors in films or canonical theatre works (Davis 2017; Johnston 2016; Sandahl 2008), the lack of opportunities for people with disabilities in performance training programs (Lewis 2010; Sandahl 2005), disparaging cultural representations of disability (Garland-Thomson 1997), and the inaccessibility of many performance spaces (Sandahl 2002).

5. I draw the term bodymind from Margaret Price (2015, 269), as a way of recognizing the entangled nature of body and mind.

6. While some have heralded Beckett's aesthetic and its singular focus on voice and actor as an exciting distillation of theatre's most essential elements (Worthen 1983, 415), others bemoan the fact that by removing nearly all familiar theatrical elements, Beckett "topples one by one the stones that have held the edifice [of theatre] together" (Barish 1981, 458).

7. Cross-gender casting, for example, was recently at issue with a Two Planks and a Passion Theatre Company in Nova Scotia, Canada. The company cancelled their production of *Waiting for Godot* after realizing that they would, according to a legal rider in the play's licensing rights, be unable to consider all-gender

casting the show. The rider states that "male actors shall play male roles" and "female actors shall play female roles" (Parsons 2019).

8. Some notable exceptions exist, such as a 2007 production of *Endgame* by Theatre Workshop Scotland that included disabled actors. For a discussion of this show, see Johnston (2016, 101–6).

9. In recent years, Touretteshero has been consulting with Battersea Arts Centre on relaxed performance practices, and in January 2020, it was announced that in response to this work, the Centre had become the world's first fully relaxed venue (Gardner 2020).

10. Standard relaxed performance protocols include providing introductions, touch tours, or visual stories prior to the performance, modifying intense light and sound effects, allowing audiences to make noise, move, and enter/depart the theatre space as needed, and providing a separate "chill out" space outside of the theatre for those in need of a place to decompress.

11. The fragmentation of the play's text and Mouth's seeming inability to coherently describe herself and the narrative of her life has, for some feminist scholars, represented the inability of women to locate themselves within the symbolic order of phallocentric language—a reading that is further supported by the visual absenting of the (female) performer's body (O'Gorman 1993; Wilson 1992).

12. See, for example, Katherine Worth's description of Whitelaw's performance: "though one couldn't wish such agonies on any future player, I have always felt that they must have taken Whitelaw's performance to a higher power than could be generated in one less rigorously set up" (2001, 53).

13. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who offered this astute observation.

14. This experimentation with sound appears to have suited Beckett; he is quoted as saying that he hoped the play would "work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" (Brater 1974, 200).

15. Acousmatic listening, or reduced listening, is often framed as an aesthetic orientation toward sound that attempts to access a sound's intrinsic properties without attention to its source. For further discussion, see Pierre Schaeffer's *Treatise on Musical Objects* (1966/2017) and Michel Chion's *Guide to Sound Objects* (1983/2009). Brian Kane's approach to acousmatic sound in *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (2014), which aims to relocate acousmatic listening within historical and cultural contexts, may also be of interest to the reader. Susan Bennett notes that Beckett, who lived in Paris for most of his adult life, would have been aware of Schaeffer's work and his theory of acousmatic listening (2019, 78).

16. For further readings on disability in connection to Beckett's work, see Davidson (2007), Levin (2018), Johnston (2016), and Maude (2016).

17. No exact speed for the text is listed in the stage directions, but Whitelaw notes that she felt that the play "would have to go . . . as fast as the speed of thought" (1996, 118).

18. The BSL interpretation was developed in consultation with Deaf theatre maker Deepa Shastri.

19. For further discussion on the term, see Cachia (2019a, 2019b), Johnson (2019), and Johnston (2016).

20. Even (seemingly benign) sound-reproduction technologies, as Sterne has shown elsewhere, emerge from specific historical understandings of sound and audition. For example, the central contributions of the Deaf and hard of hearing to the development of sound technologies are often erased from the historical narrative (Mills 2010, 39), and theories of audition are often developed by imagining a normative subject with "whole, undamaged hearing" that fails to account for the range of phenomenological sonic experience (Sterne 2012, 8).

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Interview with Micha Espinosa and Garrett Johnson

Patricia Ybarra

On March 29, 2019, I interviewed Micha Espinosa, an associate professor at Arizona State University. Espinosa is a professor of voice and acting, a practitioner of the craft of Fitzmaurice Voicework, and a performer who regularly collaborates with La Pocha Nostra. She is also an author and editor, most recently of *Scenebook for Latinx Actors*. Our conversation covered many topics, including violence at the US-Mexico border (including but not limited to Trump's No Tolerance policy that separates parents and children who cross the border and holds them in separate detention sites, our positions as Latina mothers in the face of that violence, voice education for acting students, particularly students of colour in the US, and of course the power of sonic art and activism at this historical moment. Our conversation focused primarily on Espinosa's artistic work, often based in vocal performance. Given the urgency of the political situation described above, our conversation was recursive—we circled back and around to topics over the course of the talk. Meaning, as we spoke about her artistic work—including her pieces that use lament or not discursive sounds—we often often turned to or turned back to the situation at the border, or in the borderlands, where Espinosa teaches and is from and where my father was raised after his parents crossed into the US. Our common geopolitical history and identity as Latina who are perceived as white, but for whom decolonization is a primary focus of our pedagogy, led us to an intimate conversation, which included acknowledging our rage, pain and heartbreak—including the desire to move toward new forms of solidarity only possible by the recognition of our shared complicity and/or shame in US policy. At the end of the interview, Espinosa's collaborator Garrett Johnson, composer and PhD student in Media Arts and Sciences at ASU, joined the conversation, leading us into a larger theoretical exploration of sound and silence at this moment of violent capitalism.

Over the course of our conversation, we spoke about theory around language, sound, and political theory as embodied practices, including the idea of the "sonic color line" (Stoever 2018). We spent as much or more time with Gloria Anzaldúa and the concept of linguistic terrorism (outlined in her canonical *Borderlands/La Frontera*) as we did with the idea of vulnerability put forth by Judith Butler in her recent work *Vulnerability and Resistance* (2016), in part because of our orientations to critical theory. For us, the idea of linguistic terrorism, a form of violence in which the dominant culture attacks persons who speak their native tongue—Spanish, Spanglish or Indigenous languages—and/or their entire mode of linguistic and cultural expression is crucial to understanding the current moment. This concept, in our conversation, extended from diagnosing the experience of Latinx students in the classroom to the general state of terror for all people who resist our current political reality.

Put bluntly, in asking how sound acts, we were asking, "how do we fight through sound against the state under fascism and racial capitalism?" The answer came in the form of laments, llantos (weeping crying), and gritos (a Mexican cry—often associated with a call to autonomy, national or otherwise)—forms of expression that combine classical European and contemporary Mexican

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modes of expression, which are often gendered in ways that needed to be reckoned with or adapted. Although neither of us read it before the interview, our conversation resonated with conclusions in Anne Carson's essay, "The Gender of Sound" (1994), which talks about the ways women's sounds (not words) in Ancient Greece were meant to be excised from the (male) polis and largely circumscribed within funeral rites. What I think Espinosa is suggesting is a reassertion of women's sounds *within* the polis as a political act that cries over the living and the dead so as to help us see those who have the right not to die.

Throughout the interview, we talked about Espinosa's work as a performer and sound artist as it has developed in the last decade as a whole, but particularly about the following pieces: *Taming the Wild Tongue* (2012), based on Anzaldua's essay of the same name, *My Undigested Trauma* (2016) and *I Am Not a Wife* (2016), *Los lobos no conocen fronteras* (2016), *Ni Una Mas* (2016), her participation in the Bi-national Encuentro in 2018, and *Mass Lamentation* (2019).

P. Y. [In preparing for this interview] I thought a little bit about Marci McMahon's essay, "Sounds of Narco Silence." I don't know if you've read it? On Tanya Saracho's *El Nogalar*? But there's an amazing line in *El Nogalar* which Marci quotes in her essay about people choosing not to speak about narco violence—the character says (this a paraphrase), "we're running around, opening our mouths, and nothing's coming out but static."

So I've been thinking about whether or not "words" and what words are effective as advocacy tools. And, in your recent work, you invoke the lament, which does not have statements, per se, but it is not avoidant of speaking out at all—it is not the static referenced in Saracho's play. How and why did you decide on lamentation as a mode of political (and emotional) art?

M. E. The reason I am interested in lament [is that] beyond individual pain, it is a group activity, and it is a way to have a shared consciousness. In this sense, it is an act of communal shame when we live in a nation where there is a border and the desire for a border wall. The lament is about the national shame of the atrocities and the lack of our moral compass in our nation. In terms of voicing a lament, the experience is close to an ecstatic experience—beyond language—which is beyond the construction of self. And that is why it is so effective in conveying group shame.

I think the best example of the power of the sonic is that little snippet [when] we heard the little boy crying, "mama, mama" at the beginning of [a] family separation crisis (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glpE_m8OE2A). And that was the only sound we heard throughout the tragedy of family separation at the border and the migration struggles. I did a performance piece based around just that one little sound at a transborder performance in 2019. I remember how that sound just spread on social media and how effective it was in revealing the horror of the situation.

We become numb to images. We see these images of horror but we don't hear. I believe that sound cuts through the illusion that we are separate. We do not have earlids. We can close our eyes, but we can hear, [and] we cannot shut out sound in the same way. Sound gets to the heart of the illusion that we are separate. Sound waves move through the body. Sound waves cut through walls because we are porous beings. Sound moves through us. Sound travels through still and air, so of course it travels through our bodies. If you [are] at a rock concert, even if you do not yell, you will be vibrated through and you can actually lose your voice. Your body cannot reject sound. If you hear a baby crying, you will want to pick it up.

And I know that because I'm a mother. And I know that from the years of studying voice but just literally from my body's response to a baby, crying in the grocery store when I was a young mother—this is a little graphic—but my breasts gave milk. They hurt. And they start aching, just from another woman's child.

So that is why I'm sure that sound itself—it can be used as a weapon. It can make you grow. And it can make you shrink.

(Micha turns to discussing Gloria Anzaldúa): [It was] Anzaldúa's work that began to get me thinking about linguistic terrorism and the frontera as somebody who was alienated from their culture. So I started, first, looking at ethics, and pedagogy, and Latinx students. And what happens to Latinx students when they enter the Eurocentric environment of theatre?

And what I found was that they didn't have representation and that they were experiencing much of the things that Anzaldúa was talking about in *Borderlands*: linguistic terrorism, trauma, and alienation. And so that's where I began my work. And my first performance pieces came out of taking my research and turning it into performance.

My first piece, *The Tamer of the Wild Tongue* [Espinosa created a piece with this title presented in 2012; the title refers to an essay by Gloria Anzaldúa.—P. Y.], was a criticism about who gets into the theatre and who doesn't get into the theatre. I'm very literal. So I had giant scissors. And I was trying to take out my own tongue, trying to cut my own tongue out, throwing myself into the corner for speaking the language of the other—grabbing people and giving them stars for speaking well, putting big Elizabethan collars on people. So before people could get into the theatre, I would do these actions to make them think about who gets into the theatre and who doesn't get into the theatre.

And then I started working with Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the radical performance pedagogy, which gave me a vessel and a community.

So the fact that I have a voice and explore my body, and own my body, and have a voice in this body is radical because we, as humans, not only as Latinx persons, are not allowed to express, or we're not taught to be vibratory beings. An embodied practice of working with the voice is also spiritual because it's a daily practice.

And to return to the idea . . . brought up earlier, that is lamentation for me, it's creating a space for protest. It's making audible the sounds that we don't hear. It's arguing and wrestling with the gods. Laments are displays of outrage and sorrow, which women aren't allowed to do very much. We're considered crazy if we display outrage and sorrow.

And, then, in the midst of all this chaos and ruin—because sometimes, when you go to the border and you see some of the stuff that's going on—how do you respond to that level of suffering? I think you add to the chorus in the mode of a Greek lamentation. You add your voice to that chorus. And the pain and the loss—sometimes, it's just too deep for words. And lamentation is a way to express the unspeakable.

So when we hear even a little tiny bit, it changes us. Again, sound transforms. Images are an illusion, and they can go away, but sound waves move through us.

P. Y. Can we move a little bit to your question about song, just because you've done so much work. It's song-based. And, to contextualize—there's such a long history of what we might call political or protest song on both sides of the US-Mexico border.

M. E. So, I did this piece with media artist Garrett Johnson, *Monstros en la Frontera* [*sic*] in 2015 where I sang: "I'm a Chicana alone in the Sonoran desert. Mexico, can you hear me? Obama, two million deportations. Deporter-in-chief" [This is when Obama was in office]. "Why won't you welcome the refugee children who are fleeing violence and poverty?" See, it was happening then. "I'll die in this desert waiting for immigration reform. I am a fourth-generation Sonoran, cut off from my ancestors. Mexico, can you hear me? I'm a fourth-generation Sonoran cut off from my ancestors. Emperor Trump has built a supersized wall of ignorance and xenophobia. And this is my corrido." My corrido is cries, it's throwing up, it's giving birth. It's all these female sounds that nobody wants to hear. It's orgasm. And it's long and extended, and it doesn't end (https://soundcloud.com/micha-espinosa/20200227-michaeffectsbass).

And so this was the song that I was singing against Garrett's sound wall. I'll sometimes take a classic love song, like "El Dia." I'll warp it, change the time of it. I'll change my voice so it sounds scary, from the past, or ghostly. Now it means something else.

[Micha explained that she had recently done a piece in Mexico City about the legendary border crosser the grey wolf called *Los lobos no conocen fronteras* and one called *Ni Una Mas*.—P. Y.]

The piece about the wolves, which was performed as part of the Glossolalia festival in Mexico City, I become the wolf. The wolf knows no borders. I make all the sounds of the wolf. Everything that the wolf has to go through. Fighting, running, giving birth, struggling. And then what happens to her—finally, I get everybody to howl at the moon with me. I try not to use a lot of words. I try to get right to the point of, "87,000 women are killed annually. Not any more, ni una mas." And then I begin to cry. And then I ask people to cry with me.

If we think about the concept of catharsis, we're forgetting the way it was originally practised. It was expressed through the expression of extreme vocal sounds. I'm looking for these extreme vocal sounds. The sounds of trauma—a collective llanto.

P. Y. Right. And I mean, I think what's interesting about the piece, *Monstros en la Frontera* [*sic*], is that you're pushing and pushing against the wall in the piece, which is a border wall. I mean, you're also pushing against nation, a little bit, right? Nation-state borders were imposed. They don't make any sense to people who live in the desert or who've lived in the desert for generations, including many Indigenous people, like you are suggesting, right?

M. E. Yes, exactly. The border is to be challenged, inhabited, crossed, erased. The same with borders between art and politics, between practice and theory, between artist and spectator, between mentor and apprentice. You know, the human body and our nightmares and our twisted subjectivity. That is the radical performance pedagogy of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra. It gave me a home and a place where my border-ness, my permanent hybridity is seen.

Now it's interesting that you were talking about being Indigenous, because there's a lot going on there with the way I look. And the fact that for some, and it's true, I have the face of the colonizer. I have blue eyes. My skin is a little lighter. So I specifically wanted the piece that I did at the 2018 bi-

national encuentro to be in the dark. As soon as you've seen my face, the piece doesn't work anymore, it is not about people who look like me. You just have to hear the voice. So what you see is a figure in the darkness.

So what I did was take about a hundred feet of Mylar blankets. I sewed them together. And I was on top of a shipping container. And then the blankets went all through the outdoor performance space. The Mylar blankets represent the children. They were used in the cages at the deportation centres. I then take on a crying song—a la llorona crying for her lost children. I didn't think in terms of la llorona when I created the piece. What I thought about was that three thousand children were forcibly separated from their parents. June 2018 they were supposed to be reunified. And we know that hasn't happened.

P. Y. Can we talk about this more? As a white passing Latinx person (and I am one also), how do you do this work? How do you position yourself?

M. E. I think the burden of authenticity taking on the sounds of someone else (who suffered from colourism, immigration status, and the like) can be a heavy weight and I am not trying to erase the reality of my privilege based on how someone might perceive my phenotype. The piece, however, is not just about one immigrant—it is about all women—traversing the border in the dark. People are not crossing the border in the daylight. This is the reality. It is safer to cross in dark, when it is cooler, and one is not seen.

This is not about giving voice to the voiceless. This is my own shame as a US person and the country that I live in. We have to think about what can we do: we can vote—we can express ourselves. It is a horrible feeling to not be able to change things. We have to cry for all of the things we have done wrong so then we can go on and change things. It is a call to action.

P. Y. Also, but I want to bring up something you talked about earlier, which is that a lot of this violence predates Trump. He may make it worse. But ultimately, this is a long forever process, right?

M. E. Absolutely. And actually, it's funny because I haven't pulled out all my poems and my work and looked at it as a whole in a long time and when I did, I realized that not a lot has changed over the last fifteen, twenty years. It's gotten worse. You know, the reason I want people to cry or sing with me is to build community. To create space and liberate the body in the face of this. I am just not a believer that a border exists. And I didn't grow up with a border. In the '70s and '80s, the border was pretty open in Arizona.

P. Y. My grandparents just walked right across in the late '20s, early '30s. That militarization just was not there at all. And it was much more porous. Much, much more porous, in terms of what we might call northern Mexico and the southwest of the US. Right?

M. E. Absolutely. I began to become aware of militarized borders of the southwest in the late '80's, early '90's. Another aspect of my work that is really important to me is the liberation of women's voices. I'm a Chicana feminist and I often feel like I'm fighting another wall. A wall built on marianismo values and virgin/whore dichotomies.

And I have two pieces that I think speak to that. One was called *My Undigested Trauma* (2016) and the other *I Am Not a Wife* (2016) [re-titled Ilustrada y en peligo (2018)]. Both are feminist manifestos. *My*

Undigested Trauma was performed in Peru and you could see there was complete silence after. The unspeakable had been spoken. Because the last words of *My Undigested Trauma* are a renouncement of marriage: "Attempts of domestication only makes me wilder. I was not made in the moral construct of the Virgin Mary. I may love, I may honor, but I will not obey." I was in residency in Lima doing women's voice and empowerment workshops. And as soon as I said the word feminist, I had a group of people who got up and left. And then women who came the next day and said, I can't be part of this because my husband—I almost said my father, isn't that funny—my husband won't allow me to be part of anything feminist. Because the understanding of feminism is that it is the other side of machismo. They're considered the same thing. Feminist/feminism, this identity, those terms are really conflicted in all parts of the world.

P. Y. I think about some traditional Mexican songs and the ways in which the women who performed them didn't conform in a different way. [We discussed La Santa Cecilia and other artists who modify the "Grito" or "cry," a form that is often thought of as masculine.—P. Y.] These Mexican women who did not conform to femininity take over certain songs in ways that are really profoundly radical, in ways that don't always read as radical here but feel very radical when you are listening. After the Trump election, I basically put on Lola Beltrán on repeat. And I just had to continually hear her voice to get myself through the couple of days after Trump was elected. And it was really funny. Because then I realized that other people were also listening to Lola Beltrán. A lot of us tried to find certain voices to sort of speak.

A lot of people talk a lot about the power of the silent protest. But you're sort of making the opposite argument, right? Sometimes the silent protest works. But sometimes a silent protest does not work. Right?

M. E. Right. When I go to South America, I experience cultural protest. You know, work stops, people don't go to work, students leave campus, and the streets are flooded with people. You miss your plane because you can't get a taxi. You know, in Argentina and Chile, in Peru.

And we have these sanitized marches. Nice, clean marches in Washington, D.C. But down here on the border, when you begin to protest, you're tear-gassed. And you're tear-gassed in other places, too. But there's not the same kind of regular mass protest. And that's what Garrett Johnson and I have been working on and talking about, is creating space for protest.

[Garrett, Micha's collaborator, has entered.—P. Y.].

G. J. I was working on something different before I got involved in the collaboration with La Pocha Nostra and everybody. So I'm a media artist. And I work with what's called responsive media, what we call responsive media. And the sort of intuitive interaction that you have in these kinds of media systems, which use sound and video and other things, is that you gesture in some kind of way and the media tracks with your gesture.

What I mean by that is that, instead of the default state of the media system being completely quiet or inactive, in short, the technology is on but the machine is silent. In this piece, it is flipped. Basically, [this system] creates a wall of noise to start with and by putting energy into the system, you kind of tame it down—making it quieter—for a little while. Right. But then it will ramp back up over time if you don't keep [up] your effort. It will return to its default state of loud noises. And by speaking very loudly into a microphone or screaming into a microphone—you had to do it for, like,

a period of fifteen seconds—the media would start to die down. It'd start to die down, and you'd get silence for a bit. And then it would build back up. So it was this kind of antiphonal thing. This back and forth the whole time.

But in thinking about this now, I think we're now asking questions about what the modes of resistance are adequate to the kinds of political forces we're up against. And it may be that outrage is not adequate. And [it] may be that any kind of direct criticism or negation is inadequate to confronting different types of populist forces. So all of this to say that outrage is much different than lament, I think, or silence—a form of sonic response that does something else.

P. Y. I have this question about lament, though, because it's been traditionally feminized. But it's also—there is a lot of conversation and political theory around vulnerability [notably, the work of Judith Butler such as *Vulnerability and Resistance*]. And I always have an ambivalence [toward] that, because I think lament makes you vulnerable in ways that could be really politically productive. But it also makes you vulnerable to attack. Lament relates to a certain kind of vulnerability that often accrues to women, people who can be more easily violated by the state. Which I know, includes everybody with particular cultural backgrounds or gender expression. So I'm wondering if—I'm wondering a little bit about vulnerability to lament, those kinds of sounds, and how to think about the friction between those sounds and the wall of sound that you're talking about.

M. E. Well, for me, they're all the same. Anger and lament are just actually movements in the body. Anger goes up the spine. Sadness goes down the front. So for me, it's just about the ways I direct my sound through my vessel. That's my job. I'm the vessel for the experience. And so I spend this time—this is what I was telling you before that I spend my days in an act of spiritual practice and protest—preparing my body to be a vessel for the sounds that others either don't want to make, can't make, haven't been taught to make, or haven't been given the space to make.

And Garrett and I are still going around as to where we want this piece to go. There was a part of us on our last conversation that began to say, well, it doesn't matter because maybe it's all just feeding the system. Especially with Trump. It doesn't matter what you give him. He's going to use it.

G. J. There is a kind of media theory here, where the media is the message in some ways. But I do think that maybe the intervention here, and you're thinking about other iterations whereby some blatant sound could be something which only feeds the system, but something which is more like crying could actually have a different effect than the rage. Because I think actually what you're speaking about, they're the same in that they move through the body. But they also move differently through the body.

M. E. They do. They're different directions.

G. J. The other thing I think is that lament is kind of a ritual in some ways, right? Like in some ways you go into a period of mourning.

M. E. Well, the first sound in life is the breath. But then, generally, the second sound is the cry. We cry to clear. We cry to connect with the other. It's the purest connection, certainly between the child and the parent. So it's that reaching and crying out, that connection, it's evolution.
And so we respond to it very differently.

P. Y. I mean, I think the spiritual is what's interesting. For someone who's kind of like a die-hard atheist Marxist, I still find myself at this moment asking, you know, is this just the end of how a secular idea of nation can fight oppression? Did we reach the end of what we can do through something that's not spiritual, and we have to move to the spiritual? I feel like we've gone up against the wall with what we can do with words, speech acts, systems, legislation.

M. E. Well, I'm not even sure it's spiritual. If we actually heard the women in their beds crying for their babies ripped from their arms in cages or in foster homes, I think the Senate might not be able to stand that. And . . . they would go crazy and would have to respond in a very different way.

P. Y. Do you think duration might have a purpose here? There's something about a duration that's much longer than one might expect that might transport listeners in a different way. How long are your pieces?

M. E. Some of them are twenty minutes. That's a lot for people. I mean, the piece that we did was like twelve to fifteen minutes, maybe? But it was a part of a show. In some of the museum pieces that I'm able to do with Guillermo, they're longer. [In these pieces] I am often a vessel for the ugly truths that I see. There was one place that we went where it was evident that fear and displaced people were good business. In another location, we were on an island and my piece became about the waters that were very rich in natural resources. And then the oil companies were coming in and taking over the city. And so the winners were the arms companies, oil companies, transnational corporations, and the banking systems. The people were forgotten. And so then I became this robotic voice. I became this robotic thing. And I just kept repeating over and over again, "fear, fear, fear, drugs, security, democracy—are they the synonyms?"

P. Y. I take your point that when you make work, you go to a place. You find the situation in that place. And you let the issue move through you. You know what I mean. You have it move through your body. But I'm also thinking: how do we think about these different cultural forms that are all reacting to state violence in some sense? What do they say to each other?

M. E. The only thing that comes to me is a Rumi poem and song called "A Great Wagon" that reads, "Beyond ideas of right and wrong doing, there is a field. A singing field. I'll meet you there. I'll meet you there." That's the only thing that comes to me. I truly believe that the voice cuts through the illusion that we are separate.

And when I sing that with people, it doesn't matter. Everybody starts crying. There's no right and wrong. Well, I think in all those different spaces, what we all have in common is that everybody is unregulated, triggered, and traumatized. And the singing and crying is part of the healing process.

I think that being here in Arizona, being on the border, there is something that kind of tugs at us. Something tugging at our psychic wounds. Like, even on this campus, the legacy of [us being] on ancestral lands. And there is a legacy of suffering. Right now, the campus is overrun with the alt-right and people yelling at each other about abortion and the dangers of socialism. There is a new level of activity. There's a lot to think about here. It's a land rich for artistry and activism, for thinking about and responding to. I think we need to revolt against the silence and ignorance.

P. Y. I think that the hope of your work and the way you're thinking about sound offers a way to reconceptualize this political moment. Thank you so much for speaking to me.

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Mourning the Nightingale's Song: The Audibility of Networked Performances in Protests and Funerals of the Arab Revolutions

Shayna M. Silverstein

Facebook Post Wednesday, February 2, 2011, at 12:09 p.m. CST
i'm being fed by three streams: AJE live, Twitter, and speak2tweet. the latter is a civilizing balm on the chaos in tahrir.

In the heart of the eighteen-day period of collective nonviolent protests (January 25–February 11, 2011) in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, Egypt, I posted the above status update on my Facebook timeline. "Speak2Tweet," as I referenced in the post, was a digital networked platform that offered a "voice to tweet" service.[1] Users called a phone number and left a voicemail, which was then converted into a short URL posted on the Twitter account, @Speak2Tweet.[2] Twitter users could then click on the link to hear the audio message. By the first Friday afternoon after its launch, after then-President Hosni Mubarak cut off internet and cellular connections, almost 2,900 spoken tweets had been posted on @Speak2Tweet. Activity spiked mostly during those eighteen days in late January and early February 2011 and shut down after April 11, 2011 (for reasons that remain unclear).[3] A few years later, the voice data files were no longer available online, their disappearance symptomatic of the "enduring ephemerality" of digital media (Chun 2008).[4]

Speak2Tweet was less about political utility—getting more people out on the streets, broadcasting explicit political claims, or networking activists through digital connectivity. Rather, recording a voice message enabled an affective attunement with the movement, a presence enacted through the materiality of sound. Egyptian artist Heba Amin, who juxtaposes archival recordings with visual images of urbanity in experimental film in her Project Speak2Tweet, reflected that the platform "became a gathering point for the sharing of intimate expression within a limited time-frame when people felt safe enough to expose their inner thoughts" (Amin 2014, 6), an intimacy of sharing enabled by the vocality of digital recordings. Speak2Tweet software developer Ujjwal Singh agreed that the platform gained momentum because of the affective capacity of voice: "Voices capture emotion, personality and the moment. It gives you the intangible that you can't get through text and data" (Liedtke 2011). Indeed, the affective politics of voice, and its mediation by communications technology, has been demonstrably crucial to the production of pious subjects (Hirschkind 2006) and democratic subjects (Kunreuther 2018). In this instance, not only did the sonic traces of recorded Egyptian voices make the personal experience of Tahrir Square political, these affective politics were further intensified by the transmedial and networked infrastructure of the Twitter platform.

The circulation of the recorded voice during the revolutions, and as revolutionary audio, echoes the anticolonial radio station, *Voice of Fighting Algeria*, which, as Frantz Fanon has argued (1965), enacted

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political solidarities during the Algerian revolution (1954–1962) through tactical listening techniques. These techniques, elaborates Ian Baucom, forged solidarities through "a complex labor in which [listening] subjects are at once gatherers and scatterers of the narratives of identity to which their ears are tuned" (2001, 25). In this article, I am similarly interested in the role of audio in communications technology and listening as a mode of political participation. Regarding social media practices during the Arab revolutions of the 2010s, I consider how sound circulates through and as networked digital media and how this process intensifies the affective politics of protest culture, drawing on recent literature in performance studies and media studies that seeks to collapse any false dichotomy between offline and online activism. Invoking Marcela Fuentes' concept of "performance constellations" and situating its promise in the work that sound acts enable, I turn to two specific historical moments. The article begins with fieldnotes from the first months of nonviolent protest actions in 2011 in Egypt and Syria and concludes with a discussion of protest funerals for Syrian revolutionary martyrs in 2018 and 2019. These beginnings and endings (of a sort) straddle hope and grief; they evoke the intensity of collective political actions and capture the multitudinous nature of the crowd at the protest event. I offer them not to cast a historicizing teleology onto the revolutions, but rather to provoke questions of sound, protest, and media at events critical to each revolution's history.

The role of sound acts, hailed in this issue as the power in and of embodied sound to strategically resist oppression and foment collective political action, has been studied in protest movements worldwide. Where and when bodies gather to disrupt and occupy space, they do so through sonic tactics, from banging on pots and pans to chanting slogans, that are often recognized as part of a "folk praxis" (Eyerman and Jamison 1998) that is accessible, participatory, and often intertextual in the hailing of past historical events in the present political moment (Manabe 2015). Making sounds enacts political presence both metaphorically and physically. At the Occupy Baluwatar protests in Nepal, political subjectivity forms through *āwāj* (voice)—a political allegory for democracy and an audible vocalization, sound, or noise that generates political presence (Kunreuther 2018). The "Human Mic" tactic deployed at Occupy Wall Street protests and rooftop chanting in Iran during the Green Revolution (Kheshti 2015), respectively, demonstrate the efficacy of vocal techniques to reclaim space from the state. While activists often aim to disrupt and occupy space through the production of sound, Ben Tausig (2019) insists that sounds of protest are rarely "unbounded" in either their allegorical or physical travel through political space; rather, the politics of sound are often "constrained" by geographical and social structures. This article expands this terrain of sonic protest to ask what happens when the political work of sound is uploaded and streamed as digital media that circulates on social media platforms such that the sonic geographies of protest encompass virtual spaces with and alongside physical spaces. Approaching sound acts as "bodily performance" and "digital networking" (Fuentes 2019, 65) helps to better understand digital media engagement as performance praxis, and likewise, to attend to the ways that politics are perceived and experienced through sensory apparatuses.

This article, exploring dynamics between sound, protest, and media platforms, listens for how the embodied sonic praxis of protests translates into the audio, visual, and text modalities of digital media. As Marcela Fuentes insists, networked protests are not divorced from live and copresent events. Rather, there is a "synergetic relation between on and offline environments" (Fuentes 2019, 20) that emerges through the "coaction of bodily and digitally networked protests" (3) that together form "performance constellations." Fuentes argues that performance constellations set change in motion through the constituent dynamics of performance—spatiality, temporality, embodiment, and participation. One way political change occurs online is through the use of digital technology and

connectivity to reconfigure social movements and forge affective publics in networked spaces (Tufekci 2017). Activists disrupt regimes of power through storytelling, hashtags, memes, and other narrative devices that harness affect, or the "energy that drives, neutralizes, or entraps" (Papacharissi 2014, 7) political sentiment. By intertwining live protests in public spaces with digital media tactics that interrupt virtual spaces, activists enact performance constellations through bodily actions and performative doings.

Given the salient role of embodied tactics in contemporary networked protests in performance, it seems appropriate to add an analysis of sound as part of the bodily sensorium that is affected by and affects networked collective action. I am particularly interested in audibility, or the appearance and perceptibility of sound objects, as a construct that helps navigate the mutually constitutive processes of live embodied practices and the circulation of these practices as recorded audio on social media. Audibility is a technological condition, sensory force, and social process through which affective publics emerge in networked spaces. It is technological in that it is produced by audio technology that records, compresses, circulates, and renders soundwaves in culturally specific practices. But to listen to digital media is not just to parse what is audible or inaudible as a novel departure from the tendency to notice visual material, a binary relation of media that Jonathan Sterne critiques as the "audiovisual litany" (2003, 15). Rather, the audibility of live and networked protests foregrounds many of the same questions raised to interrogate the production of social spaces: liveness, embodiment, spatiality, and materiality. Audibility is, therefore, also a sensory force and social process that constructs acoustic subjects and spaces through listening—who and what is rendered audible is a fundamental contestation that drives the politics of protest. Activists make their demands audible through techniques of vocalization, nonmusical and musical performance, and they occupy political space in silence or while listening (Silverstein 2019). Audibility in digital networked media similarly differentiates the power relations of certain subjects over others when some voices are muted and muffled while others are amplified and boosted across networked spaces. Audibility, as I will demonstrate, is crucial for understanding the affect-rich intensities that drive performance constellations, or networked protest performances, and forge political possibilities as imaginable, sensible, and perceptible.

I address these dynamics in two parts: first, how the composition techniques of social media, such as tweets and Facebook posts, translate sonic objects into written texts, and how the narrativity afforded to sonic objects and encounters helps express the stories of revolution as these travel from earwitnesses to online viewers. The assemblage of voices that emerge on social media, including artists, journalists, protesters, and spectators, make audible the sonic motifs, perspectives, and experiences that constitute the protest movements. Second, how the audibility of the crowd emerges in recorded footage of protest events, specifically the protest funerals that reclaimed Raed Fares and Abdel Baset al-Sarout, martyrs of the Syrian revolution. Approaching the live event and its circulation online as a performance constellation, I interrogate how the sounds of the crowd enable the mythologization of the martyrs' bodies and help mobilize the cause for which they died. Both of these approaches to audibility—as expressing voice and documenting sounds—are grounded in the notion that audibility is a compositional process that translates the "live" sound that occurs in physical spaces into representational spaces and, in so doing, alters the temporality and spatiality of the sonic experience. These processes are crucial to forging the stories that animate revolution—stories of martyrs, heroes, protesters, journalists, witnesses, and sympathizers.

Methods

The role of social media in mobilizing the Egyptian and Syrian revolutions has been widely contested. Though initially heralded as an unprecedented tool for political organizing (Lynch 2015), others pushed back on the tendency to celebrate digital democracy, arguing that privileging Western technology over the agency of Arab activists was a form of "digital Neo-Orientalism" (Della Ratta 2018, 110). By 2019, social media platforms were perceived ambivalently as a necessary evil, an echo chamber limited in its ability to spread awareness and yield material change, yet a technology that social movements and displaced populations depended on to communicate across geographical and political borders. My approach to the role of social media in the Arab revolutions acknowledges this complicated history while also recognizing how the affective intensity of the protests was driven by the participatory culture of social media. Through user posts and reflections on my participation in the revolution on Facebook, I draw on my complex ethnographic relationship to the field in order to distil the role of sonic performativity and sound media in the formation of affective publics.

I have engaged with Syria as my primary site of field research for approximately fifteen years (2004 to the present). I conducted short- and long-term visits (particularly 2007–2008), during which I immersed myself in copresent interactions across a broad range of social spaces and cultivated ethnographic relationships with variously situated social actors. When protests began in March 2011, I gradually shifted from immersive, copresent ethnography to what I call digital performance ethnography, a method that accounts for how we live and research in digital, sensory, and material environments, in which the presence of digital media shapes the techniques and processes of ethnography. A modality of performance ethnography, which underscores the role of copresence in the socially constructed space of the field, digital performance ethnography underscores how everyday social media practices are a site for worldmaking and lived experience. It differs from other practices of digital ethnography, such as "hashtag ethnography," which, in its presentation by Bonilla and Rosa (2015), approaches social media platforms as a field site for detached observation and analysis. Rather, just as performance ethnography critiques the positionality of the ethnographer in relation to their interlocutors, I propose that digital modes of performance ethnography account for how the researcher participates in and adds value to social media sites, rather than assuming that the researcher is a neutral outside observer. These politics of participation are especially crucial during social movements and armed conflict, where the ethics of passive and/or active spectatorship straddle a thin line between the fetishized consumption of mediatized events and a politics of solidarity with specific factions. To this end, I dedicate a considerable amount of space to ethnographic writing as a performance practice and method that arguably both cultivates relationships between the researcher (myself) and my interlocutors (users in my social media networks) and actively participates in protest culture.

The first section on translating sonic events into narrative writing turns to my own archive of activity on Facebook during the initial protests in 2011. To emphasize the intersection of traditional and digital ethnographic methods, I approached each status update and share on my timeline as a fieldnote, a writing genre and research strategy used by ethnographers to annotate the lived experience of ethnographic encounter. Like fieldnotes, my Facebook posts engendered an ethnographic space imbued with affect and expressed through writing conventions. Of course, Facebook posts do not afford a neutral or objective perspective; rather, they are biased, partial, and imbricated in the complex politics of global communication technology. It is not only that social media algorithms produce echo chambers among users or "homophilia" (Lynch 2015), nor is it only

about consumer awareness of the ethical ambiguities of Facebook. It is also that users are situated in specific habitus that condition the particular cultural practices that comprise social media platforms. In this way, Facebook posts and tweets are not altogether different from ethnographic fieldnotes. However, a critical distinction between Facebook activity and field notes is the public nature of social media. Whereas fieldnotes are intended for the ethnographer and rarely made accessible to others, social media activity is public by nature of its networked communication infrastructure. Drawing on social media as a source for ethnographic material generated by the ethnographer therefore calls attention to the performative politics of digital ethnography in the public domain.

The second half of this article shifts away from the performative writing of Facebook posts as an ethnographic method and toward the circulation of digital record(ing)s of mourning events for revolutionary martyrs. Mourners record funeral protests to circulate these events on social media and engage viewers across vast geographical divides. Yet these recording acts reveal their "aural positionality" (Kheshti 2009, 15)—the individual and cultural perspectives that frame the experience of the aural—through how and what they record. I deconstruct their aural positionality with attention to how the intensity of the acoustic shapes the listening experience. Finally, as an ethnographic witness to the revolution, my writing about martyrs and how they are grieved gifts me space to mourn their loss and honour their legacy, and to expand the geography of revolution into academic spaces.

Sound in Protest Narratives

The eighteen days from January 25 to February 11, 2011, in Egypt marked the unanticipated start of a popular revolution that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Tens of thousands of protesters participated in what would not only catalyze a change of regime (albeit not toward the protestors' desired outcomes in the long term) but also inspire popular uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world. Part of what inspired solidarity—among those at Tahrir and others spectating from near and far—was the participatory performance culture in the public space. From a wired band stage to subversive *baladi* (folk) songs, protesters made Tahrir Square festive and politically salient. These performance happenings were crucial to the public display of affect at the uprisings, an affect that translated into political possibilities and, in both real life and networked platforms, united disparate publics across and despite ideological differences.

During this time, I was riveted to my screens. Twitter, Facebook, and news media shackled me to my phone and desk as I marvelled at the very possibility of a popular uprising against Arab authoritarianism. I participated by sharing media, often adding my own response. My posts, shared below, were emotionally charged, affect-rich, and written in a genre (Facebook status updates) characterized by its immediacy, urgency, and narrativity. They are indicative of how I constructed my subject position and, moreover, how social media blurs the boundaries between ethnographer, political sympathizer, witness, and interpreter.

Facebook post Sunday, January 30, 2011, at 1:54 p.m. CST
Check out the ‘ud *on this dude. Actually,* is *that an* ud [*sic*]*?*

A protester in Cairo's Tahrir Square on January 29, 2011, holds up a poster of president Hosni Mubarak boarding an airplane with “Goodbye” written below. Al Jazeera English. This photo is reprinted under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic License. https://www.flickr.com/photos/aljazeeraenglish/5400759994/.

In the midst of the Tahrir Square protests in January 2011, a Facebook friend and fellow scholar posted an image of a male protester holding an *ʿud* on my wall. The protester posed in the crowd of Tahrir Square, with other protesters lingering in the background. He held his *ʿud* around the neck with his left hand and held up a sign in his right hand of an "X" superimposed over Mubarak and the phrase "Maʿ al-Salāma" (Goodbye) underneath. His post communicated that he was following the protests in Egypt as a "global citizen," that is, someone invested in the broader common good and without family, work, or other investments in the Middle East. I appreciated that, as actualized through this post, he participated in the networked publics who constituted the Tahrir Square revolution. His comments also focused exclusively on the instrument to the extent that the protests became a background context for this performance media. Finally, his playful distantiation ("Actually, *is* that an ud?") transformed the oud from a stabilizing index of Arabness into a signifying object that destabilized his relationship to the protest context under representation.

This post demonstrates how sound and performance media—the *ʿud*—mediate the formation of a public around Tahrir Square. In the hands of an unnamed protestor, the *ʿud* became a signifying object through which my colleague and I formed a public bond; it attests to the materiality of sound as performance and technology in the protest event. At the same time, the *ʿud* is also a record or trace of our bonding over Tahrir Square protests that exemplifies how social media facilitates feelings of engagement—for my colleague, between my colleague and me, and for myself. One among thousands of such expressions, our exchange is part of a communication flow that "accumulate[s] and disperse[s] through digitally enabled networks . . . and discursively call[s] into being further publics of support" (Papacharissi 2014, 7).

Particularly meaningful for me were moments in which political solidarities were performatively constituted through sound-based discourse. Here are two examples of protest acts in which political boundaries and contestations are signified by a sound object:

Facebook post Friday, January 28, 2011, at 9:50 a.m. CST
"i will stay on the air until police knock on my door." al jazeera english livefeed

This Facebook post is an excerpt from the live feed of a journalist affiliated with Al Jazeera English. At the time, on January 28, 2011, the Egyptian army had asserted their support for the protesters while the police continued to support Mubarak's state. The police began a crackdown on the press, and journalists found themselves at risk. As expressed in this statement, "I will stay on air until . . . ," this journalist is defiant about their right to freedom of speech and morally committed to the profession. What I would like to draw attention to is the significance of the imagined or projected event that threatens this moral promise: the "knock on my door." A discursive object that represents the sensory and material world of the subject, "knock" is at once sonic and tactile. The rapping of a hand, or perhaps arms, *upon* the door produces a sound that communicates to the listener—here, the journalist inside the room—that a violent encounter is on the horizon. The knock is a sound event through which the state enacts its authority; the journalist also hails this authority sonically by recognizing the knock as the encounter which ends airtime. Knocking fuels feelings of fear, defiance, and moral righteousness.

Facebook post Friday, February 25, 2011, at 6:43 p.m. CST
"Lebanese Musician Marcel Khalife cancels a concert in Bahrain saying that when shots are fired at protesters they also hit him . . ." (Khalife 2011)

Marcel Khalife is a renowned Lebanese musician who, in addition to his storied career as a composer, *ʿud* player, and ensemble director, is associated with pro-Palestinian resistance culture through his repertoire of Palestinian folk songs and adaptations of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. This article published in *Al Jazeera* suggests that Khalife expresses solidarity with the protestors in Bahrain by constructing a metonymic relationship between him and the protestors in which one stands for the whole. "Shots" are the discursive sound-object through which Khalife enacts this particular expression of solidarity. Grammatically, "shots" is a pluralized object that refers to an action, a sound, and a violent impact on flesh and body. By making his body vulnerable through the sensibilities of hearing, tactility, and physicality, Khalife expresses indignation at the Bahraini state.

Together, these two Facebook posts demonstrate how sonic signifiers are embedded in the discourse of protest and how protest actions, as sound acts, circulate through the discursive mediation of sound objects. Both instances involve the construction of protester subjectivity through the anticipation or evocation of a specific kind of event: an encounter with the state realized as a knock on the door heard by the subject or as a shot fired at the subject. It is the sound object that mediates the political formation of affect in these acts of defiance toward the state, which become narrativized into stories of protest. Sound is critical to mediating feelings of connectedness for networked publics, here coming together in solidarity. In a different direction, sound also demonstrates how physical and structural violence are critical forces in the affective economy of protests, that is, the accumulation and dispersal of public sentiment that drives political acts.

Facebook post: July 10, 2011
usually vocalists are "singer-poets" but this guy Ibrahim Qashush is a "martyr-poet" :/ [*sic*] *. . . also here is the original political slogans as chanted live without the synthesized dabke beats (added postproduction)*
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v-nM_7rlDvcpM)

This Facebook post annotates the death of the protest subject, specifically Ibrahim Qashoush. A Syrian protest singer from Homs who immortalized the protest song "Yalla Irhal Ya Bashar," Qashoush was reportedly murdered by *shabiḥa*, or thugs hired by the regime, though the actual identity of the singer and the murder victim remain contested (Harkin 2016). Factual accuracy notwithstanding, Qashoush's performance became the "soundtrack of the revolution" after his murder and remained so years afterwards. What is particularly grotesque about his story is how the *shabiḥa* deployed terror by massacring the sound-object itself: Qashoush's vocal cords were ripped out of his throat. What had transformed public space into a protest event and mobilized new waves of revolutionary affect among networked publics became the targeted object of terror and violence.

Vocal cords are instrumental in the formation of subjecthood (Schafers 2017). In death, Qashoush became a martyr; through martyrdom, he became what one Facebook friend called "a symbol for every victim of regime cruelty" (Facebook user July 10, 2011). In a comment responding to one of my Facebook posts about Qashoush in July 2011, the friend said that she knows only two names from Syria, "The little boy [Hamza] and this name (ibrahin Q) [*sic*]." She elaborated: "It's funny how we feel a need to put a name to the victims. Of course, and regrettably, he is one among many. In Egypt we had nearly 1000 unarmed martyrs, but we hold Khaled Said up as a symbol for every victim of regime cruelty." It is certainly the case that in the economy of protests, significant numbers of lives have been lost. Martyrdom creates subjects out of death. The public naming of martyrs is a speech act that, similar to the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and public campaigns against

disappearances in Latin America, graces the deceased or missing person with dignity in the wake of injustice. The discourse about Qashoush's vocal cords contains the record of injustice and a lament for anatomical folds of tissue whose stillness is a metaphor for the brutal tactics of regime force.

Since Qashoush's martyrdom, the political condition of mourning has scaled up from the loss of an individual to an existential state of grief for the revolution, its spaces, and subjects. Networked public life has also shifted during a protracted conflict beset by countless lives lost and buildings destroyed. In the next section, I ask how mourning is performed and how the circulation of these performances in networked public life manifests audibly. Shifting from the above discussion of the signification of sound-objects within protest narratives and events, I listen to the acoustic spaces produced in mobile video clips. I analyze cell phone footage for its acoustics, audibility, and sonic footprint in order to see how these sonic phenomena narrate and construct protest events and mourning rituals. As I move away from the discursive register of sonic writing into the audio domain of cell phone footage, I continue to pursue the question of the role of audibility in the circulation of political affect through social media practices.

Mourning

Persons, cities, revolutions. There is impossibly, unfathomably, much to mourn as the Syrian conflict persists. Figures of mourning have emerged throughout the conflict—from the first martyrs whose sacrifice was celebrated by funeral processionals that also served as protests against the regime to the nameless, traumatized bodies that scroll across phone and computer screens worldwide. In 2014, author Amal Hanano organized a seventy-two-hour long reading of the names of one hundred thousand Syrians killed during the conflict. Staged in Washington D.C., the "How Many More? Oral Memorial for Syria" event aimed to reclaim humanity for those whose death became but a statistic in international human rights discourse. Two years later, Lina Sergie Attar, an architect and nonprofit leader, mourned the destruction of her hometown, Aleppo. Elaborating on what the loss of her city means, Attar reflected that "we are witnessing a real death of the revolution as we have known it, and it has been dying for some time now" (Dlewati 2016). How individuals make sense of loss is both a personal choice and a political reckoning—not all shared Attar's sentiment that the revolution was dead, suggesting instead that the revolution be defined not by military defeat and the loss of place but as *thawra* (revolution), a state of mind that defies humiliation and brutality and demands dignity (Chabkoun 2016).

Years after mourning became a dominant mode of Syrianness, two revolutionary icons were killed by acts of violence in 2018 and 2019. Raed Fares and Abdul Baset al-Sarout were political figures central to galvanizing public support against the regime within Syria and across international networks. Their efforts were central to what would become Syria's protest culture—Fares penned banners that commented satirically on everyday moments in the conflict and put the village of Kafranbel on the map due to their broad international circulation in English-language networks. Sarout, known as the "Nightingale of the Syrian Revolution," moved individuals into action against the regime with his singing at anti-regime demonstrations in Homs. Their deaths, oddly occurring in the same season, marked not only the sorrowful passing of two major figures but also renewed grief and vengeance over the trajectory of the revolution.[5]

Across the region, funeral processionals (*jināzāt*) have been politicized into antihegemonic protests since at least the early twentieth century (Khalili 2007; Volk 2010; Ziter 2013). The politicization of

Syrian funerals into antiregime protests occurred primarily during the first years of the uprising, when funerary objects and practices actively transformed a killing act into performances of martyrdom and calls for justice. Funeral protests became spaces of violence due to their targeting by Syrian security forces, which anticipated that they would become oppositional, though not all did. They were also an indispensable genre for activists, who uploaded video footage of the events in order to expand the possibilities of participation beyond the physical space of the processional and onto digital platforms, where online viewers cocreated performances of martyrdom and participatory collective action (Wessels 2019). This proved crucial to sustaining the revolution during the mass displacement of Syrians to refugee camps, neighbouring countries, and Europe, among other destinations. Female Syrian Muslim refugees living in northern Jordan, for instance, "relived grief" when they accessed such footage daily (Boswall and Akash 2017, 176). Watching the mourners connected the women to their communities while also helping them cultivate a sense of Islamic morality that avoided *ghafla*, or negligence and carelessness. The cultural performances of martyrdom that took place at funeral processionals thus extended the technological possibilities for participation as well as the geography of revolution into sites of displacement.

Jināzāt tell stories of revolution, death, and mourning through processional theatre. Processionals, write Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Brooks McNamara, are "designed to compete with the existing environment around it [and to] employ distinctive elements to distinguish it from everyday movement through space" (1985, 2). They are a "performative community practice" (Cox 2017, 481) that "insert[s] death into spaces of protest" (Mittermaier 2014, 586) through mourning rituals and protest repertoire. Fundamental to the ritual elements of antiregime funeral processionals, yet often overlooked and underheard, are the ritual sonic objects that make *jināzāt* a powerful part of public culture during the conflict. These include traditional vocal practices such as laments, wailing, and crying, each of which expresses "suffering" through nondiscursive and affect-rich acts of performance and is more often than not gendered feminine in ways that generate a "sense and sensibility of public cohesion" (Kunreuther 2018, 14). Ritual sonic objects at Syrian funerals also include nonvocal sounds, such as gunshots or the revving of motorcycle engines, that prostheticize the mourners' aural presence. This sonic "repertoire of contention" (Tufekci 2017, 89) is at once local and prescient to the political demands and emotions of the processional event and intersecting with broader geographies and longer histories of protests, whose repertoires are, as those working in sound studies have demonstrated, intertextual, subversive, and visceral (Kheshti 2015; Kunreuther 2018; Manabe 2015; Sonevytsky 2019; Tausig 2019).

My discussion of the *jināzāt* of Raed Fares and Basel Abdel al-Sarout draws on these histories while attending to the effects of technological mediation and digital circulation in making protest funerals audible. If the auditory dynamics of *jināzāt* convey the local meanings and significance of politics, mourning, and political sentiments, audibility is a register for the political and communal sentiments of collective mourning. Audibility, in other words, announces public space in the moment of its contestation. It connects disparate sound acts through the constellative work of performance occurring asynchronously between live public space and virtual social media platforms, and it mobilizes revolutionary affects—grief, mourning, and vengeance.

My approach to affective politics of audibility leads me to argue for a particular sonic materiality associated with processionals, protests, and funerals, what I provisionally call the grain of the recording. This grain is not that of an individual voice, instrument, or performer, as first famously proposed by Roland Barthes in *The Grain of the Voice* (1985), but more a multitudinous and processual phenomenon to which I attribute a particular kind of affective and acoustic intensity that

is at once political and aesthetic. Funeral processionals have particular grains. What is significant is how these grains are mediated by cell phone technology and web technology as the footage circulates on the web, and how these grains are vital to the storytelling of the revolution. Attuning to the grain of the recording also draws attention to the role of listening bodies in the affective economy of revolution. Protests, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (2019), are as contingent on listening and responsorial bodies as they are on chants and music. Participants negotiate the spatial and temporal conditions of protest landscapes through listening as part of an entire sensorium of experience.[6] The value of theorizing audibility vis-à-vis the concept of the "grain" is to explore an acoustics framework, wherein the intensity of sound has affective value and effects that contribute to public sentiment. Acoustic intensity, affect, and sonic materiality, in other words, helps us to understand how sound-based performances circulate through listening as a mode of participation and witnessing that connects bodies across disparate spaces and times.

Raed Fares was an activist leader of the Syrian revolution. He was from Kafranbel, a town that gained wide visibility on social media through its sardonic political slogans hand-painted on banners in English and Arabic, intended for the international community watching the revolution. Fares initiated these banners when he realized the Fridays of protest were not enough to effect political change and to create international pressure on the regime. He also started Radio Fresh to distribute independent media in Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo provinces (supported by the Obama administration through radios and media supplies). In addition to his public relations organizing, he built infrastructure in and around Kafranbel, known for its local political autonomy from jihadi militants and the regime. He set up daycares and schools and trained over 2500 journalists. Along with his colleague and fellow activist Hamud Juneid, he was assassinated in November 2018, most likely by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadi group linked to Al Qaeda, which controlled Kafranbel and the greater area checkpoints at certain moments during the conflict.

Fares's death triggered mass collective grief by millions who identified with the revolution. Grieving him on Facebook, Sergie Attar posted: "we used to wake up early every Friday to see what brilliance Raed Fares had come up with on the latest Kafranbel banners. This Friday we woke up to unthinkable news. The brilliant man is gone. My friend is gone. Our collective grief is overwhelming. It is truly Black Friday" (Attar 2018). For many, his death marked the "day the Syrian Revolution died" because of his work to animate the political sentiments for a global English-speaking public and his local work leading Kafranbel, a symbol of democratic organizing in an opposition movement beset by a lack of cohesive political vision among its leaders (Grisholm 2018).

Two thousand mourners reportedly attended the funeral processional of Fares and Juneid in Kafranbel on November 23, 2018. In a composite video of cell phone footage released by Smart News Agency, the funeral begins indoors, presumably in a mosque, with a *munshid* chanting prayers to seek pardons for the deceased. The footage then cuts to an outdoors processional wherein around eight men carry each deceased body, draped with standard household bedding, on a bier through the crowd. A mourner drapes an opposition flag over one of the bodies, presumably Fares.

The next segment of footage features mourners weaving through Kafranbel's narrow village streets. Significant here are several ritualized sounds of funerals that blend protest rituals with death rituals. The crowd engages in call and response chants, repeating the vocal repertoire that has animated protest funerals over years of conflict. Gunshots are fired in quick succession, a sonic index of the death event. Female ululations (vocal trills) pierce the air, a ritual grieving practice of some communities, though this practice is contested by local interpretations of Islamic doctrine (Lange

2012). Finally, street traffic noise, specifically motorcycle engines, is the prominent keynote in this soundscape of mourning. The revving of motorcycle engines is possibly a means to display vehicular capital and thereby ascribe a certain kind of honour to the deceased. Indeed, the accumulation of engine noise suggests a larger than typical number of motorcyclists processing at this funeral. These accrete into an acoustic force of loudness that is characterized by its very excess (Quintero 2019), an excess that makes political action and martyrdom audible.

The footage then cuts to the arrival of the protest processional at the site of burial. Taken from close proximity, the camera lens centres on the burial pit, scored by the crisp sounds of shovels hitting small rocks in the dirt. The laborious breathing of those handling the shovels comes through on the recording, making audible the exertion behind their efforts. Jackets rustle with each movement. Shovellers verbally direct one another to collaboratively lower Fares's body into the burial site (the footage does not document the funeral prayers conventionally recited during the lowering of the corpse into the ground). The contrast between the intimate texture of these sounds and the prior urban soundscape of motorcycles and chants is jarring. These sounds are not ritualized elements of communal and political performance but audible traces of the labour of mourning.

Crisp and intimate, these sounds chronicle a political moment of mourning and document the ordinariness of revolution. Figures emerge, of collective male mourners, of embodied political commitment, of martyrs whose silence and stillness are marked by the actions of those who hail their sacrifice. The footage, likely from multiple sources, circulates in ways that extend the participatory mode of witnessing and being present during a burial rite for a political martyr. The audibility of ritual sonic objects registers political affect and grief by realizing public acts of mourning as both excessive and intimate. This is a particular kind of acoustic grain that emerges through listening to and for the relationship of sounds to their sources. In the next moment, I shift to considering the acoustic grain of the *jināza* as less about how sound indexes mourning and more about acoustic intensity and the (in)coherence of bodies making sounds as they create public spaces and moments of mourning.

Abdul Baset al-Sarout was a well-known leader of the Free Syrian Army who gained household recognition through his protest chants and singing at anti-regime demonstrations in Homs. His performances circulated broadly such that he became an iconic figure of the revolution, whose presence at demonstrations increased turnout and political motivation. A goalkeeper for the Syrian youth soccer team, he became a commander during the siege of Homs (2011–14). He was displaced to Idlib following the surrender of Homs to the regime. He migrated briefly to Turkey only to return to Syria to resume his struggle against the regime by joining Sunni Islamist factions. He was killed in combat in June 2019 in Tel Meleh, a town in the Hama province that was attacked by the regime in an offensive against rebel-held areas. As the editors of the journal *Al-Jumhuriyya* wrote, his death was received by many with a trifold sense of grief: "sorrow" over the loss of an individual who spent "eight years of total immersion in the revolution"; "melancholy" over the affective return to the "foundational moments of the revolution, and its crest," circa 2011 and 2012; and "anguish" over the online posthumous attack on Sarout by Assad loyalists.[7]

Memory politics notwithstanding, Sarout received a martyr's funeral that began at a hospital in Reyhanli, Turkey, where he was taken for treatment, and returned across the border to the town of al-Dana in the Idlib province. Numerous YouTube videos document the mourners gathered in Reyhanli. The videos feature an open public square occupied by a large, dense, mostly male crowd followed by a processional through Reyhanli's streets (Syrian Portal 2019). The crowd carried a

closed coffin draped with a green cloth, a "body so often carried on the shoulders of crowds raised one last time by mourners chanting for him, rather than with him" ("The Days of Abd al-Basit" 2019). As a testament to Sarout's legacy as a singer and chant leader for anti-regime demonstrations, an embodied practice of vocal politics that he sustained throughout eight years of protests and militancy, the crowd of mourners shouted, clapped, and chanted throughout the processional. Whistling and ululations punctuated the recording, along with an aberrant cough by the person holding the recording device (Bozkurt 2019). Ambient sounds also emerged in the sonic footprint of the footage, an urban soundscape of traffic, loud engines revving, and background noise.

The shouting and clapping are at times in unison, and at other times dispersed in ways that animate less a sense of collective mourning in tandem and more an assemblage of stochastic, or randomly determined, acts of mourning. As Ben Tausig writes, spontaneous and stochastic chants enable a dense, "horizontal cloud of political feeling, impossible to locate but politically present" (2019, 151). The politics presented by these chants are sorrow and melancholy over the loss of Sarout's life, a death that symbolizes the trajectory of the revolution from its purported crest in 2011 and 2012 to its descent into armed conflict, with groups chaotically vying for resources, territory, and ideology.

As a listener engaging with this sorrowful "cloud of political feeling" through social media technology, I am confronted with its acoustic intensity, one shaped as much by the inchoate dynamics of stochastic participation as by the affective space of grief and mourning. If acoustic intensity is a function of the acoustic density of sonic occupation, as Sonevytsky (2019), following Martin Daughtry, proposes, what happens when "big" and "energetic" sounds "occupy space dynamically"? What happens to the acoustic intensity of the listening experience when sound is "layered," "amplified," and "diminished"? If protest spaces emerge through the tactical bodies that gesture, chant, march, and occupy historically and politically contingent social spaces, listening is a mode through which political subjects move through and constitute political spaces across time and space. Fundamental to a discussion of acoustic intensity is its dynamism, how it waxes and wanes depending on both the emergent and spontaneous nature of chanting and the position of the recording device. When listening to the YouTube videos for research purposes, Greg Manuel noted that "when the coffin nears the camera's vantage point, the chanting is much more distinct and unified. As the coffin moves further away, the chanting is matched by more diffuse shouts and statements of individual crowd members."[8] Ben Tausig describes this phenomenon as "panoramic listening" (2019, 179) that occurs when a listener is positioned at a distance from the wavelike sonic flow of rallies, as chants "rise and recede" although the panorama here is constituted through temporal, spatial, and technological distance. The compelling question that Tausig raises is whether panoramic listening "washes away the grain" of the crowd, whether the rising and receding of chants as protesters move closer, then further, serves to "reveal" or "obscure" (2019, 179) the grain of the collective protest.

Modulating this question, we might ask what happens when grain is "washed away" by the technology that mediates the experience of those accessing these phenomena through social media. How are distance and proximity perceived after the sonic transduction (Helmreich 2015) that occurs during recording, uploading, and playback? And more importantly, how does this shape the acoustic-affective experience for listeners? What social media users listen to is of a different grain than what mourners listen to in immediate, live surroundings. What social media users listen for is the communication of political sentiment through an acoustic listening experience.

Rather than consider grain to be "washed away," I suggest that the acoustic value of grain shifts in the recordings of Sarout's funeral processional. Here, and in contrast to Fares's funeral processional, the grain of mourning becomes embedded in an acoustic framework that privileges the intensity and density of sound recording over an index of sound sources (e.g., gunshots, chants, motorcycle engines, ululations). As particular sound sources become untraceable, not visible, or unclear in their transduced, digital format on social media, the effects of acoustic intensity are paradoxically to render vitality to the event. The loudness of the crowd communicates an excess of political and emotional sentiment; it is not noise as "calculated [political] disruption" (Kunreuther 2018, 19) but rather an acoustic intensity that crafts worlds and performs martyrdom. It is the chaotic, spontaneous, and unplanned movement of persons, crowds, and the sounds that they produce that gives these protest processionals their political possibility. It is the capacity of sounds to collapse distance, to carry a sense of home to displaced listeners. When sounds are mobile, as they always are, their politics are constitutive of movements—political, physical, and performative.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Theorizing Sound Writing,* Deborah Kapchan notes when "an opportunity for empathy [was] lost because the world did not listen" (2017, 13). Reflecting on a poem by William Carlos Williams, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," which describes the landscape painting, *The Fall of Icarus* by Brueghel the Elder, Kapchan invokes how a farmer ploughing a field by the seashore failed to notice the splash of Icarus drowning. She urges us to attend to "the future in ways that make the splash of Icarus not only visible, but audible" (13). Listening for the barely audible is a sound act that intervenes in structures of power—the power of attention and the power of representation. Listening to make certain subjects more audible is likewise a sound act that shifts topographies of power in live public spaces and mediatized virtual spaces. This article has dwelled in acoustic spaces that, like the splash of Icarus, have failed to be noticed.

The challenge of thinking about audibility is not only the privilege afforded to the image in the representational economy (and particularly violence in the Syrian conflict), but also how these mediations are vital to global civic engagement and the narratives that sustain such engagement. As a witness to and sympathizer of the Arab revolutions, I have continually listened in—to events as they unfold, to the sounds of power and violence, to voices whose testimonies are silenced by dominant narratives, and to cultural expressions of conflict and displacement. As an ethnographer seeking to amplify the role of sound and aurality in the protests, I consider how power becomes (in)audible through sonic contestations, interrogating the political, representational, and affective economy of sound in particular historical moments. These efforts hope to prompt an urgency of listening across borders as a practice of critical engagement that leads to better understandings of how we engage with the political processes through which voices emerge or are suppressed. This urgency remains especially important in light of the mass displacement of Syrians, among other refugee populations, for whom sound acts mobilize affective publics across geographic and temporal divides.

There is, of course, a limit to my capacity to interpret ethnographic spaces through social media platforms. As my discussion on mourning and protest events suggested, I was unable to directly access the communities who participated in the funeral protests and unable to address experiences of mourning from the perspective of copresent participant-observation. I therefore presented these materials as a listener engaged not in the immediacy of the event and the community in which it

took place but removed temporally, spatially, and socially from its occurrence. An ethnographer positioned differently in relation to these communities might be able to gain access in different ways.

Nonetheless, it is through the affective politics of sound—when sound affords an intensity and granularity imbued with political potential and promise—that I, and others, am able to sustain the presence of connection, however networked, decentred, and partial. In my discussion of what happens when the worlds of Egyptian and Syrian protests become audible through ethnographic engagements with networked technology, I have located audibility in the sonic markers of protest, the acoustic intensity of the crowd, and the grain of mourning, all of which bear an affective value that translates into the political work of protests and mourning. When and how sound becomes inscribed into networked public life, whether through participatory social media or ethnographic and performative writing, the audibility of performance has the power to craft narrative, mobilize affect, and transform political possibilities.

Acknowledgements

This paper has benefited immensely from the feedback and support provided by *Sound Acts* conveners Caitlin Marshall, Marci McMahon, and Patricia Herrera, as well as fellow participants Danielle Bainbridge and Eddy Alvarez. An anonymous reviewer offered generous comments that helped refine the article's direction. Greg Manuel and Nathan Lamp of Northwestern University's Performance Studies program provided helpful and substantive research and writing assistance. I am also grateful for feedback at presentations at Northwestern University, namely at the 2016 conference *Listening In: Sonic Interventions in the Middle East and North Africa*, and the Weinberg Center for International and Area Studies.

Notes

1. SayNow originally developed the software for celebrity fans to leave fanmail, later acquired by Google in 2011. See Singh and Mardini (2011).

2. A Twitter account, @AliveInEgypt, transcribed messages, mostly in Arabic, into text. An internet-based radio station played recordings (http://egypt.periszkopradio.hu).

3. Speak2Tweet was relaunched on July 23, 2012, in Egypt, and again in Syria in late November during an internet blackout, though it was not used with the same frequency in Syria as in Egypt. Later attempts to revive the platform in Sudan and Egypt in 2019 were met with a similar lack of activity.

4. The data is stored on now-defunct servers (gstatic.com) and no longer available to the public.

5. Thank you to Michael Rakowitz for identifying vengeance as a mobilizing affect of protest funerals.

6. See Sonevytsky (2019) regarding relying more on ears than eyes at the Woman's March due to poor visibility, large crowds, and relative height.

7. Loyalists reportedly deleted social media tributes and blocked social media users who posted about Sarout in order to defame his legacy and portray him in memoriam as a "terrorist." See "The Days of Abd al-Basit" (2019).

8. Greg Manuel, October 21, 2019. I wish to acknowledge Greg's work, in the role of research assistant, to provide a preliminary identification and analysis of funeral processional media. See also Bozkurt, YouTube video.

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Listening Backward: Sonic Intimacies and Cross-Racial, Queer Resonance

Katelyn Hale Wood

A record scratches, skips, and then, needle in groove, begins to spin. The gravelling, resonant, aging voice of the late Black American comic Jackie Mabley moves through time and space into my scholarly, queer, white ears. Mabley, an out butch lesbian, was famous for playing her stand-up comedy character, "Moms," a hip grandmother who spoke cultural truths about sexuality, race, patriarchy, and civil rights-era politics. When I hear her—blues rhythm, blunt force, low chuckles into the microphone—I cannot help but be transported. Her audiences' raucous applause and many forms of laughter also echo in my ears. I laugh too, even in the isolation of research or during a public presentation. In a library, on a busy street, in front of a classroom teaching her performances, I am supposed to remain quiet, unassuming, professional. But Mabley's voice entering my ears cracks up the supposed decorum of the scholar.[1] The contagious sounds of laughter from her audiences (live and mediated) prove the reverberating and corporeal exchange of joke-telling and vocal response. In listening, we must be embodied. In laughter, we are embodied. Mabley's voice *sticks,* resounding in her listeners' minds/bodies/spirits. Tavia Nyong'o describes this very experience in his analysis of Little Richard's Black queer ecstatic recordings: "Sound escapes as it reverberates and echoes, a singular voice that is out of body and out of time, that is present even when it is not audible" (2014, 176). The reverberating power of Mabley's voice, her resonance beyond my initial archival encounters, has sparked a method of listening that moves toward a deeper kind of documentation, engaging the cross-racial and queer affective qualities of the sonic archive.

This paper explores the cross-racial/sexual politics of sonic historiography and listening practices steeped in relational and resonant modes of archiving. Through a method I term *listening backward,* I examine how sound procures queer sonic intimacies between critic and subject: the repetitive listening, soundwaves directly travelling from one voice to one person, and most pertinently, the historical and sociocultural contexts that make consumption of such exchange possible and/or fraught. I also use the term *sonic intimacies* in this essay to connote an embodied and affective connection that arises from encounters across soundwaves, an intimacy predicted not on physical proximity or objectification but on commitment to articulating the dynamics of how bodies (even those, especially those, not in physical contact) interact and relate.

In the pages that follow, I document how I listen backward to Mabley's sonic archive, specifically her comedic material that points to and laughs at gay male sexuality and queer gender performativity, or what I call her "fairy repertoire." Mabley's career spanned sixty years: from minstrel shows in the early 1900s to Chitlin' Circuit routines across the eastern, southern and midwestern US, to sold-out performances at the Apollo in the 1960s. Mabley's archive is mostly limited to recordings available on LPs, some of which have been uploaded to digital streaming services such as Spotify. Since her

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death in 1975, sound has been the largest evidence of Mabley's extraordinary body of work, and thus, her legacy. Mabley's "fairy" jokes are scattered across her comedy records, but many of them appear on her 1961 album *Moms Mabley at the Playboy Club*. They are the only public acknowledgement of homosexuality I have found in Mabley's performance archive. Each joke in Mabley's fairy repertoire follows a pattern: Mabley often cues to her audience that she is going to tell a "fairy story" and performs a bit in which an effeminate man or group of men has an encounter with a straight male or heteronormative community. In the clever punchline— a pun or innuendo around queer sexuality—the fairy reveals himself as an imposter and/or renders the unassuming straight audience surprised. For example, a quick joke on *Moms Mabley at the Playboy Club* goes, "A man was walking down 42nd street and said to another man, 'Excuse me can you tell me where the 42nd street ferry is?'" Mabley switches her low voice to a snobbish impersonation of an effeminate male: "*Speaking, darling.*" In Mabley's vocal virtuosity (playing both the fairy and the other characters in her scenes through vocal impersonation), the sonic illuminates queer existence.

And the listener? I am a queer, white woman deeply invested in anti-racist scholarship and pedagogy. Mabley has been a focal point of my research on Black feminist comedic performance since 2012. I have listened to her recordings over and over again, a compulsive return to a sparse archive. Three generations separated from her, I return because I find Mabley to be a searing truth-teller and an exceptional comic. I also return to her sonic archive to find historical kinship with queer people who have come before me. In these ways, Mabley has my deep admiration. My previous and forthcoming writings about her contextualize Mabley within histories of Black feminist and Black queer performance and stand-up comedy.[2] Turning inward and toward historiographical reflection and critique, this essay is more concerned with the sonic dance between Mabley and myself.

Performance studies has long been concerned with expanding and creatively re-conceptualizing archival processes through affective and performative modes of documentation (See Sedgwick 2002; Cvetkovich 2003; Taylor 2003; Alexander 2005; Scott 2010; Jones 2015; Dickinson 2015). This turn implores scholars to go beyond the material and recognize the intimacy of archival encounters. A melding of the material archive and its repertoire/ephemeral/feeling asks us to "place our living bodies in the stream of performance tradition" (Bernstein 2009, 90). By homing in on my specific relationship to the sonic archive of Jackie "Moms" Mabley, I ask broad-reaching questions about cross-racial and queer sonic encounters across time and space. Namely, how can exploring methods of sonic documentation align performance studies' commitment to archiving the affective? What might attention to not only the product of such documentation but also its performative processes offer us about how the sonic can deepen modes of performance historiography and the racial/sexual the politics of listening? What practices of listening can centre queer intimacies and temporalities in the archive? More simply, I seek to understand what the reverberating potencies of sound can do to expand our understanding of history, identity, and community.

Listening Backward and Sonic Intimacies

This essay follows the efforts of scholars who have positioned sound beyond a static object of analysis and toward a dynamic means of knowledge production that exposes structures of power, affect and embodiment, and queer temporalities.[3] In listening backward to Mabley's archive, I position the sonic as a modality of queer time travel, in which historical subject and listening ear intimately meet. Listening backward is a method of archiving that is multidirectional, attempting not just to understand the historical sound in the record, but also how listening itself is contingent and

contextual. I approach listening as an ethical act, repetitively engaging in Mabley's archive and my archival practices as a white, queer critic. Re-routing what Stoever calls "sonic color lines" away from white aural superiority complexes that erase difference or colonize racialized sonic experiences, listening backward is at once deeply personal and broadly political (2016).

Blending a "backward" queer historiography and a listening practice steeped in the vibrational/relational, I chart a practice of sonic historiography not bound to objective discovery or static affirmation. I borrow from Heather Love's arguments in *Feeling Backward* that "the critical compulsion to fix—at least imaginatively—the problems of queer life has made it difficult to fully engage" in the complexities of historical subjects and queer identities (2007, 3). I focus on Mabley's sonic archive not to "discover" or "uncover" a particular pattern in her work as either solely progressive or not and/or enjoyable to my ears or not. Simplifying queer archival subjects often means giving in to pressures or compulsions of linear progress narratives about gay and lesbian lives or a desire to find subversion of power structures, where such subversion may not exist. Listening backward is thus a practice through which I simultaneously assume Mabley's agency as a Black queer subject and acknowledge that her work may not be inherently dissident.

In such sonic archiving of Mabley's performances, I underscore the dynamic, embodied, and tense connections between subject and critic. I explore what happens when the recorded voice enters the ears of the listener: the relational experiences within the sonic archive. Nina Sun Eidsheim's (2015) call for a turn toward vibrational practice in analyzing music helps me situate the relational, and thus intimate, practices in sonic archiving. Eidsheim frames sound as a vibrational paradigm in which intermaterial flow and ever-changing relations between listener and performer should centre sonic documentation. I use the term *sonic* not as a synonym of sound in the ways Eidsheim refers (a static, objective mode), but rather as an experiential term—audible waves that reverberate and resonate between subject and listener. Listening backward refuses positivist documentation and supposes an active, subjective critic.

In this essay, the listening subject is constituted through 1) the embodied sonic, archival encounter and 2) sonically occupying space as the outsider—both outside the live event and, in my case, outside of the cultural, racial, and temporal target audience Mabley sought to reach. In archiving the sonic, reverberation, or the act of being driven back, reflected, echoing, or absorbing, is inescapable. Kheshti describes in *Modernity's Ear* (2015) that what often stands in for "discovery" to the white listener is a reifying of colonizing practices that objectify, exoticize, and appropriate the voice of the "Other." The act of recording, according to Kheshti, was a mode of capture, an attempt by white audiences to consume a supposed authentic racialized voice.[4] However, as Bronfman reminds historians, the recorded archive is a "product of negotiated encounters rather than transparent windows into culture" (2016, 228). Listening and the pleasure that ensues from it is never apolitical but often bound to structures of power and histories of colonial invasion. In other words, the listener is not and cannot be passive in the racial dynamics that make up a sonic exchange.

I attempt not to rectify or erase historical legacies of love and theft but to pay close attention to how these histories inform and reverberate throughout my sonic encounters with Mabley's archive. But is ethical listening that also engages ideas of pleasure and desire possible? In a turn to cross-racial and queer sonic intimacy, I refuse the "easy listening" that Josh Kun names as a mode or consequence of the passive white music critic (2005) and instead pay attention to the "complex material history present in bodies, vocal timbres, and listening practices" that influence how listener and subject intimately relate (Eidsheim 2015, 27). To take on the critical framework of listening backward, I

position myself as implicated in the sonic experience of a white stranger. I refuse to ignore my white identity even as I feel a queer kinship with Mabley. Through listening backward, sonic intimacies do not imply closeness in sameness, but rather intimacy through deep attention to how power circulates in the archival and the archiving.[5] In other words, listening backward may not bring subject and critic closer together in a homogeneous sense, but this analytic turn is meant to complicate both Mabley's archive and my relationship to it. Because intimacy is about resting in the unknown, getting close without getting invasive, a practice of ethical performance historiography in which the subject of study is not objectified, not mapped onto the desires of the living, nor placed onto a pedestal. In sum, listening backward is a practice and a process that asks us not to arrive, but to explore and deeply engage, re-routing criticism from objective analysis and a singular conclusion toward multi-directional possibility.

Speaking, Darling

Jackie Mabley performed as her comedic persona "Moms" for nearly six decades and was a groundbreaking pioneer of stand-up comedy. She began her career as the first woman to perform a solo comedy routine on the Chitlin' Circuit and eventually became one of the most popular Black performers of the mid-twentieth century. Mabley had more sold-out performances at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem than any other woman of her generation by the time she began recording her stand-up onto comedy albums in the 1960s. In the final years of her career, Mabley made her first television appearances on late night talk shows and variety programs such as *The Merv Griffin Show* and *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. The year before her passing in 1975, she starred in the film *Amazing Grace* as the movie's title character.[6]

Offstage, Mabley wore tailored suits and gender-neutral clothing, yet "Moms" wore floral housedresses and slippers. Creating a distinct separation between her own butch lesbian identity and her performances, Mabley's "Moms" persona was preoccupied with heterosexual desire and/or gendered power play. Mabley's sexually explicit bits were often about Moms seeking pleasure from young men, and her famous "old man" routines rendered the aging male body abject through brilliant turns of phrase à la playing the dozens and operatic parodies.[7] Mabley's performances of intergenerational sexual prowess can and have been read as a kind of queer performance practice, but explicit references to homosexuality are sparse in Mabley's sonic archive. However, *Moms Mabley at the Playboy Club* holds her most concentrated collection of fairy jokes. In my own desire to link Mabley's performance practices to her lesbian identity, I became particularly drawn to this album and Mabley's multiple references to queerness. It is worth noting that jokes about homosexuality in Mabley's work were always about the male fairy, a mainstay butt of the joke in twentieth-century comedic performance. In Mabley's comedic material, the lesbian remains nearly invisible and inaudible. However, as I examine later in the chapter, Mabley's voice was undeniably butch—low and hoarse with much power behind it. Mabley thus melds multiple queer subjectivities into her fairy repertoire and sonic archive.

Half of the *Playboy* album's tracks come from a set Mabley performed at Philadelphia's Uptown Theater in 1961. My favourite joke in Mabley's fairy repertoire comes from the track "Love/I Need the Money" and features a supposedly rich man who makes his way to a church service and donates a large amount of money to the congregation. Mabley tells the story like this:

> One day, a little a fairy walks into the back of a church and sits down in the back and when they passed the plate around, he put a hundred-dollar bill in it. . . . So the preacher walked over and says, "Oh we thank you so much for that hundred-dollar bill that you put in the plate and to show you our appreciation, the choir wants to give you any *hymn* that you want." The little fairy said, "I want him, and him, and him, and *you!*" [emphasis mine]

In a 2014 article, I wrote the following response to this joke, arguing it representative of Mabley's subversive queer humour: "Moms performs a queer character who lives without fear of discipline from the state or homophobic communities . . . reclaiming queer sexuality, visibility, and strength through ordinary affects and erotic expression" (Wood 2014, 97). As I listen backward at the recording and re-read my analysis of Mabley's fairy joke, my arguments become unstable. Concentrating primarily on the text of the joke, I emphasized my desire to prove "Mabley as a kind of queer ally who embraces and produces non-heteronormative performances of pleasure and joyful dissent," using vocalized performances to show the fairy getting the "last laugh" amidst a potentially inhospitable environment (97). Yet, I did not initially attend to what Mabley's voice *does* in performances of queer gender/sexuality and how vibrational exchange between myself and the recording fosters an in-depth and complicated reading of the performance.

In listening backward, the joke is neither queer reclamation nor fully problematic. The grain of Mabley's voice reveals more. The grain of the voice, the "body inside the voice," or "the materiality of the body speaking," as Barthes would describe it, "displaces the fringe of contact between music and language" (1981, 181–82). Certainly, as Mabley plays him, the "fairy" in the back of the church asserts presence and confidence through turn of phrase, sexual innuendo, and playfulness. And Mabley as Moms could detract from her own queerness by spotlighting the young queer male. But what of the sonic encounter? Between me as listener and Mabley as performer? Between Mabley and the live audience? When I listen backward, I hear a more dynamic relationship among Mabley, the audience, and the fictional queer character, one in which the fairy is the object of ridicule *and* possesses witty panache (as well as the financial capital to back up such).

First, Mabley's manipulation of her voice reveals the instability of the fairy jokes. Her voice shifts and re-shapes, circumventing decided criticism that would label her work as inherently subversive, simplistic, or even as a mode of detracting from her queerness. The preacher's voice, similar to Mabley's, elongates on the line, "the choir wants to give you any hymn you want," hinting at the upcoming pun. Mabley drops to her low, scratchy tone stating, "the little fairy says." Mabley's booming voice then becomes tinny when she takes on the role of the fairy. The lead-up to the punchline is obvious. In a switch, Mabley sounds narrow and whining. "I want him, and him, and him, and *you*!" With each "him," the fairy voice becomes more pointed, even predatory. When Moms gets to the punchline, "you!" the fairy shouts loudly, boldly. My encounter with the sonic archive, once so sure of Mabley's subversive and campy portrayal of the gay male trickster, no longer fits with the queer optimism I clung to for so long. Simple subversion is not what I hear on this recording. Mabley's disembodied vocal impression of the fairy resonates with me as a caricature of the predatory, sneaky homosexual. Mabley's fairy character is clever yet laughable. My desire in the archive was to map onto Mabley's work a direct line between the existence of progressive queer politics amidst hostile, homophobic environments and resistant queer performance practices of today. I wanted to rest easy in a linear genealogy that showed Mabley as a pioneer of out and proud queer performances. But the queer, disembodied voice does not follow a straight line. Instead,

Mabley's fairy character, even as he gets the last laugh, falls into the trope of the infantile, threatening, and disruptive queer presence.

The sonic triangulation among Mabley, the Uptown Theater audience, and me also de-stabilizes my initial reading of this performance. When listening backward, I cannot ignore the vocal presence of the audience and the historical contexts that surround their important role in Mabley's performance practices. Located in the predominately African American North Philadelphia neighbourhood, Uptown was a hub for Black artists and entertainers and an important stop on the Black vaudeville circuit.[8] No doubt Mabley had a home in Uptown, and the audience for this recording certainly celebrated her presence. The 2,146-seat theatre echoes with each of Mabley's punchlines. Laughter abounds on these tracks: chuckles, whoops, belly laughs, screeches. The recording quality gives a particularly reverberating force to listeners, both live and mediated. The recording is slightly granular, yet Mabley's voice in the microphone thunders from the acoustics of the ornate theatre. Mabley's audience affirms her presence and talent and obviously delights in her familiar routines, presumably from Mabley's touring of the Theater Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.) and Chitlin' circuits, as well as her albums, which, by 1961, were gaining popularity in US households for evening listening parties (Kantor and Maslon 2008, 229).

I hear the audience's laughter as a reflection of Mabley's impeccable comedic timing and highly skilled performances. Mabley's ability to control an audience through her rhythm seeped in sonic prowess is especially evident in this joke. By the time the fairy gets to the second "him" they are laughing heartily. The final punchline, "you!" is even more of a surprise. She is in complete rhythmic control, so just as the audience thinks the joke's over, "*you!*" brings them back into uproarious focus. Her voice rises to a crescendo, the "you" sounding more like "yew." Mabley's voice echoes in the theatre as does her audience's positive response. I hear the rhythmic clapping, laughter exploding from the collective with a few high-pitched cackles that last longer and prove louder than the group. There is a sonic and energetic dynamism in their call and response; Mabley's fairy voice provokes those in the theatre to both fall under the spell of her comedic prowess and engage in the long-standing cultural practice of laughter directed at a queer and/or gender nonconforming Other.

I too fall under Mabley's comedic spell; I have laughed more times than I can remember at this joke. In listening backward, though, I attempt to get held up in the details of such sonic exchange. Here, laughter becomes part of the multidirectional repertoire of queer and cross-racial sonic experience. In my laughter, I initially seem to become folded in with the "them" of the recorded, presumably mostly Black audience. Laughter requires direction and recognition. A group often bonds in laughter at the expense of the Other.[9] Beyond Mabley's cues to her punchline, the audience in the recording signals my own laughter. It is a contagious, embodied bonding across space and time. Like them, I laugh in confirmation of Mabley's artistry, but not necessarily *at* the fairy. To be temporally in sync with the audience on the recording does not mean we are directing our laughter (a sonic/embodied response) in symmetry. Here, I take on Kun's challenge to the cross-racial listener to "register our experience of ourselves by confronting ourselves as strangers in the sounds we make our own" (2005, 14). Mabley performs for her live audience; I am foremost an outsider in relationship to Mabley and the recorded listeners, occupying an "*other* space-time," as Kheshti defines the experience of listening (2011, 331). In listening backward, my laughter may not be in groove with theirs. Is their laughter at the fairy? At Mabley's clever wordplay? At Mabley's facial expressions to which I am not privy? At the preacher character getting played by a sexual deviant? Is my laughter a queer recognition? Or is it attempting to be on the "inside" of Black enjoyment not made for me? I am listening *in* on the joke, not co-creating an experience.

Sonic Returns

Listening backward also considers missed content in the archive. Re-listening, a repetitive return to Mabley's performance at Uptown, requires me to confront what I have actively or accidentally ignored in her performances. For example, while I have played the *Playboy Club* album, again and again, a recent listen when preparing this article proved a difficult one. Mabley does not introduce her fairy routine with the "hymn joke" as I had initially remembered. Instead, she tells another story that I had, even after years of researching Mabley, forgotten. In the re-listening, I pause, avoiding the impulse to transcribe right away. I lean forward, wondering what I am hearing. Two minutes into the album, Mabley begins, "Moms wanted to tell you a fairy story." Her voice fakes a saccharine sweet: I imagine her eyelashes batting, satirical in her whimsy. Mabley's delight is obvious, and the audience's is too, as evidenced by their laughter. I, however, tense. Something in her tone, mocking and a little cruel, makes me cringe. My shoulders shrug closer to my ears, and I do not smile as I usually do when listening to Mabley. I wince, somehow knowing what is coming despite the fact that I did not initially recall this bit.

Mabley continues, "A fairy was, had one of them little cars. I call them a bug, one of them little jag wags. Had one of them little jag wags, you know." I know why "jag wag" works so well in this joke, even before she gets to the punchline. She elongates *jag* and *wag*, the vowel hanging in the air, the guttural short "g" sound both punctuating and lasting along with the "a." The audience chuckles lightly in some sort of recognition. Perhaps they are already picturing the fairy, small and slim, with a snooty stature. Or they, like me, know what synonym for "fairy" rhymes with "jag wag." Mabley's tone relaxes back to her low register: "So he was riding down the highway. And run right into a great big truck." She shouts, "Bam! The truck driver jumped out of the truck and the little faggot jumped out of the truck."

I had never noticed Mabley using "faggot" before. I am not ahistorical in my listening. I understand that word as acceptable on the live comedic stage in the 1960s as opposed to the hypermediated world of twenty-first-century comedy. I wonder, as Marlon Ross observes in his examination of Amiri Baraka's use of the word "fag," if Mabley played with such an insult to redirect the "internalization of the constant surveillance . . . by conformist straight society" (2012, 304). Mabley might have used "faggot" as a homage to the dirty dozens and queer camp aesthetics, which Ross describes as a "playful game of the sexual aggressions directed at [queer communities] amidst an ugly reality of relentless stereotyping and other forms of conformist verbal violence dictated by U.S. socio-sexual norms" (304). Ross argues that both "the sexualized verbal battles of camp and the dozens engage their participants in acts of community-formation and identity-sustenance by resourcefully using the scraps most at their disposal: the things others say hatefully about them" (303).

At first, however, Mabley's voice seems more resentful than campy or playful. This tone remains as she dips into her fairy impersonation. She clicks her tongue and continues, "He said, 'Now look what you have done.'" This impersonation, different from the church-going fairy, is characterized by a nasal voice with a thick lisp, heavy on the "s" sound and overly articulate. She manipulates her voice to a higher register, whispery and a bit quieter. She pauses after a drawn out "done," giving the audience time to react. They do so heartily. In unison, their laughter creates a singular, long laugh—almost an exaggerated sigh. One person, captured on the recording, falls out of sync with her fellow audience members. She (I, maybe mistakenly, assume gender because of the pitch of the person's

voice) howls for a second longer, a singular voice, in extra excitement about Mabley's bit. Mabley continues, her fairy voice becoming more exaggerated: "You done tore my car out the pavement." Her rhythm is slow, each word enunciated for effect. Mabley pauses again, letting the audience revel in her comedic timing. She adds, more emphatic, "You big brute, you. I should strike you *three successful times*." Here, Mabley's voice does not only seem to be pointing fun at the man's effeminate nature, but also his put-on upper-classness and martyrdom. She has the audience hanging on each punchline. The echoes of their laughter boom through the theatre, the grainy quality of the recording resonating into my headphones.

Mabley's voice drops, and she switches to the driver: "The truck driver says, 'Why you, you . . .'" Mabley trips up, blubbering and stuttering, characterizing the truck driver as both holding back a range of insults and unable to actually speak to the fairy. The joke, of course, is that the truck driver is rendered speechless by the overtly forward queen. The audience howls at this as well. As the truck driver, who sounds just like Mabley's "Moms" voice, blurts out to the fairy, "Do you know what you can do for me?" In her transition back to the fairy voice, she delivers the final punchline: "The little faggot says, 'Now you wanna settle outta court?'" The laughter of the audience in the theatre booms. "The little faggot." Again, I wince.

However, as the audience's laughter in the recording resonates, my disdain for the joke begins to wane. I am reminded by Alexandra Vasquez to return to the details of sonic performance. Listening backward, like Vasquez's practice of "listening in detail" to Cuban music, offers an experience rather than a "fixed theoretical formula." Getting held up in the details slows down temporal pressures of exacting and correct critique, and instead asks us to engage in "stories bigger than ourselves" (Vasquez 2013, 38). The details of Mabley's vocal performance take me out of my initial discomfort and foreground a more nuanced reading of the bit.

First, I notice a sonic slippage and conflation between Mabley and the fairy as she tells this joke. Listening backward, I hear the ways Mabley slides, with much virtuoso, in and out of myriad sonic performances of gender and sexuality. I hear Mabley's clear, direct, and harsh words, but I also become tuned in to how Mabley sonically dances among three characters at once: the frisky, truth-telling grandmother (a queer character in her own right), the hypermasculine truck driver, and the fairy, all of which are variations of Mabley's decidedly butch vocality. Her comedic prowess was often in timing and clever punchlines, but also in her ability, even as she aged, to manipulate her voice—playing with gender and sexuality through her vocal range. Mabley's voice stretches across identity and refuses stability. Her switches among characters are not seamless and crisp. Rather, her voices blend, especially between Mabley and her fairy characters. When she sets up the final punchline, "The little faggot says," her voice slips into her caricature. By the time she is speaking as the fairy, her voice has already become him. Thus, she does not simply vocally mock the fairy through performance. The fairy is not the object of Mabley's joke; the fairy becomes blended into her own comedic persona.

Even as they attack the queer subject, these vocal impersonations highlight the queerness of Mabley's performance practices. Mabley vocally slides into that position of the wiser, sharper queer, as well as the hypermasculine truck driver. I hear Mabley's delight not only in laughing at the fairy but becoming him. Occupying the sonic space of the effeminate man perhaps grants her freedom to be both inside and outside the realm of queer subject. Mabley takes on the "faggot" as the most boisterous figure in the LGBT community. The faggot is unwilling to concede to normalized racial, gendered, and classed performances of white, heteronormative masculinity. The faggot's

nonconformity and self-confidence leaves bystanders (like the bumbling truck driver) tongue-tied and/or dumbfounded.

I also hear Mabley's butch voice, rough and deep, become more apparent next to her performance of the sharp whining fairy. The effeminate vocal performance of the fairy beside the tough truck driver shows off Mabley's impressive range too. In a tradition of Black feminist and Black queer performance strategies, Mabley "takes as a given the portrayal of multiple subjectivities and emphasis on the body itself as a proverbial canvas" (McMillan 2015, 206). Here, the vocal body is Mabley's primary canvas that moves into others' ears, demonstrating the sonic as a powerful mechanism by which to shape-shift. It is the queer tongue—that is, Mabley's—that creates a resonating archive of sexual deviance and fluid gender performativity.

You'll Get Yours

The second half of *Moms Mabley at the Playboy Club* shifts to the recording of Mabley's 1961 performance at the Playboy Club in Chicago. The venue would eventually become a global franchise that saw its demise in the 1980s, but the first opened in Chicago in 1960. It was one of the few commercially popular nightclubs of its kind that allowed both racially integrated audiences and Black entertainers. Given its location on Chicago's Magnificent Mile, a section of downtown with upscale hotels and dining, the Playboy Club attracted wealthy businessmen and tourists wanting to be served by women in the infamous bunny costumes. While Mabley performed in a wide array of venues (including a yearly stand-up routine at Sing Sing Prison), the ethos of the Playboy Club was vastly dissimilar to many of the other theatres at which Mabley appeared. The recording is quieter, the audience seemingly more intimate. Mabley does not yell loudly into the microphone to reach her audience in the back of the auditorium, but speaks in such a way to signal close proximity to those consuming her performance.

For this audience, Mabley performs a fairy joke with a softer, more reserved quality than the other side of the album. Within the previously examined repertoire of jokes aimed at or about fairy men, Mabley is a nonpresent narrator. She does not place herself inside the story or even as an observer. However, on the last track of the *Playboy Club* recording, Mabley sings a short acapella serenade in which Moms recalls an encounter with a young queer boy. Covering Nat King Cole's 1948 single "Nature Boy," Moms narrates, through song, a singular encounter with a young, effeminate man.[10] Unlike the swelling strings and melodic flute of "Nature Boy," Mabley begins "Fairy Boy" with a pause. The audience is silent for a beat. She begins verbatim of Cole's version: "There was a boy."[11] Her pace quickens, keeping in a monotone melody: "A very strange enchanted boy." Then, Mabley's twist begins. Instead of the nature boy, who "traveled over land and sea," Mabley makes her voice soft and melodic, a bit higher in pitch as she sings, "They say he didn't look like Pa, more like Ma." Her voice drops again, "Strange as it may seem." She trails off slowly, quietly.

At this point, the club is still silent. The tone of the song is set as a bit sombre and sweet, but more haunting than Cole's crooning version. Moms drops in volume and sings, "He looked as though …" There is a slight pause, and Mabley's voice goes deeper and continues, "He could whip Archie Moore." Here, her voice cracks. On "Archie Moore," Moms (or Mabley?) breaks into chuckle. A low, mumbling laugh that makes her have to catch herself. The audience joins in. She regains composure, takes a breath, and in a deeper timbre, grandly arrives at the first punchline in a satirical vibrato: "But a powder puff was he." Moms continues, moving her pitch back up to a sweet

softness, almost like a Billie Holiday impression: "And so one day/a swish of perfume came my way/and as he strolled down Sunset Strip/hands on hip, this I said to him . . ." Her enunciation becomes somewhat staccato, mirroring the rhythmic hip switches of the boy's walk. Another deep breath and Mabley stays quiet and controlled, almost dropping to a whisper: "The dearest thing/you'll ever learn my friend/is that you'll get yours." Another breath and Moms' voice goes up in pitch as she repeats, "You'll get yours . . ." She drops back down in the melody and finishes in a sweet tone, "in the end." Moms elongates "end" as if finishing a lullaby. The audience quietly laughs at the turn of phrase and claps.

Within the frame of sonic intimacy, I hear this moment in Mabley's performance as one in which she chooses to encounter queerness, not through stereotypical vocality as she does in her other fairy jokes, but through a simultaneously mothering and haunting tune. For example, this song is the only fairy joke in which Moms is present in the scene and confronts/speaks to the queer subject. The original song was meant to tribute *lebensreform,* a return to nature and the simple life, and helped Cole cross over into mainstream, white audiences (Clayton 2012, 136). Cole's version depicted "Nature Boy" as "shy and sad of eye." His soft crooning paints the picture of a nymph-like young man, presumably white. But Mabley is enchanted by the incongruity of the effeminate, yet hypermasculine in appearance, fairy. Archie Moore was a pinnacle depiction of Black masculinity and athleticism, so the boy's incompatible physical prowess melded with his effeminate movements. Yet, Mabley positions Moms as still able to recognize and acknowledge queerness, intimately encountered amidst a bustling Sunset Strip.

The closing lines of Cole's "Nature Boy" end in sweet finality. Cole sentimentally sings how the nature boy told him, "The greatest thing/you'll ever learn/is just to love/and be loved in return." Moms, however, drops her voice, almost to a whisper, but her gravelly tone will not allow too much softness. The "dearest thing/you'll ever learn, my friend," Moms quietly sings, "Is that you'll get yours/you'll get yours/in the end." The prophetic ending of the song reverses, so that Moms is the one imparting wisdom on the fairy boy. Of course, "the dearest thing," sung softly and as if pointed directly in the ear of the boy, is a hint at anal sex. In telling the boy he'll "get yours/in the end," a queer colloquialism for receiving pleasure, Mabley reminds the queer subject of the worthwhile nature of being perceived as "strange." While the words are not of love, the first "you'll get yours" is high, a bit melodic, imitating Cole's serenade, the promise of sexual pleasure is stated with much affection. And yet, her voice drops the second time she sings "you'll get yours" to a slow and low tone, providing the queer subject with a warning. She repeats again, dropping in volume, "you'll get yours in the end." When sung in the minor notes Mabley adopts, this last line is also a reminder of *both* the ever-present threat of queer violence and the promise of queer pleasure. Mabley's crafting of a sonically intimate encounter between Moms and a young queer male thus refuses simple subversion or objectification. Instead, the song highlights the ways in which sonic intimacy always haunts instead of resolves.

In the recording of Mabley at the Playboy Club, the interplay between Mabley, the audience, and I is also significant for the purposes of this essay. Much of Mabley's success came from performing for predominantly Black audiences at theatres like the Apollo in Harlem, Chicago's Regal Theater, and the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C. Mabley's crossover success with white audiences grew with the advent of late-night television and wide distribution of her comedy albums later in the 1960s. As with many of Mabley's other albums, *Playboy* was distributed by Chess Records, the premier independent record label of its time. The racial politics of Chess were reflective of other labels such as Atlantic Records insofar as white producers and executives profited from

"discovering" Black entertainers and bringing them to white audiences (Absher 2014, 90). Despite marketing itself as a racially progressive space, the Playboy Club was white and male-dominated. On this 1961 album, recorded one year after the opening of the Playboy Club, Mabley surely performed for white audiences who paid a fine coin to participate in rituals of misogyny and white voyeuristic spectatorship of the racialized Other.

Mabley controls her sonic performance to keep such audiences waiting to be titillated at a distance. Notably, she omits the typical impersonation of the fairy, so the voice of the queer subject cannot be the clear punchline. Being the narrator of the song, she creates a barrier between the "strange, enchanted boy" and the audience as heterosexual and white objectifying outsider. In this joke, Mabley also holds back her infamous booming voice. She does not allow the audience at the Playboy Club to take one last laugh at the fairy through a guided rise in volume or pace (like the "Hymn" joke). Her quiet voice detaches from a potentially voyeuristic audience. And while they may laugh at "in the end," they stay relatively quiet, even sombre. All they are left to do is respond, not in laughter, but customary polite applause. Perhaps they wanted something more explicit, more explosive, but Mabley keeps the live audience at bay. In my headphones, though, her quiet voice feels like a gentle message to the powderpuff on Sunset Strip. I find myself smiling at this bit, the voice of Mabley directly in my ear, turning me into a strange, enchanted queer listener.

Performance Studies and Sonic Archives

Mabley's resonating archive offers an intimate engagement with performance historiography that moves past the material and linear toward affective, queer documentation. I understand Mabley's recorded voice and my sonic encounters with her as a "productive act across multiple orders" (Swithinbank 2018, 143). That is, listening backward aims to deconstruct categories of author and subject and refuses to assume a direct (straight) line toward a positivist past. This practice employs the sonic as a pathway toward more expansive ways to understand the archive and archival processes and intimate engagements with history. Listening backward explores that which binds queer subject and listener without ignoring the complicated dynamics of cross-racial encounters across time and space. This work embraces the co-creative forces of the archive and the repertoire and attempts to exemplify how performance and sound studies can generate performance historiographies rooted in sonic experience and cross-cultural, multidimensional knowledge production.

Listening backward also reflects Dwight Conquergood's call to "rethink" ethnography through methods of listening, imploring performance scholars to consider themselves deeply within process documentation. For Conquergood, listening rather than writing, knowing, or determining became an apt way to negotiate power dynamics, cultural differences, and the fluid negotiations between subject and researcher. Listening "privilege[s] temporal process, proximity, and incorporation. Listening is an interiorizing experience, a gathering together, a drawing in, whereas observation sizes up exteriors [creating] copresence even as it decenters the categories of knower and known" (Conquergood 1991, 183). Listening is a practice of opening up rather than foreclosing the temporal and relational possibilities of the sonic.

Listening backward uses the multidirectionality of the sonic—that which resonates and reverberates—as a mode of performance analysis rich in process and possibility, not simply product and arrival. Like Daphne Brooks's writing on Nina Simone that calls to re-sound the Black female voices buried at the bottom of the archive, I frame Mabley's vocal performances as exemplary of the

ways Black/queer sonic archives can exist on "another frequency from hegemonic order" (Brooks 2014, 208). The vocal virtuosity in Mabley's fairy repertoire demands that we listen differently. Listening backward, as I hear it, is a mode of queer worldmaking across time and space. Breaking up the dichotomy of past/present, the sonic reveals how performance can become a "critical intervention into the very concept of history, of historical being" (Crawley 2016, 8). Imbued in listening backward, then, is an embrace of queer temporalities or a rejection of the linear, the static, the rhythms that ask us to adhere to hegemonic notions of scholarly objectivity and/or progress via the passage of time.

My sonic relationship to Mabley's archive reveals a queer kinship, one in which the fairy navigates treacherous situations with unparalleled wit. I listen to Mabley embody the fairy with, at times, meanness *and* with reverence to their ability to have the last word (Mabley, after all, wrote the punchlines). And yet, I am listening *in* on Mabley's work. Appreciative from across time. These soundwaves travel to me, but I am not the first to hear them and their power. I write of Mabley's sonic archive not because I know, but because I wish to document all that is unknown and complicated. Humbled by her artistry and comedic genius, enlivened by evidence of queer history, I listen backward to hear the resonating force of intimate connection across soundwaves. Headphones on, the record scratches, skips, and, needle in groove, begins to spin again.

Notes

1. As I wrote this sentence, I also heard in my head Omi Osun Joni L. Jones say, "In the academy, we like to pretend we don't have bodies, but we do!" (2013).

2. For more of my writing that has historicized Mabley's career, see Wood (2014) and (2018) and *Cracking Up: Black Feminist Comedy in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Century United States* (forthcoming, 2021).

3. Daphne Brooks and Roshanak Kheshti have called sound a "social force" that requires a move to think" beyond sound as an object and to think of sound instead as an analytic or a hermeneutical tool for understanding inequality, racism, gender formation, desire, pleasure" (Brooks and Kheshti 2011, 330).

4. See Kheshti's *Modernity's Ear* (2015), particularly the book's first chapter, "The Female Sound Collector and her Talking Machine," in which Kheshti historicizes white women's role in ethnomusicology, and how the white woman became the "world music culture industry's ideal listener" (18).

5. This queer "bind," as Elizabeth Freeman would describe it, is innate to queer histories: our shared and varied pasts can bind us in camaraderie, *as well as* put us in a (problematic) bind (2010, 62).

6. See Jackie "Moms" Mabley, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,* Season 2, Episode 108, October 22, 1967; *The Merv Griffin Show,* Season 7, Episode 1, August 18, 1969; and *Amazing Grace,* directed by Stan Lathan, (Los Angeles: MGM, 1974).

7. More of Mabley's comedic stylings that include her "old man" jokes, diva comedy, and civil rights rhetoric can be found on the following albums: *Moms Mabley Live at the U.N.*, Chess Records, LP, 1960; *Moms Wows: Recorded Live at The Playboy Club*, Chess Records, LP, 1961; *Best of Moms and Pigmeat Markham*, Vol. 1, Chess Records, LP, 1961; *Moms Mabley at Geneva Conference*, Chess Records, LP, 1963; *The Funny Sides of Moms Mabley*, Jewel Records, LP, 1964; *Moms Mabley Breaks it Up*, Chess Records, LP, 1968; *Live at Sing Sing*, Mercury Records, LP, 1970.

8. For more on the history of the Uptown Theater and current revitalization efforts, see https://whyy.org/articles/why-marquee-lights-are-back-on-at-n-phillys-uptown-theater/.

9. Freud's 1960 book, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* marked a precedent in humour theory as it solidified notions that successful comedy requires aggression against another for the pleasure of the voyeur.

According to Freud's psychoanalytic approach to humour, the subject (joke-teller) expresses aggression toward an object under the guise of laughter. The "successful" joke form follows a simple formulation: the teller attacks an object for his and the listener's pleasure. The traditional joke form is centred on the punchline. The "set up" becomes subsidiary to the momentary release of laughter. Freud expands upon this idea by explaining that a comic's success is dependent upon an "economy of release." The mental pleasure of the listener (voyeur) is wrapped up in the *amount* of laughter directed *at* the marginalized other, or more colloquially, the "butt of the joke." For Freud, we move toward comedy solely to obtain pleasurable release.

10. Nat King Cole's recording of "Nature Boy" helped him succeed in securing both Black and white audiences throughout his career. It was a number one hit on the Billboard charts (the only solo Black performer to do so that year) and established Cole's style as "crooner." For more on Nat King Cole and "Nature Boy," see Gabbard (1996).

11. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iq0XJCJ1Srw.

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Listening to *Cambodian Rock Band*: An Interview with Lauren Yee and Chay Yew

Donatella Galella

"Cyclo!" Lauren Yee's play *Cambodian Rock Band* opens with a rousing concert, tuning audiences into the sounds and stories of Cambodians and Cambodian Americans. When Neary seeks justice for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, she discovers the complicated past of her father, Chum. A musician, Chum had become a target of Pol Pot's regime. Yet his songs save him. As Chum and his captor Duch wrestle for narrative control, *Cambodian Rock Band* not only gives resonance to the genocide of a people and cultural genocide of their music but also underscores their survival.

In addition to resurrecting 1960s and '70s Cambodian rock, the play uses music to offer loose narrative commentary, set dramatic tone, and ultimately inspire theatregoers to turn into music fans. For example, Neary performs her favourite karaoke song, "Family Business," after she finds out that her father was a survivor of Duch's infamous prison. The biting lyrics gloss selling military weapons as "just a family business," and in the context of the play, they gesture toward the United States' wars in Asia, Neary's job putting Duch on trial, and Neary's emotional state. But this number does not exactly fit the dramatic situation, propel the action, or construct an assimilated community, as American musicals often do.

Cambodian Rock Band's catalogue comprises songs by the Los Angeles-based group Dengue Fever and Cambodian artists such as Sinn Sisamouth and Ros Serey Sothea. Dengue Fever has covered songs by the latter, and the Cambodian artists originally drew from traditional Cambodian music, California surfer rock, and French cabaret, challenging presumed separations between "East" and "West" by pointing to the transnational circulation of cultural productions from imperialism to immigration. Performance studies scholar Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson has argued, "By performing the repurposed scraps of a forgotten past, Dengue Fever subtly invites its audiences to engage with, interrogate, and even challenge the politics of amnesia that have affected Cambodia and Cambodian America from the Vietnam War era to the present" (2011, 260–61). When the play's fictional band, the Cyclos, performs these songs, and Chum revisits his traumatic past, the human toll of the Khmer Rouge having decimated this music registers loudly. Further, Chum and Neary's journey and their collaborative rock performance enact a history of Asian American diaspora and return, especially as co-created by a pan-Asian/Asian American cast and creative team.

Cambodian Rock Band, a memory play, not only replays Chum's life in Cambodia but also serves as an aesthetic-political project of remembering for multiple audiences, from Cambodian refugees to the white Americans more typical of US regional theatre patrons. Some spectators may know Cambodian rock, Dengue Fever, and the Khmer language, while others may have Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'" as their only touchstone. These songs can conjure up personal, coming-of-age reminiscences associated with those songs and reconfigure who feels at home in these theatre spaces. Because "Jeas Cyclo" begins the play, the audience already has familiarity with

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it during the reprise, evoking the pleasures of both memory and this rock music. At the finale, the cast encourages spectators to clap, dance, and sing along, joining in embodied ways to refuse the erasures of Cambodian people and culture.

In July 2020, when COVID-19, anti-Asian xenophobia, and systemic anti-Blackness continued to imperil Americans, Lauren Yee led a major fundraising, fan-based initiative. The CRB Challenge asked *Cambodian Rock Band* fans to record themselves covering songs from the play, or other songs by Dengue Fever and Cambodian artists, and to donate money to causes including the United Cambodian Community of Long Beach's Cambodia Town Business Relief Fund and the Movement for Black Lives. Cast members, their families, and fans used social media to lend their voices to amplify Cambodian rock, connect with Cambodian musicians across the diaspora, and rediscover long forgotten lyrics. Mostly Asian and Asian American, some performers even wore Cyclos t-shirts. By performing these songs, they remember and revivify Cambodian rock.

Originally directed by Chay Yew, *Cambodian Rock Band* premiered at South Coast Repertory in Southern California in 2015. Yew led Victory Gardens Theater for nearly a decade, directed an array of productions regionally and internationally, and authored plays including *A Language of Their Own*, *A Beautiful Country*, and *Question 27, Question 28*. In addition to *Cambodian Rock Band*, award-winning playwright Lauren Yee wrote *The Great Leap*, *King of the Yees*, and *Ching Chong Chinaman*. These interviews took place on December 4, 2019. Thanks to Ishwanzya Rivers for transcribing.

D. G. How did you originally envision the role of music in *Cambodian Rock Band*? To what extent did that change over the course of developing it and staging it?

L. Y. This initially was supposed to be a play about music. It came about because I became deeply obsessed with the music of Dengue Fever, and then also the world of Cambodian oldies. I was much less ambitious in what this play was going to be like, like during intermission or curtain call, or in the lobby, you'll hear some of this music and that's how you'll get into the world. Basically, what happened was I kept casting people who could play these instruments already. And so, it was one of those things where I was like, oh, I didn't even think to realize this could be possible, but it's completely possible. And we should do it. And the more I got into it, the more I heard the music in conjunction with the play, the more I became convinced how essential and doable the music was. Because if it's a piece about the attempted eradication of this whole chunk of musical history and these artists by an oppressive regime, the most radical thing you can do is to play that music live and really give it another life. So that's the thing that I realized in the writing process that I really had no idea was so important when I first started.

C. Y. It was helpful that I've had a music background of more than ten years, playing the piano, being in a high school band, and leading a choir. I was able to help shape some of the music towards theatricality. I grew up in Singapore, so I happen to know some of the songs, especially the old ones. I knew the significance of those songs and what they meant in the Southeast Asian region. For example, "Champa Battambang" at the top of act 2 is the one that I suggested to Lauren and the band, because it was a lullaby about home. I wanted Chum to come [to] see his country under a new regime at the top of act 2, and to sing "Champa Battambang" once he realizes his home is now a very different place. Together with Lauren, I was able to help ensure the music is woven organically into the play. There were also songs we took out; we changed the order, arranged a few sections of the songs. In the end, try to make sure that the music is holding hands with Lauren's play. Not that

the music should tell the story all the time, but it is a part of the world that Lauren intended. Otherwise, the play becomes a musical.

D. G. Chay, as a director, how do you make that music effective and embodied?

C. Y. I work in close collaboration with music director Matt MacNelly and with the band, since the music in *Cambodian Rock Band* does not necessarily propel the narrative, like a musical, and the music must not overwhelm the storytelling. Sometimes, a song is just a song in the play, and sometimes the song reinforces or gives a window to the emotions Lauren's characters are undergoing at the moment. Sometimes the songs are played during transitions, and the songs have to set up the tone of the next scene. Throughout this process, I often ask myself: How does music function in act 1, in act 2, the entire show? I need to see the overall shape of how the music works throughout the entire play. Aside from ensuring the music is setting up the emotional tone of scenes and characters, we have to be mindful of the variation of music styles so that the audience's ears are not hearing the same thing musically—for example, three ballads in a row or a set of hard rock songs in one act. This helps the flow and rhythm of the play and storytelling as well. Who knew the painful ten years of playing Bach and Debussy actually helped me appreciate musicality in theatre works and then using that knowledge in a new play?

D. G. I'm mindful that we hear Khmer lyrics first, and that orients the audience, establishes the plot of the play.

L. Y. We're presenting the music basically the same way that the songs are written and performed generally. Some of these songs are oldies; some of these are Dengue Fever songs. The Dengue Fever songs that are in English we're presenting in English; the Dengue Fever songs that are in Khmer, we're presenting in Khmer. It kind of mirrors a Dengue Fever set in many ways. The song lyrics themselves may not always push you forward dramaturgically, but I think the songs in the feel of them and the way they're arranged always give you a sense of the emotion in the moment. Presenting all the songs as they were written kind of gives you this wonderfully uncompromising presentation of this music in its original form.

C. Y. This is my dramaturgical theory: the music is actually another character in Lauren's play. The way music functions in the beginning can seem decorative, exotic. It seemed far away. The audiences are introduced to a country called Cambodia, and this is their music. The music—as is the world of the play—is Otherized. I think it's very deft of Lauren to use music to start the play this way. As the play progresses, you get to see how intricately interwoven culture and music is to the characters and the world in which they live. The audience slowly empathizes with the characters. The music then makes a shift when we go back into the past in Phnom Penh. There, for the first time, we see young people like you and me, playing in a band with hopes and dreams of success and fame. The music here personifies this. They will always have friends, and they're doing what they love best, which is music. Technically, this scene establishes the characters in their finest moments, reaching their dreams and realizing their future. And in the very same day, everything was ripped apart when the Khmer Rouge [marched] into the city, destroying their world and dreams. At the end of the act, music functions as a defiance against incredible odds; it is only fitting that the sound of bombs, gunfire, and marching overwhelms, interrupting the final song in act 1. In act 2, we begin to witness how music and art are destroyed by a brutal regime. Chum enters at the top of the second act and sings "Champa"—initially a cappella and then joined by others in the band—a song about homesickness, pain, and loss. Once the interrogation scene begins, music functions very differently

with the introduction of the Bob Dylan song, "The Times They Are A-Changin'." All of a sudden, music takes us to a whole new level. Music now transcends internationally, interculturally. The meaning for this song as an anthem of change may be the same in one place, but it is different when Chum sings, in a different context: is it hope for change, or is it hopeless knowing that change is impossible under the Pol Pot regime? It is an especially poignant moment in the play. When he was alone in a labour camp, Chum had no choice but to regurgitate Dylan's lyrics, writing them down, sustaining him during dark times. Unfortunately, the written lyrics are assumed to be a spy code, and the Pol Pot regime used this as evidence against Chum. The next number, "Tooth and Nail," is a song Chum wrote for himself. For the first time, he has agency to create his own music while incarcerated in S21 prison. He sings the song that he wrote, and it is profoundly personal as he is presumably going to be executed after singing this final song. At the very end, again, the music takes another shift when Chum plays the cassette recording of the band prior to the fall of Phnom Penh. He asks Neary, Chum's daughter, if "you want to hear what your dad was like," and plays the tape. We recognize that song, and we remember the end of act 1 when Chum and his band members were all young and hopeful. Now he's an old man in the same room where he killed his friend and former bandmate and where all his dreams have died—all in the same country. But what is different is the young woman next to him, his daughter, who has not known much about Chum, finally understands for the first time her legacy and her father's unrealized dream. When she says to Chum to show her what they sounded like, the band comes out on stage again. When Neary joins the band with her father Chum, the circle is complete. It's as if Chum introduces his daughter to his bandmates who had died. And for the first time, the entirety of Cambodia is singing together: the Cambodian American, the Cambodian immigrant, and the Cambodians. That's the trajectory of music in the play and how subtly and potently music functions in grabbing the audience's heart. At the end, the audience doesn't care about the language as much because the music has made an emotional and personal connection to each and every one of them.

D. G. That was such a beautiful, critical, dramaturgical analysis, Chay. What do you hope that the impact is on the audience with this music? How do you want them to hear *Cambodian Rock Band* and the Cyclos?

L. Y. I want them to fall in love with this music and become deeply obsessed in the way I was when I first heard it. I want you to kind of feel a sense of empathy and joy for this fictitious band but also the real musicians that this band is based on. If there's one thing I can contribute, it's that we're able to shine a light on who these real-life musicians were and what kind of loss it was to the world when they were taken from us.

D. G. Yeah, that's the experience I had coming out of seeing the South Coast Rep production. I immediately tried to find Dengue Fever's music and "Jeas Cyclo." And I love that there is that Facebook Live performance of the band. So, I definitely felt that that was very effective for me.

L. Y. Yeah. Good.

D. G. Lauren, in *American Theatre* magazine, you describe the music as "raucous, LOUD, bubblegum, dissonant psychedelic surfer rock. We should hear in it the Jackson 5, Jefferson Airplane, and James Taylor, but also all their Cambodian counterparts. It should sound both familiar and foreign. Most of all, the music should be shit you want to get up and dance to. Music to get drunk and high to. The biggest, most epic, and possibly last concert of your life" (Yee 2018, 48).

L. Y. I think I put that note in because most American theatre audiences are probably going to be like me when I first started this, where you know nothing about Cambodian history in the twentieth century. Maybe you know that something bad happened there and there was a guy named Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge rings a bell, but so much of Cambodia's history that was happening right alongside America and its experience in the Vietnam War just is not part of the American consciousness. Being able to ground it in some reference points musically can help you to really relate and feel like you're a part of that world. The events that happened in the past for the play happened somewhere between like '75 and '78, and that, for a lot of the audience, is [a] time that they remember and lived through and means something to them especially musically. I think, through all periods of our lives, but especially traumatic and tumultuous ones, it's the music of the time that really helps to ground you, where the memories live for you. So, I kind of wanted to figure out what might be an analogous experience for the average American walking in.

D. G. When I taught this play in my Asian American Theatre class, a student raised the point that because the Cambodian music has these Western style elements . . . it kind of makes Cambodians seem more accessible for a presumed American audience. They can register the loss of a people and a culture when they feel similarities to them.

L. Y. I mean I do think it's definitely true that it's almost always easiest to relate to people who look like us, sound like us. I think that reminder that Cambodia had rock music, Cambodia had electric guitars, Cambodia knew who Elvis Presley or James Taylor was does help to bridge things for an audience or at least locate it time-wise.

C. Y. Music is universal and it defies borders. For me, food and art defy borders. It's our common unspoken language. When I was growing up in Singapore, we listened to ABBA, Donna Summer, and Queen. We also had Southeast Asians singing jazz and blues, forming country music and pop cover bands, and cutting records. We looked to the West, to the UK and the US for the coolest in film, fashion, and music. In some perverse way, it's also a form of cultural imperialism. What is really remarkable about Cambodian rock music is that it's a fusion of both the East and the West, making the music uniquely Cambodian. In a way, Cambodia's history is also a hybrid of many cultures, particularly from recent French and American colonialism. The music is a reflection of the history of the country.

L. Y. It's also a really helpful reminder that the genocide that Cambodia went through was not something that happened years and years ago. It's something that happened as late as the end of '78, beginning of '79. And that's something that is almost too close for comfort, like when we think about modern-day genocides and traumas that are being enacted all over today. That in a way we feel so far from. That they almost feel like they don't exist.

C. Y. Looking at Lauren's play, she too has created a thrilling theatrical hybrid. She has seamlessly melded a historical play to a genocide play, fused that into a father and daughter play and a rock and roll concert. So out of all these best genres, a new artwork has been created for the American theatre and that is *Cambodian Rock Band*. Isn't being Asian American one of the greatest fusion experiments of the American culture?

D. G. Speaking of how the music functions, I'm also interested in how Duch serves as a kind of antimusical force such as when he repeatedly interrupts the music performance.

C. Y. To some extent, he's not antagonistic to music, even though one can surmise that dramaturgically as you have. He actually loves music. For someone who cannot play nor create music, Duch finds profound joy in listening to music. It is the music that allows him to finally get the sleep he's been craving throughout the play, and to spare Chum's life. Music belongs to those who listen and those who make it. Lauren has created extremely morally complex characters in *Cambodian Rock Band*. Both Duch and Chum did what they were told. They were "just following orders." They had to make the most awful choices to survive in this world. If Duch didn't execute the political prisoners under his watch, he and his family would be killed. If Chum didn't kill his friend, he would not have lived to move to Boston to start a family and have a child. What is ironic, too, is that Chum the American immigrant/refugee has chosen never to listen to music after leaving Cambodia because it was just too painful for him. What Lauren has written, it's not a black and white play. It's actually a profoundly and morally ambiguous, complicated play. What would you do to survive? What will survive after everything has been destroyed? It's actually music and art. They will transcend any empire, any genocide, throughout the ages.

D. G. That's very powerful. I agree with you about the ambiguity or multiplicity of how music is functioning for those characters. The music helps them survive, but it's also a kind of sacrifice for Chum to give up the music later in his life. But at the same time, we get the pleasure of seeing him perform.

C. Y. Chum didn't make a sacrifice to give up music. He had to forego music because of his guilt and the price of his deceit. He lied to his parents in order to delay departing Cambodia in order to record the album with the band. As a result, they were all killed. The band recording was everything that he ever wanted. It was his dream that killed his family. To me, at the end of the play, Chum plays music again only to pass on his history and heritage to Neary. This time, it's not a selfish motivation. In a way, it's redemption.

D. G. How has the play changed in the context of the current Republican administration deporting Cambodian refugees?

L. Y. Yeah, that's a good question, because I do feel like a play, if it's a good play, can kind of speak differently but also powerfully to whatever time period that we're in. Like the fact that it was a play that started in 2015 and is still getting productions in 2019, 2020 . . . may shift how certain characters and themes are being received. But it feels like it should stand on its own as a play. What's really interesting is that the Cambodian deportations are the direct result of American actions x number of years ago when we were bombing Cambodia.

C. Y. The play has not changed much and definitely not to directly address our current regime. The play, however, does shine a light on an American community that is often invisible and not given voice. I hope after people experience Lauren's play, the audiences will be able to put a face and a soul on each and every Cambodian refugee our divisive government has chosen to deport. That's the power of the theatre. The power of empathy. It's important for Americans to not perceive Cambodian refugees as numbers but full-bloodied human beings. If anything, *Cambodian Rock Band* comments most on how regimes can suddenly change overnight. The big question is: how can we actively prevent this from happening? Or are we just like Chum, selfishly and blindly pursuing our own desires, to devastating consequences? Any democracy could devolve into a regime like Pol Pot's if we are not mindful. I think *Cambodian Rock Band* can be perceived as a cautionary tale: We have to be watchful of our government and exercise our rights to resist and stop fascism and dictatorship if

they appear. It's silence and fear they feed on. If we do nothing, the consequences would be oppression, destruction, and death. We'll have another Cambodia.

D. G. That's an excellent point about making connections more widely. Lauren, I'd love for us to talk about musical embodiment, Asian American community building, and fandom for this exciting fictional band. Tell me about the Cyclos t-shirts!

L. Y. The t-shirts came out of the fact that one of our band members or actors, Jane Lui, just happens to be very, very crafty and talented—musically, acting-wise, but also in designing t-shirts. So it's a show that engenders such deep affection amongst audience members and also actors. I was like, Jane, you should make a t-shirt, in the beginning of the rehearsal process. And she came up with an incredible design that everyone loved. It became this phenomenon such that everyone wanted a t-shirt, everyone felt so connected with this show and Chay's various productions of it. And that's been such a gift.

D. G. That's really wonderful to hear about how that spread out. It really brings people together. I know you wrote on Facebook asking about who has seen the show multiple times.

L. Y. Isn't that nuts? Because the way that regional nonprofit theatre is set up is that it shows up for a month and you may get to see it like once or it may only have one production. But the fact that it's been up so many times—it's been up at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), which had a very long run. And then I think just in general, it's a show that does not necessarily diminish with having seen it before. It's like a musical in that it really benefits from multiple viewings, and it's like going to see your favourite bands. There's a relationship and affection you build towards these performances and this production. So, I think I'm pretty lucky and grateful for the fact that the production at South Coast for the most part has had a lot of life. A majority of the elements that we see at South Coast, that went to OSF, that's at La Jolla [Playhouse] now. That will be at Signature Theatre. So, I'm pretty delighted because that usually does not happen in that way.

D. G. I'm so excited that more people will be able to see and hear *Cambodian Rock Band*.

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