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editors' note

The editors of *Current Musicology* are excited to present special issue number 93 on *Race, Sound, and Performance*. Through this issue, *Current Musicology* continues to push the boundaries of musicological inquiry to include disciplines such as sound studies, critical race theory, performance and dance studies, art criticism, and other areas that engage music from diverse perspectives. Scholars in American Studies, musicology, English & Comparative Literature, and art history were approached to contribute to this interdisciplinary conversation. As the first musicology journal to dedicate an issue to theme of race, sound, and performance, we hope to contribute to the expansion of approaches within music and sound studies at large.

The articles in this issue push the reader to think through the creation and impact of racialized sound from multiple sensorial perspectives, while also pointing toward new ways to conceptualize how sound has been produced, performed, commodified, and circulated along what W. E. B. Du Bois called the “color line.” While race and other markers of identity have been traditionally understood within an ocularcentric purview in the creation of “western” civilization, *sound*—and its production through music—is as critical in evaluating how both identity and society are formed and function. The history of racialized sound in the United States extends back to the antebellum era, and it was formally constructed through the first, “original” form of popular entertainment in the U.S.—blackface minstrelsy. Yet sound, and its musical production, has also been a way for individuals and groups to hear and see themselves beyond the systems by which they are defined. The articles in this special issue discuss the significant ways in which individuals, groups, and systems engage with identity and racial formations through sound—particularly as articulated through performance and music—and how people both sonically exist and resist within racialized societal structures. Moving from the crawl space of Harriet Jacobs in the antebellum era to the production of the hip hop album, *Watch the Throne* (2012), the authors collectively engage with the history of sound in the construction of race in ways that force us to rehear the development of popular sound and culture.

Nina Eidsheim, through a number of contentions and interventions, opens the issue by challenging the reader to understand vocal production as an act of choreography, rather than as an innate sound that comes from a “marked” or racialized body. This theoretical turn requires a detangling

of the “naturalized” voice from the body in order to understand the complicated physiological developments and cognitive choices through which humans produce sound. In “Harriet Jacobs Gets a Hearing,” Ashon Crawley suggests that we listen to freedom, flight, and existence in the “loop hole of retreat”—the cramped, solitary, and empty crawl space to which Harriet Jacobs escaped enslavement. Unable to be in physical contact or interaction with her family or outside world, Crawley paints a sonic portrait of Jacob’s life, as sound becomes a way to think through solitude and silence, existence and resistance. The issue then takes a temporal turn as we move to Regina Bradley’s theorization of “Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose” in commercial rap music. Rather than focus primarily on the lyrics and images that are often attended to in commentary on hip hop/rap, Bradley suggests that we take seriously the sounds that complement the lyrics (i.e., the track) in order to consider how sound allows rappers to be a part of, as well as challenge, the structures of capitalism and the commercial music industry in which they participate. Siarhei Biareishyk takes us a few decades back to the 1960s and the racial tensions of the Civil Rights era, as he reconsiders how we hear avant-garde composer Steve Reich’s response to the 1964 “Harlem Six” case through his tape piece. Biareishyk moves beyond a pure analysis of the recording itself in his thoughtful consideration of the ways in which discourses of whiteness are embedded into its composition and reception. The author further considers the Lacanian “split” that occurs between the (white) composer and the (black) voice through which the composer speaks and becomes “avante-garde.” The closing article by Charles Carson is an analysis of music and art by African Americans (the string band The Carolina Chocolate Drops and artist Jefferson Pinder are among those highlighted) who challenge the past by critically engaging with it; what could be considered nostalgia on the part of the artists becomes a retelling and rehearing of history, and these retellings produce new forms of art that are at once engaged with the past and the present, while pointing towards the future.

Issue 93 closes with three reviews of recent texts within sound studies: Julian Henrique’s *Sonic Bodies*, Hillel Schwartz’s *Making Noise*, and Barbara Lorenzkowski’s *Sounds of Ethnicity*. Each of these books are central within the growing discipline of sound studies, and the reviewers provide thoughtful analyses that consider the significance of sound, society, and identity in this rapidly growing and interdisciplinary field. Jennifer B. Lee, curator for performing arts at Columbia University, closes the review section with a discussion of the *Ulysses Kay Special Collection* housed in the University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library. This brief essay provides a short biography of this significant twentieth-century American composer, as well as a guide to the exciting and rare manuscripts, correspondences, publications,

and other materials ripe for research that are part of the collection. *Current Musicology* continues its role as a critical voice in the expansion of music studies through special issue 95, an exciting collection of experimental writings on music, edited by David Gutkin. We hope that readers will be stimulated by the provoking methods and topics presented in these issues, and that musicology will continue to readily engage in cross-disciplinary conversations about music and sound.

Matthew D. Morrison
David Gutkin

Voice as Action: Toward a Model for Analyzing the Dynamic Construction of Racialized Voice

Nina Eidsheim

Shirley Verrett once asked an interviewer:
“When you hear my sound, would you think it’s a black voice?”
The interviewer replied without hesitation: “No.”
Verrett responds, “That’s it. And people told me this a long
time ago. So, it mixes me up a little bit.”
(Schmidt – Garre 2000)

Vocal timbre is commonly believed to be an unmanipulable attribute, akin to a sonic fingerprint.¹ Because the voice arises from inside the body, quotidian discourse tends to refer to someone’s vocal sounds as inborn, natural, and a true expressions of the person. What, then, are we to make of the common notion that a person’s race is audible in her voice? While it has been conclusively demonstrated that many of the physiognomic aspects historically employed as evidence of a person’s race—including skin color, hair texture, and dialect or accent²—evidence nothing more than the construction of race according to the ideological values of beholders, vocal timbre continues to elude such deconstruction.³

Recent critical thought on the intermingling of the physical senses, including the so-called sensory turn in anthropology, “new materialist” philosophies, and recent advances in science, technology, sound studies, and media studies, underscores the need for scholarship that recognizes the voice and vocal categories as culturally conditioned material entities.⁴ Trends such as the metaphorical notion of “having voice”⁵ have to some degree obscured the material and multisensory aspects of voice. Conceived within the specific context of musicology and the general context of the humanities, this article seeks to demonstrate how the re-framing of voice implied by sensory and material inquiries redraws the topology of voice. I believe that this exercise may offer a deepened understanding of racial dynamics as they play out in our interactions with voice.

Firstly, I oppose the common metaphor that equates voice with unified subjectivity—an association that “assum[es] myths of constancy, coherence, and universality”⁶ (Ira Sadoff, quoted in Wheeler, 2008:37)—and instead examine the voice in its concrete specificity, as an unfolding event articulated through a particular sensing and sensed body. Secondly, I take issue with musical research that has traditionally construed voice as sound (or even

conflated it with notations in a score), and instead suggest that because voice is always already materially grounded across all points of contact, we might understand it as corporeally enacted throughout all acts of voicing, transduction, and reception.⁷ In short, I wish to offer vocal research that centers on the material, sonorous, and sensory voice as it is produced and imagined.

Encouraged by the critical discourse enabled by the aforementioned sensory turn in anthropology, history, and philosophy, I submit four contentions about the ways in which vocal timbre is racially framed, and offer two interventions in the form of analytical models. The first two contentions address distinct, but nonetheless intermingling and reinforcing, perceptions of vocal timbre as an indicator of race, bearing in mind the fact that vocal sounds are never experienced in a purely sonorous realm, divorced from contextual information. Rather, non-sonic aspects, including preconceptions of race, tend to influence how sound is perceived. My third and fourth contentions deal with the definition and subsequent analysis of voice. Both claims account for the fact that each vocal sound uttered is materially produced and through that process imprinted onto the vocalizer's body and therefore, in time, becomes part of the vocalizer's vocal sound; and both recognize the complexity that this adds to any attempt at thinking through voice and race. I hence propose, drawing on concepts from dance and choreography, a theoretical and analytical framework that can address voice as the product of both societal shaping *and* individual articulation and materiality. This framework foregrounds the ways in which vocal timbral character is mistakenly attributed to race.⁸ Thus, we may consider how the sound of a singer's voice is in fact a co-creation to which listeners significantly contribute.

Contention One: Hearing is guided by non-sonic information, including preconceptions

In part, it is because no single type of sensing takes place in isolation that voices are perceived as racial indicators. While it may seem that a listener's assessment of a voice is based purely on the voice as it is heard, this evaluation is actually made on the basis of an informational composite, parts of which may more strongly influence the listener's judgment. What we refer to as "sound" is in reality a composite of visual, textural, discursive, and other kinds of information. In other words, the multisensory context surrounding a voice forms a filter, a "suggestion" through which we listen. As such, our contexts and our attitudes determine what we hear. While the sound of the

voice is indeed experienced and described as objectively meaningful, we cannot but perceive it through filters generated by our own preconceptions, which together constitute a compass that we use to navigate between vocal input and extra-vocal context.

When the informational composite that comprises “voice as heard” seems to point toward what a listener understands as “difference,” what she presumes to hear is precisely that: difference—including racial otherness. A number of studies confirm the effects of social information on the perception of sociolinguistic variables.⁹ For example, Nancy Niedzielski (1999) concluded that listeners tend to hear according to stereotypes suggested by current sociocultural circumstances. Forty-one Detroit residents were asked to choose, from a set of synthesized vowels, the token they felt best matched the vowel presented to them on a recording. All of the recordings were of a fellow Detroit resident, but half the subjects were told that the speaker hailed from Michigan while the other half were told that the person was from Canada, directly across the Detroit River. The subjects who believed that the speaker was Canadian tended to choose the raised-diphthong token /aw/, while the subjects who thought the speaker was from Michigan tended to choose the unraised diphthong token /a/ (in words like “about” and “house”).¹⁰ The only difference between the two respondent groups was in how they perceived the nationality of the speaker. Niedzielski therefore concluded that each listener “uses social information in speech perception” (1999: 62). Her experiment suggests that listening is informed more by what people *believe* they hear than by what they actually hear.¹¹

Just as knowledge about the social context surrounding this sound sample framed listeners’ perceptual strategies, so might a photograph effect the way in which a sound is heard. Donald L. Rubin (1992) addresses the impact of visual aspects of the listening experience. In his experiment, a native speaker of American English recorded a lecture. This single recording was paired with a picture of what appeared to be either an Asian lecturer or an Anglo-American lecturer. Subjects, drawn from a pool of American college undergraduates,¹² were asked to listen to the tape, paired by random selection with either picture. Questions were asked regarding the clarity of speech, level of accent, and coherence of the lecturer. Although the lecture was identical for each picture, the recording paired with what appeared to be an Asian lecturer was, in comparison with the recording paired with a Caucasian lecturer, rated less clear in speech, higher in level of accent, and poorer in coherence. Here, again, we see how extra-sonic information affects perception of the voice more than does sonic information.¹³

Contention Two: Correlation is not to be confused with causality

Where word choice, accent and pronunciation—things one *does* with one's voice—are being judged, it is relatively easy to pinpoint the prejudices of judges. However, where timbre (*the sound of the voice itself*) is concerned, identifying perceptual patterns is more challenging. There is, for example, a lack of consensus about whether the race–voice correlation is always present, even among expert vocalizers and listeners such as opera singers. African–American opera singers (as well as members of other ethnic groups) differ in their abilities to distinguish African–American singing voices from those of other ethnicities. Regarding the issue in general—the question of whether race is recognizable in voice—these singers also maintain a wide range of positions; their responses range from “yes, always” to “no, that's not possible” to “sometimes.”

Soprano Grace Bumbry says: “I can *always* tell when there is a black singer, or a black speaker. I can *always* tell. Maybe I'll be wrong one time out of a hundred” (Schmidt–Garre 2000). In comparison, soprano Shirley Verrett believes that she can identify a black singer most of the time, but she recounts seeing Marilyn Horne, a singer she had previously thought was black, for the first time. She recalls: “When I found out it was a white person I said, ‘Hmmm, there goes that.’ But that doesn't happen very often, I do admit. It's very rare when I would mistake a white singer for a black singer, but I have mistaken black singers for white singers many times, especially the lighter voices. When you get down to the mezzo voices, the dramatic soprano voices, somehow the weight of the voice gives it away” (Story 1990: 187). At the other end of the scale, the celebrated African–American tenor Vinson Cole admits that he heard Martina Arroyo's voice—considered by many to be the quintessential representative of African American timbre—on the radio for many years before he learned from a picture that she was black. “You come into this world like a blank page,” says Cole. “You don't know what you like or don't like. You don't come into the world with prejudices. They depend on what you're taught and brought up with” (Smith 2002).

These perceptions bring us to my second contention: when we hear a voice that happens to align with our preconceived ideas of racial differences, *this correlation is not to be confused with causality*.¹⁴ That is, a correspondence between what is visually and sonically understood as representative of a particular racial category in a given time and place is not necessarily caused by an essential body of an essential ethnicity in question. That is, the vocal timbre that might be perceived as evidencing racial correspondence is only one of many vocal timbres that body, that voice can emit. So, when vocal

timbre happens to correlate with other markers that we associate with race (skin color and so on), we need to interrogate this correlation rather than simply assuming it to be a *causal* correlation.

We can divide the output of the voice into two general categories: first, that which is carried by the voice (words, pitch and so on)—or, to imagine this slightly differently, that which can be articulated by many different voices while retaining a singular identity;¹⁵ and second, that through which the linguistic or paralinguistic content is articulated—in other words, the vocal timbre. We might also imagine timbre as that which cannot be articulated by another person; that is, as that which a person attempts to copy when trying to imitate another's voice, rather than simply repeating the content of the utterance. The perception of content has been grounds for much scholarship, exemplified by Rubin's work. Timbre, however, has proved challenging to study in relation to race. Therefore, even though current scholarship¹⁶ affords no evidence that one's vocal timbre results directly from one's race, researchers have yet to identify explanations or concrete examples of this apparent non-relationship.¹⁷ In general, timbre is notoriously difficult to study. Especially in regards to the perception of identity, we do not yet possess satisfactory analytical tools that may address timbre with the nuance it deserves.

My long-term objective is to work toward a means of untangling confusions about timbre that may lead to racialized conceptions of voice. Such a project is crucial given the voice's heavy metaphorical burden of essence, subjectivity, and presence is both consciously and unconsciously taken as innate evidence of race.¹⁸ My strategy is to approach the fraught relationship between race and vocal timbre from multiple angles, one of which is performance. To develop an understanding of voice as material and action, I have relied on my own experience as a singer, which I regard as a mode of research and explicit analysis. I will now turn to my performance work, specifically to the *Voice Box* project (1999–2012), my work in vocal pedagogy and contemporary dance, and the connections thereby illuminated between dancing and singing. Through *Voice Box*, I explored the material singing body; and through contemporary dance and vocal teaching I investigated how the body's actions give rise to sound.

Contention Three: The material of body and voice never exists as such

The *material* that is the singing voice, i.e., the body in its material dimension, never exists in a pre-cultural state. The vocal, material body is always already formed by the cultural and social context within which it vocalizes.¹⁹ Each

utterance (made by one's own body and by others') leaves imprints on one's ligaments, tissue, and flesh. As a result, voice is never heard in a state prior to the impact of cultural, social, and other outside forces. In collaboration with French fashion, textile, and object designer Elodie Blanchard, I explore these notions by creating devices that reshape the form and restrict the movement of the body, making apparent the connection between the shape of the vocal apparatus and the sonic result.

The *Voice Box* project consists of three vocally restrictive devices.²⁰ At the intersection of functional sculpture, accessory, and performance piece, each device focuses on a different area of the vocal system, modifying its airflow and resonating spaces. Because the physical and material activities and changes that constitute vocal usage take place internally and are mostly invisible (excepting a few visible changes such as bulging veins), this project intends to make visible and tangible the processes regularly undergone by voices. While manipulation of the throat area is a sensitive process that may be considered risky, and although my project's primary intention is not to provoke physical discomfort,²¹ an important goal of *Voice Box* is to viscerally convey the stakes involved in the shaping of the voice through the manipulation of the body, which goes on in everyday, common, and typically non-strenuous vocal interactions. I intend to use *Voice Box* in musical vocal performances, and to show it in interactive art exhibits where audiences can experiment with their own bodies and voices.

Each component of *Voice Box* targets different areas of the body. The *Throat Sleeve* reshapes the throat area; *The Squeeze* constricts the entire body into a very small space; and *Blow up/Pumped* forces the body into an erect, expanded posture. As such, the three different "voice boxes" target three of the main areas of the vocal apparatus: the throat, the mouth and nose cavities, and the overall body which—despite the popular idea that vocal production is restricted to the lungs, throat, and mouth—indeed constitutes a part of the vocal apparatus. When wearing the *Throat Sleeve*, the user can modify the diameter and shape of the throat in different ways (See Figure 1).

Unlike, for example, a cello, which cannot be reduced to the size and shape of a violin, the voice is an acoustic instrument that can radically change its shape. As a result of the modification caused by the *Throat Sleeve*, the voice changes in pitch, amplitude, and spectrum—and these are the fundamental properties of sound. That is to say, if the parameters of pitch, amplitude, and spectrum are altered, a wholly different sonic character results. The *Throat Sleeve* can be worn on any throat, therefore anyone can acquire the ability to form her throat into the positions required to produce a variety of vocal timbres.

THE THROAT SLEEVE.

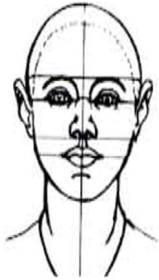
The *Throat Sleeve* resembles a Lycra neck warmer.

Objects can be added into hidden pockets that create different shapes by adding pressure on the neck.

The *Throat Sleeve* has grommets and pockets at the top and bottom into which sticks (akin to tent poles) can be attached.



INSPIRATIONS



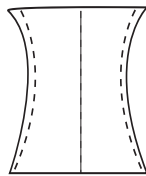
THE NECK WITHOUT MODIFICATION.



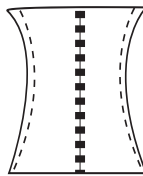
MODIFICATION 1: WARMTH

The *Throat Sleeve* worn without modifications.

This warms the neck.

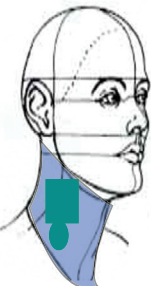


front view



back view

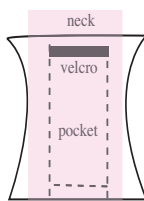
Tight Lycra sleeve, zipped in the back, with four seams that follow the contour of the neck.



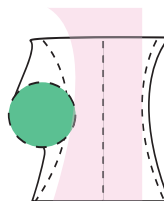
MODIFICATION 2A: PRESSURE TO THE SIDE

Objects, still or not..., are inserted into the side pockets of the *throat sleeve*.

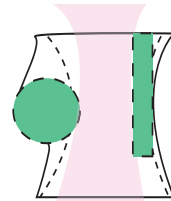
Depending on the pressure and shape desired, objects can be inserted.



side view

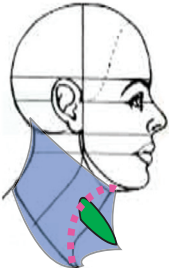


front view



front view

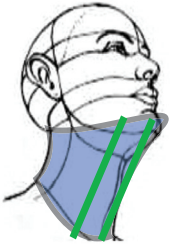
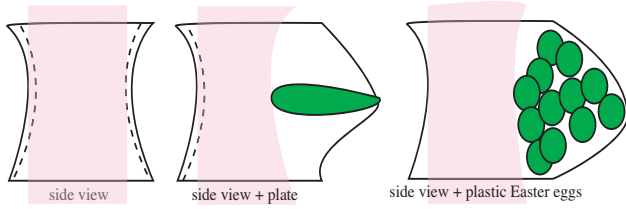
Current Musicology



New throat shape indicated by dotted pink line

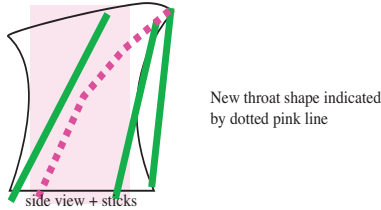
MODIFICATION 2B: PRESSURE TO THE FRONT

The objects are inserted into the front pocket of the *Throat Sleeve*. Depending on the pressure and shape desired, objects can be inserted.

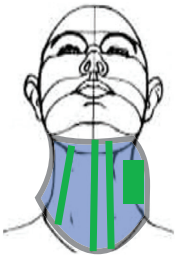


MODIFICATION 3: HEAD PROTRUDING FORWARD

Sticks are inserted into the pockets, akin to tent poles.



New throat shape indicated by dotted pink line



MODIFICATION 5: ALL THE ABOVE IN DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS

Figure 1: The *Voice Boxes*, *Throat Sleeve* sketches for construction. © Elodie Blanchard, 2012.

The Squeeze, as its title indicates, squeezes the entire body into the smallest possible space, compressing the body mass. The effects include a minimization of all bodily expansion, which entails constricting the lungs and the opening of the trachea. While the most immediate effect is on the amount of air it is possible to inhale, control of exhalation and the size of the resonating cavities are also affected. Additionally, and perhaps less intuitively, *The Squeeze* affects the overall relationship between the body's flesh and frame. Besides limiting the lengths of phrases that it is possible to sing, this intervention also affects vocal timbre. While the length of the vibrating vocal chords determine the pitch of the voice, its timbre is determined in large part by the tautness of the flesh surrounding the vibrating cavities (i.e., the neck and face). An analogy might be the tautness of the skin drawn over a drumhead. As this skin is tightened, whilst the diameter of the drum head remains the same, the pitch and timbre of the drum gradually changes. Similarly, as the body is squeezed, the flesh and skin drawn over its bony frame become slack. This alteration to the areas through which vocal sounds vibrate affects the timbre of the voice.

Blow up/Pumped forces the body into another posture: erect, expanded, and in many ways the opposite of the pose enforced by the *Squeeze*. While the *Squeeze* constricts all areas of the body, this *Voice Box* expands the body as much as possible. This also affects airflow control and vocal timbre, but in a contrasting manner: *Blow up/Pumped* eases the process of airflow control. Pulled by the frame, the body's internal reverberant spaces are maximally expanded. The sonic effects include a tauter and more reverberant sound and the possibility of longer vocal lines.

While my idea for these devices arose from feeling vocally "boxed in," unable under given sociocultural circumstances to produce the sound expected of me, it developed into the general notion that *the vocal apparatus is already restricted* when the tools necessary to shape it are unavailable. The physically restrictive harnesses that are the *Voice Boxes* externalize the inner, typically hidden conflict between corporeal restrictions and sonic expectations. *Voice Box* is thus a meditation on the gap between preconceived or desired vocal sounds, and the degrees of (in)ability of the given vocal instrument to produce such sounds. The *Voice Box* project also stages, and brings to the forefront of attention, the physical alteration of the vocal instrument that results from repeated and limited vocal production. An analogous, yet hardly successful, project is the physical alteration—in this case, a dire injury—induced by Robert Schumann's nineteenth-century mechanical device that was intended to lengthen and strengthen the fingers.²² Generally, then, acting material bodies may be formed and physically altered by mechanical devices, deliberate impediments, and even repetitive imitations of sonic ideas. Repeated action literally forms the body.²³

Additionally, these harnesses materialize metaphors for the ways in which quotidian expectations reinforce certain vocal modes and, as such, limit vocal identity, output, and possibilities. The body that sings takes on these limiting parameters, which thus are no less restrictive than our *Voice Boxes*. However, the extreme nature of *Voice Box* promotes awareness of the vocal instrument, its materiality, and the limitations we place upon it, all of which would be challenging to decipher by simply observing the vocal instrument in quotidian or practice-specific contexts. While each of our devices constitutes an extreme example of oral and vocal restriction, they are not metaphors; these devices are heuristics which are quite literal in modeling how the throat and mouth are physically shaped by external corporeal forces.

Even if a figurative voice box were to be imposed upon and then removed from a singer, the ways in which it restricted her body would leave its mark—just as a callus or a limp might not fade even after the conditions that created it had disappeared. In other words, each person is born with a physical body which, throughout its lifetime, is never left to its own devices—and even if a particular pressure on that body is eased, physical imprints of the trauma remain; and these become integral aspects of the body's sounding. The ways in which a body is physically shaped by vocal expectations and restrictions, affirmative as well as restrictive, are no less violent or intrusive than our *Voice Boxes*. This leads us to the play of names which the title of this project seeks to evoke. Our voices are physically and metaphorically bent into certain corporeal and sonic molds so that they may fit certain preconceived sonic identities.

Contention Four: Singing is not sound, but action

In addition to my work with *Voice Boxes*, my research included extrapolating, from observations of *involuntary* sounds due to bodily movement, the relationship between physical movement and *deliberate* sound production. Observing modern dance classes, I noticed small sounds that resulted from certain motions. The close study of and engagement with the body during two different activities—singing and dancing—strongly influenced my current theorizing of voice, which centers on questioning basic assumptions about singing.

Informed by these two bodily practices, my objective while singing shifted from attempting to produce a particular sound in order to sing a particular type of music—thereby imprisoning my body within ideals—to exploring the following question: if I carry out an action with my body, what is the sonic result? In short, I realized that *the framing and definition*

of an action or event may shift, even while the event remains the same. Via one frame, we understand an event as, for example, a landing after a leap; employing another frame, we understand the same event as a thumping sound. A sound-focused model of singing would say: our goal is to create a sound that is similar to the “thump,” while an action-focused model would

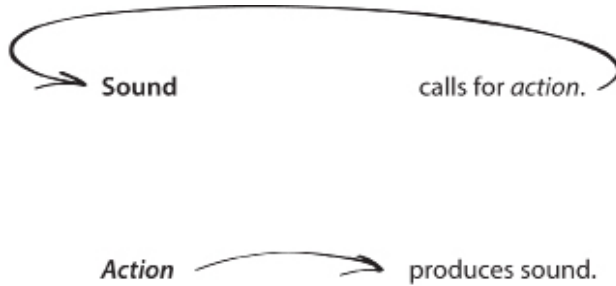


Figure 2: Sound-versus action-based notions of singing.

say: our goal is to leap and discover which sonic ranges this action can create. Considering sound in this way allows us to radically rewrite notions of sound and action in relation to cause and effect (see Figure 2).

I contend that scholarship has been unable to fully analyze the situation of vocal timbral identity, not only because timbre resists analysis, but also because we have thus far operated under mistaken notions of the voice in general, and singing in particular. Singing, I argue, is not sound but a dynamic interaction, a co-creation of action and what we typically think of as “sonic material.”

Intervention One: Sound is a symptom of preceding actions

As we will see below, if singing is an action and sound its result, we may think about sound from the perspective of *perception*, as opposed to production. Thus, if we apply insights from *Voice Box* and the observation of dance to the question of racialized vocal timbre, we may realize that our notions of visual racial norms often match up with our notions of vocal timbral racial norms precisely because deep-seated beliefs correlate both aural and visual phenomena with race as an essential category. However, we tend to posit a relationship of cause and effect between these norms. Merely because our notions of vocal-timbral racial norms *often* align with our notions of visual racial norms, we mistakenly extrapolate and assign a causal relationship, firstly to a notion of an essential racial category, and secondly to a

cause-and-effect matrix wherein a racial innateness is vocally sonified. This correspondence, which may well arise only during reception, seems to take two different forms. The first possibility is that, as Niedzielski and Rubin have shown, extra-sonic information overrides actual sound, leading listeners to project onto sound what they expect to hear. The second possibility is that the (constructed) visual and sonic categories really do correspond; but, the correspondence has come about as a result of a (deliberate or unconscious) effort on the part of the vocalizer to use her voice in accordance with societal expectations associated with racial categories.

Racial difference is perceived in voices if contextual information suggests that they are non-normative (e.g., non-white, or foreign). But we must take into account that the voice is infinitely malleable—it tends to adapt according to the ways in which it is heard and defined. Therefore, while visual and timbral notions of race do sometimes correspond, the concept of singing as action can help us to understand that these aspects may correlate for reasons other than a sound's genesis in “innate” racial difference. Sociocultural conceptions of race may function as centrifugal forces that funnel the act of singing into prescribed choreographies. This vocal choreography enacts the idea of race perpetuated by the surrounding sociocultural circumstances. In other words, people seen as belonging to a certain race are thus assigned particular vocal choreographies; and in performing these choreographies, these persons' voices sonically align with the racial categories that society assigned to them. In part, what complicates our understanding and ability to analyze any given situation that concerns voice and race is that, in many cases—unlike in Niedzielski's and Rubin's studies where difference was perceived rather than actual—there are often actual, discernible, vocal differences. However, rather than arising from innate physical differences, I argue, these sounds are the results of socially imposed choreographies, the performance of which physically alters the vocal apparatus in ways akin to Schumann's hand device, and the idea that *Voice Box* seeks to illustrate.²⁴

In short, when voices seem to exemplify racial vocal norms it is *because they act out a choreography that gives rise to these sounds*; it is not because their bodies are limited, able to emit only these sounds. The correlation between race and vocal timbre is not due to innate physical qualities; rather, it is identifiable precisely because societies categorize others according to constructed notions of race. Moreover, people often identify themselves in racial terms, and their vocal actions are prescribed accordingly through this *structural choreography* adopted by or imposed upon them.²⁵ It is when timbre is believed to sound innate qualities, rather than qualities articulated by a vocal body that has been formed by structural hierarchies, that bodies are correspondingly categorically organized. Therefore, in order to reimag-

ine relations between race and sound in general, and race and timbre in particular, we must first radically rethink the most fundamental notions of sound and timbre, as well as the theoretical and analytical tools we use to address them. Considering voice as action rather than as sound affords us a productive entry into this important undertaking. The first intervention enabled by such a conception is the possibility of disentangling vocal timbres from the notion that they are innate rather than constructed.

Intervention Two: Play within the structure

Considering singing from the complementary perspectives of material and action not only offers ways to think through and beyond voice as timbre, but also shows us a way into theorizing voice as it functions in tension between structurally imposed bodily practices and individual play or agency. We have established that singing is not a noun (sound) but a verb—an action that gives rise to sound. While I have long considered singing to be a hidden choreography,²⁶ this notion might be refined by drawing on William Forsythe's ideas on the work of the choreographer and dancer. I will now offer a model through which we may think about singing in relation to the structural limits imposed upon voices and bodies.

Forsythe, himself a choreographer and dancer, considers choreography—or, more specifically, what he terms the “choreographic object”—as “elicit[ing] action upon action.” He views choreography as “an environment of grammatical rule governed by exception,”²⁷ and demonstrates how this plays out in the history-, genre-, and style-based concerns of ballet and other western dance practices. For Forsythe, choreography and dance inhabit two distinct realms. He puts it simply: “they are not the same.”²⁸ While I understand this to mean that although, traditionally, choreography is thought to determine how some body dances—i.e., the choreography shapes the dancing, both moving towards the same end—for Forsythe choreography and dancing do not necessarily share goals. For him, then, choreography is about a basic condition—as fundamental to the determination of movement as, say, the restrictions imposed on (and the possibilities offered to) a person wearing skis—and its horizon is that condition in relation to the body. The art of dancing—whether it occurs within a pre-established choreographic condition or outside such a context—is realized through a continuously maturing ability to differentiate between what, for most people, will remain subterranean gradations of difference, the global effect of which is felt but which would, in most instances, prove impossible for a layperson to perform or pinpoint. While “choreography is an organizational skill,” Forsythe explains, dancing is about “accumulating expertise in difference” (Forsythe, 2012)—that is, it is about developing the ability to distinguish between two



Figure 3: Movement that calls forth vocal sounds ranges from coerced to lightly suggested action.

very similar, yet distinct bodily positions or movements. Loosely adapting Forsythe’s model, I understand choreography, then, as an external structural force that—with a decisive power that ranges from “coercion” to “suggestion”—funnels the body through certain movements and stances rather than others. It is a condition within which we carry out actions, whether those actions are considered dance or, as we will see, song.

Forsythe asks whether choreography must either reside in or be funneled through the body alone. His own answer is “no,” and to this end he develops a practice involving the choreographic object. One example of a Forsythean choreographic object can be seen in the piece *White Bouncy Castle*, which indeed consists of a giant white bouncy castle.²⁹

The physical properties of the environment provided by the bouncy castle offer certain options for activity (bouncing, falling) rather than others (walking, standing still).³⁰ A feather duster is another choreographic object. Holding it perfectly still, for example, requires a particular range of bodily stances. “If you hold a feather duster, you realize that you are vibrating the entire time. It tells you something about yourself physically. That’s what makes something a choreographic object,” says Forsythe. “You’re looking at how you move unconsciously, and you try to engage with that.”³¹ The choreographic object is a channeling of (subconsciously) unfolding bodily activity. It is a significant departure from the definition of traditional choreography—a prescribed set of movements—since it fails to offer directives on a micro level. For example, it does not tell the body to bounce around in this particular way, at this speed, with this quality of movement. Rather, it offers a meta-condition that renders these movements, speeds, and qualities the only options. In Forsythe’s words, a choreographic object is “a perfect ecology” that offers an “ideal logic.”³²

This is useful for my thinking about singing as an action carried out through a choreographic directive because it also envisions choreography as a set of actions called forth by a set of conditions. In *White Bouncy Castle*, Forsythe offers his cast of dancers, which consists of audience members, the condition of a physical environment with a wobbly, uneven surface that will cushion potential falls. Particular types of movements, their qualities, and so

on arise as a result of *inhabiting* the castle's condition. Similarly, the minute inner movements giving rise to vocal timbres that have been organized into various racial categories are not innate, but rather situational. In this case, the condition is the situation of a given person within a structural concept of race. To be clear, the participants in the bouncy-castle-as-choreographic-object scenario do not always bounce and wobble *outside* the bouncy castle; in fact it would be close to impossible to do so. The experience of being defined by a given racial category is an equally strong and indeed formational choreographic object. One's performance of a racial category, then, is not determined by innate qualities, but takes place within and as a direct result of the condition of racial categorization that holds the body within its movement-action structure. The *White Bouncy Castle* within which voices and the acts of singing are formed is race.

While the choreographic situation locks in the meta-structure of movement, the dance is the particular way in which a person moves through that structure, and the way in which she tackles minute options and choices within the landscape. Similarly, to realize that singing takes place through the funnel of the choreographic object, which is seemingly an impenetrable condition (exemplified by the power and importance of racial categories, in this case), is not to suggest that voice is completely locked within a hegemonic structure, such that each person only vocalizes within a fixed, formative grid. While I believe that voice is commonly heard and articulated within such a configuration, I would like to consider the possibility of room for agency, even within this tightly confined structure. Thinking about singing as an interlocking dynamic of choreography and dance (rather than as sound) opens a space for thinking about agency in this situation beyond sheer subversion, disruption, sabotage, destabilization, and other such forces. While I will not explore this idea in the detail it deserves here, I find Forsythe's notion of dance productive in considering these types of counter-forces against a choreography or hegemonic structure that is also controlled by those very forces.

Forsythe defines dancing, in contrast to choreography, as "differentiat[ing] between different qualities."³³ This means that one can find room for play within the structure of the choreography. To me this seems to be a more productive way of conceptualizing agency in singing as dance than the idea that individual expression in dance is merely the subversion and disruption of choreography. "A life in dancing," to quote Forsythe again, "is an accumulation of sensitivities to very small differences" (Forsythe, 2012). Similarly, a person's voice is an accumulation of experiences which allows us to find and articulate individual agency within a structure that itself consists of many nuances.

Thus, the dance that is vocal micro–choreography is constituted by the particular way in which the vocalizer moves through concrete limitations determined by structural forces. The way in which, for example, we are expected to vocalize as women or as men within a given culture may be seen as choreography. The dance, in this example, would be the specific ways in which we choose to vocalize, through and despite these limitations. The dance of singing is *the particular way* in which one moves through, vocalizes within, and inhabits a choreographic situation or ecology.

The dynamic I wish to tease out exists between enclosed structural limitations and the individual timbres it is possible to create given those limited options. In other words, each action is a composite, each deriving impetus and impulse from the choreography and the dance, the meta–structure and micro–articulation. This format for thinking through racialized voices allows us to account for the top–down enclosure of vocalization, while leaving room to pinpoint individual agency in this admittedly limited situation of negotiation.

Moving from an understanding of singing as sound to singing as materially unfolding action has allowed us to propose a new, dance–based model for the analysis of voice and vocal phenomena. This model enables us to think about voices as materially structured and materially shaped through action, while remaining aware of the potential for play within that strict structure. Additionally, as I will discuss in the following section, such insights allow us to understand the role of the listener or audience in greater detail, especially in regard to the ways in which the listener partakes in the production of what he or she perceives.

With the “nested circles of singing” sketched in Figure 4, I offer perspectives on the relationship between what the singer herself brings to her voice (in other words, the physical materiality of the voice) and the listener’s input into what is nonetheless the singer’s voice. Layer 1 contains the singer’s actions (for example, the movement of her ligaments); Layer 2 contains any change effected by, or any outcome of, an action, such as increased heart rate, sweating, or vocal cord vibration and sound production. While the entirety described by the three circles appears to a listener as a single package, only the two innermost layers are provided by the singer; the listener herself creates Layer 3.

In Rubin’s experiment, the listeners’ composite impressions were formed in part by a photograph of a person, which strongly influenced what the listeners subsequently heard. The same recording, then, could be heard in two different ways—the same experience could be diagrammed with two different “third circles”: as an eloquent lecture or as a disorganized lecture. However, the two innermost circles, the material and the action/output, remained the same. We can see, then, that Layer 3 is not unmediated output

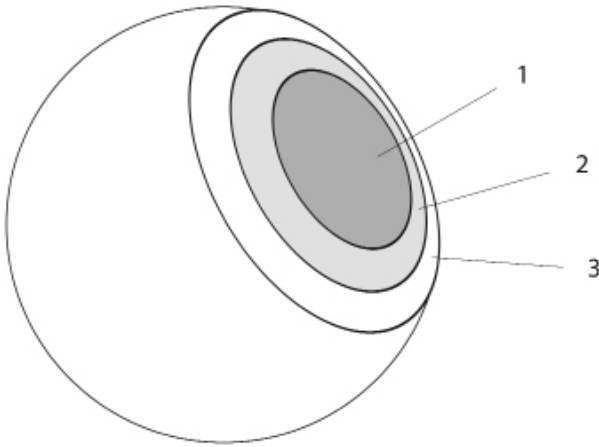


Figure 4: Nested circles of singing.

produced by the singer, but is rather created by the listener based on her experiences, values, and beliefs. This model suggests that when the listener ceases to imagine that singing is passively received sound, and instead accepts that it is action, the listener may come to understand that what she experiences as the voice (Layer 3) is the result of combined contributions by the singer as well as the listener herself. Thus, singing is *not* unmediated material supplied only by the singer.

Re-conceptualizing singing as material- and action-based clarifies the limitations involved in understanding singing as sound. Action-based thinking provides a more productive understanding of the dynamic structure within which voices are *produced and perceived* as they are made to signify (racially and otherwise). In addition, considering singing in terms of *choreography and dancing* illuminates the important role of the interlocking relationship between the hegemonic structures that funnel the body into certain types of actions that in turn produce particular vocal timbres, and the way we act within these given choreographies, each of us with a different tongue, row of teeth and oral, nose and throat cavities. As both dancing and choreography, a single voice can present itself as multiple phenomena with particular characters determined by perceivers. Voice as sound and voice as action, then, are themselves nested definitions of voice; the predominance of one definition or the other depends on the values and preconceptions harbored by individual perceivers (hence the existence of Layer 3).

In summary, while action-based thinking and the choreography-dance model offer ways in which to understand voice and insights into its production, the nested circles suggest a way of understanding the strong role of the perceiver and her beliefs. We could even say that the listener calls forth the voice according to her beliefs.

Conclusion

This project is part of my ongoing effort to think about how music, sound, and voices are conceptualized, theorized, and analyzed, and about what kind of knowledge such definitions and analyses have enabled and closed off. In particular, I have an ongoing interest in how the sensorium beyond sound feeds into conceptions of voice and race that, on the surface, seemingly take place in the sonic register. Because “blackness” as it is “smelled, heard, and felt” (in the words of Mark M. Smith; 2006: 47), has been so difficult to “explain,” and has been considered an aspect of human existence that is not “definite or tangible,” perceptions of race have for the most part been left unchallenged. Nella Larsen writes exactly about this in *Passing*, her 1929 novella on the multisensory registers of race. In a conversation with (a white character) Hugh Wentworth, Irene, who has passed into white society, replies to his reflection on not being able to tell whether a person is white or black:

[Irene:] “Well, don’t let that worry you. Nobody can. Not by looking.”

[Hugh:] “Not by looking, eh? Meaning?”

[Irene:] “I’m afraid I can’t explain. Not clearly. There are ways. But they’re not definite or tangible.” (1929 [2004]: 206)

What Irene means here is that although it is clothed and explained in such sensory terms, race is not simply performed or detected in the visual sensory realm alone. Rather, the sum of what we process multi-sensorially is trained, by virtue of existence in social environments, to carry out the work of corroborating socially constructed racial distinctions.

To understand the social and sensory structures wherein race is constructed, we need to carefully deconstruct, point by point, *how precisely* race eludes the “definite or tangible.” This important and challenging work has been carried out by a number of scholars from several disciplines. I’ll name just a few. John Cruz (1999) listens in to abolitionists listening to slave songs, and hears how the reinterpretation of the black singer (seeing him no longer as a slave but as a potentially Christian convert or religious *subject*) changes the sound of his voice and song from “unintelligible noise” to “mournful spirituals” (59). Deborah Wong’s (2000) theorization of race, through a performance-studies framework, reveals how “[t]he somatic realization of

race is one of the great performative, destructive accomplishments of any society” (87). And, most recently, Daphne Brooks’s brilliant subterranean feminist history of *Porgy and Bess* opens infinite possibilities of thinking through the performance of race, as did her book *Bodies in Dissent* (2006).³⁴ By shifting the question at hand from whether or not African American singers should refuse to perform *Bess* because of her one-dimensional character, to the question of how to recover the character *Bess* as a site of “black women’s Avant-garde musicking,” Brooks changes the premise upon which African-American singers are perceived.

These scholars bring to light various facets of a great *White Bouncy Castle*, the sociocultural conditions within which twenty-first-century voices are formed: a condition that we call “race.” In my own way, through analysis that takes the multisensory dimensions of vocal culture seriously, I try to understand the complex material history present in bodies, vocal timbres, and listening practices. My contribution, then, is an attempt to think through specific multi-sensorial analytical strategies that address vocal timbre, with the ultimate goal of better understanding both sonic offerings and listening practices.

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Notes

1. Steven Connor sharply exposes this fallacy in the opening page of his monograph on ventriloquism (2000:1).

2. For foundational work on race as socially constructed, see Omi and Winant (1986); on the same topic from anthropological and historical perspectives, see Smedley and Smelley (2005); and on the legal construction of race, see, for example, Haney-López (2006).
3. Many have discussed timbre's elusiveness and the high levels of subjective and extrasonic information that contribute to the perception thereof, including Fales (2002), Olwage (2004) and Wallmark (forthcoming). Additionally, see Hajda et al (1997) for a review of timbre research undertaken in the last fifty years.
4. Also see Annette Schlichter's close reading and apt critique of Judith Butler. Schlichter argues "that the repression of the sonoric aspects of the voice can be read as a symptom of the role of materiality in the theory of gender performativity. Despite Butler's attempts to attend to the material body within a discourse of the performative, the notion of materiality is constrained through the economy of the sign and remains subordinated to the realm of intelligibility, a hierarchy that Butler explicitly rejects" (2011:31).
5. Described in Carson 1995 [1992]: 119–137; Cavarero 2005; Connor 2000; Daughtry, forthcoming; Weidman 2006), and the oculo-centric clinical understanding of the vocal apparatus common in medicine and classical vocal pedagogy (including Rodgers 2010; Sterne 1999).
6. Ira Sadoff specifically addresses the metaphor of the poet's voice, a metaphor that is derived from the human voice. I find her description succinct and applicable to the sonorous voice, as I believe that similar sentiments regarding the "poetic voice" as a metaphor are projected back onto the sonorous human voice. In Sadoff's words recounted by Lesley Wheeler (2008): "What we extract from the page is a series of inscriptions analogous to a voice" (221); voice as "workshop cliché," he continues, "assumes myths of constancy, coherence, and universality," and these myths enable the reader's desirable illusion of intimacy with the poet" (Wheeler 2008:37).
7. Please see Eidsheim (2011) on a detailed reading of the transduction and reception of voice. Sound cannot exist in a vacuum; for sound to perpetuate, it needs a material through which to transduce. In my study of Juliana Snapper's underwater opera practice, I consider sound's differing transduction in water versus air, and how singers' and listeners' material bodies interact differently with water versus air. This means that sound takes on a distinct character when it is transduced through water, and another character when it moves through air. The most notable difference is that, through water, sound transduces around four times faster than it does in air (although there are variables, depending on the saltine level of the water, its temperature and pressure, etc.). Additionally, because singing and hearing are materially bound, the material body immersed in water hears differently from bodies immersed in air. For details see Eidsheim (2011).
8. While a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to suggest that this model may also be useful in understanding how socially sanctioned categories other than race—such as, for example, gender and class—impinge on voice.
9. It is interesting that the power of such seemingly subtle differences and the way in which they place the speaker in dynamic relationships of power or intimacy, or in "us versus them" situations, is also evident in the extent to which one's interlocutor "accommodates" one's speech. (See Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) for additional information on accommodation theory.) Oprah Winfrey's television interviews have been analyzed for the presence of such accommodation. Winfrey pronounces the vowel of words like I and my with either a monophthong or diphthong. When she discussed or introduced African American guests on her program, the monophthong pronunciation was used 38% of the time; whereas in the presence of non-African American guests, the same pronunciation was only used 10% of the time (Rickford and Rickford 2000:106–7). While it is believed that the difference is

below the conscious threshold of all parties involved (and when it is detected, it most likely has the effect of mimicry or making fun), similar accommodations can be found in other social dynamics as well. For example, see Gregory and Webster (1996) in relation to class.

10. According to Niedzielski, the majority of white, middle class Detroit residents consider their speech Standard American English. However, the raised diphthong is dominant in their speech. Besides that social information informed the respondent's listening, Niedzielski's study also showed that with the label "Canada," Detroit residents were able to hear the raised diphthong of a recording that indeed was of a Detroit resident with a raised diphthong. However, they did not hear raised diphthong when the recording's label read "Michigan."

11. Niedzielski concludes the study saying, "The results of this study suggest social information must be included in future research in phonetics, sociolinguistics, and social psychology, particularly in the areas of speech perception and language change" (1999: 84). I would add vocal timbres to that list.

12. The information regarding the subjects is limited to that they were recruited from basic speech communication classes at a large southeastern university.

13. Ronald Radano has also observed that we never "Let the music speak for itself" (2003:xi). This is so, as he continues, because "all we hear in black music, or indeed in any kind of music, is inevitably invested in words; in the stores we tell, in the histories we recite, in the associations we make" (xi).

14. This is of course far from a new argument, however, but one that has received less regular attention in visual-centric discourses.

15. While pitch indeed does contribute to timbre, a pitch can be sung or otherwise articulated without the voice losing its distinct timbre.

16. Including Dillard 1972: 39–72; 186–228; Eidsheim 2008: 7–12, 30–103; 158–70; Mann 2008; Miller 2004: 218–22.

17. Walton and Orlikoff (1994), however, argue the opposite. Excerpting one-second acoustic samples from a sustained /a/, from 50 black and 50 white adult males (newly admitted inmates at the Mississippi Department of Corrections State Penitentiary at Parchman), the study reports that acoustic analysis showed that "although within ranges reported by previous studies of normal voices, the black speakers had greater frequency perturbation, significantly greater amplitude perturbation, and a significantly lower harmonic-to-noise ratio than did the white speakers." Listeners were able to "identify the black and white speaker in a voice pair 60% of the time," which the researchers point out is "a level significantly greater than chance" (741). However, there were "no significant differences in the mean fundamental frequency or formant structure of the voice samples." The researchers therefore concluded: "listeners relied on difference in spectral noise to discriminate the black and white speakers" (738).

To the work I present here, these findings are not contradictory. Firstly, it is exactly because the voice is an organic instrument and matter, infinitely malleable and shaped by daily usage, formed by the way a given society identifies a person and the way a person identifies herself, that it can sound according to the social groups identified by a given society. Secondly, the researchers note that while previous studies have examined whether listeners can identify "black and white speakers" in the context of contextual speech (which contain "phonological, morphological, lexical, and/or syntactical information"—and here the studies Baugh, 1983; Dillard, 1972, 1977; Fasold, 1981; Hanley, 1951; Labov, 1983; Tarone, 1972; Wofram & Fasold, 1974 were referenced), they would like to identify the difference between black and white speakers "from isolated vowel samples and to provide more detailed analysis of the acoustic characteristics of those samples as they relate to voice quality" (739). I read that

to mean that they seek to identify race present in voice “prior” to the vocal level of accent, which they recognize is a social factor. However, while the acoustic analysis and the listener identification analysis were undertaken with the vowel /a/, isolated and decontextualized, that vowel /a/ was produced by a person who learned to pronounce that vowel /a/ within the context of speech and therefore, although the sound sample represented an isolated /a/, the quality of that vowel /a/ cannot be isolated from larger contexts. Thirdly, while the researchers mock George Krapp’s (1924) “undocumented ‘experiment’” and conclusion, which states that “Negro speakers cannot be distinguished from white speakers merely by the quality of their voices” (quoted on 738), Walton and Orlikoff rely on a 1945 study from apartheid South–Africa, comparing “102 cadaveric larynges from Bantu South African blacks with those obtained from 23 white South Africans” wherein the study’s author, Boshoff, “noted several cartilaginous and soft tissue differences relating to both size and biomechanics.” Walton and Orlikoff cite Boshoff’s conclusion: “On the whole, as demonstrated by the musculature in particular, the South African Negro larynx is a more powerful organ than that of the Caucasian. Those muscles which are the same in the two races are broader, stronger, and often of more complicated attachment in the Negro. The finding in the Negro of distinct differences from the Caucasian anatomy of the vocal apparatus would naturally lead one to suspect similar differences in function, more especially vocalisation (pp. 49–50).” Considering the Apartheid context within Boshoff’s study took place, it is difficult to imagine any other outcome than stark difference. To the contrary, a leading American otolaryngologist has stated that by examining vocal folds, it oftentimes is difficult to distinguish men from women, let alone one so-called races, from another (Eidsheim 2008).

18. See Weidman (2006) and Daughtry (forthcoming).

19. Even prior to birth, the neonate is formed by and through the soundscape that is created within the uterus and penetrates it from without. While most experiments with neonates’ listening abilities are performed after 26 weeks of gestation, the onset of hearing, Arabin notes, “does not seem to be an all or nothing phenomenon” (2002: 425); responses have been observed as early as 20 weeks. Speculations on the centrality and impact of such relation to the sonic world is even considered by psychotherapists, who may therefore postulate that relationships with the mother’s voice as presence and absence begin prior to birth and might even present proto-experiences of presence and absence, thus may be important to analytic work with borderline and psychotic patients (Maiello 1995).

20. The Voice Box project is currently in production; currently only prototypes exist. The project is scheduled to première in fall of 2012.

21. While it is not my motivation nor primary intention to reference the “Máscara de Flandres” (or Iron Mask) used as punishment of slaves and prisoners in Brazil and elsewhere, or other mask-like contraptions used during slave trade, I recognize that Voice Box cannot but evoke such histories of oral control. For the history of a discussion of Jacques Arago’s image of a man wearing the “Máscara de Flandres,” see J. Handler and A. Steiner (2006). For the appropriation of the image to stories about martyred female slaves in Brazil, see J. Handler and K. Hayes, (2009). I thank Kariann Goldschmitt and Jason Stanyek for talking with me about this.

22. I thank Mandy–Suzanne Wong for reminding me about this.

23. We are familiar with this idea in the context of sport. For example, we see that the distinct training associated with a particular sport, say, long distance running versus sprinting, conditions and shape the long distance runner’s or sprinter’s bodies differently.

24. Here, I come to a conclusion that opposes that of Walton and Orlikoff (see endnote 17). I would argue that when difference is discernable, rather than due to innate racial difference, it is due to the way in which the vocal apparatus is physically and materially used and performed.
25. With Grant Olwage (2004), I don't necessarily seek to "wish away 'the black voice'" (208). Within the context of his study, "the black voice is something very real that has a history." In the face of colonizing and civilizing project within the South African context, maintaining a distinct vocal culture can both be thought through as an act of subversion as well as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other [was] a subject of a difference that [was] almost the same, but not quite" as Homi K. Bhabha has argued (quoted in Olwage 2004:209).
26. See Eidsheim (2008).
27. Forsythe, William, "Choreographic Objects." <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html> (accessed March 9, 2012).
28. In a private conversation on March 7, 2012, and during a public interview with Tim Murray, on March 10, 2012, William Forsythe described the realization that dancing and choreography "are not the same."
29. "The choreography," according to Forsythe's official website, "is the result of complete physical destabilisation [sic.] and the resulting social absurdity. The inadvertant [sic.] euphoria that results from the situation is infectious and, in some cases, addictive." http://www.williamforsythe.de/installations.html?&no_cache=1&detail=1&uid=30 (accessed March 12, 2012).
30. See the promotional video for the White Bouncy Castle http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNGBbj_CmPo, (accessed March 9, 2012).
31. Public discussion of "Forsythe's artistic practice, his development of choreographic objects, and their relationship to the choreographic work, Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time." "A conversation with William Forsythe and Timothy Murray. Milstein and Rand Halls. Sponsored by the A. D. White Professors-at-Large Program." March 10, 2012, Cornell University. http://www.arts.cornell.edu/sochum/shc_evens.html (accessed March 9, 2012).
32. Ibid.
33. For Forsythe this means: a skilled dancer can both differentiate between and articulate or carry out minute physical differences. An unskilled dancer would notice that, say, an arm had moved from a position alongside the body to one horizontally extended from the body, while a skilled dancer, or differentiator, would see the fine details of how the arm was held alongside the body and the quality of the movement to a horizontal position, and would decipher the cues and impetus that had given rise to the movement. She would also be able to carry out infinite variations of this movement. A less-skilled dancer or differentiator would only be able to see, in that movement, two crude positions.
34. See Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Descent*.

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Harriet Jacobs Gets a Hearing

Ashon Crawley

I

What can one hear in confinement, and how can that hearing be connective lineament? In her grandmother's crawlspace for seven years—compressed as a means to escape, confined with access only to shallow air as a means to flight—Harriet Jacobs was both discarded and discardable.¹ What did it mean to be discarded, for discardable materiality to bespeak an ontological condition? What can we learn from Jacobs's existence in the crawlspace, of her throwing herself into claustrophobic conditions to stage her eventual scurrying away? Her discarded body bodies forth socially and a sociality. What is the social life—as opposed to the social death—of the discarded? Her existence in that crawlspace, as an object that was thrown and thrown away, is cause for celebration. Harriet Jacobs knew something about black performance as a mode of sociality that is still reproduced today.² Sound, for Harriet Jacobs, was an important resource for allowing her thriving, even in the most horrific of conditions.

A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by any thing but rats and mice. It was a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles, according to southern custom for such buildings. The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to loose the board floor. There was no admission for either light or air . . . To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total.³

Jacobs's escape is a sonic event: she wrote about the sound she heard in confinement, and that hearing was foundational for the telling of her narrative. This essay considers what it means to hear Jacobs's narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,⁴ how sound reverberates throughout the text, how sound is residue and materiality of thought that memory refuses to forget. Severed sight, eclipsed connection: "And now came the trying hour for

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that drove of human beings, driven away like cattle, to be sold they knew not where. Husbands were torn from wives, parents from children, never to look upon each other again this side of the grave. There was wringing of hands and cries of despair.”⁵ Sound remains. Her text is a songbook. Listen:

When I had been in the family [of Dr. Flint,⁶ the man who purchased and subsequently harassed her daily for sex] a few weeks, one of the plantation slaves was brought to town, by order of his master. It was near night when he arrived, and Dr. Flint ordered him to be taken to the work house, and tied up to the joist, so that his feet would just escape the ground. In that situation he was to wait till the doctor had taken his tea. I shall never forget the night. Never before, in my life, had I heard hundreds of blows fall, in succession, on a human being. His piteous groans, and his “O, pray don’t, massa,” rang in my ear for months afterwards.⁷

Sound remains. Of course, the songbook is replete with lament. To consider the sounds, those piteous groans, is to think about how sound can prompt movement towards escape. But more, sound compels the movement of pen to paper. That is, the sounds Jacobs hears “rang in her ears for months” so much so that she not only remembered the sound, but retold the sound to her audience. That ringing sound, that emanatory vibration, are the grounds for the narrativity of the slave girl’s incidents. Sound—what was heard—thus, was the residual materiality of enslavement.⁸ There appears to be, embedded in the text, what Diana Taylor might call performance as a vital act of transfer, attempting to transfer the knowledge of enslavement to readers by way of recalling and retelling how the institution sounded, how the institutional force of enslavement reverberated, because sight was broken.⁹ The loss of sight and connection is invaginated—cut and augmented—by the sense of sound, by what sound does, particularly by reverberation and echo. For Jacobs, sonic vibrations are a mnemonic reservoir that recalls sights, sounds, smells, and touches. Sound not only recalls memory but is the memory itself. Thus, I argue, the sonic of Jacobs’s text shares a relationship with how she cognized enslavement and how she encouraged her audience, through the reiteration of sound events, to *listen* to the text rather than (merely) read it.

In Jacobs’s recalling, the antebellum soundscape compelled thoughts of fear as well as excitement, terror as well as joy. She told of how slave codes were read aloud on ships: “Every vessel northward bound was thoroughly examined, and the law against harboring fugitives was read to all on board”;¹⁰ how Dr. Flint would read letters aloud to his family and to her grandmother;¹¹

and how sound technology was used to facilitate flight and escape: “It was not long before we heard the paddle of oars, and the low whistle, which had been agreed upon as a signal.”¹² Having spent time under floorboards, in a swamp and years in a crawlspace, Jacobs’s text continually “hears” sound through spaces of darkness, spaces where sight was at best compromised and at worst, impossible. What materializes is a theory of memory, recall and narrative that depends upon lost sight, amplified noise. The senses become, following Fred Moten, an ensemble, a suite.

If the sensual dominant of a performance is visual (if you’re there, live, at the club), then the aural emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the visual . . . Similarly, if the sensual dominant of the performance is aural (if you’re at home, in your room, with the recording), then the visual emerges as that which is given in its fullest possibility by the aural . . . in hearing the space and silence, the density and sound, that indicate and are generated by [the] movement[s].¹³

With Jacobs’s songbook in mind, I argue that in order to understand the conditions of enslavement, escape, the possibilities for kinship, ideas of terror and joy that she recounts, one must attend to the ways sound is inserted in her text. Hers is a text that moves in the way of black performance as a giving and withholding. Not only did she give narrative but withhold names for her own and others’ safety, she gave escape by way of withdrawing from view. What her contemporaneous readers would ascertain about the status of slave girls manifested by a visual that depended upon being unseen, by a soundscape that was intensified. Jacobs’s proto-black feminist project,¹⁴ written particularly to white women to engage them in abolition work, capitalized upon space, silence, density and sound to bespeak the horrors of enslavement so that they would not only visualize enslavement but hear it, taste it, feel it. The sonic in her text functioned in the service of presencing enslavement without allowing a reader’s slippage into mere empathy, which, Saidiya Hartman says, dovetails in a “too-easy intimacy” that effaces the enslaved and “fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead.”¹⁵

In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman explores the various ways terror festers in the most unlikely stagings and performances: in dances, songs and prayers.¹⁶ Distilling her argument through the “terrible spectacle” of enslavement, Hartman considers scenes where terror might hardly be detected, showing that the quotidian and mundane occurrences of everyday life are important, critical sites that must be given attention if the reader is to robustly understand the horrors of such an institution. Hartman explains how “*Incidents*, by utilizing seduction and inquiring into its dangers . . . is fraught with perils precisely because there is no secure or autonomous exte-

riority from which the enslaved can operate or to which they can retreat.”¹⁷ I want to think about the sonic dimensions of such declarations—is black humanity possible; is there an exteriority towards which the black subject can escape?—in order to build on Hartman’s rigorous analyses.

Attention to sound in and as Jacobs’s text is critical for theorizing resistance—which she says is “hopeless”—in the crawlspace.¹⁸ The declaration that “resistance is hopeless” for the slave girl highlights the limits of resistance discourse. Since Jacobs was successful with her escape—lengthy and horrific though it was—we must be attuned to how her performances were not (merely about) resistance but were (about) some new thing, some enlivened way to be in the world. N., the main character in Nathaniel Mackey’s *Bedouin Hornbook* offers critical theory to think about compression and confinement, and the possibility for making light, making love, as and in sound. The book is in epistolary form, a collection of letters—not dissimilar to the letter-writing that Harriet Jacobs engaged in the crawlspace—that all concern the nature of sound and sentiment, the nature of the sonic and social world. N., a musician and critical theorist, created a form of writing that I believe is consistent with Jacobs’s dwelling in the crawlspace: she was a Compressed Accompaniment before N. ever wrote about them:

I’ve come up with a very dense form of writing, brief blocks of which are to be used to punctuate and otherwise season the music. Compressed Accompaniments I call them. I’m enclosing copies of the ones I’ve written for this piece. [. . .] What happens is that each station is presided over, so to speak, by one of the Accompaniments, and in the course of the performance each player moves from station to station, at each of which he or she recites a particular Accompaniment which “defines” that station. (I put the word “defines” in quotes because the point is to occupy a place, not to advocate a position. The word “informs,” it occurs to me now, might get more aptly at what I mean.) [. . .] Some would say it’s not my place to make comments on what I’ve written, but let me suggest that what’s most notably at issue in the Accompaniments’ he/she confrontation is a binary round of works and deeds whereby the dead accost a ground of uncapturable “stations.” The point is that any insistence on locale must have long since given way to locus, that the rainbow bridge which makes for unrest ongoingly echoes what creaking the rickety bed of conception makes. I admit this is business we’ve been over before, but bear with it long enough to hear the cricketlike chirp one gets from the guitar in most reggae bands as the echoic spectre of a sexual “cut” (sex/unsexed, seeded/unsown, etc.)—“ineffable glints or vaguely audible grunts of unavoidable alarm.”¹⁹

Near suffocation, Jacobs had very little room to maneuver her body, very little air to breathe, and very little light through a crack in the wall. Having dwelt in the crawlspace for seven years, she can be said to have “defined” that small, compressed space by her presence, a position she occupied

without advocating for its health or safety. Thus, I quoted Mackey because the passage is illustrative of the ongoing preoccupation with movement and compression, antiphony and texture, that animated Jacobs's performance, which vivifies black sonic performance traditions from Spirituals to Gospel, from Blues to Jazz. Dr. Flint continually focused on Jacobs's absence, her locale in the purported north, but he should have yielded to what N. called the "locus," which is the idea of center, source, and flow. Her ability to recall life that transpired while she was in the crawlspace—her mode of escape—depended upon a forced looking away that heightened her awareness of the sound in and around her. The sound heard, generally conceived of as "noise"—of children and horses and wind blowing, for example—was differently intentioned, through imagination, in Jacobs's text. Jacobs was compressed, indeed, but also accompanied, which is to say in existence with others, pointing us towards the ways in which compression and constraint do not ever remove possibilities for movement, flight, and escape. Listen.

Jacobs's attunement to black performance—which is to say the transfer of resistance as the force for life, the transfer of resistance as energetic field, through the reiteration of motions, migrations, flights, fleings, abscondings, escapes—through Jacobs's own stilled flight, stilled escape in the nearly suffocating crawlspace concerns, quite literally, breath and movement, giving and withholding. Giving herself over to conditions of confinement, withholding as much sound as possible in order to remain undetectable, those movements were held together in her performance of/as escape. Jacobs's life and escape anticipated and pre-performed Martin Heidegger's later theory of being, time, and the given. Heidegger lectured on the way in which past, present and future all participate in that which gives time, how each depends on the others in terms of proximities and approaches.²⁰ Barely experienced, that which is *present* retreats while the past and future share a buoyant, directional relationship with any present: "time appears as the succession of nows, each of which, barely named, already disappears into the 'ago' and is already being pursued by the 'soon.'"²¹ Heidegger states, "Being *is* not. There is, It gives Being as the unconcealing; as the gift of unconcealing it is retained in the giving."²² He continues, "Time *is* not. There is, It gives time. The giving that gives time is determined by denying and withholding nearness."²³ Heidegger reminds readers that Being and Time are not actual but their givenness, their gifting, their extending outward and manifesting a sociality and relationality are real.

Again, Jacobs anticipated and pre-performed this. She unconcealed herself as a gift by enclosing herself in tight quarters; she discarded herself because of the discarded nature of the enslaved. That discardedness or, following Heidegger, "self-withdrawal" is a giving, it is a gift, that not only

takes place in “time” but gives temporality. The text she writes moves quickly and what took place in the span of years shuttles quickly but was no less real. Temporal presencing depended upon the gift of unconcealment. To be attuned to the gift and the given is to consider an irreducible relationship of giving, blackness and the discarded. Daphne Brooks thinks through issues of approach and proximity—and, thus, giving and withholding—in her theorization of black cultural production and performance.²⁴ Brooks’s contention of “motion, migration, and flight” as an “operative trope in the black abolitionist cultural production of the slave’s narrative” elucidated how I think about how this essay opened, how I think about being discarded and discardable, how I think about being thrown and thrown away.²⁵

II

How is it possible for the terribly terrorizing to also be terribly beautiful? Why are occasions for marginalization also taken up as a resource for resilience? That is to ask why motion, migration and flight—even when forced—allow for those moving, those in migration, those in flight to imagine a future, to use the pathway as the occasion to think a different relation to the given world? There was something given in the man’s “piteous groans”—along with “heart rending shrieks,”²⁶ as screams—that Jacobs recounted that exceeded the scream’s limits, an uncontainable outside of the sound given in/as sound. What was given was a gift. But that gift is a withholding. Some excess materiality withheld, against the scream’s sonic materiality. Immediately given in the scream is the condition of what it meant to be enslaved, what it meant to be held against one’s will. But also given in that scream is a desire, a provocation against such an institution. The reverb that remained in Jacobs’s ear for “months” afterward—one could argue years, even, since she retold the story years later in the narrative—was a gift: of movement toward abolition. How is proximity—distance, nearness, or, following Heidegger, “approach”—as that which gives time, gives space, an organizing principle for black performance?

While the “piteous groans” as but one form of screaming quicken Jacobs’s knowledge of the distasteful, doleful nature of enslavement, we must also consider what it means to occupy the space of a scream, what it means to position oneself within sonic materiality that bespeaks burden and pain but also allows for the protection against burden and pain.

When you yell/scream, you take a deep breath and basically hold it to get the sound out . . . so you are not breathing. This leads to decreased oxygenation to the fetus. Oxygenation to the fetus is always important, but becomes critically important during the labor process. The contractions

associated with birth have the potential to lead to decrease oxygenation to the fetus, leading to a certain type of heart deceleration, leading to a possible urgent/emergent situation. So yelling in labor can be like a double whammy.

This quote is from an OB/GYN colleague of mine sent through personal communication, concerns the nature of screaming when giving birth. I first began to think about the relationship of sound to birth when my godson's mother gave birth at a natural birthing center in Philadelphia. The midwife instructed her, telling her that screaming would restrict airflow but moaning would allow her to breathe concurrently. Though the pain is acute, screaming blocks air and, as such, is literally *sound without the exhalation of air*, *sound without the exhalation breath*. So the screams of the man that rang in Jacobs's ear are a withholding of breath and the giving of sound. In this instance, the discarded and the discardable is the emission of sound, the scream itself. The discarded and discardable materiality of scream is art; art insofar as in its presencing, it quickens in the hearer a response, whether an averted hearing so as to not respond or as a desire to listen more deeply, more intently. The scream is an aesthetic object that carries the trace and weight of its source of emanation.

Black performance is the ongoing repetition of giving and withholding, of furnishing forth and withdrawal, of the continual (re)birth of avoidance that Nathaniel Mackey calls the "eva[sion of] each and every natal occasion."²⁷ Screams and moans function as sonic resources that speak to and against each other: moans give breath, screams withhold air, which might suggest a recalibration to the rather insouciant and careless way that "call and response" is invoked as some sort of solitary hinge upon which black performance is articulable. Moans and screams concern the status of breath in incubation, during any moment and by any mode of flight and escape.

But the new, cool thing (re)birthed in Jacobs's performance also includes play, creativity, taunt and trickery, demonstrated by her writing letters to Dr. Flint from her suffocating crawlspace. She utilized the compressed space to articulate and create herself, self-fashioning subjectivity by imagination and wit. Her letters written to Dr. Flint and others "from" locations she could only imagine in the crawlspace were a chorus, continually echoing the sentiment, "I am not here." N. in *Bedouin Hornbook* theorizes the chorus as such:

You bring up the possibility of taunt, a distinct quality of tease you detect in the seductive, almost dovelike smoothness we so often get from the chorus. I'm very much inclined to agree, but I can't help cautioning us both against, again, overhearing rather than hearing what's there. [. . .] What I'm trying to say is that, while I'd agree that there's an aspect of taunt to the chorus' contribution, part of what it taunts is our inclination to hear it as taunt, that the chorus whispers so as not to be overheard"²⁸

Jacobs understood that if sent to Louisiana, there would be unrestricted effacements to her personhood by Dr. Flint's son who cared very little for her. She also understood that north of the Mason and Dixon Line was a freedom that she could only imagine. Jacobs was, thus, against Louisiana as an impossible future and imagined—which is to say, held—impossibility of the present moment. The impossible present was the writing of letters to Dr. Flint “from” New York, Boston and Canada. Those places—both south and north—were imagined as an oppressiveness that her stillness in the crawlspace sought to escape, and her writing was generated out of a knowledge of freedom which was held near and dear to her heart.

When Jacobs wrote about the letters scripted to Dr. Flint, a critique of the idea of textuality and narrativity was given, and curiously enough was discovered when Dr. Flint read the letters aloud to her grandmother, while inserting his own words as edits, rather than reading verbatim the words on the page. He engaged in on-the-spot revision, and by his revision of words, he troubled the status of the literary text itself, the same disrupting that Jacobs's writing produced. The multiple letters “from” varied locales liquidate the possibility of abolitionist activism as simply a matter of writing letters. Though participating herself in the enterprise of literacy, because she infused narrative with sonic claims and memory, Jacobs impels a different sort of ecstatic response. Voices (over)heard in the crawl space beckoned Jacobs's imagination in the two spatial directions that were literally antithetical to the other. She was in a suspended space, stopped time. She obscured the status of the written word, using the confined, constrained mode of literacy as a ruse against the institution that confined and constrained her. She taunted and teased Dr. Flint with her letter writing, compelling him to overhear what wasn't there and to allow what was repetitiously whispered—her presence—go undetected.

Thinking through Jacobs's confinement and compression may help us ask what the sonic—screams and moans, here—shares relationally with birth and/of performance, with blackness. Again: what does it mean to occupy the sonic space of a scream? In the crawlspace:

Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard for in my small den day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. There was joy and there was sadness in the sound. It made my tears flow. How I longed to speak to them! I was eager to look on their faces; but there was no hole, no crack, through which I could peep.²⁹

The suffocating crawlspace was a scream, it is the withholding of life-force while the yielding a way to and for sound. The scream highlights the exteriority of sound and the interiority of the thing withheld. Jacobs was held within the crawlspace and, with little air, sound heard was issued forth all around her. She was in the sonic position of the scream; in the crawlspace she was held breath, loud noise. In the crawlspace she was sounding out by way of restricted air. What was withheld in stifling silence was her life force, her breath, her animus. That which animated the body was withheld while giving. There is a theological dimension here, a mode of sacred sociality within her withholding. The withholding anticipated Heidegger's theorizing on giving and withholding. The withheld is the excess, given in its refusal to give. The scream bears the trace of a gift, unconcealed by concealment. Jacques Derrida elucidates a relationship of gift to economy useful for thinking about the scream:

If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain aneconomic. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must keep a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible. Not impossible but the impossible. The very figure of the impossible. It announces itself, gives itself to be thought as the impossible.³⁰

In the literal economics of enslavement, the gift that is withheld—breath—remains aneconomic to enslavement. The breath is essentially foreign, irreducibly disagreeable to enslavement. That to say—hopefully simply and precisely—that enslavement and the whip could not lash out personhood. Rather, the scream emits—sonically, phonically—to presence the anti-breath, that which remains literally outside this system. The bodying forth of the scream is the refusal of the material gift—air, breath, the capacity of lungs to hold—as essential foreignness, as keeping, holding, arresting, presencing, possessing an irreducibly disagreeableness. The scream also refuses to birth anything, the scream aborts what the whip tries to inculcate.

With the scream, what is heard always exceeds what is audible. With the scream, sound emits by way of the withdrawing and withholding of breath. The screams Jacobs recounts give the gift of withholding relation and relationality, a relationality of antirelationality. This is to say that the whip is irreducibly in foreign relation—sonically—to the one abused. This presencing of the scream implicates a mode of sociality. What does it mean to be this gift, this essentially aneconomic substance that keeps and holds that economy to which it is always foreign; that which is impossible that founds the condition of possibility of an economy of circulation? Sound as discardable. Breath as withheld. Proximity and performance. But breath

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withheld is no less real, it gives and sustains life against the scream that sounds death. The seen and unseen, the scene and unscene, the heard and unheard: these concern space, place, movement and performance. Blackness sings, hums, holds breath, gives scream. The crawlspace Jacobs occupied for seven years makes this audible. Harriet's "performance" forces us to think the relationship between voice and environment. In this effort, we can solicit the help of more recent reflections on this problematic.

III

Alvin Lucier sits in a room in order to hear himself and the room more pronouncedly, using performance art to question how spaces and voices are mutually constitutive. Responding to Lucier's 1970 performance piece *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1970), Timothy Morton writes that Lucier's work is "a powerful demonstration of the shifting and intertwined qualities of foreground and background."³¹ Subjectivity was inculcated at the scene and there is a necessary sonic quality to this production. Lucier's "I"—the one who sits in the room—is constructed by the mutually constitutive relationship of his seated body and the room. Lucier sat in a room recording the process of recording. As such, it was a recording of recording of recording. According to Morton, the "multiple" recordings of Lucier's voice in a room on a tape recorder makes audible the "resonance of the room and feeds it back, amplif[ies] and articulat[es] it through the sound of the speaking voice."³² Multiple recordings on the same tape allow for "the loss of words and for the inscribing of the sound of the room 'itself,'" demonstrating the way in which we come to realize that the voice and the room are mutually determining. One does not precede the other. The work is situated on a wavering margin between words and music, between music and sheer sound, and ultimately between sound (foreground) and noise (background). Retroactively, we realize that the room was present in the voice at the very beginning of the process. The voice was always already in its environment.³³

What is evinced is that the scene that subjects does not ever escape sonic dimensionality. Noise, particularly outside the crawlspace or above the floorboard that Jacobs hears, cannot be discarded but must be gathered and held. Noise must be likewise conceived as materiality of and for thought, if not the very materiality from which any thought could be said to possibly emerge. Attention to the noise of the background bespeaks the insistence of breath, of life force. There is an unheard, an unseen on which we must likewise concentrate during any hearing, during any scene that exceeds a scene's subjection.

Environment, noise and blackness converge in performance for Adrian Piper. Piper's *Art for the Artworld Surface Pattern* constructs a tightly closed room full of sensory information on walls.³⁴ The piece is a rather small room that could fit three to four persons. Walls flat with only one small entrance, the room has no furniture and the walls and ceiling are covered with newspaper clippings of various political struggles and world disasters and "at arbitrary places across the photographs the words NOT A PERFORMANCE are stenciled in red." In Piper's words, the piece "surrounds you with the political problems you ignore and the rationalizations by which you attempt to avoid them."³⁵ There is also the insertion of speech with a tape loop, which is the repudiation of the material on the wall as art, it is a stereotyped reply to the aesthetics "that ignored completely [the] topical thrust" of the work.³⁶ The point of both the visual and sonic overload was to create a situation in which, "in order to distance oneself from the work, one would be forced to adopt some critical stance that did not itself express the aestheticizing response."³⁷

An audience enters this art space only to be confronted with that-which-is-not-art that is the condition of possibility for that-which-is-art. This confrontation takes place on the level of the scene constituted by the seen and the sonic. What Piper does—by including the words "NOT A PERFORMANCE" and the audio loop—is gather and insert that which is typically thrown away. The condition for art is noise, and this condition is necessarily discardable in order to assent to an aesthetic creation. To be attentive to the "surface pattern" is to give attention to that which easily recedes, that which readily is discarded. Attending to the "surface pattern" equally requires attention to that which exists right below the surface, that which is barely there, that which shows up by way of a resistance to showing up. Being in a claustrophobic condition makes this seen and heard. The noisy walls and speech are the material that prompt thought itself, thought that instantiates a "looking away" and a "hearing away" from what is seen and heard in this scene. To think an otherwise aesthetic—an aesthetic grounded in the refusal to look away, to hear away; that is, an aesthetic grounded in a refusal of aversion—occurs at the moment of confrontation with that materiality that is already thought. The ability to withhold (one's thoughts) that Piper facilitated by means of the tape loop declares the possibility for one to be critical, for one to think. Her rhetoric of "distance" and "critical stance" informs my thoughts on black performance as critically distancing. The distance between Jacobs in the crawlspace and the voices she hears bodies forth the criticality of withholding. Withholding is a critical act and

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screams and moans make this audible. Noisy sounds just outside the cramped quarters of claustrophobic escape are purposive for thought, imagination, recall and play.

We should also consider the relationship of sound to kinship that was anything but negated. Previous to his mother's escape to the north, Jacobs's son "Benny" importantly recounts how noise and mothering inform the other. He heard noise issuing from the crawlspace:

I was standing under the eaves, one day, before Ellen [Linda Brent's daughter] went away, and I heard somebody cough up over the wood shed. I don't know what made me think it was you, but I did think so. I missed Ellen, the night before she went away; and grandmother brought her back into the room in the night; and I thought maybe she'd been to see you, before she went, for I heard grandmother whisper to her. 'Now go to sleep; and remember never to tell.'

I asked him if he ever mentioned his suspicions to his sister. He said he never did; but after he heard the cough, if he saw her playing with other children on that side of the house, he always tried to coax her round to the other side, for fear they would hear me cough, too. He said he had kept a close lookout for Dr. Flint, and if he saw him speak to a constable, or a patrol, he always told grandmother. I now recollected that I had seen him manifest uneasiness, when people were on that side of the house, and I had at the time been puzzled to conjecture a motive for his actions.³⁸

What does it mean for him to hear noise, to hear coughing, and have a knowledge of mothering that was thought to not exist for black women in the Antebellum period? What does it mean for him to hear noise and recognize life therein? Noise had a hearing that was generative for understanding life, both on the inside of the crawlspace where seeing was nearly impossible and on the outside where only sound could tether those lines of kinship. Noise on both sides of the crawlspace connects, yields—which is to say, is submitted—to the power of protection and desire for and the giving of love.

IV

The crawlspace is a place not of abandon from her children, family and friends, but a place of lingering, a place of abiding, a caesura, an extended beat. This section will consider the sonic, tonal dimensionality of such abiding presence, augmenting the insouciant discourse in which blackness and rhythm has been presented as if naturally going together, as if African “diaspora” only sounds out through the “talking drum.” Whereas Fred Moten thinks about black radicalism “in the break,”³⁹ I want to think about dwelling in the crawlspace as a means to extend the break, as a means to suspend brokenness as a moment and mode of black performance.

Jacobs extends the measure, and finds a “buoyant device” of an uncomfortable, inconvenient, unprofitable and non-gratifying rationality for our consideration.⁴⁰ Her abiding in the crawlspace is all about love—of herself, of her grandmother, of her children. Her time in that breaking broken space, in that breaking brokenness that could not break *her*; the time therein was, thus an example of “abiding love” in which “the past is nullified by reconceiving any break not as a conclusion but as the inauguration of a possibility.”⁴¹ What does it mean to attend to the sonic dimensions of abiding, which would attend to the the love from a mother that was deemed impossible, or to think that possibility is immanent, is always waiting in potential?

Jacobs’s occupying of dark spaces moves us toward a discussion of tone and voice. As a former Pentecostal organist, choir director, singer and songwriter, I would say that if Jacobs were to join a choir that I directed, I would place her in the alto section because of the position this voice occupies in three-part harmonic Pentecostal black gospel choirs.⁴² Within this admittedly small configuration of sounds, the alto section plays a defining role in the harmonics by determining the major or minor tonality of the song. Jacobs’s text is about flight and escape and continually stages these movements by lingering in what Jennifer Brody might call the suspended space of the ellipsis . . .⁴³ For the major scale, troubled treble clef part of her escape, Jacobs spends time suspended in between grandmother’s crawlspace and under Betty’s floorboard but above the ground. She is the alto “note,”⁴⁴ using this necessarily in-between position to move towards escape. This is the story of how refuge and escape sound, how the crawlspace is the alto voicing, a forced middling position that both confines and struggles against that confinement by way of imagination and tricky movement. This is about the crawl space and black performance, giving and withholding, breathing and withdrawal.

The way I think “altoness” emerges from the black Pentecostal experience and within this religiocultural movement, harmonic contribution converges with being off and in between; the best changes converge with challenges to

the ear; prettiness—or, the beautiful—converges with weird turns; ambiguity converges with difficult classification.⁴⁵ In these churches, for example, when popular black gospel music is performed, those who have a voice in the bass range are generally encouraged either to sing an octave below the sopranos or to strive to sing tenor, and many songs chosen to sing intentionally do not accommodate that lowest register whatsoever. It is within this specific sonic world of black Pentecostalism that I began to ask: what does it mean for a sound—altoness—to situate itself in the middle, regardless of the harmonic chord? To be the middle is to be the alto; the alto is both a giving and withholding, an excess and a lack concurrently. The alto “note” creates suspended space both above and below it, functions like a magnetic field that attracts and repels, acts like a circle that buoys in two directions.

Jacobs’s insistence on existing within in-between spaces as a mode of escape lets us think about tonality and its relation to personhood, utilizing the alto “note” as an example. This alto “note,” when voiced, brings together sound, subjectivity and sexuality. The alto voice is defined as both “the lowest female” part and “the highest male” part conterminously. In the history of three-part music, the alto occupies an interstitial space, it is literally situated between that which holds and that which is against being held. “[I]n the present context [*alto*] is an Italian abbreviation derived from the Latin phrase *contratenor altus*, used in medieval polyphony, usually to describe the highest of three parts, the line of which was in counterpoint . . . with the tenor (which “held” the main melody; this word itself originates in the Latin verb *tenere*, meaning “to hold”).”⁴⁶ And though it refers today to voices, it initially named a range, a space, a sonic dwelling. From the Latin meaning the “second highest,” it appears that *alto* is between—literally—the voice that holds (tenor) and that which is the sonic antithesis of being held (soprano). The space the alto occupies is a forced middling position and—in the way I conceive it—is a *with*-holding. That is, the alto is against being held and holds concurrently. So what does the alto range hold? And what does the alto range refuse to hold? There are two resonances of being held: that of the erotic, libidinous and that of the violent, incarcerational.

The sonic situation of the alto is a middle space, a suspension that literally occurs through sound. A middle space, a middle passage, even. The alto range exceeds itself both towards and away from the tenor and the soprano, and in that striving between those two spaces is agitational. But the alto range—like the other two—is also relational. We can think of the sonic position of alto through its constraint by the heights of the sopranos and the depths of the tenors; though the alto can approach either of those two “notes” at any given moment in a song, there are few moments when the alto sings higher than the soprano or lower than the tenor. This space

of constraint also creates the condition for creativity to emanate, this space of constraint is the place out of which harmony is voiced.

But what of the libidinous alto, the alto in its zone of amorphous, ambiguous gendering and sexuality, the alto that is both—which is to say, neither—the highest female and lowest male part that is sung, that is sounded out? As an incarcerational space, the alto range allows for all sorts of possibilities by way of the deformational force contained within it. A voicing that is off and in-between, beautiful and weird, constitutive and problematic is the nature of queer diaspora, another zone of possibility eked out through the limitations placed on what is conceived as normal. The alto stands as both anti- and ante-gender, it is also anti- and ante-normality, it is a sonic thought that sounds before the bodies through which it is sounded. So the alto is queer because it is a concept that is thought outside of and aside from the bodies whose voices inside will enunciate. It is a fugitive voice before it sings, it is within the incarcerational space of thought. Jacobs, of course, theorizes this queered space by way of her escape performance through the street:

I had not the slightest idea where I was going. Betty brought me a suit of sailor's clothes—jacket, trowsers, and tarpaulin hat. She gave me a small bundle, saying I might need it where I was going. In cheery tones, she exclaimed, 'Ise so glad you is gwine to free parts! Don't forget ole Betty. P'raps I'll come 'long by and by.'⁴⁷

We were rowed ashore, and went boldly through the streets, to my grandmother's. I wore my sailor's clothes, and had blackened my face with charcoal. I passed several people whom I knew. The father of my children came so near that I brushed against his arm; but he had no idea who it was.⁴⁸

The incarcerational space out of which the alto “notes” emerge includes the various dark spaces that Harriet Jacobs performed acts of flight and escape—what Daphne Brooks theorizes as places full of opaque possibility. The Pentecostal three-part harmonic's alto range, because of its seeming ontic position, submits and is submitted to regulation. But through the possibility of what Pentecostalism colloquially calls the alto range's “weirdness,” its sounding “off” that it could be said it initiates and instantiates, a possibility of disruption is always already *before* the composition of any harmonic itself. This sonic space is bound up with a knowledge of freedom that the submission to this zone could be said to allow its materialization but not create.

One always is surprised, then, by the refusal to submission that is voiced in the very constraints of submission itself. And it sounds beautiful, weird, off, in-between, murky and challenging. Is this not Jacobs in her terribly enriching and beautiful performance? She submits to a regulatory mode of existence and it is this very submission that makes possible the enunciation of her personhood. Or, more precisely, her submission highlights the fact that she “cannot give the consent that, nevertheless, she can withhold.”⁴⁹

Consider what it means to “occupy”—which is to say, to take up and to throw down—the sonic position that approaches and refuses; the alto approaches and refuses, refuses as a means of approach, approaches as a means of refusal. A challenge both internally—across the section—and externally with how that section relates to the others. This voicing is expansive through both breadth and depth while also it moves across time and through space. So the alto voice, I think, is fugitivity that opens up and breaks down. This alto is the zone of black social life that is thought as nothing other than social death. The alto is “an irreducibly disordering, deformational force” that is “at the same time being (that is) absolutely indispensable to normative order, normative form.”⁵⁰ We call this normal order and form music . . . but I want to think of it as a mode of flight and escape.

There is a deformational quality to the alto position that exists prior to the enunciation of any note. The alto is an insistent challenge that is—in a Nathaniel Mackeyan formulation—“previous to situation” of song, of composing itself. To compose means to gather together, to organize into, to create form out of that which precedes it. Thus, before any note is ever sung, before any tone had been thought by the writer of any such song, the alto—by virtue of this sonic subjectivity—will have already been that voice that will occupy that middling position. As previous to situation, the materiality of song stands before (and against) its organization as and into music as such. The alto voicing, then, through musical composition practices could be thought otherwise than sound, which brings me to Jacobs’s occupation in dense, dark, desolate spaces.

Jacobs as and in alto—a sonic spacing—gives us room, however small, to think about the emptiness and fullness that Henry Dumas describes as a saxophone in his short story “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?”: “[H]is soprano sax resting against his inner knee, his afro-horn linking his ankles like a bridge. The afro-horn was the newest axe to cut the deadwood of the world.”⁵¹ Can something that cuts also be a bridge? Lacan’s understanding of language cutting to create subjects approaches this severed/linked binary. Moten discusses “the perception of the absence of a regular pulse in African music” perceived as “that same pulse’s often overwhelming presence.”⁵² What can it mean for absence and presence to linger in the same moment—whether

image, sound or text? Not just a presence, but one that overwhelms, a presence that encloses and opens up—like a circle—as the condition of possibility for social life. The presence that encloses as it opens, gives as it withholds, restricts breath as it gives life: this is the position of Jacobs. The possibility for a social life is found even there under the floorboard, in the swamp, in the crawlspace, in any moment and mode of performance of giving and withdrawal.

The alto range mediates, it is a voice of transfer, as a translator. So the alto voice, in the ways I'm thinking of it, concern language, utterance and meaning, and sound. Consider the space between *de rien* (literally “of nothing”) and *you're welcome*, the structure that is between these two ideas that prompt thought, that which, even when translated, is always mistranslated. In the act of translation itself—an act of movement from, to—there is the agitational force of flight and escape at work. From *de rien* to *you're welcome*, some excess goes unattended, it is left dangling.

The alto voice *means* in the same manner that the soprano and tenor *mean* in song. But as a transactional voice, as that mediation, as that middling position, as that *held* and *against being held* voice, the alto breaks down that which it opens up. Unity and breakdown at the sound of the voice that structures black social life, which is to say, black diaspora. Unity and unison are important, here. The unison voice of black Pentecostal choirs is typically in the alto range, a voicing that is low enough for tenors but high enough sopranos, reached from two different directions. When the voices split apart, when they go to their respective sonic communities, the alto range will typically continue to occupy that same sonic space, not jumping up or down. The alto range, the alto zone, pushes away from itself, moves others as it moves itself. This pushing away from self is what Harriet Jacobs performed in those tight spaces of incarceration. She withdrew breath, performed scream; she submitted to constrained, performed flight. Heeding the sonic consequences of such performances augment the statement: “Always these sounds render the indescribable, implying ‘Words can't begin to tell you but maybe moaning will.’”⁵³ And maybe screaming will. We learn of giving and withholding, of life and escape by way of sound. Listen to Harriet Jacobs sing.

Notes

1. This essay concerns the piece written by Harriet Jacobs about her experiences of enslavement published, initially, in 1861. In the text, Jacobs uses the name “Linda Brent” in order to ensure the safety of herself, her family and friends; she wanted to ensure that the incidents she recounted would not lead to harm of the ones she loved, given the fact that she was writing in

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the Antebellum period. Most notable in the text is Jacobs's seven-year stay in the "loophole of retreat," the crawlspace of her grandmother's abode. See Harriet A. (Harriet Ann) Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, c2009).

2. Diana Taylor states that performance is a "vital act of transfer" and here I want to consider the vitality, the force of life, is given and transmitted through the performance of retreat, through Harriet Jacobs's movement into the crawlspace for seven years. As "black performance," this essay is in conversation with Fred Moten's contention that "the history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" where the object, here, is Jacobs and her resistant movement, her against-the-grain stalling as another movement that privileges silence and quietude. See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; 2); Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition*, 1st edn (Minnesota: Univ. Of Minnesota Press, 2003; 1).

3. Jacobs, 69.

4. Ibid.

5. Jacobs, 65.

6. Dr. Flint" is the pseudonym Jacobs uses for the man who owned her, Dr. James Norcom.

7. Jacobs. 10.

8. This is argued forcefully in Shane White and Graham White's historicizing of the sounds of the Antebellum south. See Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

9. Taylor, 2.

10. Jacobs, 59.

11. Ibid.

12. Jacobs, 40.

13. Moten, *In The Break*, 172-3.

14. Anachronistic though such a distinction as "black feminist" may be, I use Hazel Carby's discussion of Jacobs as support: "Jacobs used the material circumstances of her life to critique conventional standards of female behavior and to question their relevance and applicability to the experience of blackwomen" (47). See Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

15. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997; 20).

16. Ibid.

17. Hartman, 102.

18. Jacobs, 32.

19. Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Bedouin Hornbook, Djbot Baghostus's Run, Atet A.D.*, 1st edn (New Directions, 2010; 29-30).

20. Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*. (New York, Harper & Row [1972]).

21. Heidegger, 11.

22. Heidegger. 6.

23. Heidegger, 16.

24. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.).
25. Brooks, 67.
26. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Bedford Books in American History (Boston : Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993; 3).
27. Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Bedouin Hornbook*, *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, Atet A.D., 1st edn (New Directions, 2010; 34).
28. Mackey, 22-3.
29. Jacobs, 69.
30. Jacques Derrida as quoted in Alan D. Schrift, *The Logic of the Gift : Toward an Ethic of Generosity* (New York: Routledge, 1997; 124).
31. Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature : Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007; 47).
32. Morton, 48.
33. Ibid.
34. Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).
35. Piper, 162.
36. Piper, 164.
37. Piper, 167.
38. Jacobs, 93.
39. Moten, *In the Break*, 1.
40. Adrian Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, Volume 1: *The Humean Conception*. (Berlin: Adrian Piper Research Archive, 2008). In this volume, she states: “Buffeted and bruised by the currents of desire and longing for once to ride the wave, we may cast about for some buoyant device from which to chart a rational course; and finding none, ask ourselves the following questions: Do we at least have the capacity ever to do anything beyond what is comfortable, convenient, profitable, or gratifying? Can our conscious explanations for what we do ever be anything more than opportunistic ex post facto rationalization for satisfying these familiar egocentric desires?
If so, are we capable of distinguishing in ourselves those moments when we are in fact heeding the requirements of rationality, from those when we are merely rationalizing the temptations of opportunity? I am cautiously optimistic about the existence of a buoyant device—namely reason itself—that offers encouraging answers to all three questions.” It appears that Jacobs, at the very least, found the space—which is to say the capacity—of this buoyant device of reason.
41. Andrew Zawacki, “‘The Break Is Not a Break’: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Poesis as Abiding Love,” *The Antioch Review*, 62 (2004), 156–170.
42. I make no claims about the “Black Church” as a monolith; this particular theorizing emerges from my personal encounters and interactions within the Pentecostal sects of which I have been a part for a long period of my life. I grew up in the Church of God in Christ, the largest Black Pentecostal body in the world and have choral director within Pentecostal circles for many years. Within that tradition, three–part harmony [soprano, alto and tenor] was privileged above four–part harmony. Of course, there would be occasions when even we would sing four– part harmonic selections, but those occasions were far and few in between.

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43. Jennifer DeVere Brody, "The Blackness of Blackness . . . Reading the Typography of 'Invisible Man,'" *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005): 679–698.
44. In non-musicological settings, in Pentecostal churches—at least the many with which I have been involved—we designate alto, not by range but by "note." The ideas I have about "altoness" emerge from colloquial usage of these musicological designations. I'm sure not a few musicologists will be slightly annoyed by the imprecision of such language but be assured that the imprecision is represented as precisely as it would be invoked in the peculiar corners of black Pentecostalism.
45. I posed a question as a status on Facebook asking what section people preferred in black gospel choirs and the most recurrent answer was the alto section. Many that are familiar with black gospel music in general and black gospel choirs particularly state that the alto section is typically the most interesting sonically. People noted that the parts given to the alto section are challenging and atonal; the voicing can strive towards the heights of the sopranos or the depths of the tenors but never exceed in either direction:
- "Altos have the best harmonic contributions"
- "Alto, while I love it, always has some off/inbetween notes"
- "Altos because they have the best changes ever. It challenges the ear."
- "Altos always have the prettiest parts to me. That middle note takes some weird turns to hold the harmony together."
- "Altos are the ambiguous middle...they often occupy a murky space...not easy to classify"
46. See James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
47. Jacobs, 68.
48. Jacobs, 69.
49. Fred Moten, "Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 17 (2007), 217.
50. Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50 (2008), 177–218.
51. Henry Dumas and Eugene Redmond, *Echo Tree: the Collected Short Fiction of Henry Dumas* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press: Distributor, Consortium Book Sales & Distribution, 2003; 105).
52. Fred Moten, "The New International Rhythmic of Feelings," in *Sonic Interventions* (Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007; 39).
53. Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: Good News and Bad Times – 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1997; xxxiii).

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Contextualizing Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose in Late Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Rap Music

Regina N. Bradley

“Cool is so individual that one man’s cool won’t work for other men”
—Guthrie Ramsey

“You might think we all beats and rhymes . . . but you don’t hear me”
—Lil’ Flip, “Game Over”

In considering the cultural significance of rap music in (mis)conceptualizations of American identity, it is important to point out commercialized rap’s attachment to notions of blackness that are presumed irrefutable. Likewise, constructions of racial discourse in popular culture cannot be divorced from the effects of capitalism and enterprise on the framework of a twenty-first century black American experience. While it would be overly simplistic to dismiss commercial rap music as socially and ethically bankrupt due to the mass consumption and (over)production of corporatized black narratives, it is important to identify rap’s corporatization as a mutual investment by both record labels and artists themselves. Employing regurgitated and thus normalized scripts of blackness and black manhood is rewarded by monetary gain and popularity. The artists’ investment in such scripts sustains public visibility and thus relevance. The commercialization of rap music simultaneously enables rap to become a gauge of the post-Civil Rights experience while it becomes commodified and stereotyped. Thus, hip hop is important in providing alternative forms of negotiating the manifestations—visual, sonic, and political—of blackness that are mass consumed by a multi-ethnic audience. One way we can complicate our understanding of the impetus behind rappers’ performance and identity politics is to examine their negotiations of “black cool.” Of particular interest to this essay are the intersections of enterprise and sonic manifestations of black masculine cool in commercial rap music.

Arguably, the most visible script of popular black masculine performance is *cool pose*. Cool pose, the performance and positioning of the black male body as a symbol of coolness, in its present form leans heavily upon stereotypical and often uncontested expectations of black masculinity. A litany of scholarship has theorized how black cool establishes the visible significance and presence of black men in American popular culture. Richard

Majors and Janet Bilson's seminal study *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (1992) broke ground for teasing out manifestations of cool pose in a post-Civil Rights American cultural landscape. Todd Boyd (1997) reads cool pose as a survival mechanism and the antithesis of white masculinity, opining that "cool is about a detached, removed, nonchalant sense of being. An aloofness that suggests one is above it all. A pride, an arrogance even, that is at once laid back, unconcerned, perceived to be highly sexual, and potentially violent" (118). Bell hooks asserts in *We Real Cool* that black cool "was defined by the ways in which black men confronted the hardships of life without their spirits being ravaged . . . it was defined by black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it . . . it was defined by individual black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others" (138). Donna Britt renegotiates cool as a collective response of black men within this contemporary moment of history, coining the term "brothercool." "Brothercool is demonstrating black men's increasing diversity in income, interest, and attitude. The 'new cool' that black men are forging could be more like the old: deriving its edge from the risks that accompany growth, expansion, the embrace of other culture, the hot breath that signifies *life*" (author's original emphasis). Rebecca Walker, editor of *1000 Streams of Black Cool*, situates black cool as both a gauge and limitation to understanding a contemporary African-American experience: "black cool can be emulated, co-opted, and appropriated, but its ownership can't be denied . . . it's our language of survival. It's our genius . . . Black cool is forever."

Still, composing a working definition of cool pose as it has presented itself in rap music of the last twenty years proves to be an arduous and complex task, considering the numerous, often conflicting intersections of blackness, masculinity, and enterprise that frame commercial rap music. Greg Tate points out the complexities of hip hop, while acknowledging that the convergence of enterprise and hip hop culture construes it as a "hip-hop marketplace":

The omnipresence and omnipotence of hip-hop, artistically, economically, and socially, have forced all within Black America and beyond to find a rapprochement with at least some aspect of its essence. Within hip-hop, however, as in American entrepreneurship generally, competing ideologies exist to be exploited rather than expunged and expelled—if only because hip-hop culture and the hip-hop marketplace, like a quantum paradox, provide space to all black ideologies, from the most antiwhite [*sic*] to the most pro-capitalist, without ever having to account for the contradiction. (7)

The lack of accountability in commercial rap that Tate points out is interpreted through a gender-dominant lens in hooks' discussion, where she argues that "[in] hip-hop packaged for mainstream consumption, many of its primary themes—the embrace of capitalism, the support of patriarchal violence, the conservative approach to gender roles, the call to liberal individualism—all reflect the ruling values of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, albeit in black face" (142).

Similarly, John L. Jackson observes the conflicting and blurred lines of reality and relevance in rap, noting how "hip-hop is considered a rendition of performative blackness with roots in everyday urban struggles against marginalization" (177). If we read Jackson's discussion of authenticity and blackness as a demonstration of black male cool, it appears that commercial rap music situates black men's coolness in a vacuum of violence, materialism, and apathy. The lack of discourse and space available to complicate black men's experiences creates a limited range of experiences by which to "stay black" and "stay real." In keeping with Tate's observations about the hip-hop marketplace, it is important to note that male rappers' and consumers' mutual investment in coolness and black manhood pivots upon restricted access to experiences believed to occur within the black working class.

In a scene from Paul Beatty's novel *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996), a satiric coming of age story about a black boy growing up in 1990s California, a fictitious rap group named Stoic Undertakers records a music video to accompany their album, *Closed Casket Eulogies in F Major*. Beatty's narrator Gunnar observes the video shoot:

Carloads of sybaritic rappers and hired concubines cruised down the street in ghetto palanquins, mint condition 1964 Impala lowriders, reciting their lyrics and leaning into the camera with gnarled intimidating scowls.

"Cut!"

The curled lips snapped back into watermelon grins like fleshy rubber bands. "How was that massa? Menacing enough fo' ya?" (77)

Aside from the tensions between black youth and the "just the way it is" mentality Beatty addresses as a problematic gangsta rap aesthetic, even more problematic is the commodification and consumption of such an aesthetic as an uncontested reality in one's daily life. Beatty subverts Mark Anthony Neal's observations about hip hop's initial purposes—that it "allowed [African American youth] to counter the iconography of fear, menace and spectacle that dominated mass-mediated perceptions of contemporary black life" (138). This passage highlights the romanticized inner city aesthetic within

mainstream American popular culture, which creates a fetishistic bubble of black poverty within which African Americans and, specifically, black men are forced to exist. Removal from that commercial bubble of poverty voids one's blackness and manhood, to which Tupac Shakur retorts "they ask me if I'm still down/I move up out the ghetto so I ain't real now?" Gunnar, with his actual experience of residing in the same 'hood where the video was being produced, was dismissed by the video's casting director as "too studious." His lack of a "menacing and despondent" appearance strips him of his visibility, blackness, and, ultimately, masculinity. Because Gunnar does not satisfy expected performance scripts of black masculinity, relevance is forcefully taken from him. This passage not only highlights the pathological implications of gangsta rap, but shows that such pathological performances are, in fact, performances. The rappers' exaggerated "minstrel" response, though satiric, forces the reader to confront his investment in the exaggerated realities of black cultural consumption, and their own investment in such pathological peculiarities. Gunnar, aware of the awkwardness of the video shoot's fetishizing of 'hood life and its parlaying of "hood cool" masculinity, is still invested in the Stoic Undertakers performance.

In part, this is because of the *sound* of the music video itself, the instrumentals inducing Gunnar to "reflexively" vibe to the song: "eyes closed halfway, my shoulders hunched toward the ground, my right foot tapped softly on the stair, and my head began a faintly perceptible bob" (78). At play here is not only the projection of black male coolness by the Stoic Undertakers, but Gunnar's responding cool pose, in which he demonstrates a grimacing authentic black masculinity that is left unavailable to him. Gunnar renegotiates Boyd's definition of cool, detaching himself from his lived experiences in order to sustain the arrogance and menace needed to survive. The disjunctive and peculiar reading of black masculinity Gunnar attempts to negotiate is embodied in his response to sound. His angst about the dismissal of his manhood and the blackness attached to it is lessened through Gunnar's head bobbing to the music. While the rappers' lyrics and bodies may not speak to Gunnar's experiences or anxieties, the sound itself provides him an alternative reading of his blackness, as he falls in rhythm with the music and becomes aware of the commodified worth of his manhood.

Both Gunnar and the Stoic Undertakers' anxieties reflect a dilemma that successful commercial rappers face in balancing lived experiences with expected performance. Jackson argues that such angst is an example of how "hip-hop artists attempt, however fleetingly and unsuccessfully, to challenge external categories of social authentication (2006:177)." He acknowledges a complex and often unarticulated angst that simultaneously fosters and

resists popular conceptions of black manhood. A dearth of traditional race and gender scholarship addressing such anxieties points towards a need for a more unorthodox method of analysis. One pivotal and underutilized approach to such analysis is through sound.

Theorizing Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose

While numerous studies of cool pose have relied on visual and (popular) cultural interpretations of black manhood, there is a paucity of scholarship that addresses the sonic implications of black masculinity. Considering black male coolness as a fulcrum of realness and performance, this article furthers discussion of black male performance by positing a concept of “Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose,” (hereafter HHSCP)—a sonic redressing of black masculine performance in the hypercommodified and commercial space of rap music. HHSCP is the relentless grappling and maneuvering of the type of hip hop Richard Schur (2009) defines as “the world of sounds, images, texts, and commodities through which African Americans and others experience contemporary life” (47). Building upon Schur’s definition of hip hop, HHSCP negotiates complexities of black masculinity through presenting sonic signifiers of black manhood, experiences, and coolness. The crux of my theorizing HHSCP lies in an understanding of sound as musical and nonmusical, and posits a sonically manifested space to interpret and explore aspects of black identity unavailable in other mediums. Framing black men’s narratives through a combination of instrumentals, vocals, and other relevant sounds like grunts, laughter, and wails—HHSCP negotiates signifiers of black male life through a sonic framework. It is the improvisation of black masculinity through sound, making space for the performance of otherwise silenced, supposedly non–normative feelings and expressions. Take, for example, the laugh of Tupac Shakur. Throughout the track “I Ain’t Mad at Cha” Shakur frequently chuckles, at times forcefully. While the expectations of his youth and black manhood at the beginning of the song—“heard ya’ll tearing up shit out there/kicking up dust/giving a mutha fuck”—Shakur gives a subtle but powerful laugh. It embodies the conflicts of Shakur’s reality, pathological impositions, and static performances of his manhood. Because Shakur grappled with and was frequently engulfed in the West Coast gangsta rapper mentality milieu during his career in the early and mid 1990s, he frequently used laughter as a signifier of the peculiarities of commercial black masculinity. Shakur’s laugh simultaneous marked his imposed cool and inability to fully articulate his angst as a black man.

A sonic cool pose framework makes room for teasing out conflicting and peculiar dimensions in which black men exist in the United States.

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Thus, HHSCP offers a discursive space of varying and frequently conflicting performances of cool and its attachment to blackness as commodity and lived experiences. One immediately acknowledgeable restriction, however, to the development of HHSCP in this context is its limiting heteronormative approach to black masculinity that frames commercial rap music. Still, HHSCP is useful in troubling commercial rap music discourse, because it denotes enterprise as unrestricted to visual and narrative expressions of black manhood. Tricia Rose's discussion of commodified rap is particularly useful in addressing HHSCP's poignancy as an alternative frame work for gender expression. Rose writes: "hip hop has always been articulated via commodities and engaged in the revision of meaning attached to them" (41). By regarding sound as a commodity, HHSCP identifies the commodification of black masculinity through sound and what black masculinity culturally and sonically represents in the American popular imagination.

HHSCP is in conversation with Michael P. Jeffries' theorization of complex cool, an application of cool pose that speaks specifically to a post-Civil Rights black (masculine) experience. Jeffries defines complex cool as:

more transparent than previous manifestations of black coolness. It openly foregrounds and sustains the *conflicts* of black American masculinity rather than concealing them, saturating these struggles in an appealing marinade of pride in one's hip-hop skills and sensibilities. That is, hip-hop's complex coolness is what allows commercially successful representations to simultaneously contain narratives about collective racial identity, political injustice, God and the afterlife, Cadillac Escalades, strip clubs, and drug money. (60)

In addition to the literal reading of lyrics as an indication of coolness, HHSCP adds complexity to the conflict Jeffries' calls an "appealing marinade of pride" through instrumentation, sampling, and other sonic markers of black masculinity found in commercial rap music. Rapper Rick Ross, for example, heavily grunts "UGH" as an introductory ad lib during his raps. This sonic signifier alerts the audience to his identity and "brand," establishes a steady tempo for his lyrical delivery, and sustains expected performances of black masculinity as forceful and hard hitting. Ross' grunting is accompanied by similar hard-hitting beats grounded in crashing symbols, synthesizers, and sonic booms, signifying not only the bass of the instrumental accompaniment but the low register and therefore menacing markers of his own voice. Arguably on the opposite end of that spectrum is rapper Drake, whose sing-song lyricism is frequently interrupted with an emphatic "Ah!" Drake's vocals are accompanied by a staple blend of strings, piano, and "soft" instrumentals, drawing attention to a vulnerability often lacking in commercial rap narratives. Both rappers manipulate sound to construct a

discourse that simultaneously engages their (materialistic) privilege while addressing the limitations of their experiences within rap as a corporatized space. The polarity of Ross' and Drake's performances of HHSCP is in fact representative of the complex and frequently conflictive range of cool that HHSCP encompasses as a sonic site of expression.

This sonic scripting of the black male body and experience engages Ronald Jackson's related work in which he points out how "script[ing] someone else's body is to actively inscribe or figuratively place one's self, worldview, or ascriptions onto another projected text, which often requires dislocating the original text and redefining the newly affected or mirrored text as counterpositional or oppositional Other" (53). The sonic qualities of rap complicate the static black masculine existence within popular music and culture, sounding what Jeffries observes as a "publicly conflicted discourse of black masculinity, far more complex and far more forthcoming about vulnerability and connectedness than cool pose theory allows for" (62). The subaltern reading of HHSCP provides a blueprint for understanding the present moment of popular and cultural black manhood. It allows for materialism and resistance, frequently and restrictively regarded as individual and un-touching, to be comprehended as flourishing and colliding in sonic performances of black masculinity. As Jeffries points out, "Even in the context of the restrictive political economy of the record industry, black masculine conflict and vulnerability are exposed in contemporary hip-hop in a way that is not explained by previous theories of black coolness" (61).

"Sounding commodities," a key concept in Fred Moten's theorizing of race and capitalism, is heavily utilized in addressing HHSCP. Moten generally considers the sounds of blackness and black cultural expression as "sound commodities" in American capitalism. Blackness as a performance, he asserts, is "the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing eruption that anarranges every line, a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity" (1). What blackness sounds like in commercial rap signifies its worth. The performance of this expected type of commodified and commodifiable black identity as normal strains any type of black experience outside of this context in the popular imagination. The upheaval that Moten designates as a marker of blackness' performance is shunned if not overpowered by the push for racial ambiguity in public spaces. Situating black performers as a commodity in this current social climate, then, is to speak to how those ambiguities relegate blackness to a position of essentialized discourse tethered to profit. Moten suggests sounding blackness as a commodity in an effort to address these peculiarities. Focusing on black performers' speech, Moten argues "what is at stake is not *what* the commodity says but *that* the commodity says or, more properly,

that the commodity, in its inability to say, must be made to say” (9, original emphasis). In the context of white hegemonic privilege in rap, there are tensions that exist between the ability to speak, forced silence, and power in speaking or lack of power through being silenced. Emphasis is placed on presence and being given the opportunity to perform a rap narrative—albeit manufactured but authenticated through mass consumption. As Jelani Cobb astutely states, “a rapper without a record deal is a commercial without a time slot” (9).

HHSCP extends the vocalizing of black male rappers as commodities to include non-vocal sounds as markers of intersections with corporatization and privilege. A primary catalyst for such intersections is the technological production of sound and, ultimately, blackness, in rap. Thus, one possible way for rappers to overcome the “inability to speak” beyond corporate control is through the distortion of one’s voice through production tools like autotune. Aside from the overt ‘coolness’ of shifting one’s voice electronically, autotune provides a space for black male rappers to distance themselves from the expected “hardness” of a characteristically black masculine sound. Although constituting an innovative niche for alternative modes of black masculine expression, autotune is still nevertheless tied to the commodification of blackness through sound. T-Pain (Tallahassee Pain), for example, branded himself through the nearly exclusive use of autotune in his performances, while also selling cellular phone applications and a microphone that similarly distorts the user’s voice. The use of technology to alter and modify Pain’s voice signifies Ronald Jackson’s assertion that new media and technology have been imposed upon rap as a signifier of the black masculine body. Access to ideas of blackness via the constructed sounds of “Black manhood”—granted by consumer products such as T-Pain’s microphone, and media outlets like YouTube and WorldStar—is given to a wider audience. Public scripts of black masculinity are continuously renegotiated and manipulated to both commodify the (popular) black experience while feeding into static, often one-dimensional representations of black American men.

This conflict is heightened within the sound spectrum, sonically pushing against expectation and profitability amongst rappers themselves. Rapper Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter, for example, sought to attack T-Pain’s autotune modification of his voice and music, releasing “D.O.A (Death of Autotune)” on his 2009 album *The Blueprint 3*. In a looped sample of Janko Nilvic and Dave Sucky’s “In the Space,” Jay-Z dismisses autotune as irrelevant and raps: “this anti-autotune, death of the ringtone/this ain’t for iTunes/this ain’t for sing alongs.” While Jay-Z lyrically decimates auto-tune as an easy cop-out for a lack of talent, his vocal rebuke is re-emphasized by the sample, a deliberately extended horn representing the awkwardness (and

annoyance) of an auto-tuned voice. Jay-Z utilizes sound to ‘trump’ T-Pain’s narrative as the truer representation of acoustic realness while discounting the significance of autotune—and ultimately dissing T-Pain—as an alternate reading of voice and black masculine narratives.

The use of sampling in rap music is a prominent practice in its production and branding. Sampling borrows from previous recordings to create a ‘new’ sonic backdrop. This provides a unique filter for understanding Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose as it allots space for renegotiations and interpretations of black manhood in sound. Joe Schloss’ *Making Beats: The Art of Sample Based Hip Hop* is a seminal text in understanding the craftwork behind sampling as it is used to mark this contemporary moment of commercial rap’s production. “Hip-hop production constitutes an ideal value for developing a tactical sense of when to make knowledge public,” Schloss observes. “The constant struggle that producers face between using their work to display their esoteric record knowledge to each other and making beats that appeal to a broad audience that wants to dance” (81). Sampling allows for the manipulation of sound to create a specific aesthetic, frequently catered to the expectation of the consuming audience. It provides space for both hidden and public scripts of race and gender to sonically parlay, intersect, conflict, and consume. Richard Schur writes that “sampling as a creative method or framework bridges the acts of consumption and production” (46). Both consumers and critics, then, should pay special attention to the hip hop producer who presents any departure from the norm. In addition to establishing and identifying the artist’s work through a unique cobbling of sounds, producers shift negotiations of coolness away from simple beats and accompanying rhymes. “For hip-hop producers—who are highly attuned to the origins of particular samples—the significance tends to lie more in the ingenuity of the way the elements are fused together than in calling attention to the diversity of their origins,” Schloss asserts (46).

Moten’s Marxist reading of the production of black music aptly frames the purpose of sampling in hip hop:

The intensity and density of what could be thought here as his [Marx] alternative mode of preparation make possible a whole other experience of the music of the event the object’s speech. Moving, then, in the critical remixing of nonconvergent tracks, modes of preparation, traditions, we can think how the commodity who speaks in speaking, in the sound—the inspired materiality—of that speech, constitutes a kind of temporal warp that disrupts and augments not only Marx but the mode of subjectivity that the ultimate object of his critique, capital, both allows and disallows. (11)

Sampling, like HHSCP, forms a lens through which to understand intersections of commercial black cultural expression with American (popular)

culture. For the purposes of this paper, the ‘remixing’ and preparation of seemingly unrelated tracks to produce a new framework for black musical expression adds emphasis to the manufacturing and mass consumption of black manhood through sound.

Hearing Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose in *Watch the Throne*

Sounding and sampling tensions among black masculinity, cool, and enterprise in rap music reflect an unsettled and constantly shifting twenty-first-century social-cultural landscape of racial and gender politics in the United States. In addition to the shifting politics its soundscape represents, Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose pivots on discourses of power and whiteness. In effect, it is the claiming of power on and within the black male body. Of particular interest for explicating the significance of sampling in the construction of HHSCP is Jay-Z and Kanye West’s collaborative album *Watch the Throne* (2011). A tribute to “tight” productive and vocal work, *Watch the Throne* (hereafter *WTT*) is a sonic foray into interventions and limitations of coolness and black manhood within commercial rap music. It is critical to point out the commercial and figurative intersections of both Jay-Z and Kanye West’s masculinity with popular discourse. This is achieved in large part by the unorthodox use of sound throughout the album, which not only demonstrates a form of commercial elitism that both Jay-Z and West have attained but the limitations in which this elitism is (dis)regarded through sound. For example, the brief carnival-esque sounding ‘outros’ of “No Church in the Wild,” “New Day,” and “Welcome to the Jungle” sonically highlight the use of obscure European rock samples to speak to their (global) accessibility to wealth. The sample, taken from the song “Tristessa” originally done by Italian rock band, Orchestra Njervudarov, sonically highlights West’s awareness of hip hop as a global market. The obscurity of the sample signifies not only West’s affinity for European genres of music like progressive rock, but his ability to access, reclaim, and re-contextualize it within commercial rap to speak to their privilege. The spotlight on producers such as Swizz Beats and West himself sonically opens up alternative means of discussion about commercially successful rappers’ negotiations of social-political responsibility and corporatism. To date, *WTT* is one of the most comprehensive representation of Jeffries’ concept of complex cool and HHSCP, utilizing overarching tropes of materialism and capitalist impulse alongside retorts of protest and resistance. The crux of the sonic and lyrical black masculine coolness is situated within a tense tug/pull relationship between status and agency, offering an understanding that both Jay-Z and West are afforded—literally and figuratively—the opportunity to speak about

oppression because of their position within a corporate soundscape. *WTT*'s "protest" discourse is made visible and exists between realities of rap music as a bankrupt resistance discourse and commercial rap as a portal to wealth and opulence. The result is seemingly conflicting narratives and sounds of black manhood, privilege, social agency, and American degeneracy.

As both a rapper and a mogul, Jay-Z's verses on *WTT* signify not only a shifting commercial and cultural production framework for black (male) rappers to maneuver, but also shifting social implications of progress and political agency. He was in the executive board room as well, helping found Roc-A-Fella Records and serving as CEO of Def Jam Recordings from 2004—2008. Jay-Z's position as a hip hop mogul undoubtedly influences the consumption and appreciation of the sonic signifiers of his identity as well as his brand, maneuvering both corporatized and ethnic discourses of black masculinity. Christopher Holmes Smith describes how the iconicity of black hip hop moguls is a gauge of social responsibility for minorities:

[The hip hop mogul] raises the issues of "representation" in both a semiotic sense—as may regard the codes and symbols through which these figures generate social recognition—and in terms of an ethical responsibility to serve as stewards for the thoughtful composition of these codes as they may "stand in for" the desires and values of those individuals who are not eligible to occupy similar positions of mass mediation and discursive credibility . . . the hip-hop mogul is not intelligible without credible accounts of the lavish manner in which he leads his life, nor is he intelligible unless his largesse connotes not only his personal agency but also a structural condition that squelches the potential agency of so many others. (673)

Jay-Z's juxtaposition of performances of power, as a black businessman and rapper, collapses boundaries of (white) power as static and impenetrable by minorities, while remaining hinged to the 'hood aesthetics that helped Jay-Z enunciate and retain his essentialized and visible blackness. His management of image and performance—sonic and textual—must remain aware of expected and often conflicting performances of his own idea of blackness and manhood.

Holmes Smith further observes how Jay-Z's mogul status situates him within the black (popular) imagination as "a visual signifier for the 'good life.'" The hip hop mogul, Holmes Smith asserts, "identifies growth-mediated forms of social uplift as rapidly normalizing black political discourses, as opposed to the support-led communal development blueprints from the civil rights era" (674). *WTT* inundates its audience with social and cultural critiques enveloped within narratives of luxury and (lack of) access. Yet these narratives are accompanied and complicated by samplings of soul music, popular culture, and instrumentation that create a map for maneuvering

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what 21st century black manhood looks and sounds like in a hyper-commodified and mass-consumed cultural space.

The album's first single, "Otis," samples soul singer Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness." The majority of Redding's sample is limited to a loop of his emphatic "got ta get to her now now now!," derived from the ad-lib that precedes the chorus, "got ta try a little tenderness!" Not only does the sampling of Redding's music place *WTT* into a broader trajectory of black American popular music, it taps into the influence of one of the initial forays into sonic cool pose previously afforded by soul, jazz, and blues singers. This type of cool, which is often considered a resistance to white privilege and oppression, was undeniably imitated by nonblack fans and consumers as the epitome of what Greg Tate calls American discontent:

Once the music of marginalized minorities, they [African-American musicians and music] have become the theme musics of a young, white, middle-class male majority—due largely to that demographic's investment in the tragic-magical displays of virility exhibited by America's outsider, the Black male. This American manhood began to be defined less by the heroic individualism of a John Wayne and more by the ineffable hipness, coolness, antiheroic, antiauthoritarian stances of bona-fide genius black musicians (9).

Redding's agency for love and acceptance geared towards his lover is redressed by Jay-Z and West to boast about their acquiring of wealth, privilege, and judgment through their utilization of hegemonic privilege. The discontent Tate acknowledges as a sort of black masculine 'crossover' into a mainstream white American public is thrust into this contemporary moment of consumption and commodification in which Jay-Z and West perform a subversive script that collides black and white male privilege. The still prevalent connection of the white middle class' and, more specifically, white middle class youth's embrace of commercially successful rappers like Jay-Z and Kanye West speaks to the viability of profit and black popular discourse in which Jay-Z and West cohabitate. The murkiness of race and identity politics that resonated and framed scripts of black cool amongst black musicians of previous eras is no longer concrete. The antiestablishment agenda that resisted white privilege, thus pushing it on the radar of white consumers, is no longer the primary focus of contemporary black popular music. The agency, vulnerability, and political prowess of black male performers like Otis Redding, Curtis Mayfield, and Isaac Hayes, among others, is subverted to represent the collapse of historicized black cool to current, more capitalistically implied constructions of black cool. This shift is slyly and cunningly acknowledged by Jay-Z, prompting the reader to consider the changes in black music soundscapes with his lyric, "sounds so soulful, don't you agree?"

Carter and West's cognizance of rap as an industry, and their participation in commercial black masculinity, are blended through sound and lyricism. One of the most engaging aspects of *WTT* is how the complexity of black masculinity, often underplayed or overlooked by a track's lyrical delivery and content, are sustained through their sonic markers and accompaniments. On the track "Niggas in Paris," an initial listen can be interpreted as a celebration of excessive spending and luxury. Jay-Z questions his audience: "I ball so hard muthufuckas wanna fine me/first niggas gotta find me/what's 50 grand to a muthufucka like me please remind me." His aggressive delivery is a literal challenge to his audience: who can stack up enough authority and has enough stacks (money) to challenge his power or wealth? Jay-Z's lyrics and their belligerently sonic delivery reflects his ability to expatriate himself in Paris—a nod to the similar actions of preceding expatriate black male artists like James Baldwin or Richard Wright. Jay-Z's cool lies in his ability to self-define—make his own rules—via the ability to literally and figuratively remove himself from American scrutiny.

Aside from the subversion of expatriatism as a lap of luxury instead of a form of social protest and agency, "Niggas in Paris" samples a scene from the comedy *Blades of Glory*, which features primarily white actors. Sampling this movie is an acknowledgement of commercial rap's intersections with mainstream and, in effect, white popular culture. Whiteness' connection to rap music is brazenly present in this song, offering tense and often subverted markers and performances of white male privilege by West and Carter. The song opens with the lines "We're gonna skate to one song and one song only," while the instrumental track plays in the background. An awkward yet humorous sampling of Will Ferrell's lines, the opening could be heard as using Ferrell's voice and lines to poke fun at the misconception of commercial rap music as a white corporate entity. Sampling Ferrell, then, gives whiteness a tangible and culturally recognizable voice. In this respect, Ferrell's demand for "one song and one song only" sonically signifies the monolithic and corporatized manufacturing of rap music, thus pointing out the awkwardness of the lack of creativity in rap music that Carter and West seek to rectify throughout *WTT*. After West delivers a verse about buying luxury labels, world travel, and "suffering from realness," the second *Blades of Glory* interlude resituates the audience with a satirical interpretation of rap as a black-white cultural production. West's affirmation of his associates "going gorillas" in Paris is interrupted by sampling Jon Heder's character's response to Ferrell's initial demands with a high and awkward "I don't know what that means." Ferrell responds, "no one knows what it means, but it's provocative . . . it gets the people going!" Heder and Ferrell's "private" exchange signifies Carter and West's awareness of commercial rap music as a sustained produc-

tion of white voyeurism. If West introduces “going gorillas” as a new slang term for excessive spending or “balling out of control,” for example, it sustains West’s popularity as a black rapper, while “authenticating” his blackness to a white and multicultural audience. Situating Heder and Ferrell’s exchange in this sonic moment reintroduces Carter and West’s intent to highlight multiple layers of consumption, production, and associated privileges.

WTT’s most telling manipulation of sound and sampling as Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose is the brilliantly produced “Murder to Excellence.” The track bridges commercial rap with an international audience through the sampling of Romanian music. The role and prowess of the producer in “Murder to Excellence” is key to the construction of HHSCP, connecting that “esoteric knowledge” of obscure and unfamiliar tracks with the worldliness and privilege afforded Jay-Z and West through their commercial rap success. Another unique component of the integration of the producer’s sonic cool is the understanding of “digging in the crates” to find the music with which to sample. DJ Kool Herc once emphasized the significance of crate digging as groundwork for branding one’s identity and, therefore, cool with unique music tracks. The choice to sample “Fetele de la Capalna” and Quincy Jones’ “Katutoka Corrine” from *The Color Purple Soundtrack* (1986) demonstrates the blurring of cultural discourses through production in “Murder to Excellence.” The background accompaniment of guitars, percussion, and the sample of the women’s chorus “La, La, La” from “Fetele de la Capalna” is somber and steady, a sonic signifier of the exposition of “Murder.” A crashing cymbal plays consistently on every other down beat in the first half of the song suggests a forceful urgency in the delivery of a critique of the murder of young black men. The crashing cymbal, at this moment, sonically reiterates the agency in addressing black murder. The guitars and percussion of the first half of the track become more sparse during the transition to an accelerated sample of “Katutoka Corrine,” signaling a change to a celebration of “Excellence.” Similar to the changes that occur in the lyrical content of murder to excellence, there is a shift in the seriousness of the track as the crashing cymbal is replaced with an E-flat minor piano sample. Perhaps most penetrating about this transition is the use of sound to grapple shifting representations of agency in rap music. Tensions between the “agency” and significance of materialism—Jay-Z’s description of excellence—and the social-political agency of black America struggle expressed in West’s verses are made visible through sonic reflections of “murder” and “excellence” via the shift from the crashing cymbal to the piano. The children’s chorus of “Na Na, Na Corrine” is accelerated to sound like the progression of the “La, La, La” of the first half of the song. Incidentally, (or a stroke of brilliance), as the sample is sped up, the “Corrine” might sound like “money,” which

caters to Carter's discussion of opulence and wealth. The integration of these two samples blends global culture with local, culturally recognizable ideas of blackness. This negotiation of black and cool in rap is complicated however, because the sampling is embedded in such a way that suggests a full, organically developed accompaniment. As separated tracks, each song does not speak to nor align with the intentions of "Murder to Excellence." The blending of these vastly different songs, however, alludes to not only Carter and West's accessibility to the world, but their own experiences as men of color.

"Murder to Excellence" juxtaposes the social awareness of acknowledging the challenges inner city African Americans face—"I feel the pain in my city wherever I go/314 soldiers died in Iraq/504 died in Chicago" with opulence (personified by Jay-Z). The song's sonic impositions of West and Carter's blackness and masculinity teeter between juxtapositions of black protest and blacks' accessibility to (white) opulence. "It's a celebration of black excellence/Black tie, black Maybachs/Black excellence, opulence, decadence/Tuxes next to the President/I'm present," Carter raps. Here he plays on the multi-dimensionality of blackness through signifying class, "the new black elite," color, "black tuxes," and enterprise "black Maybachs/black excellence, opulence, decadence." This plays on current manifestations of black cool, materialistic attainments that are in conflict with historicized markers of black cool—social protest, resistance, and individualism. West's verse rebukes black cool as pathologically violent and shallow, toying with altruistic intonations of social respectability, while Jay-Z's discussion of blackness ebbs and weaves through materialism and opulence as pliable lenses of cool black manhood. The fluid exchange of discourses through lyrics and background accompaniment reflects the complexity of HHSCP, as well as through this sliding social-cultural landscape that black male rappers such as Jay-Z and Kanye West attempt to maneuver.

Returning to the sonic exchanges between Gunnar and the Stoic Undertakers in the explicated scene from *The White Boy Shuffle*, an overarching trope that connects the men together is performance and reaffirmation of normalcy. While the Stoic Undertakers were infused, performed, and invested in the performance of pathological scripts of black manhood as normal, Gunnar's response to the Undertakers' sonic cool pose reaffirmed the performance's normalcy. In considering Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose as a gauge of normalcy for black masculine performance, the challenge lies in being able to incorporate an understanding of black masculinity as both an improvisational performance and commodity, as Moten argues. While sonic cool pose can be historicized and invoke preceding black male artists like Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye, and Isaac Hayes (and undoubtedly

further back), this current moment of Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose is unique in that it attempts to exist between hypercommodification, essentialism, and lived experiences of the last twenty years. The benefit in utilizing Hip Hop Sonic Cool Pose as a tool to analyzing constructions of black manhood and ultimately blackness in commercial rap is its ability to adapt to the fluidity of the commercial–social climate landscape in which mainstream rap music exists. There is room for revision of what HHSCP encompasses as a reflection of not only the market, but shifting negotiations of black manhood in the American public and popular imagination. Most importantly, sonically reading commercialized black manhood provides an alternative space for interpretation and execution of black manhood with contributions from the artists—and other black males—themselves.

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Come Out to Show the Split Subject: Steve Reich, Whiteness, and the Avant–Garde

Siarhei Biareishyk

“Through the effects of speech, the subject always realizes himself more in the Other, but he is already pursuing there more than half of himself. He will simply find his desire ever more divided, pulverized, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech.”

– Jacques Lacan

“I didn’t want to *sound* Balinese or African, I wanted to *think* Balinese or African.”

– Steve Reich

Steve Reich’s *Come Out* (1966) begins with articulated speech—a mere sentence—and in the span of 12 minutes and 54 seconds, by way of looping and phasing, it deteriorates into utter noise. *Come Out* is a tribute to the Harlem Six case (1964) in which six African–American youths were falsely accused of murder. The voice in the composition belongs to one of these six men, Daniel Hamm; the noise at the end is a product of Reich’s experimentation in the development of what was then a new avant–garde technique. Jacques Attali theorizes music as an “organization of noise,” arguing that music is “inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of the social codification” (Attali 11;20). In order to transcend the musical tradition and its own time, many avant–garde composers appeal to this sphere of noise—a sphere identified as the “Other” of music; through the composer’s intervention, such noise becomes the avant–garde’s music. In Reich’s *Come Out*, the composer ostensibly identifies the noise as the signifier in the sphere of technology, namely, in tape recordings; and yet, one must insist on the question, why is the recorded voice that of a black man—of the domain that whiteness constructs as its Other? As I will argue, this sphere of noise, for the avant–garde musician, shares functional equivalence with what Jacques Lacan theorizes as the function of the “big” Other. It is nevertheless necessary to insist that the Lacanian field of the Other is a battery of signifiers; it is the field of the symbolic order that is understood as the Other of being, which is by no means synonymous with racial Otherness. If the Lacanian Other then overlaps with racial Otherness, as I contend it does in the case of Steve Reich’s *Come Out* and the avant–garde music more generally in a greater scope, it is a result of historical contingency and not structural necessity. But this historical contingency is a reason enough to insist relentlessly on the conditions of such historical manifestation; one must question all the more

rigorously: why, in the development of the Western avant-garde music does the field of the Other fall on the voice of racialized Otherness? What is the function of this Other in reconstituting a subjectivity in crisis?

These are just a few of the questions that I address in this essay as I interpret Reich's *Come Out* within a ternary constellation of whiteness studies, theories of the avant-garde, and psychoanalysis. I demonstrate a functional isomorphism between the constitution of the contemporary whiteness subjectivity considered by Wiegman and the subjectivity of the avant-garde (developed through both Bürger and Groys), while locating both cases as a manifestation of an ontological split in the constitution of the subject of secular modernity (Lacan). This homology is most succinctly summarized in the fact that the subjectivity in question—both the avant-garde and that of contemporary whiteness—seeks to transgress its own constitutive condition; in other words, it attempts to negate that which defines it at the most profound level. The psychoanalytic approach furthermore allows one to interrogate the necessity of such a split, yet it also accounts for the contingent and historical dimensions of the split manifested in the subject's transferential investment in racialized Otherness. A close reading of Reich's exemplary text, *Come Out*, demonstrates the function of racial otherness at work both in the development of the avant-garde music, as well as in the reconstitution of contemporary whiteness.

Constructing non-racist white subjectivity, retaining its privilege

In his essay "A Report from Occupied Territory," James Baldwin describes the overwhelming presence of the police as a physical means of control over African Americans and Puerto Ricans in 1964 Harlem—a situation characteristic of other major cities throughout the United States at that time. Baldwin illustrates the function of the law as representing whiteness, whereby the senseless violence against racial minorities serves as a token of power that seeks to subdue and to maintain the dominance of whiteness in the United States. Baldwin insists that the police in Harlem "are present to keep the Negro in his place and to protect white business interests, and they have no other function" (Baldwin 1966). These conditions determine the context for the case known as the Harlem Six, in which six African-American youths were falsely accused of the murder of a Jewish storekeeper. After the arrest, the accused were brutally beaten and forced to confess to the murder; the outcome of the initial trial resulted in life sentences, in which the authorities denied each of the accused independent representation. The actions of the police in arresting the young men in the Harlem Six case and subsequently submitting them to torture explicitly represents the broader function of the

power apparatus of whiteness. Reich composed his *Come Out*—an early work seminal to Reich’s recognition as a major Western composer—as part of a benefit concert that raised funds so the accused youths could afford independent representation in court. Yet, one is left wondering: Is *Come Out* merely a testament to the legacy of the Harlem Six, or is it much more telling about the developing sound of avant-garde music of the time?

As a result of the benefit show, in which Reich was one of many participants, enough money was raised for a retrial of the accused, this time with independent representation in court. The Harlem Six case was dropped after it came to light that the evidence used in the original trial was fabricated—the case, along with other significant civil rights cases during this period, grew to symbolize the corruption and racial discrimination of the judicial system in New York and the United States (Gopinath 2009:121–128; Reich 2002e: 22). In *Come Out*, Reich chooses a single sentence from hours of recorded interviews with all six of the accused juveniles as the only material for the entire composition. The recorded voice of Daniel Hamm, one of the Harlem Six, says: “I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them.” Whereas Hamm’s voice is directly audible in the utterance, the work also entails the latent voice of the composer—a voice embedded in the structure of the piece, inaudible but nonetheless present in the compositional choices of the author in manipulations of Hamm’s statement. Running parallel to the relation between Hamm’s voice and Reich’s authorial choices in the musical composition is the relation of their respective positions in society. Whereas the six young men find themselves on trial largely judged based on their black identity, Reich’s compositional choices—not unlike the function of whiteness—remain invisible/inaudible, despite their ubiquitous presence.

While the privilege of whiteness and racism are not to be thought apart, considering the relation between Reich and Hamm’s voice shifts the question to the privilege of whiteness and the construction of non-racist white subjectivity. Robyn Wiegman locates the desire for non-racist white subjectivity as predominant in contemporary whiteness and, furthermore, articulates this problem in the context of whiteness studies in the academy as the limit case of contemporary whiteness. Because the main critique lodged against whiteness has localized its privilege in its assumption of invisibility and universality, Wiegman locates the predominant strategy of whiteness studies in the construction of a non-racist white subject, in that it seeks to expose whiteness as particularity, thereby denying its status of an empty category. Yet Wiegman also points to the fact that this desire is in part complicit in the perpetuation of white privilege, insofar as it is a component in the structural constitution of contemporary white subjectivity. Wiegman describes this

contemporary white subjectivity as split “between disaffiliation from white supremacist practices and disavowal of the ongoing reformation of white power and one’s benefit from it” (120). She then proceeds to demonstrate that the two sides of the split—the first, non-racist particularity, and the second, universal privilege of whiteness—are codependent. As Wiegman points out, “the political project for the study of whiteness entails not simply rendering whiteness particular but engaging with the ways that being particular will not divest whiteness of its universal epistemological power” (150). Thus, the mission of contemporary whiteness studies to diffuse racism may surface as yet another manifestation of an attempt to construct contemporary non-racist whiteness, whereby even in rendering whiteness as particularity it unwittingly reconstitutes whiteness as a category of privilege. In all this, it is crucial to note the formal paradox underlying contemporary whiteness: the construction of a non-racist white subjectivity seeks to disavow the very condition (racism and white privilege) that constitutes this subjectivity.

Theorizing the avant-garde

The structure of the split in contemporary whiteness that Wiegman describes can be further located, in a subtler way, in Reich’s *Come Out*. While it is also true that Reich does share the sentiment of contemporary whiteness that seeks to construct a non-racist white subject, more importantly, the parallel between Reich’s composition and contemporary whiteness is one of functional equivalence, rather than of composer identity. This functional equivalence becomes evident if *Come Out* is considered in the context of developments in twentieth-century Western classical music belonging to the avant-garde tradition. Reich’s work is usually discussed as pivotal to the development of the American minimalist music emerging in the 1960s (incidentally, the very period to which Wiegman traces the advent of the phenomenon of contemporary whiteness in question); along with the music of La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass, Reich’s work belongs to a greater tradition of radical aesthetic practice going back to the historical European avant-garde. Peter Bürger, in his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, characterizes “avant-garde” not according to a certain style, but rather as an attack on the function of art as an institution which guarantees “apartness of the work of art from the praxis of life” (25). A double paradoxical objective outlines the avant-garde’s ambition to destroy the art institution: that art become integrated in the praxis of life and at the same time that it escape the means-ends rationality of the social order (1984:49). Paradoxical, because the means-ends rationality altogether defines the social life praxis of the bourgeois world: the injunction to introduce art in the praxis of life signals

the contradiction of the original demand that art remain outside means–ends rationality. This is but one manifestation of an irreducible split—one, I argue, that is the formal condition of avant–garde subjectivity.

While Bürger claims that his analysis only applies to the historical avant–garde movements and their failure (in particular, Dadaism, early Surrealism, and Russian avant–garde), the post–World War II “neo–avant–gardes” nonetheless inherit avant–gardiste gestures by the token of similarity in their constitutive structure (109). It is unclear whether the task of the avant–garde in the music scene of 1960s New York can be said to be the same as that of the historical avant–garde—whether, indeed, the main emphasis lies in integrating art in the praxis of life; the fact that *Come Out* was produced as a part of the benefit concert for social justice would certainly point this way.¹ One thing, however, remains clear: Reich’s work shares the ambition of overstepping the limits of its own immediate context, and the disparateness of “institutionalized art” and “life” is merely one aspect of this context, even if it is not central to Reich’s work. I argue therefore that it is not despite the failure of the historical avant–garde (as Bürger would have it) that post–WWII experimental music shares its gestures, but *because* of the failure to integrate art and life praxis. As the consequence of this failure the two spheres still remained radically separated in the post–WWII aesthetic terrain. More importantly, however, avant–garde music in 1960s New York still shares a formal split present in the historical avant–garde, and therein lies the structural homology with contemporary whiteness: much like contemporary white subjectivity, avant–garde seeks to transgress the constitutive condition of its own subjectivity.

In his essay “Weak Universalism,” Boris Groys claims that characteristic of the avant–garde is an attempt to transcend its own time by means of destruction and reduction. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben and Walter Benjamin, Groys aptly points toward the avant–garde’s similarity to messianic knowledge—“knowledge of the coming end of the world as we know it” (4). While Groys insists on the centrality of “contracting time,” and its use in avant–gardiste strategies, what this conception reaffirms is that what Bürger calls the attack on the art institution can be understood as the avant–garde’s self–annihilating gesture—the end of its own world as it knows it. No doubt, Reich’s *Come Out* shares this discourse of “weak signs” of messianic knowledge that “impoverishes, empties all our cultural signs and activities” (ibid). The aforementioned split of the avant–garde is reflected in its dual position of belonging and not belonging to its historical moment: the avant–garde attempts to transcend its own time, but nonetheless appears in the context of its time, thereby, as Groys argues, engendering both clarification and confusion with regard to its own temporal/spacial location. “Clarification,” Groys

writes, “because it revealed repetitive image patterns behind the changes in historical styles and trends; but also confusion, because avant-garde art was exhibited alongside other art production in a way that allowed it to be (mis)understood as a specific historical style” (2010:9). The avant-garde must repeat its self-annihilating gesture as a response to the necessary institutionalization of its practices (for instance, its exhibition in a museum alongside other historically specific art); it must perpetually renew itself by means of negating its immediate context. Although Bürger heralds the end of the avant-garde with its initial failure, the same structure necessarily resurfaces. As Groys notes, “weak, transcendental artistic gesture could not be produced once and for all time,” it must be repeated in a different manner (ibid). I maintain that Reich’s *Come Out* must be understood precisely as one of these avant-gardiste repetitions, as an attempt to interrogate and annihilate the conditions of its own historical embeddedness.

The avant-garde’s anti-institutional stance, emphasized in Bürger’s account, thus can be understood in a broad sense, if “institution” connotes the material conditions defining art at a given historical moment. Consequently, institutionalization is a process, one which divests the avant-garde’s reductive gesture of its negating force by incorporating a radical practice as a norm belonging to the history of art—as Groys would have it, “every . . . discovery of the unoriginal was understood as an original discovery” (7). In this respect, institutionalization once again necessitates the avant-garde’s renewed “weak sign” that would signal the annihilation of the world (i.e., institution) as we know it. But in this formal characterization of the avant-garde, one must specify that this discourse centers on the practice of Western art, and that the avant-garde composer seeks to transgress the institutionalization of what has historically been designated as traditionally Western, whose producers have been not only white but also predominantly male. The institution of Western classical music has come to occupy the position of universal epistemological power—often implicitly determining what counted as music and what counts as noise. Richard Dyer would call this a position of whiteness. What is at stake is not simplification of nominalistic arguments about positive entities (e.g., avant-garde, whiteness, experimental music), but rather the elucidation of the relational functions of institutionalization, transgression, transcendence, and self-annihilation. With the advent of the avant-garde, the historical manifestation of these relational functions gain racial specificity, and, as becomes evident in Reich’s work, occupy a central role in its constitution. Hence the central question: what role does racial otherness play in negotiating the split constitutive of avant-garde subjectivity?

Ontological split and the subject of secular modernity

The split that Wiegman identifies in the contemporary white subject and the one that defines Western avant-garde subjectivity are just two instances of the manifestation of the ontological split that, according to Jacques Lacan,

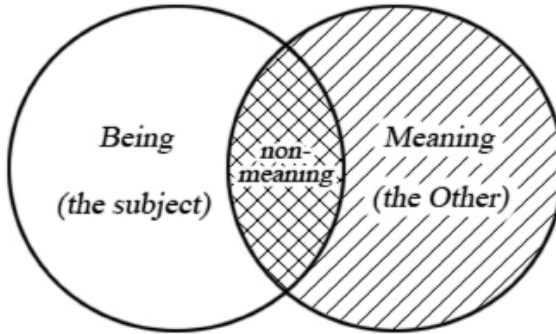


Figure 1: Lacan 211.

characterizes the subject of secular modernity. This split is produced by the movement Lacan calls alienation, which results from a forced, losing choice that can be formalized as possibilities inscribed into two overlapping sets (Figure 1). These two sets are joined by the token of having at least one common element—the common element being a necessary condition to the totality of each set. Thus, because of the forced choice, the common element is necessarily lost upon the decision, meaning that the choice “has as its consequence neither one, nor the other [set]” (Lacan 211; emphasis in the original). The split emerges as the vacillation of the subject between being and meaning—constituting two overlapping sets—due to the introduction of the signifier. Lacan stresses the point that the signifier is “that which represents a subject,” not for another subject, but “for another signifier” (207). The signifier that represents the subject emerges in the field of the Other, in language, wherein meaning can be located.² Consequently, “if we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning” (Lacan 211). If, on the other hand, we choose meaning, because there is something in being that always eludes language, “it is of the nature of this meaning,” Lacan says, “to be eclipsed by the disappearance of being” (211).

The split in the subject of the Western avant-garde musician can be mapped out in the opposition of the Western musical tradition and the avant-garde as realized in the field of the Other (Figure 2). The avant-garde musician must maintain the split as both a Western composer, and as the one who transcends traditional Western musical norms. When choosing

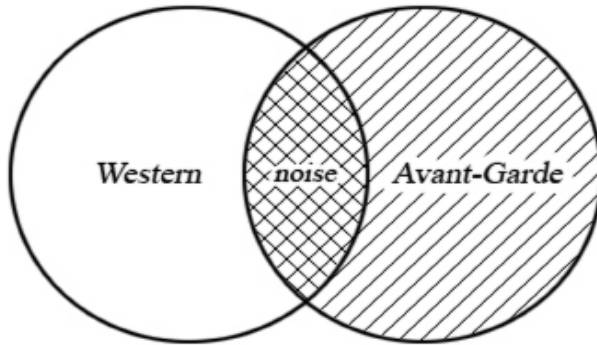


Figure 2: My adaptation of Lacan's diagram.

the avant-garde as otherness, as the transgression of the Western tradition, the subject loses its constitutive part as a Western musician. Hence, because the Western tradition has defined the composer on the most profound level, choosing the avant-garde triggers the disappearance of the subject's being as a musician. The other choice—the side of the Western tradition—leaves the avant-garde composer eclipsed, losing the desire for innovation imperative for avant-garde tradition. In this way, whatever the choice, the Western avant-garde musician remains doubly lacking: neither a Western musician (since the musician in question must transcend the present conditions of art), nor avant-garde musician (since avant-garde positions itself outside of what Western canon defines as “music”). This disappearance occurs with the introduction of a signifier that represents a subject; Lacan emphasizes that the emergence of this signifier, insofar as it represents the subject for another signifier, devoid of meaning in itself, functions in its signification only to “reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject” (207). The question then arises, in the scheme that I outline: what is the signifier that represents the avant-garde musician as subject, which calls it to speak, to compose, and at the same time marks the subject's own fading?

Attali's insight that music must be understood as an “organization of noise” proves useful in answering this question. Prior to the moment that music is to emerge as organized noise, however, comes the noise—not yet music, but a signifier that simply points to more meaningless signifiers. Attali writes: “music localizes and specifies power, because it marks and regiments the rare noises that cultures, in their normalization of behavior, see fit to authorize” (21). In other words, music, as the organization of noise, is the process of conjuring meaning in the proliferation of the signifiers in

the field of the Other—the meaning that arises at the cost of certain repression, normalization, and constitution or assumption of authority. It must be ascribed to the task of the Western music institution, understood in the broadest sense possible, to bestow value on musical organization, designating certain sounds as appropriate for the musical canon while marginalizing and devaluing other sounds as non-music. Hence, the Western music institution must be understood as a totality of everything that is considered music—a totality constituted by the exclusion of everything deemed to be noise. Although this division is simplified, the duality of inside and outside must be in place for the avant-garde to appeal to noise in order to transcend the musical formations of its own time. In this sense, the emergence of music from noise does point to Lacan's field of the Other. It is possible now to return to the question posed in the introduction: if the Lacanian Other has nothing to do with racialized otherness, why do the functions of the two overlap in the case of the avant-garde music? Thus, the hypothesis: it is because the Western classical music institution prior and to the point of 1960s (and at least until the 1990s) was heavily driven by white males that the noise in the Other may be thought to be located in non-Western or racially specific music. It is by way of noise that the latter becomes the signifier for which the subject (the white Western classical composer) is represented to another signifier (more noise)—the very signifier that calls the subject to compose as an avant-garde musician and at the same time splits the subject, triggering its disappearance as a musician.

Split in the process of alienation, the subject recovers its being through desire, in the movement subsequent to alienation, which Lacan designates as separation. In its disappearance, the subject is lacking (being), which marks a point at which desire emerges. For in addition to the lack of its own eclipsed being, the subject locates a lack in the field of the Other—this gap in the Other is the lacking meaning, the fact that the signifier representing the subject has no fixed signified. Lacan illustrates the lack of the Other in the subject's reaction to the message that it receives from the Other: "*He is saying this to me, but what does he want?*" (214). He is saying to me "I like the way your stuff sounds," but what does he want (me to be)? It is clear, therefore, that the desire that emerges in the subject is the desire of the Other, but only as an unknown, as lacking. The separation then proceeds as a superimposition of the two lacks: "the subject . . . brings the answer of the previous lack, of his own disappearance, which he situates here at the point of lack perceived in the Other" (214). Confusing its own lack for the lack in the Other, the subject is able to imagine the Other's desire as its own. In order to find its own desire in the field of the Other, however, the subject has to make a leap: the meaning and the certainty that the subject has to posit is

essentially ungrounded. The lack of ground in the formation of subjectivity must be repressed—repression in the domain of the unconscious. The sense in the field of the Other, therefore, comes with the cutting off of the original non-sense, which splits the subject in the first place. By analogy, in order for music to emerge, the noise as non-sense that is the original signifier has to be repressed, for what we designate as music is noise with meaning attached to it. From the point of this leap, of this repression, having given up the non-sense, the subject emerges as the subject of the unconscious.

Subject looking for his certainty: singularity, transference, racial otherness

In this light, “Steve Reich” transpires as a text—as a subject of the unconscious—defined by the network of signifiers that determine him as a Western avant-garde composer from the outside. Because the unconscious emerges as a result of the leap in the subject’s relation to the signifier, to the symbolic order, Lacan says that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other . . . it is *outside*” (131). “The unconscious,” Lacan continues to argue, “has already in its formations . . . proceeded by interpretation” (130). Although the signifiers in the world determine the subject on the most profound level, because the interpretation of these signifiers is not objectively predetermined, the subject arises as a singularity, which precludes complete immersion in a single symbolic order. In other words, although the signifier that is outside determines the subjectivity of the composer, the latter is not reduced to the outside that determines him; in the formation of the unconscious the composer already provides a singular interpretation of the constellation of signifiers that determine him. “Singularity,” Kojin Karatani writes, “has nothing to do with bourgeois individualism; paradoxically enough, singularity is inseparable from society, from being ‘in between’ communities” (152). That is precisely the position that avant-garde subjectivity attempts to occupy and sustain—a position of both, belonging and not-belonging, of the transcendence of immediate present and the necessity of belonging to this present. Although Reich belongs to a community as a Western composer—community understood as “a space enclosed within a certain system of rules”—the traditional values of Western music no longer can fill the split in his subjectivity (1995:133).

Whether Reich’s attempt to transgress the space of his community can be judged successful or not, what is undeniable is the persistence of the desire to navigate the space “in between” communities—whether by the use of jazz, African music, or new technology in classical composition, or by means of Daniel Hamm’s voice. What defines the singularity of Reich’s

own composition—what he called “music as a gradual process”—is the influence Reich derived from the field of the racialized Other. During his college years in the mid-1950s, Reich had already begun studying African music at Cornell University while completing his masters in jazz. This influence persisted through his early works and resulted in a trip to Ghana in the summer of 1970 to study drumming with musicians from the Ewe tribe. In addition to taking drumming lessons, Reich recorded the lessons and transcribed the rhythmic patterns of Ewe drumming, which he later incorporated into his own scores. Reich also studied Balinese Gamelan in 1974 and 1975 in order to explore the rhythmic structures inherent in this music. In his article “Steve Reich and Discourse on Non-Western Music” Sumanth Gopinath demonstrates that Reich’s interest in non-Western music was by no means an exception in his social milieu; in fact, other pioneering minimalist composers of the time, such as Glass, Riley, and La Monte Young, showed deep interest in non-Western music. Gopinath further notes that Reich’s immediate context was instrumental to a shift that occurred in his music during the 1970s, marked by the composition *Drumming* (1970): “The historical moment is also central to Reich’s career, redirecting his enduring preoccupation with (and possible self-definition through) The Other, from an ‘internal other’ (African Americans) in his pieces of the early to mid-1960s to an ‘external other’ (West Africans) in *Drumming* and beyond” (Gopinath 2001:141). What is significant is the sheer persistence in Reich’s search for otherness as a means to negate the community that constitutes him as a composer. While Reich is just one such case among others, I treat him as exemplary in demonstrating this movement in the formation and development of avant-garde subjectivity in negotiating and sustaining its own split. But it is not enough to demonstrate mere appeal to the sphere of otherness, it is important to ask: how, and by what means does the formation of avant-garde subjectivity proceed? What types of mechanisms are at work in this movement toward racialized otherness in the formation of Western avant-garde music and in the work of Reich in particular?

In “Non-Western Music and the Western Composer” (1988) and other articles and interviews, Reich continuously emphasizes that his interest in studying non-Western music does not lead him to absorb a non-Western sound.³ He writes, “I didn’t want to *sound* Balinese or African, I wanted to *think* Balinese or African” (Reich 2002b:148). In making this distinction, Reich outlines his usage of what he learned through non-Western music: he refuses to absorb the non-Western scales or instruments, but by studying the structure of non-Western music he finds new venues for a contemporary Western sound to develop. “The structure remains,” says Reich regarding the rhythmic patterns in African drumming and Balinese Gamelan that he

chooses to use in his composition, “but the sound is (hopefully) new and expressive of the times and place the composer lives in” (Reich 2002b:149).

The influence of non-Western music illustrates Reich’s relationship to the racialized Other, and locates Reich in what psychoanalysis calls transference [*Übertragung*] with this Other. Transference emerges as means to resolve the split induced in alienation; Lacan emphasizes that “[t]ransference is established with the emergence of the subject who is supposed to know” (232). Transference must be understood as an intersubjective formation emerging with an appearance of the desired (and imagined) knowledge in the Other; it is through this sphere, Lacan emphasizes, that the subject seeks to derive its certainty in filling the split induced by the signifier. It must be noted that transference is both the cause and the effect of the unconscious formations. Hence, if this peculiar position of the subject of the unconscious is to be articulated, it is in the analysis of transference. As Lacan argues, it is only through the encounter with the Other who is supposed to know, in the phenomenon of transference that the unconscious becomes accessible: “this primary position of the unconscious that is articulated as constituted by the indetermination of the subject—it is to this that transference gives us access” (129). Because the subject is determined from the outside, according to signifiers in the world, the famous Lacanian formula follows: “*the unconscious is structured like a language*” (Lacan 20; emphasis in the original). Thus, the telling of the subject’s unconscious as singularity through transference is also telling of political and ideological structures of the signifiers that determine the subject. Consequently, insofar as Reich as a singularity is subject of and to contemporary Western classical music and, on a broader scale, the subject of and to whiteness, his unconscious is telling of these structures. It is these structures that I will try to explore in the manifestations of transference in Reich’s music.

Come Out belongs to a formative stage of Reich’s compositional development. Today this piece is marketed in a collection under the title of “Early Works,” just as the scholarly literature on Reich places it in the “early” stage of Reich’s composition, characterizing the piece as a precondition to his more complex and influential work. The late 1960s, therefore, is a period that illustrates Reich’s pursuit for a style that would mark him as a Western avant-garde composer; this period in Reich’s life can be said to coincide with what Lacan terms as “a subject looking for his certainty”—that is, the process by which the subject learns to negotiate the split in his subjectivity. The early pieces more than any others, therefore, show how the subject is able to deal with the alienation induced by the necessity to transgress the tradition that defines that subject—the necessity present in both, the split of the avant-garde as well as the subjectivity of contemporary whiteness.

Indeed, through the tape loops, particularly in *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain*—the latter of which is another tape piece by Reich composed a year earlier that features the voice of Brother Walter, a black preacher—Reich discovers the process of repetition with complex rhythmic patterns that he would later adapt to acoustic instruments, incorporating them into his scores. Reich writes, “What tape did for me basically was on the one hand to realize certain musical ideas that at first just had to come out of machines, and on the other to make some instrumental music possible that I never would have got to by looking at any Western or non-Western music” (Reich 2002c:54). Whereas it is true that phasing in tape loops allowed Reich to adapt the same technique to acoustic instruments, it is also significant that in order for Reich to *recognize* new musical patterns in his tape pieces rather than mere noise, he already had to have studied and recognized the patterns in West African drumming. Although Reich’s intensified engagement with Ewe music and his trip to Ghana with the purpose of learning West African drumming date to 1970 (several years after the composition of *Come Out*), his engagement with non-Western music prior to this time is well documented.⁴ West African drumming makes use of the downbeats that do not coincide, a possibility previously not explored in Western classical music. This is, incidentally, the innovative structure that Reich achieved through phasing in tape loops—the divergent speeds at which Reich plays two tape loops simultaneously creates the effect of non-coinciding downbeats constitutive of West African drumming. In other words, Reich’s technique that innovates or transgresses the tradition that defines him emerges by means of implicit interiorization of otherness: first, identification with the signifier that belongs to the field of the Other (“noise” of the racialized Other); second, recognition of the structure of this noise (either in tape loops or in study of drumming); finally, incorporation of this structure in the sphere of Western classical music as means to innovation.⁵

One of the traces of this dynamic between the internalized otherness and innovation in the Western canon is evident in the tension between the impersonal nature of Reich’s composition and the necessity of the authorial function of the composer. In his tape pieces, Reich emphasizes that the technique he employs, which the composer designates as “a gradual process,” develops independently from its author. Reich writes that the “experience of that musical process is, above all else, impersonal; *it just goes its way*” (Reich 2002d:20, emphasis in the original). This is yet another example of an attempt to negate the legacy of Western music characterized by the bourgeois individualism that romanticizes the achievement of a single composer as the author. Reich proceeds to compare the impersonal nature of his gradual process to the non-Western music, making his transference in accepting the racialized Other as the subject who is supposed to know

apparent; “[i]n African drumming,” he writes, “all the musicians have fixed parts, with the exception of the master drummer, who improvises on traditional patterns” (Reich 2002:69). In the discourse on non-Western music—in the case of Reich, Balinese Gamelan and West African drumming—indeed, an impersonal character persists in the production of the music, and rather than the name of the author, a geographical region or the historical context of its production is used to identify the sound (the classification that is already a part of the production of Western knowledge); in Reich’s own discourse on non-Western music, the name of the tribe is the limit of the particular. In case of the Western composer, however, the name of the individual author clings to the piece as a necessary structural component even at the point when the composer tries to diminish his or her own significance; Reich certainly puts his name on the record and collects the royalties. What is at stake, however, is not to criticize Reich or to point out some kind of hypocrisy and contradiction inherent in his method and persona, neither is the point to defend him.⁶ On the contrary, I insist that this apparent contradiction is a manifestation of necessary precondition to materialization of the avant-garde subjectivity; this paradoxical duality inherent in Reich’s musical composition is yet another manifestation of the split induced in alienation in encountering the Other. This split manifests itself in the transference with the racialized Other in the insistence of the impersonal (non-bourgeois sphere of West African drumming), on the one hand, and the necessity of the “complete control” that belongs to the authorial “I” (bourgeois individualism of the Western musician) on the other.

From transference to interpretation

If Reich as the avant-garde composer thus embraces the split constitutive of the avant-garde subject, thereby triggering the necessity of transference, it becomes increasingly clear that the composer finds the point of transference in the very material of his composition—namely, in Daniel Hamm’s voice. In contrast to Hamm’s voice, Reich’s position of whiteness is evident: since it was the racial motivation that drove the Harlem Six case, the privilege of whiteness would not have allowed Reich to be in the position of Hamm. It is more than obvious to say that Reich and Hamm occupy a different position in society; but it is also significant to point out that the two occupy different subjective positions, if the subjectivity is constituted by the material conditions and the position of embeddedness in the world. Although perhaps it is not a position to be desired, Hamm’s subjective embeddedness in the world is radically inaccessible to that of the privileged position of whiteness, not merely by choice—e.g., it is not enough to assume an anti-racist stance

to change one's subjective position—but by historical contingency. Indeed, while Hamm is the victim of police violence and social injustice, he nevertheless possess a desirable quality: Hamm holds certain knowledge inaccessible to Reich, insofar as he finds himself in the world under a gaze different from that of a privileged position of whiteness—the subjective position that Reich cannot obtain. If avant-garde's self-annihilating imperative is to transcend the constitutive conditions of its subjectivity, the sphere of what whiteness constructs as the Other becomes the desirable sphere of knowledge.

In this light, the sentence that Reich utilizes in *Come Out* lends itself to musical as well as to semantic interpretation. Having transcribed Hamm's voice, Gopinath points out that it fits Western tonality and scale and, therefore, “in excerpting the testimony in a particular way according to his aesthetic preferences—and not due to some ‘essential’ musicality of black voices—Reich rendered Hamm's recorded voice in an abstracted, ‘musical’ way” (Gopinath 2009:129). The content of the excerpt, however, is no less powerful for the composer. The piece repeats the excerpt in its entirety—“I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them”—only three times; after the initial repetition, it then proceeds to loop only the last part of the phrase: “come out to show them.” This statement gives a promise “to show.” To show whom?—the police, the representatives of the apparatus of whiteness par excellence. To show what? That is precisely what Steve Reich is after in his manipulation of Hamm's voice—hence, the transference.

Although Reich excerpts Hamm's sentence from the interview in which Hamm describes the cruelty inflicted on him by the police, the action of the police is present in the excerpted sentence only indirectly. The reason that Hamm has to “open his bruise up” is that the police were only taking those with open wounds to the hospital; Hamm points out that puncturing his own skin becomes the only way for him to receive much needed medical attention. The entire project of *Come Out* was initiated by Truman Nelson, a white novelist and anti-racist activist, who provided the recordings of the interviews to the composer. In addition to creating *Come Out*, Reich also produced a dramatic sound collage out of the interviews, as was originally suggested by Nelson. In producing *Come Out*, however, Reich insisted on having a full freedom in using these interviews, despite Nelson's initial disagreement (Gopinath 2009:127). Certainly, Reich's sympathies lie with Hamm in condemnation of the action by the police, which is consistent with Wiegman's articulation of contemporary whiteness as disavowing white supremacy. The question however arises, out of hours of interviews describing the beating by the police, why does Reich choose the point at which the victim is hurting his own body? This choice may be further tell-

ing of the transferential relation between Reich and the Other. While the broader context of the Harlem Six shows the violence done by the system in an attempt to subjugate the youths and situate them in a passive position, in the excerpt that Reich chooses, Hamm, although hurting himself, is the one who is in the position of action. Because the description of the police brutality in the narrative of *Come Out* would turn Hamm into an *object* of violence, this portrayal would preclude the transference with Hamm's voice as the *subject* who is supposed to know. While this distinction is not a structural one, it nevertheless further points to the imaginary function central in transference. It primarily shows that the composer, although addressing the issue of institutionalized injustice and racism inherent in the symbolic order, primarily takes interest in his own split. That is, Reich's *Come Out*, rather than reflecting the narrative of the Harlem Six, first and foremost points to the composer's own vacillation as an avant-garde musician.

Reich's composition produces the split of Hamm's voice through playing the recording on two different channels, at first in unison and then at slightly different speeds. This phasing technique—originally developed in *It's Gonna Rain*, also in manipulation of a black male voice—at first creates an effect of a voice echoing itself, but soon enough, the interval between two channels becomes significantly greater and the split becomes perceptible. This point marks the introduction of the non-Western patterns in the piece; Gopinath notes that the repetition in *Come Out* shifts from “discursive repetition (repetition of phrases or sections, characteristic of many European-derived musics of the West) to musematic repetition (immediate repetition of short riff or units, particularly common in African-diasporic musics)” (Gopinath 2009:29). In this change of repetitive patterns, the vacillation of subject between Western and non-Western sides of the split becomes apparent in the sound produced (thus, also vacillating between “noise” and “music”). In manipulating Hamm's voice Reich exploits the split to its limit: looping the recording once again to create a repetition of four voices, and then with another loop dividing the recording into eight voices, at which point the voice can no longer be heard, vanishing into utter noise. What is the function of this noise? How can this disintegration of the voice into complete chaos be interpreted?

It is in this last part of the piece, when Hamm's voice becomes completely incomprehensible, that Lloyd Whitesell locates the function of whiteness. Whitesell says: “The music moves toward an abstract, metaphorical whiteness, mesmerizing in its unfathomable remoteness from the material black vocalicity of the opening” (177). Whitesell's critique is predicated on Dyer's claim that in its invisibility, whiteness assumes the position of universality. He says, At the level of racial representation . . . whites are not of a certain race,

they are just human race” (Dyer 3). Whitesell sees the trend of self-erasure in avant-garde movement as a whole; he writes, “in these quests for the irreducible background we can see the ideals of ‘art without history’ and ‘man without qualities’ converging under the sign of racial identity. That is, the blank page comes to serve as a medium of white self-representation” (175). By the mere token of sounding like background noise, Whitesell seems to imply that the music disappears—and by being invisible occupies the position of whiteness.

Does this claim, however, not presuppose and perpetuate the division of “music” and “non-music” established by the Western classical (read: white) hegemony? Does the minimalist music in its silence and repetition indeed disappear? Rather than disguise and disappear, the minimalist aesthetic and a piece like *Come Out* especially, on the contrary, in its conspicuous harshness, if anything, renders whiteness particular—even if, as Wiegman points out, it does not automatically dislodge it from the privileged position. While Whitesell correctly points toward the self-annihilating and reductive tendency of the avant-garde, I think that he does not account for the ambiguity inherent in this self-erasure—an ambiguity that I have characterized as a split in the avant-garde subjectivity. As Groys points out, the reductive tendency of the avant-garde art “produces transcendental images, in the Kantian sense of the term—images that manifest the conditions for the emergence and contemplation of any other image” (6). The avant-garde produces transcendental sound in the reduction of its music to noise, in order to demonstrate that, as Attali would have it, music is nothing but ordered noise and presupposes the exclusion of unordered noise in the first place. The avant-garde does not erase itself, but produces self-annihilating gestures that remain ever present. In this respect, Reich’s *Come Out* articulates the transcendental conditions of music, and does this within the context of a benefit show; or, as Groys aptly puts it: “the avant-garde places the empirical and transcendental on the same level” (7). In other words, what is at stake is not a process of assuming a position of universality, but a method of investigating the conditions that make any universality possible (transcendental), and rendering these condition as part of the social practice (empirical). If the avant-garde’s functional equivalence with whiteness is to be admitted, I argue, it does not consist in self-erasure of avant-garde. For this self-erasure is of a different order, leaving its own traces in the empirical. The structural homology that emerges is to be sought in the transference with the racialized Other in order to fill the split of its own subjectivity. It is furthermore possible to argue that therein lies the most significant difference between whiteness and avant-garde: while whiteness perpetuates its privilege by means of disguising the unquestioned presuppositions of its

privilege in assuming an anti-racist stance, avant-garde first and foremost investigates and interrogates its own split, therefore sustaining rather than erasing this split. Consequently, while whiteness is at base a conservative force, avant-garde (while also conservative in respect of perpetuation of Western sound) aims at a certain productive surplus evident in its aesthetic innovation.

I would like to insist on a different interpretation of *Come Out*, one that stresses the transferential relationship between Reich and Hamm's statement: through repetition, Reich reenacts the movement of alienation in the split of the Western avant-garde composer. At the point of transference, the subject seeks its desire in the field of the Other who is supposed to know. But precisely because the Other's knowledge is imagined, as Lacan points out, the subject "will simply find his desire ever more divided, pulverized, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech" (188). In other words, just because the subject finds signifiers in the Other, these signifiers do not concretely outline what the subject must desire. Reich's studying West African drumming or encountering Hamm's utterance does not clearly define new possibilities in music or in the reconstitution of racial subjectivity. Insofar as *Come Out* belongs to Reich's early work in which he attempts to establish himself as an avant-garde composer, his own uncertainty in the face of disappearance as a musician is reflected in the choices of the composition. The noise of *Come Out*, which in turn is retroactively to become music, is not characteristic of the erasure of whiteness or presence of the Western composer, but of their reconstitution in the moment of crisis by means of detour through the racialized Other.

If the split in the avant-garde subjectivity occurs upon the identification with the non-sense signifier (noise), this signifier renders the Western canon as not-all-encompassing; consequently, Hamm's voice, standing for the constructed otherness to whiteness (thus also projected onto non-Western music) is mutilated by the Western composer: it departs, taking a piece of the totality of Western music with it. This split is evident in Reich's treatment of the voice, which he redoubles through phasing—the effect that surfaces by means of repetition. Lacan notes that "the endless repetition that is in question"—referring to the repetition during transference that acts out the gap induced in alienation—"reveals the radical vacillation of the subject" (239). This vacillation persists throughout the composition. By the end of the first section (at about 2:58 into composition), the words "come out" break away from "to show them." This split does not yet get to the bottom of the matter—Reich then takes the split even further by looping the entire thing; in this second part, the duality is manifested in a different way, between "come ma-ma-ma" and "to sh-sh-show them" (evident after 4:00). Even

when the composer redoubles the voices once more, taking Hamm's enunciation to radical reduction, thereby rendering it incomprehensible (at 8:37), the split endures as an opposition of two phonemes that sound something like "tsh" and "c-ma." This finding illustrates what Lacan designates as the function of interpretation; interpretation in transference, Lacan says, "is not open to any meaning," but rather the "effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel . . . of *non-sense*" (250). The interpretation targets the non-meaning that lies at the root of the emergence of the unconscious—it is the cut off signifier that splits the subject in alienation. In *Come Out*, having pursued the signifier in the field of the Other, Reich arrives at noise and silence—two phonemes, "tsh" and "c-ma," and the momentary silence that separates them—denoting the movement of the subject between sense and impeding non-sense.

It is significant to note that *Come Out* was Reich's last tape piece through which he discovered new ways of manipulating scores for acoustic Western instruments—it allowed him to navigate the split of the avant-garde subjectivity, finally emerging a successful Western classical composer. To attach a concrete meaning to the noise that lies behind Reich's discovery would be a mistake and an inconsistency in my argument. Instead, this analysis reveals the mechanism by means of which Western music reconstitutes itself in the face of its own fading. Rather than a single meaning, the compulsive repetition outlines the movement of the subject: first, split with the signifier that emerges in the field of the Other; then, concerning itself with the noise of otherness; finally, having internalized the Other—injecting noise with meaning—it comes back to itself in a new form. This mechanism manifest in *Come Out* also heralds the development of white subjectivity after the 1960s, which turns to non-whites in order to sustain the imaginary of itself as anti-racist white subjectivity. This noise as non-sense in *Come Out*, however, does not remain outside of music for long; on the contrary, it becomes institutionalized at the point when the composer attaches his name to it. Meaning, then, emerges retroactively. For instance, viewed in the light of whiteness studies, Whitesell sees the piece as a manifestation of white privilege in its disappearance. Gopinath, on the other hand, produces a multitude of interpretations made possible by historical contextualization of the piece; he maintains that the sound in *Come Out*, among others, may be interpreted as broader violence and paranoia (whether white, black, left or Jewish) of the historical period, the aftermath of a riot, interpellation of a listener as a "cop fighter," sexualization of black masculinity, or, superimposed onto contemporary issues, a composition outlining the "prison-industrial complex" (Gopinath 2009:134–9). All of the above interpretations stand contingent on the gaze of the interpreter, making the multitude of interpreta-

tions possible and by no means false—but what is important to point out is that these interpretations emerge only after a fundamental suppression of what Reich produces as non-sense, after the institutionalization of noise as music. While taking interest in racialized Other, the avant-garde subject first and foremost betrays the crisis of its own subjectivity, seeking a way to reconstitute it. With the arrival of the avant-garde Western composer, the lack of ground behind the emerging subjectivity manifested in a gesture to negate all such ground becomes the locus of its meanings and serves as the condition that grants it the power of fluidity and flexibility.

Notes

1. The same politically charged and democratic, if not utopian vision rings true in the closing words of Reich's famous essay "Music as a Gradual Process": "While performing and listening to gradual music one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual. Focusing in on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and me outwards towards it" (306). Reich gestures toward the potential of music as a transformative force, as a force that either changes the material conditions of the everyday (benefit concert) or reforms the conditions of perception. In his book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, while discussing Cage's "4'33" as exemplary to what he calls "experimental music" (a tradition in which he places Reich), Michael Nyman further indicates the prevailing attempt of this tradition to align experimental practices in music with life rather than with art, or at least to point toward the subversion of this duality: "Henceforward sounds ('for music, like silence, does not exist' [citing Cage]) would get closer to introducing us to Life, rather than Art, which is something separate from Life" (26). While perhaps not the dominant trait of 1960s New York avant-garde scene, the discussion of the collapse of "art" and "life" nevertheless remains a major topic.

2. It is necessary to insist that Lacanian field of the Other is a battery of signifiers; it is the field of the symbolic order—language, law, cultural codes and so on. Hence, it must be understood as the Other of being. The Lacanian Other is therefore not synonymous with racial Otherness; but if the Lacanian Other overlaps with racial Otherness, as we shall see can be the case, it is due to functional equivalence and is a result of historical contingency and not structural necessity.

3. See, for instance, "Interview with Michael Nyman (1970)" or "Postscript to a Brief Study of Balinese and African Music (1973)."

4. See, for instance, Gopinath "Steve Reich and Discourse on Non-Western Music." In this article, Gopinath suggests that Reich's knowledge of these patterns may be traced back to A.M. Jones's *Studies*.

5. The temporality of these events must be understood in terms of logical causality, and not linear causality. In other words, although I point to certain steps as logical presuppositions to one another, it does not mean that they must be understood diachronically, that is, happening one after another in a temporal order; rather, the temporality is one of synchrony. For this reason it is justified to claim, as Gopinath argues, that in transcribing West African drumming, Reich "constructed" and not merely "discovered" the aforementioned rhythmical structures (see "Steve Reich and Discourse on Non-Western Music"). Nevertheless, I maintain, that

all the aforementioned steps are logical necessities, which exemplify the constitution of the avant-garde subjectivity.

6. Furthermore, Reich himself is more than ready to acknowledge the tension of the authorial and the impersonal; in his “Music as a Gradual Process,” Reich writes: “Musical processes can give one a direct contact with the impersonal and also a kind of complete control . . . I completely control all the results, but also . . . I accept all that result without changes” (305). It is clear that one must not be logically consistent in order to produce music.

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“Melanin in the Music”: Black Music History in Sound and Image

Charles D. Carson

“If you find yourself written out of history,
you can feel free to write yourself back in...”
—George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself*

In *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, George Lewis undertakes the arduous task of “writing back in” to history a story that had, for the most part, been excluded. The resulting narrative casts new light on heretofore marginalized modes of African–American creativity, altering our conception of not only the jazz canon, but the entirety of (at least) the American musical tradition. In doing so, Lewis forces us to ask one of the most difficult questions: *What else have we missed?*

More than that, however, Lewis’s project reveals an unwavering faith in the ability of music, art, literature, and dance to actively engage—and affect—ideas about community, identity, and history (xxxii). The AACM used the arts as a means of enacting change, and Lewis’s account demonstrates the potential—if not the efficacy—of such work. The arts and the artists who create them form part of a conversation amongst all Americans, one in which negotiations about who we were, are, and hope to be take place. With respect to African–American expressive practices, these conversations seem especially important, influenced as they are by discontinuities in historical narratives, legacies of oppression, and the increasing cooptation of Black cultural practices. While Lewis’s work is motivated by a need to question, and eventually revise, accepted narratives within the jazz tradition, such moves have become increasingly common among a variety of genres of Black music in recent years. In jazz, soul/r&b, rock, pop, and hip–hop, contemporary musicians are attempting to draw attention to the systematic cooptation of Black music by both the music industry and popular culture at large. ...

Take as a case in point Mos Def, a rapper who initially gained attention as one half of the underground hip–hop duo Black Star. While modest critical reception and the Gold record status of his 1999 solo debut, *Black on Both Sides* (Rawkus Records), did not make Mos Def a household name, it did provide evidence that the public was amenable to his thoughtful Black nationalist–inspired philosophies and laid–back style of flow (Posten 1999). Among the album’s high points is the track, “Rock n Roll,” which—while predating Lewis’ work by a decade—draws from the same critical and historiographic traditions. This song highlights what some might call inac-

curacies in the historical record by reasserting the role of Black musicians in the development of popular music. Mos Def seeks to set the record straight about popular music history, and offers into evidence a number of Black artists he feels have been overlooked in favor of their lighter counterparts (Table 1). Many of the artists Mos Def singles out as those who “ain’t got no soul” belong to the pop pantheon, including The Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley. (Curiously, smooth jazz saxophonist Kenny G is also included in this category, likely as a foil to John Coltrane.) Moreover, the not un-ironic insistence that the Black musicians listed under “is rock ‘n roll” are, in fact, rock n roll musicians sits in sharp contrast to the wide range of musical styles and genres that they represent: from jazz, to soul and R&B, to rock n roll itself. Mos Def’s performance highlights not only the fact that the contributions and legacies of these (Black) musicians have been largely ignored (or at the very least, coopted), but also how the influences of their associated genres have been overlooked. The implication is that this “whitewashing” has facilitated the arrogation of Black musical genres. Mos Def’s track is overtly concerned with this process, and issues a call for the reclamation of Black music.

“Rock n Roll” further complicates the relationship between these genres by foregrounding a sample from Mobb Deep’s 1999 track “Allustrious,” in which rapper Prodigy refers to hip-hop as “heavy metal for the Black people” (*Murda Musik*). This statement has a dual meaning. By drawing together hip-hop and heavy metal in the same breath, the sample underscores the shared socio-political functions (such as giving voice to a dispossessed group) of these seemingly disparate musics. At the same time however, this statement can be read as a call to arms: a sonic reclamation of a coopted genre. In this case, Prodigy and Mos Def (by proxy) seem to be calling for a re-appropriation of a musical lineage that often goes unremarked upon within the music industry, one that includes not only rock n roll, but even related genres like heavy metal. Mos Def appears to confirm this reading when, towards the end of the track, the style shifts from hip-hop to what can perhaps best be described as speed metal. Speed metal (or perhaps thrash metal), as a sub-genre of rock n roll, is most often associated with white youth culture, and its use here represents what I believe to be a conscious effort on Mos Def’s part to draw attention to the processes of appropriation, and—in effect—to take back the music (Walser 1993, Mahon 2004, Pillsbury 2006).

Such acts of reclamation form the core discussion of this paper. The impetus behind this project concerns the ways in which important voices in Black music history (and in this article, the United States specifically) have been ignored, overlooked, written out, or silenced in favor of what seem to be more or less widely accepted teleological narratives. Perhaps

just as problematic, however, is that when Black artists and their works are discussed, they often serve merely as romanticized reminders of the past—as *nostalgia*. In the following discussion, I would like to explore these ideas with respect to the relationship between African–American music and visual art. I will examine some ways in which contemporary artists and musicians use Black music—as an index for Black culture as a whole—to reclaim African–American history and memory. Rather than focusing on loss, these artists celebrate the continued immediacy of the works they reference (and the past they represent) as a means of sidestepping the impotence of nostalgia.

My reading of nostalgia is heavily influenced by film theorist Paul Grainge, who defines it as “a socio–cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual ‘golden age’” (2002; 21). Moreover, Grainge sees—among other things—the commodification of memory as a primary motivation for the “culture of nostalgia” that developed around the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. The feelings of distance and loss, part and parcel of contemporary theories of nostalgia, are omnipresent in discourses surrounding popular music: reunion tours, compilations albums, or common tropes like “oldies,” “classic,” or “retro.” For recent examples in Black popular music, one only has to look as far as The Black Eyed Peas’ “They Don’t Want Music” (*Monkey Business*, 2005) or—more prominently—the title track from Prince’s 2004 double–Platinum and double–Grammy–winning album, *Musicology*.¹ Both tracks invoke the past merely to lament how far current popular music has fallen. In glorifying the past as *lost*, such works promote seemingly unproblematic historical narratives, ones in which processes of appropriation are either ignored altogether, or helplessly shrugged off as a matter of fact.

Nostalgia can be very powerful from an emotional perspective—as a means of maintaining connections to an often meaningful past—but its weakness lies in its unquestioning romanticizing of that past. By continually looking backward, we forget to act *now*. Instead of building upon that past, we fetishize it. Scholars and artists like Lewis and Mos Def seem to offer an alternative. Like the best historians, they posit readings of the present that integrate *re*–readings of the past, and in doing so, expose both the discourses that inform the contemporary Black experience, and the often hidden power structures that sustain those discourses.

Let me be clear: this approach is not new. Lewis and Mos Def are certainly not the originators of this form of critique, but perhaps only among its most recent (and gifted) practitioners. It can be argued that such a relationship to the past is a constituent part of the African–American experience, with roots that can be traced back to the West African concept of *sankofa*—or,

“return and reclaim” (Mbiti 1991). As a literary tradition, it extends at least as far back as Gil Scott Heron, Amiri Baraka, or Langston Hughes. These writers resonate with the current discussion in that they worked, in various ways, to place music in a central position with respect to the formation and articulation of African–American identity. However, such critiques seem to have taken on greater urgency since the mid–twentieth century as the increased commodification of African–American cultural practices—music chief among them—continues to contribute to the speed of both their dissemination and appropriation (Lott 1993, Phinney 2005). In turn, the pace at which Black musical practices are being unquestionably absorbed into the pop music repertoire threatens to weaken the recognition of the cultural ties between these expressive practices and the African–American community and its culture, which might be interpreted as a continuing act of oppression. No doubt for this reason we have seen a significant growth in the number, determination, and creativity of such critiques in a variety of modes of African–American cultural expression recently, and it is this thread I would like to take up in the remainder of this article.

In his recent work, *Cultural Codes* (2010), William Banfield takes such questions as a starting point for an exploration of African–American modes of expression. Banfield articulates what he sees as a central concern among many members of the African–American arts community; namely, the growing disconnect between African–American cultural products and culture from which they are derived. As an African–American composer, performer, and educator, Banfield’s discussion takes on a tone of urgency—he is particularly invested in these issues—but perhaps the most remarkable aspect of his argument is that it is even being made in the first place. Nearly half a century after Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People*, it would seem that we are still grappling with the relationship between Black music and Black identity within the larger context of American society. Banfield, in more of a continuation of these earlier ideas than a revision of them, argues that such connections are vital not only to the creation of music, but also to understanding African–American contributions to the American cultural landscape.

Banfield’s ideas are useful for the current discussion on a number of levels. First, extending the work Baraka began with *Blues People* and *Black Music*, Banfield places the music in a prominent position in his discussion. While obviously a result of his background, the current ubiquity of Black music in the culture industry writ large enables him to connect to other areas, including economics, media, fashion, and—especially useful for the current discussion—visual arts. Second, Banfield draws on a number of approaches—from the aforementioned music–centeredness of Baraka, to

Asante's afrocentrism, to Gilroy's critique of commodification—and in doing so, illustrates the continued relevance of these issues in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Thus, Banfield's project makes a useful tool in that it ties together a number of ongoing critical approaches to Black music, and underscores their present usefulness in both academic and popular contexts.

At the center of Banfield's project is the outlining of "a philosophy driven by practiced codes, supported by an overarching aesthetic, and created by connected artists" (49). These codes both shape and result from the ideals and aesthetics of a culture, disseminated through its various art forms, whether consciously or not. Though Banfield gives artists and musicians the job of marking and maintaining these codes, his theory is grounded in populism. Banfield insists upon a symbiotic relationship between the artist (including his/her works) and the culture (as practiced by "the folks") to which the artist belongs. Banfield's philosophy is motivated by a concern for history, the recognition of unique artistic voices, an engagement with social themes, and the construction and distribution of the images, rituals, and expressions of Black culture (23).

Black expressive forms—like music—both contain and inform Black cultural codes. Moreover, Black music's ubiquity in contemporary American society (and in the market) both extends its reach and heightens its impact within this context. Taken together, these factors place Black music in a central position with respect to the processes of culture formation. Thus, references to elements of Black music—whether forms, structures, practices, repertoires, or merely intertextual allusions—can be used to tie non-musical artforms to these Black cultural codes through what Banfield calls "the unique aesthetics of Black musical expression (94)." Visual artists, like the ones discussed below, can use Black music as a means of tapping into the aesthetics, processes, and values of Black culture in the U.S.

My interest in the relationship between African-American music and contemporary African-American visual art began in earnest in the fall of 2008, when I was approached by Julie McGee, a colleague at the University of Delaware, to collaborate on a project exploring this theme, which resulted in an exhibition entitled *Sound:Print:Record: African American Legacies*. Rather than just showcasing works inspired by or featuring music and musicians, we spent the better part of a year reading, listening, and meeting with Black artists, while discussing with them the role that music plays in African-American visual arts. For many of the artists we spoke with or studied, music seemed to provide a framework for the creation, performance, and interpretation of Black identit(ies), both individual and collective. (McGee and Carson 2009). The emphasis in this paper is on performance and interpretation, as the wide variety of artistic expressions

we observed demonstrated the multiple readings and articulations of blackness available to individuals at the close of the second millennium. In the works we surveyed, there seems to be a division: whereas many works by earlier artists appear to capture or depict romanticized elements of a now lost past, contemporary works of the twenty-first century are more apt to attempt an engagement with Black histories—real or imagined—as a means of making political and/or personal statements about that past.² Grainge’s “golden age” has been replaced by a more insistent criticism of the legacies we, as a society, have inherited.

What changed? Our experience in curating the exhibition suggests that many African-American contemporary artists and musicians are, generally, hyper-aware of processes of commodification, and are mindful of the ways in which the reception of their works is affected by the kinds of cooptation of Black culture addressed in Banfield’s work. Thus, many tend to use their art to police, undermine, and ultimately reclaim control over ideas of history and memory, whether personal, communal, or cultural. This was evident in several recent (post-2000) works we included as a part of the *Sound:Print:Record* exhibition.³

As one example, I would point to *After an Afternoon*, a 2008 installation by Whitfield Lovell (Figure 1). Lovell is a New York-based African-American artist and a 2007 MacArthur Fellow. Lovell’s works show a preoccupation with bygone eras, often integrating period artifacts that he repurposes to make powerful personal statements about the past (Otterness 2005). He is perhaps best known for his life-sized portraits based on African-American vintage photographs, which he reproduces on large pieces of wood, furniture, or other found objects.

At first glance, the work appears to be intensely nostalgic, constructed as it is of distressed vintage radios. Bakelite and wood grain are punctuated by shocks of pastel pink and seafoam green. But upon closer inspection, the work appears to critique notions of a fixed and romanticized idea of the past.

To begin with, sound is central to the work. It includes a soundtrack ostensibly emanating from the radios themselves, despite the fact that the radios are not plugged in. This literal disconnectedness highlights the gulf that exists between *then* and *now*, and offers a clue about how this work engages with the past. The sounds, it seems, are merely echoes; past as it is recalled, not as it was. We are discouraged from trusting what we see, hear, and, thus, remember.

The piece utilizes three superimposed sonic layers: a Walter Winchell broadcast, an excerpt of CBS radio’s *The Beulah Show*, and two performances by Billie Holiday. The inclusion of Walter Winchell, the ever-present voice of WWII-era radio, seems to situate us in a particular historical moment



Figure 1: Whitfield Lovell, “After an Afternoon.” Courtesy of Whitfield Lovell and DC Moore Gallery.

(the 1940s) as a sonic-temporal reference point. The foundations of this reference point are shaky, however, given Winchell’s reputation for gossip, scandal, and dubious reportage. Again, the past as we know it is not to be taken at face value.

The Beulah Show, which ran on CBS radio from 1945 until 1954, also presents us with a complicated picture of history. The series focused on the weekly adventures of the Henderson family, viewed from the perspective of their African-American “domestic,” Beulah Brown. Though the character was created in 1939, it was not until the third season of the radio show (1947) that Beulah would actually be voiced by an African-American woman (initially, Academy Award winner Hattie McDaniel, though Ethel Waters would play the character after its move to TV). Prior to that, the role was performed by a series of white males (Dates and Barlow 1993, Kolbert 1993). Thus, the *Beulah* soundtrack represents both the media’s (quite literal) appropriation of African-American culture and identity, and an early attempt by African-Americans to wrest back control of their own representation.

These sounds are woven together by recordings of Billie Holiday’s

performances of “Yesterdays” and “Strange Fruit.” One of the most iconic African–American performers, the mere inclusion of Holiday’s highly recognizable voice in the sonic landscape of *After an Afternoon* ties that work to the kinds of Black expressive practices that are highlighted in Banfield’s philosophy. As we grapple with the issues of representation stirred by references to *The Beulah Show*, the presence of Holiday’s voice—as an index of the (missing) Black performing body—enables the installation as a whole to draw upon Black aesthetics in a way that highlights the absence of the Black subject.

Furthermore, while Kern & Harbach’s “Yesterdays” seems a rather straightforward evocation of the past, its pairing with “Strange Fruit”—Jewish–American songwriter Abel Meeropol’s musical response to a lynching photograph—forces a re–reading of it that complicates the impulse to hear it as nostalgic. Taken together, these works certainly recall the past, but it is not a past to be lamented as lost. Our relationship to that past is ambiguous: it is a past that we both want to forget it, and need to remember. Here, music works to evoke and disrupt our view of the past, compelling us to confront the darker moments of our history. Lovell’s piece references modes of nostalgia that are familiar to us, but its self–awareness enables it to avoid being nostalgic itself. Through the work’s intertextuality, the past, history, and memory collapse upon themselves, leaving behind the question: *What does the past have yet to teach us?* To that end, the piece can be read as a cautionary tale about the limitations, ambiguities, and even dangers of nostalgia.

One might consider the musical group the Carolina Chocolate Drops to be the musical analogue to Lovell’s visual approach, incorporating—in their own way—a sort of “found object” aesthetic. In the same way that Lovell reconfigures discarded or forgotten *materials*, the Carolina Chocolate Drops draw from discarded or forgotten *musical traditions*—namely, Black string bands. Currently built around Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons, Adam Matta, and Hubby Jenkins, the predominately African–American quartet (Giddens is of mixed heritage) has built a solid reputation within roots and folk music circles as gifted interpreters of string band music.

Or should we say *re*–interpreters? Beginning in 2005, several of the musicians who would come to be known as the Carolina Chocolate Drops began an informal apprenticeship under Joe Thompson, considered to be one of the last of the Black Piedmont fiddlers.⁴ In subsequent years, the group—no doubt riding the wave of the roots music revival of the past decade—continued to perform a mixture of their mentor’s repertoire, original works, and even roots–inspired covers of songs from other genres (Farris 2008).

While they themselves recognize that (what some may perceive as) the

novelty of African–American roots music performers may have led to their early and rapid success, they represent a continuation of a tradition, not a departure. The contributions of African–American genres and musicians to American folk, traditional, or roots music have been largely underappreciated of late, displaced by more the common narratives of blues and jazz development (with one of the few exceptions being Conway 1995). While it is true that the folk revival of the 50s and 60s was critical in helping gain recognition for an entire generation of African–American blues and folk musicians, the largely white faces of that revival (Odetta notwithstanding!) and the rock music that came out of it have contributed to an erasure of the Black influence in the ensuing years.⁵ As performers, the Carolina Chocolate Drops reclaim some of this lost legacy, reinserting African–American voices in places where they have typically been absent or silenced.

Like Lovell’s work, however, this is not an expression of loss or longing, but rather a corrective. Take, for example, the performance of “Snowden’s Jig” from their 2010 Grammy–winning effort. Subtitled “Genuine Negro Jig” (also the name of the album), it refers to a composition attributed to the prominent blackface minstrel performer, Daniel Decatur Emmett. Some disagreement exists as to the true authorship of this piece, however, with some claiming that Emmett took the song—as well as his most famous composition, “Dixie”—from his Black neighbors, the Snowden family of Ohio (Fiskin 1995). The Carolina Chocolate Drops’ re–christening of the melancholy tune is therefore an overtly political act of re–appropriation, one intended to recover lost historical narratives. Such a move not only sheds light on the roles played by Black composers and performers in early American music, but also forces us to confront the means and reasoning behind their exclusion in the first place.

Discontinuity and disjuncture are common enough elements of African–American conceptions of history, influenced as they are by that discontinuity *par excellence*, the middle passage. With this in mind, one must consider the effects of such ruptures upon individual or community identity formation. What is the end result of gaps in the historical record? How are our experiences of the present affected by the histories we have been given? Or, put more plainly: what would the present look like if the narratives of our past included things like *Black roots music*?

While their acoustic cover of African–American R&B singer Blu Cantrell’s 2001 single “Hit ‘Em Up Style” (from *So Blu*) may at first seem to be a tongue–in–cheek answer to such lofty questions, the Carolina Chocolate Drops’ performance of this song goes a long way towards reshaping our understanding of the relationship between the past and the present in Black music. A call for jilted women to get back at their lovers by spending all

of their money, “Hit ‘Em Up Style” was the breakout hit of Cantrell’s debut album. In the Carolina Chocolate Drops’ version, however, the aural mismatch of the fiddle, beatbox (Adam Matta), and Giddens’s take on Cantrell’s lyrics may initially seem somewhat unusual. Listening closely, however, we realize that these two performances are, in fact, not that far apart.

In terms of content, the song belongs to a long tradition of “woman scorned” songs, stretching back at least to works like Ma Rainey’s “Don’t Fish in My Sea,” Bessie Smith’s “Ain’t Gonna Play No Second Fiddle,” and countless others. The natural minor outlined by the melody gives the song a modal tinge, one that connects this song to the earlier folk songs that form the core of the Carolina Chocolate Drops’ repertoire. Both versions have a distinct rhythmic groove, the result of moderate tempo and significant inflection on weak beats. The clarity and power of Giddens’s voice certainly doesn’t take away from the Carolina Chocolate Drops’ performance, either. But the point is not that the Carolina Chocolate Drops’ version can *sound like* contemporary R&B. Rather, in this track, the Carolina Chocolate Drops recover some of the possibilities of Black musical expression perhaps lost by the exclusion of roots music from the narrative of Black music history. Bringing their tradition in line with contemporary Black musics, they emphasize both the continuities and discontinuities between them. If nostalgia entails looking back at the past through the lens of the present, this example inverts such a definition. The Carolina Chocolate Drops offer us a view of the present—or at least a potential present—viewed from the perspective of a newly rediscovered past. Again, the effect is decidedly *un*-nostalgic. Its themes are not distance and loss, but immediacy and recovery. This instills in both the music and its history a sense of novelty, vitality, and relevance that is key to the performers’ sustained engagement with the politics of representation. As the Carolina Chocolate Drops themselves say: “It is OK to mix it up and go where the spirit moves” (Carolina Chocolate Drops 2011).

If, as scholars such as Banfield argue, commodification, focus groups, and marketing departments have severed (or at the very least, concealed) the ties between Black musics and Black cultural codes, then examples like this represent an attempt to attenuate the effects of such processes. But the goal is not to show how this or that music or genre is or is not “Black.” Superficial similarities like lyrical content or mode do not go very far. Rather, it is a question of understanding the roles that such performances play in constructing alternative representations of Blackness, and how we might use these alternatives to create an awareness of the methods and meanings behind Black representation in popular media.

The “methods of popular media” lie at the heart of African–American artist Jefferson Pinder’s multi-year work, entitled the *Missionary Project*.⁶

Part performance–art, part social experiment, the *Missionary Project* addresses issues of Black identity and representation on the subways of Mexico City. Central to this project is a mix tape, created by Pinder, which contains audio examples representing many facets of Black identity. Donning a backpack with built-in speakers, Pinder spends days riding the city's transportation system, the sounds of “blackness” emanating from him—a Black male—as he sells these CDs to passengers on the train for ten pesos each. In Pinder's own words:

I went forth to create a “mix-CD” of music that would represent my culture, my home [the US], and myself . . . a product that represents identity in a way that is truthful to my knowledge of what “blackness” is . . . (Pinder 2009; quoted in McGee and Carson 2009, 21)

Pinder continues, noting that he:

. . . use[s] music to inform and enhance the listener's understanding of the depth of the Afro-American experience and in some way present a complete and dynamic non-commercial interpretation of the power of black music . . . (21)

By doing this, Pinder hopes to create a space for public dialogue about identity writ large. Pinder's focus on Mexico City is motivated, in part, by that country's complicated past vis-à-vis its indigenous peoples, its role in the African slave trade, and contemporary immigration issues. These issues are heightened by the government's socialist philosophies, wherein Pinder believes “minorities and their interests are swallowed up by mainstream culture” (Pinder 2009).

Pinder sees himself as an “ambassador,” a role which he considers to be both a “burden and a privilege” (Pinder 2009). Music's part in this is vital, since it is through the normally highly commodified medium of music that he makes statements about the commercial nature of Black representation. By using the industry's own products—recombined and repackaged—he contradicts commercialized representations of Black identity. The mix-CD contains, among other things, tracks by seminal Black artists like James Brown and Gil Scott-Heron, Shaggy's “Chica Bonita,” and excerpts from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” speech. It also includes a Mexican folk song for children and audio from the Apollo 11 launch. While Pinder's works adds a global perspective that is somewhat beyond the purview of this article, it is important to note the variety of works he considers to be “black.” Like the Carolina Chocolate Drops' set list, this variety complicates common notions of blackness and reveals the exceedingly personal nature of identity formation.



Figure 2: Jefferson Pinder, “Music Missionaries.” Courtesy of G-Fine Art.

This complexity is made visible in another of Pinder’s works, *Music Missionaries* (2008), a woodblock print which adorns the front of the CDs Pinder makes and sells (Figure 2). Iconic representations of African–American musicians (including Robert Johnson and Billie Holiday), scenes from Black life, and images of slavery are juxtaposed against African folk elements and Mexican *calaveras*. As in his live “performances,” these themes are unified by a train motif signifying motion, change, or progress. Art historian Julie McGee sums it up thusly:

Pinder’s work activates cultural constructions of African American culture and deploys aural and visual codes of signification that at once invoke a ‘black familiar’ and then destabilize tautological relationships between African American art and sound. (McGee and Carson 2009, 21)

Such “destabilization” is the focus of the present study. By placing elements of African–American culture in a broader (international) context, Pinder questions US–centric ideas of blackness, while simultaneously using those same conceptions to challenge problematic post–racial policies in Mexico.

Thus far, I have tried to uncover some shared elements between African–American visual arts and music—elements through which artists and musicians reshape conceptions of the past. My final pair of examples, I hope, will illustrate just how entwined art, music, and history can be, and how this interconnectedness can be used to great artistic, intellectual, and political effect.

Ellington Robinson, an African–American visual artist specializing in mixed media, often turns to musical topics or materials in his projects. The son of a US diplomat, he spent much of his youth divided between Washington, D.C. and St. Croix. In the Virgin Islands, his family lived on a former plantation—which Robinson considered to be “a constant reminder of our past”—a fact which is evident in virtually all of his works (Robinson 2011). Similarly, jazz pianist and composer Jason Moran describes his music as “music that starts from a historical place” (MacArthur Foundation Interview 2010). Moran, a Houston–born musician who was later mentored by Jaki Byard at the Manhattan School of Music, has built a solid reputation in the jazz world based on his unique mixture of old and new approaches to the music. Both artists are concerned with history and its meanings, and—born in the same year (1975)—they share similar musical interests and influences. They grew up alongside contemporary American popular musics (most notably, hip–hop), but both cite genres like blues and jazz as important influences, too—Robinson through his father’s record collection, and Moran through his enduring fascination with Thelonious Monk. This musical eclecticism proved to be influential on their artistic development, as many of their projects involve an assimilation of these elements. Despite their different artistic areas—visual arts and music, respectively—a common thread between their works is a processual approach. That is, many of their pieces actively engage their subject matter and perform a re–reading of it staged specifically for us—the audience. Thus, history is not past; it is immediate. Each artist sees himself as a participant in a history that is constantly being (re)written. Works like Robinson’s 2007 sculpture *The Last is Preparing to Leave* (Figure 3) or Moran’s recording of “Planet Rock” (from *Modernistic*, 2002) reflect each artist’s eclecticism, blurring the lines between genres, styles, or historical period.

The Last is Preparing to Leave is a sculpture constructed of a metallic cassette tape, gel, toys, and hip–hop cassette labels. The image of the train reappears here, symbolizing the movement of the music (in this case, the hip–hop alluded to in the affixed labels) that helped Robinson retain connections to his African–American community in the US while living in the Virgin Islands. Moreover, the juxtaposition of hip–hop and the train also recalls the prominent role of subway cars in early urban hip–hop culture: tagging trains as a means of gaining recognition for your crew outside of

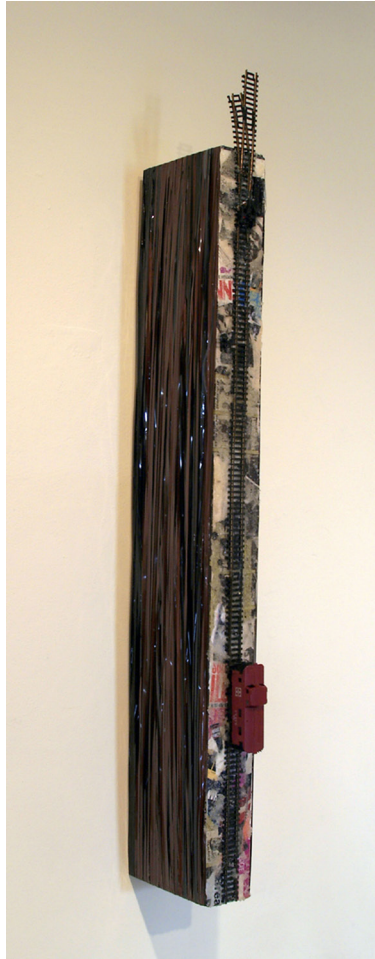


Figure 3: Ellington Robinson, “The Last is Preparing to Leave.” Courtesy of Ellington Robinson.

your local neighborhood. Thus, these tracks (in both senses of the word) served as a primary means of communication both within and beyond a given community. Though music is not present here in a sonic sense, its use as a symbol points to its power as a means for forging connections between individuals and their communities or cultures.

Moran’s music is a bit more overt in its nod to the past—he directly quotes his musical progenitors. Memories and influences are re-enacted and reconsidered in a very present way. As a cover of a track by the seminal early hip-hop DJ, Afrika Bambaataa, Moran’s version begins with a recreation of the original track’s signature Roland 808 beat, reproduced on acoustic piano

through the insertion of paper between the instrument's strings. Moran continues by not only playing the track's melodic hook—a sample taken from “Trans–Europe Express” by German electronic pop pioneers Kraftwerk—but also by emulating the rapped call–and–response vocal interjections of the MCs (members of Bambaataa's group, Soulsonic Force). In an interesting take on the straight–ahead jazz practice of improvising on a given chord progression, Moran uses these elements as a starting point for an exploration of the sonic (not harmonic) world of “Planet Rock.” This cover therefore lies at the intersection of jazz, early hip–hop, electronic pop music (through the Kraftwerk reference), and the art music *avant garde* (through the use of prepared piano).

While the allusions contained in Moran's “Planet Rock” are perhaps more obvious to the casual observer than those in Robinson's work, they are no less effective. Both works speak by layering references to earlier works and disparate genres, and infusing them with highly personalized experiences, associations, and connections. This reconfiguring of the familiar challenges master–narratives of style and genre development, and—often linked to these concepts—temporality itself. Ellington's and Moran's works are always intensely *present*, despite their frequent references to earlier times, places, and musics.

Moran's performance of “You've Got To Be Modernistic” (also from *Modernistic*), first recorded by James P. Johnson in the 1930s, shows the younger musician's indebtedness to early virtuosos like Johnson. But, despite the original's place in the canon, Moran doesn't just “cover” the tune; this is not a rehearsal of obsessive nostalgia. Rather, Moran engages the earlier recording in a conversation, quoting it, repeating its figures, but just as often stopping to give a particular musical fragment special attention. In some instances, he fixatedly repeats a fragment, turning it over and over in his hands—seeing what makes it tick—before picking up where he left off. This process results in a work that may *sound* different than Johnson's original, but that difference is more a result of a process of interrogation than a conscious departure. Obviously, Moran draws from the jazz tradition (improvising on a harmonic model), but he also departs from it in fundamental ways. He frequently interrupts the harmonic progression, rhythmic flow, and pulse in a way that clouds the form and structure of the original work. The effect is telling: rather than using the original as a vehicle for improvisation, his version specifically refers to Johnson's version through quotation and reference. Both versions remain vehicles for virtuosity. Moran's is a new and separate reading, to be sure, but it is a reading that is acutely aware of its relationship to its predecessor, to an extent that goes beyond mere homage. Moran *deconstructs* the earlier work out of curiosity, respect, or even reverence.

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Here, we are hearing the *process* of engaging with the past. Moran succeeds in retaining that which is “modernistic” about the piece, but he does so for a contemporary audience.

A similar move informs the final work I would like to consider. Robinson’s 2006 collage, *Melanin in the Music I* (Figure 4), is a visual work constructed of material elements taken from old LPs, mostly from his father’s



Figure 4: Ellington Robinson, “Melanin in the Music I.” Courtesy of Ellington Robinson.

collection. Album covers, inner sleeves, and even the vinyl itself comprise this dense and textured work. The album art is barely visible, obscuring the individual recordings included in the collage like so many familiar yet forgotten tunes. Nevertheless, a cursory glance may reveal a few of the more iconic jazz cover art examples of the 1960s, including Dexter Gordon’s *Go*, Lee Morgan’s *The Sidewinder*, and Eric Dolphy’s *Out to Lunch*—albums which evoke a particular moment rooted in mid-century Afromodernist aesthetics.

But this evocation is layered. In addition to the impressionistic use of the cover art images, the backs of the albums are arranged so as to form a regular, geometric pattern. With its mixture of strict grids, angled intersections, and large circles, the pattern recalls the footprint of Robinson's own Washington, DC. Built by slaves, and labeled a "chocolate city" since the late-1950s, DC has long been a lightning rod for issues of race and class—heightened by its political importance. The thick layering of sepia in this work—*melanin*, perhaps—serves to remind us of DC's Black legacy by quite literally re-inscribing blackness onto the geography of a city whose white-washed domes and monuments often overshadow the struggles of the large, mostly Black population (a population which still lacks voting congressional representation). Through his use of musical artifacts and materials, Robinson succeeds in offering a corrective to established narratives of American history that recognize DC as a seat of power without acknowledging the ongoing struggles of its least powerful residents. Like in the Mos Def example with which we began, Robinson seeks to reclaim a history that has been systematically ignored, erased, and rewritten. And—similar to Moran's performance, as well—he does this by confronting this history from a highly individualistic point of view.

Black music, both as a product of African-American culture and an increasingly *transcultural* commodity, lies at the center of debates about race, culture, nationalism, and capitalism. Each of the works considered here engages with music in different ways, but their shared concern is an awareness of music's role in offering a re-interpretation of an African-American past—or, perhaps more to the point—ideas about that past: art as *historiography*. As in the earlier discussion of nostalgia, it could be said that the works included in this discussion are not so much "black" (whatever that may mean) as they are "about blackness." They attempt to illustrate and challenge the many ways blackness, or even history, can be performed. In contrast to the hollow rehearsal of the past—*nostalgia*—the works discussed above invoke the past as a challenge to our way of thinking. Consequently, the past is made present, and its legacy is not one of loss, but of potential.

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Notes

1. In the track, Prince laments: “Don’t you miss the feeling music gave you back in the day?”
2. To be fair, many of these earlier works are products of different times, and as such had different goals—the work of photographer P.H. Polk (1898–1984) being a telling example. Polk’s oeuvre, which is dominated by portraits of prominent African–Americans taken during his tenure as the official photographer of the Tuskegee Institute, reflects an interest in representing the variety of Black experiences, and as such are exceptional works of their time. For contemporary audiences, however, they perhaps lack the urgency of post–Civil Rights Era activism.
3. The majority of the exhibition was drawn from works in the Paul R. Jones Collection housed at the University of Delaware. To this, we added works by artists whose approaches to the relationship between music and visual art reflected or enhanced the spirit of the exhibition, with particular attention to living artists (mostly from the Mid–Atlantic region).
4. The Piedmont region is located along the eastern part of the United States, between the Appalachian Mountains and the coastal regions along the Atlantic. It stretches at least as far north as eastern Pennsylvania/New Jersey, and as far south as Alabama. The musical traditions of this region, while certainly related to those of the Upland South (Appalachian music), are distinct in that they show more influence of blues and early ragtime.
5. A telling example of this can be seen by comparing the original release of Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952)—a racially varied recording which helped launch the folk revival—with the 1999 tribute album *The Harry Smith Project: An Anthology of American Folk Revisited*. The latter album features covers of several of the works that appeared on the original anthology, now performed by mostly white musicians. Moreover, despite the inclusion of a number of works by Black performers on the soundtrack to the 2000 Coen Brothers film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, the roots revival it sparked was certainly coded white, as made evident by the concert film *Down From the Mountain*, which documented a concert of music from the film performed at the historic Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, TN.
6. Videos documenting this project are available via Jefferson Pinder’s website, www.jeffersonpinder.com/newsite/work/missionary-project [accessed 10–01–2011].

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Julian Henriques. 2011. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*. New York: Continuum.

Reviewed by Seth Mulliken

The evolution of sound studies over the past decade has been rapid. It would be wrong to say that sound studies is ‘arriving’: it has arrived. But this arrival has not brought with it even a tacit agreement about its place in the academy, and more specifically, within cultural studies. More than likely, this has to do with a lack of agreement about what precisely is being studied. While a comparison to visual studies for sound studies is specious at best, the field of visual studies has long ago ossified into cells of academic interest. Sound studies seems under no such threat of atrophy. As such, books that challenge the boundaries of sound studies continue to appear and examine the diverse roles sound plays in social life. The most cursory glance through the introduction of Julian Henriques’ *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* reveals a list of scholarly names familiar to any reader of sound studies: Douglas Kahn, Jonathan Sterne, Les Bull, Michael Bull, Mark Katz. Despite the familiarity of these names, *Sonic Bodies* describes sound studies as a field that offers much variation and dispersion across many areas sites and methods of analysis.

But what is sound, exactly? Is sound what happens in the ears, in the brain, or at the surface of the door slamming shut? Sound is buried under a simultaneous denial and responsibility, and it carries information that is crucial to the social and political life of the subject in modernity. Some scholars, such as Jonathan Sterne in *The Audible Past*, (2003) are unconcerned with what precisely sound is (or, more accurately, where sound happens) than with the ways that sound interacts with political history of technological development. In contrast, Veit Erlman, in *Reason and Resonance* (2010) is concerned with the history of the ear. Like Sterne, Erlman goes to great lengths to question, and in some cases reverse, the image of the passive ear. However, he still depends an essential morphological functioning to the ear, distinct from dynamic processes of sound interpretation. These two examples represent a relatively small continuum of sound studies, but they do illustrate what flows beneath the field: a radical multiplicity as to what constitutes sound.

Henriques’ book is, in part, an expansion of an article published in Bull and Back’s *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003). In “Sonic Dominance and

the Reggae Sound System,” Henriques explores events where he feels sound supplants vision as the dominant sensory modality; he cites the large-scale sporting event and the Reggae Sound System as examples. The earlier article is concerned primarily with the experience of sonic dominance, and how it can bring about a shared politics, in opposition to the visual dominance, which is often used to articulate a hierarchal politics. In *Sonic Bodies*, Henriques deepens his analysis, using the experience of being present at a live DJ event to create a theory of thinking through sound. While his site of analysis is the Reggae Sound System, he is concerned with establishing a theoretical basis for thinking *through* sound.

As a process, thinking through sound is distinct from thinking about sound. Henriques says that there is something distinct and unique about a sounding way of thinking, something that is dynamic in opposition to the static nature of the visual and the image. Sounding has a unique relationship to embodiment; sound is a full-bodied sensory experience, one that engulfs and envelopes. In his introduction, Henriques goes to great lengths to avoid the snare of sound as related to instinct and emotion, and proposes that the envelopment by sound is a different way of thinking.

Sonic Bodies reads like three different books weaving through, into, and out of one another. Rather than a precise threading process, the book can sometimes feel like the weaving of satin thread, linguini, and a garden hose into a fascinatingly odd scarf. The introduction positions the book firmly in a cultural studies tradition; Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, amongst others, are cited as sources for thinking about culture and identity. He says that the book is the result of four years of participation and observation of the Stone Love Movement—a group of DJs, MCs, and performers. The discussion of his observations creates one of the threads. While *Sonic Bodies* is not strictly an ethnography in the way that Louise Meintjes’ *Sound of Africa!* is, it does incorporate interviews and thick descriptions about the sound system at work. A reference to Geertz and a delicate empiricism in the middle of the text supports the ethnographic techniques at work. The ethnographic portion addresses what he refers to as the sociocultural and corporeal aspects of sound thinking; they form a triangle with the material aspect that will be crucial to the conclusion.

The second book at work inside *Sonic Bodies* is one that might be called a textual/historical analysis. This is what Henriques refers to as the material aspect of the sound thinking. Henriques provides fascinating descriptions of the construction of speakers and cabinets to best project the sound of the system into the street, into the public space. Throughout this section, his focus is on the skillfulness of the sound system creators, displaying the specific and sophisticated levels of creation at work in the sound system.

While race is not his focus, *Sonic Bodies* does contribute to the field of critical race theory. One of the more unsettling strains that runs through discourses of ethnographic musicology is the way in which non-Western, non-white, non-European musical creations are characterized as the result of “instinct” and “natural” ability. While this might reflect some of the complex ways non-Western music might relate to culture outside of the capitalist context, it also frames those musics as lacking in skill or intellect, as the product of a kind of savagery. This feeds and strengthens racism towards the non-White, non-Western world, a racism that has ceased to be erased over the past century. Henriques’ discussion of technological skill and knowing creation makes excellent strides against that too-common subtext. In highlighting the technological skill of the sound system selectors and MCs, Henriques challenges the notion that music made by people of color, particularly music that involves a crucial interaction with machines, such as hip-hop or modern R & B, is neither skilled or innovative. He describes the process of building the sound system from the construction of the wooden speaker cabinets to the choosing of a public space to perform. Framing the sound system as the result of skilled and precise creation processes allows Henriques to make a larger point, that is, that the sound system is a political act of creating a sound space within which a community might interact. For Henriques, the sonic dominant space, a space like that which the sound system creates, offers a chance to engage in the sharing of space, rather than controlling space. So, for the communities he is concerned with, the Jamaican designers and selectors of the sound system, as well as the audiences of young and older folks who attend the sound system, they become agents, and engagement with the sound system is an expression of identity. And this is a clear challenge to ethnomusicology that sees the “other,” here, the reggae musician and reggae music fans, as only unconscious vehicles of tradition. It is in this point that the book makes his clearest contribution to ethnomusicology. This is how he can make the claim that “(t)he sound system itself should be ranked as one of popular culture’s major achievements, anywhere in the world (2011; 3).”

Henriques willingly engages a perspective that troubles some inquiries in sound studies: the idea of sound as “radical” or subversive in itself. Scholars such as Erlmann are skeptical of such a claim, worried that it is a short journey away from replacing one dominant discourse, that of the visual, with another, the auditory, without questioning the politics of oppressive power at work. For Henriques, however, sound itself contains the possibility of a radical politics, a politics that can move beyond “habitual patterns of visual thought (2011; xx).” This is what makes Henriques’ theories most compelling; the idea that a politics based on sounding does still possess a power to “strike at the heart of Western metaphysics (2011; xxix).”

The final two chapters of the book, chapters 8 and 9, are the most curious; they create the third book contained in *Sonic Bodies*. Although mentions of classical rhetoric theory weave spectrally through the introduction, they don't necessarily figure in the body of the text. Similar to bass's resonance in the sound system, this final chapter strikes the reader by altering the theoretical landscape of the text. The ethnographic and explanatory examples almost completely disappear, replaced by explications of rhetorical theory. He differentiates the Shannon–Weaver model of communication from rhetorical theory; he says that it is only classical rhetorical theory that can account for the affective persuasion that occurs in the sensory impact of the MC's voice. (207)

It should be noted here that Henriques ignores the growing body of literature in cultural studies on affect by scholars such as Brian Massumi (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2004), Sara Ahmed (2004), Lauren Berlant (2011), as well as ethnographic work that deals with the sensory, such as Sarah Pink (2009). Rhetoric, at least, the classical rhetoric that Henriques' is interested in, doesn't figure in the work of Massumi, Pink, or other scholars of communication, affect, and the sensible. Equally, these scholars attempt to employ models of communication and interaction far different from the Shannon–Weaver model. Classical rhetoric offers Henriques a theoretical bounding that doesn't threaten the exclusivity of the individual—the subject. Henriques' sonic body rests on the idea of a stable, autonomous subject, one capable of agency. For Massumi and scholars of a similar thought, the move toward a fragmented body, suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their text *A Thousand Plateaus*, is a crucial step away from Shannon and Weaver.

In the afterword, Henriques states that one of the criticisms of thinking through sound, as he defines it, “is that it makes vibrations inescapable (277).” This allows a move, he says, from a discursive question, that is, how does the sound system work, to what it produces. He says that *Sonic Bodies* has been more focused on the former, but that he hopes further research moves more toward the latter (277). Where the preceding chapters dealing with classical rhetoric might seem almost “creaky,” in the afterword he opens up the applicable possibilities for his theory. He is saying, to summarize, that his text has offered a foundation in a discursive method that sets the stage for a move beyond it. Rather than showing how bodies express waves, this next turn can explore how waves produce bodies (277).

Henriques' text is not easily summarized. It sits uncomfortably on the knife-edges of various contested disciplinary boundaries: rhetoric and cultural studies, ethnography and textual analysis, sound studies and musicology. It is a cultural studies text that concludes with an attempt to

link to classical rhetorical theory. It uses ethnographic techniques but never addresses questions of method. It is concerned with music, but doesn't address musicology. Henriques' book is, quite frankly, strange. But it is in this strangeness that it questions the usefulness of the various disciplines it scratches. *Sonic Bodies* might even be thought of as a quintessential sound studies text: it never quite touches down and ossifies its theoretical questions. On the last page, it is left rather ambiguous what a sonic body is exactly, or how it is constituted. Maybe it is in texts like these, those that implicitly invite further questions and analysis, where a quasi-field like sound studies can flourish. The incompleteness of Henriques' book is what, in the end, makes it compelling, leaving scholars of sound, music, and the culture of technology to explore where the analysis might go from where Henriques leaves off.

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Hillel Schwartz. 2011. *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond*. Brooklyn: Zone Books.

Reviewed by Shannon Mattern

Hillel Schwartz's *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* is not merely a text to be read; it's also an object to be grappled with. One must create space for it, adopt a proper reading posture to accommodate it, and listen to it—both to the words on the pages and to the pages themselves. At 9 ¼ in. x 6 ¼ in. x 2 ⅜ in., *Making Noise* is not the kind of book one can easily tuck into a bag for subway reading. In fact, in the two months I spent working through the text, not once did I manage to find sufficient spare space in my bag to lug it to school or to a coffee shop; consequently, I read the book entirely in my apartment—in a familiar and relatively quiet acoustic environment, which may have set Schwartz's babble and bang into acoustic relief. In addition, *Making Noise* is not the kind of book one can easily read while lying on the couch; its 2.5 pounds tired my wrists far too quickly. As a result, I read the entire book sitting or standing up, or while lying on my stomach on the living room carpet. I never experienced Schwartz with my head cocooned in a pillow, down and cloth providing acoustic insulation. Consequently, as I read, I became more conscious of the symphony of white noises—humming refrigerators and whirring hard drives—filling my seemingly quiet Brooklyn apartment.

The main text alone is 859 pages; with the index, it is 912. Yet even that number doesn't include all bibliographic components. Because of the book's length, the publisher decided to make the 349 pages of endnotes, along with a 51-page bibliography of "noisy" children's books (including a panoply of intriguing titles, such as *Don't Wake the Baby* and *Croak! Hoot! Squeak! Buzz!*), downloadable from the Zones Books website. I regard the endnotes, when they're more than mere citations, as an integral part of any text; when I read I typically maintain two bookmarks—one in the main text, one in the end matter—so that I can continually reference relevant notes and citations. With Schwartz's book, I often found myself so intrigued by a particular tale or provoked by a specific claim that I sought to follow his trail of inquiry by consulting his source material. Alas, the printed text itself required such a physical commitment that I simply couldn't manage simultaneous consultation of the endnotes. I couldn't keep running back and forth from reading chair to computer, or juggling the physical book and an iPad full of notes.

As a result, in the moment of reading, I missed the fecund end matter and lost an opportunity to hear the myriad voices informing and foretelling the arrival of Schwartz's noisy tale.

Yet a subsequent perusal of the endnotes revealed the astounding range of resources that the author consulted over the course of two decades. According to the book's distributor, MIT Press, Schwartz drew upon

such diverse sources as the archives of antinoise activists and radio advertisers, catalogs of fireworks and dental drills, letters and daybooks of physicists and physicians, military manuals and training films, travel diaries and civil defense pamphlets, as well as museum collections of bells, ear trumpets, megaphones, sirens, stethoscopes, and street organs. (n.d.)

Published resources include scholarly texts from, among countless fields, anthropology, architecture, art history, biology, literature, material culture, musicology, otology, physics, sensory history, soundscape studies, urban history, and, my own field, media studies—and scholars and practitioners from all of these fields constitute the book's potential audience. We can hear the work of Emily Thompson, Jonathan Sterne, Jacques Attali, Mark M. Smith, Alain Corbin and countless others echoing throughout *Making Noise*, and perhaps placed in conversation with one another for the first time. Given the breadth and eclecticism of his resources, Schwartz's work represents a monumental convergence of often disparate voices on sound and noise.

These voices live not only on the book's pages, but also in its form. With so many sheets bound into such a large volume—and these aren't your typical Norton Anthology onion skins, as this volume rivals the weight of a nicely published mass-market fiction hard-cover—there's a distinctive depth to its flutter as I flip through its pages. When I drop it on the floor, what a nice round thud it makes—not the strident crack of less substantial volumes! *Making Noise* is a tenor. Yet it's a discordant tenor, with its somewhere-between-mint-green-and-robin's-egg-blue cover featuring, in fluorescent orange (which imparts the effect of being printed in negative), a blown-up print of J.J. Grandville's "Katzenmusik" ("rough music"), and type in an elegant brick-red serif font. Quite a noisy contrast of graphic elements.

Inside the cover, past the black endpapers; past an image of Michael Barton Miller's "aroundsound #2 (elpasoyodel)," sculptures resembling the ear canal; past the copyright information and dedication, we encounter Schwartz's "Note to Reader": "This book is meant to be read aloud." There is indeed a lyricism to the writing that Schwartz manages to sustain throughout all 800+ pages. Even if my lips weren't moving as I read, I heard Schwartz's

words resonate in my inner ear—something that rarely happens when one reads tone-deaf academic prose.

Schwartz has divided the book into three main sections, or “Rounds”:

- (1) Everywhere: On apprehensions of noise on all sides. How this comes to be, and from which directions.
- (2) Everywhen, Everyone: On ears of all sorts. On who is hearing noise, under what conditions and at what time of day or year of life.
- (3) Everyhow: On hearing what had not been heard, could not be heard, should not be heard. Calibrating and recalibrating noise. Toward what end?

While working my way through the book, the Rounds resonated only very faintly for me; they felt more like cryptic titles of symphonic movements. But after completing the book and allowing it to echo for a while, the rhetorical functions of these titles did eventually make some sense: the focus on where, when, who, and how suggests that Schwartz regards his work as that of a storyteller. And the regular use of the “every-” prefix prepares us to accept the broad, encompassing breadth of these stories; Schwartz’s story of noise has multiple protagonists and antagonists, widely distributed agency (implicating a variety of inanimate objects and bio-technical systems), and is inflected by the place, time, and identity of his characters and informants. The story’s telling also depends upon the methods those various culturally and historically situated subjects use to define, measure, and represent noise. Structuring the book in “Rounds” seems fitting for a story that cycles through time, continually revisits subjects (some, perhaps a bit too frequently), and appreciates their echoes. Even the book’s polychronic subtitle—which starts with Babel, then listens back for echoes of the Big Bang, then listens forward to the beyond—suggests that this is not a linear, teleological story.

The three Rounds are preceded by “Consonances,” Schwartz’s acknowledgments of resonant minds and voices; and “Bang (A Beginning),” his introduction on “hearing out noise,” “origins auricular and oracular, mythic and metaphoric,” and “hardness of hearing.” This Bang isn’t the “big” one, however; it refers instead to the booms, breaths, brouhaha, and babble in various Vedic and Judeo-Christian genesis stories. It is here that Schwartz establishes the “every-”ness and, at the same time, the contingency of noise:

Noise is never so much a question of the intensity of sound as of the intensity of relationships: between deep past, past, and present, imagined or experienced; between one generation and the next, gods or mortals; between country and city, urb and suburb; between one class and another; between the sexes; between Neanderthals and other humans. (20–1)

Noise, Schwartz proposes, has a fourfold history:

First, the chronicle of changing soundscapes: how each era and culture lives within its own ambience of sounds. Next, the annals of sounds earmarked as pleasant or obnoxious: how each era, culture, and rank hears (or does not hear) and welcomes or disdains the sounds around it. Next, the career of noise itself as variously apprehended: how each era, culture, occupation or discipline reconstitutes the notion and nature of noise. Contingent upon these, finally, are narratives of noisemaking and noise-breaking: how noise in each era, culture, and class has been denounced or defended, defiantly produced or determinedly deadened. (21)

In a book this large, in which readers are likely seeking orientation and a guide to navigation, this four-part model might seem to promise a map or score of the text—but no; these are simply four refrains to listen for throughout the three Rounds. There's much to be heard in the silences, too. In the “sound-shadow,” Schwartz says, we can discern “four reciprocal histories”: “the history of elected or commanded silence; the history of the deaf and deafness; the history of Arcadian idylls and millennial kingdoms; the history of stillness—of portraiture and death, sedation and paralysis, inner reserve and outward desolation” (21). This set of reciprocal histories can in turn be contextualized within (and is often unfortunately “masked” by) the “ostensibly larger stories of civilization, urbanization, industrialization, mass distribution, and mass communications” (21). These eight reciprocal histories—as well as others not named here, like the histories of medicine, fashion, children's literature, and war—and the five larger historical contexts are intertwined, together composing the multivocal history of noise. I'll highlight just a sampling of the connections drawn in the introduction and each of the three main sections; to offer a full listing of the topics Schwartz addresses would require far more space than we have here.

In “Bang,” we hear about epidemic diseases with ototoxic side-effects, “low noise” cassette tapes, the evolving role of the encore in the performing arts, and the many challenges of being a sonarman on a submarine, where a mishearing can have devastating consequences. The sonarman reminds us that “the meanings we assign to noise are no less consequential than the meanings we assign to other sounds. Noise may be unwanted or incomprehensible sound; it is never insignificant sound” (28). Schwartz also mentions humans' vain search for an Ur-language, “root of all other tongues spoken by humanity,” and the cultural biases inherent in anthropologists' early studies, among ancient or isolated communities, of what it means to “hear well” (30). Recognizing the futility of these endeavors, and “abandoning... any claim to imperturbable sanctuary or impeccable hearing, we are free to move on to what is left: the history of noise” (36).

And move on we do, into Round One: Everywhere. Here we hear about the history of reading aloud and the textual conventions—spaces between words, punctuation, capitalization—that thwarted or facilitated this practice. We hear town criers in the street; conversations in the Medici-era court; echoes represented visually in cliff paintings and cave walls; and echoes reverberating around Mayan pyramids and Greek amphitheaters. We learn of the integration of zones of publicity and privacy, of sound and silence, into the Renaissance domestic sphere, where various architectural solutions were designed to keep noise out, and often failed. In the Old World,

[Echo] was active in the stone corridors of narrow city streets, in the hallways of country houses, in the lyrics and staging of songs and operas, in artificial grottoes hollowed out for aristocratic gardens and public amusement, in the echo-organs of cathedrals whose vaulted domes sometimes (as at St. Paul's) had whispering galleries. (65)

Echo echoed in Baroque music, and in the sounds of war and the cacophony of the underworld. The righteous had to “listen through noise . . . for the Lord’s guidance” (90–1)—but what, precisely, constituted the medium through which they listened was a matter for debate: was it *pneuma*, or ether—either or neither? We also consider in this Round how flatulence, laughter, and weeping were received in various contexts, and wonder what it means to speak with angels or through machines. We map a new geography, and a new soundscape, shaped by iron furnaces and steam engines. We think about practices of “educating the senses”—particularly in the penitentiary, where, as the prevailing penal theories had it, “it was solitude [and silence] that conduced toward repentance” (182). We hear the noises of slavery and freedom, and consider how they sounded different in relation to one another. We imagine doctors pressing ears and stethoscopes to ailing patients, and telegraphers making sense of the “dit-da of Morse Code” (227). We consider how the rise of these new technologies—telephones, radios, radar—installed “a new mode of listening that entailed a heightened sensitivity to the ubiquity of noise,” and we watch Victorian architects work toward isolating interior life from the cacophony outside (230).

Early in Round Two: “Everywhen, Everyone,” Schwartz presents a concise “lesson”:

Each generation inhabits a different acoustic universe, constituted by different musics and memories of sound, by different thicknesses of walls and densities of traffic, by different means of manufacture and broadcast, by different diets and ear-damaging diseases, by different proportions and preponderances of metal rattling in kitchens, clanging on the streets, or ringing in the (differently polluted) air above. (314)

We begin this Round with the “loud dress” of the dandies, then we later address the onomatopoeia of the Futurists and acknowledge that others were composing with silence long before John Cage. We’re stumped by acoustic shadow (topographical obstructions to the propagation of sound) on Civil War battlefields, and made to wonder if the “acoustic density” of our industrializing cities—a function of demographics, traffic, and urban heat, which “[sped] sound along”—is an inevitability. To some, the only recourse seemed to be a search for sonic retreats in cemeteries and parks, or “rest cures” in Japan and other foreign lands (274). Meanwhile, officials experimented with new street-paving materials to cut down on traffic noise. Florence Nightingale reminded us of the healing powers of quiet, and various anti-noise parties set out to enforce it, in part by encouraging the establishment of acoustic zones. Later in the Round, we hear about new scientific studies of sound (by Bell, Doppler, Edison, Faraday, Maxwell, Sabine, and others), and about architects who learned from these scientific discoveries as they strove to soundproof homes and hospitals. Meanwhile, urbanites watched overhead wires overtake their cities.

We consider hearing loss and tinnitus, particularly among factory workers. We think also of the significance assigned to ears—how they were once used for the “typing of personality”—and how, nevertheless, they’ve been subject to all sorts of abuse (355):

Add it all up—the endemic diseases, epidemics, and childhood “fevers” with their otological after-effects, often permanent; the ototoxic drugs used to treat those afflictions; the boxing of schoolchildren’s ears and the familial tugging or cuffing at home; the injury done by industrial noise to the inner and middle ears of working adults, year after year, and more swiftly by the cannonade of battle to the ears of soldiers and sailors; the tinnitus and earache from impacted wisdom teeth, dental decay, and gum disease; the cigar and cigarette smoke, sulfuric ash and coal dust, lead-laced paint and arsenical wallpapers in the most genteel of homes, and the soot and smog outside in the thick city air . . . add it all up and the heard world was widely compromised. (383)

While concert halls and upper- and middle-class homes were more insulated from the din, working-class ears were not.

In Round 3, “Everyhow,” we begin with anthropologists studying the hearing of “savage and semi-civilized races,” and learn that some Western researchers came to understand that their own hearing was neither superior nor inferior to that of the Other; rather, “[the savages] senses,” like their own city-tuned hears, “were honed by minds that grasped the ecology of their milieu” (556). We hear again about the sounds of war—about shellshock and terrifying silences—and about assaulting sounds emerging from new

loudspeakers, even in peaceful territories. We overhear politically charged deliberations on the cause of deafness. We talk of sound therapies: Freud's "talking cure" and hearing aids.

Again, we consider how architecture and construction devise new strategies—"electrically amplified sound-transmitting infrastructure[s]" and "sound-absorbent wall and floor coverings" like Celotex—to seal out the noise (635; 638). Sometimes, as before, those solutions "redoubled the problem" (632). We again consider urban zoning and the spread of litigation against noise—even in the depths of the ocean. In one particularly fascinating segment, Schwartz addresses the audition of fish and sound-making of whales and recounts activists' efforts to prevent their disruption by deleterious naval activities. We heard inside other aquatic environments, too; ultrasound transformed how parents listened to their children—both in utero and throughout their development. Meanwhile, we also began to listen to the universe, to hear static in cosmic rays and to search for radio transmitted from afar.

We started to think of noise in terms of wave patterns, and we classified those patterns by color: white, "patternless sound," perhaps the most familiar; black; brown; orange; and pink—along with blue, violet, grey, and green, which aren't mentioned here (834). Pink, perhaps the most trivial-sounding of all, is "moderately correlated over *all* time scales and so, on the average, it should display 'interesting structure' over all time intervals" (839). We eventually recognized the power of pink: "1/f noise was suddenly found to be flickering almost everywhere that things or beings were in motion. It was in fact intrinsic to perception and judgment" (840).

[Pink noise] seems to be the optimal noise for catalyzing phase transitions and rescuing systems out of whack. When added to a weak signal, pink noise can nudge it over a threshold crucial to awareness or stability; when introduced to a system in turmoil, pink noise can shepherd it back to homeostasis . . . [P]ink noise allows organisms to "hear" and respond more aptly to their environs; in physical and otological terms, it restores balance. (843)

The ubiquity and utility of pink noise explodes the commonplace notion that noise is simply "unwanted sound." Schwartz writes: "Not only was the world literally shaped by noise; our brains required noise. Pink noise. Measured at the peripheries, the noise of the nervous system is white; in the brain, electrical fluctuations approach 1/f" (845). This noise is very much wanted and necessary sound. "The intentional making of noise was an ontological statement: I substantiate my historical being through the noise I can make" (846). In other words, "without noise, we would not be in the world" (859). Encountering such incontrovertible evidence near the end of the book,

for the “every-”ness and crucial importance of noise, we might be led to reconsider the constructive, and perhaps even essential, roles played by the other noises echoing throughout the book: babble and static, gunfire and steam whistles, street music and sirens.

We might say that something like “rhetorical pink noise” also plays an integral role in the maintenance of balance in Schwartz’s book. As my recounting of the variety of topics visited in each of the Rounds might suggest, the logic by which particular topics or tales are sorted into each of the three Rounds (and the coherence of those Rounds) is often elusive, and occasionally it seems that Schwartz’s fluid prose smooths over odd leaps in logic and strained connections. (For example, how, exactly, did we move from the primal scream to SETI to the D.C. post-hardcore band Rites of Spring to sonocytology within the space of five pages?). But every once in a while, we’ll hear one of Schwartz’s refrains—the fourfold histories and their “silent” reciprocal counterparts—which allows us to reconnect with the book’s underlying rhythm. The “flicker noise” of these refrains “nudge[s] [Schwartz’s looping lyric tale] over a threshold crucial to awareness or stability” (843). Perhaps even the unwieldy physicality of the book—object itself cultivates a particular reading experience, with particular sonic character, that contributes to this awareness and stability.

We require a certain stability of attention to follow Schwartz through his 859 pages in order to appreciate, ultimately, that among the few stable qualities of noise are its everywhere-, everywhen-, an everhow-ness. The rest is vibrational, conditional, provisional, historical; the rest is noise:

Bound up with bone and tissue, with solids, liquids, gases, and plasmas, with the tactile and cortical, with the chthonic and the cosmic, all those vibrations that are soundmusicnoise have been historically re-cognized, from era to era, within a cultural logic as nonlinear as the coils of the hairs of our inner ears. Distinctions between sound and noise, or noise and music, or music and sound, can only be provisional—not because they are matters of taste but because they are matters of history and histrionics: of what becomes audible through time and how the acoustics are staged, in auditoria, or bedrooms, in laboratories or courtrooms . . . (858)

. . . or in beautifully typeset tomes with noisy covers, like *Making Noise*.

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Reviewed by Florence Feiereisen

Tuning in to German North America: Performing German Ethnicity 1850–1914

Barbara Lorenzkowski provides the following description of Waterloo County soundscape on May 2, 1871:

The [1871 peace] jubilee was ushered in by a salute of twenty-one cannon shots . . . As exuberant as the speeches were the ten thousand celebrants who clapped enthusiastically when an oak was planted . . . With revelers singing German songs and loudly cheering at portraits of Emperor Wilhelm I, the celebrations culminated in a fireworks display. (2010:128f.)

In her seminal work on the sound of German ethnicity in the Great Lakes region in the six decades prior to World War I, Lorenzkowski adds an important aural dimension to the historiography of German culture in North America. By studying past sounds of rural Waterloo County, Ontario and industrialized urban Buffalo, New York, she allows her readers to tune in to the public and private worlds of German migrants and their self-declared leaders as they practiced and performed their ethnic consciousness in the transnational borderland of the Great Lakes region.

How can our understanding of the past be deepened by the study of its sounds? Hearing is a process of perceiving the world and contributes to our daily acquisition of knowledge. “[K]nowing the world through sound,” as Bruce Smith suggests, “is fundamentally different from knowing the world through vision” (2003:4). This notion can—and should—be applied to academic research; indeed, several disciplines, history included, have been experiencing a “sonic turn.” In *Hearing History*, sensory historian Mark M. Smith writes about the increasing focus on the aural in historical research: “This intensification holds out to the prospect of helping to redirect in some profoundly important ways what is often the visually oriented discipline of history, a discipline replete with emphases on the search for

‘perspective’ and ‘focus’ through the ‘lens’ of evidence, one heavily, if often unthinkingly, indebted to the visualism of ‘Enlightenment’ thinking and ways of understanding the word” (2004:ix).

This review concentrates on the aural aspects of narrating the past, which holds one seat at the table of what Smith terms “Sensory History,” which is not a field within the traditional discipline of history, but rather, a certain “habit” in “thinking about the past” (2007:4). This habit, Smith continues, has emerged from a number of distinct traditional disciplines and remains open to members of an even greater variety. Smith’s comparisons to “Women’s History” and “African American History” attest to the high potential of Sensory History: “What are usually considered historical ‘fields’ of inquiry—diplomatic, gender, race, regional, borderlands, cultural, political, military, and so on,” argues Smith, “could all be written and researched through the habit of sensory history” (2007:5).

Sound Studies is one such transdisciplinary “habit” within Sensory History. In “Onwards to an Audible Past,” Smith predicts a bright future for Sound Studies:

My hope is that questions of sound, noise and aurality will not just infiltrate historical narratives but also change the very conceptualization of historical thinking and problems. Should that occur, history will regain its full texture, invite new questions, and take us beyond an unwitting commitment to seeing the past. Ideally, we will begin to contextualize the past within the larger rubric of all senses and thus free mainstream historical writing from the powerful but blinding focus of vision alone. (2004:xxi)

Historian Lorenzkowski presents an excellent example of Sound Studies by concentrating on the aural worlds of German North America. As with visual elements such as architecture or costume, the various sonic elements of a space (and with it its keynotes, sound marks, and sound events) can reveal a group’s identity. It would have been easy to subsume all German immigrants under one ethnic group, but Lorenzkowski knows better: following Rogers Brubaker, she does not attempt to isolate German ethnicity as a group that she studies, but conceives ethnicity as an event comprising “everyday encounters, practical categories, commonsense knowledge, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, interactional cues, discursive frames, organizational routines, social networks, and institutional forms” (Lorenzkowski 2010:6). She analyzes the ethnopolitical missions of newspaper editors, school curricula, and singers’ festivals, and follows individuals through their diary entries into their private lives. And while she does not deny that visual aspects played an important role in the performance of German ethnicity, Lorenzkowski’s approach to historical analysis is decidedly through sound.

Listening to German Ethnicity

The extensive and pleasantly readable introduction takes the readers to the Great Lakes region in the mid-nineteenth century, an area characterized by transcultural exchanges through transatlantic immigration and transnational border crossings. German was prominently featured on the streets; according to Lorenzkowski's research, in 1871 55% of Waterloo's population of 40,252 was of German cultural origin with the highest concentration (73%) in Berlin. German immigration to Buffalo, the city across the border, started after the famine in 1817 and continued until the late thirties of the nineteenth century. The city, according to historian David Gerber (cited by Lorenzkowski), "had more Bavarians than any other American city, and more Southern Germans than such equally significant centres as St. Louis, Chicago and New York" (2010:15). In 1855 39% of household heads were born on German land, sharing this multicultural city with people of Irish (18%), Canadian (12%), French (5%), and US-American (25%) descent. In the beginning, the German language was the ticket of admission to membership in this community and self-declared gatekeepers of German ethnicity made it their life task to preserve German language and culture. This public line was not always in accordance with domestic reality; the two main parts of the book, "Language Matters" and "Music Matters," deal with varied patterns of German ethnicity in North America that were constantly in flux. Here the focus is on two major subfields of Sound Studies: language and music, although with the latter Lorenzkowski mostly means song instead of music in general. Each chapter is well suited to be assigned as a class reading.

Chapter 1, "Territories of Translation," one of many alliterative chapter titles, investigates language practices of the first and second generation of German-Canadians who negotiated life in two cultures by negotiating life in two languages. Self-declared "ethnic leaders" (such as the editors of the widely read German-language newspaper *Berliner Journal*) saw themselves in the tradition of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb von Fichte (the latter with a decidedly nationalistic agenda) and tried to impose their mission of "ethnic unity und linguistic purity" onto German migrants from above (2010:25). Germanness, they reminded the family heads, had to be seeded and cultivated at home, through efforts such as conversing solely in German and eating German "nourishing rye bread, of course" (2010:31). Yet the private reality was often in contradiction with such ideals as many young German-Canadians emphatically embraced their new home, and even when their German accent was detected and they were asked to continue a conversation in German, they insisted on using English or a hybrid of the

two languages. In the eyes of the newspaper editors, Lorenzkowski states, “these fools had entered cultural wasteland” (2010:34).

In the mid-1880s, an anonymous writer published eight articles in which he bemoaned the decline of the German language in Waterloo County. Even though such accusations have always existed in bilingual communities (in Germany as well, especially today!), these contributions point to another fact: the written and the spoken versions of the language were already divorced from one another. While standard written German had become the *lingua franca* for German migrants (some of whom could neither understand Bavarian nor Swabian), the spoken language not only reflected different German accents or dialects, but was in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis essentially a hybrid. Here Lorenzkowski offers a rich array of examples for linguistic hybrids such as “Ein Bottlefiller muss Bottlen und Labeln koennen” (“a bottlefiller has to know how to bottle and label”; 2010:37). It would have been useful if Lorenzkowski had explored the trend of incorporating English nouns and verbs into the German syntax, but granted, she never claims to be a linguist.

The ethnic gatekeepers, however, demanded that all German-Canadians and German-Americans learn their native tongue—and by native tongue, they had come to mean not necessarily the German of their parents, but a pure, grammatically correct Standard German, the language of Germany’s *Dichter* and *Denker* (poets and thinkers). German was no longer an emotional souvenir from a time long gone, but now was constructed to promise “entrance into the world of higher learning, the arts and sciences, and offered practical benefits as a language of trade and community” (2010:43).

In her second chapter, “Languages of Ethnicity,” Lorenzkowski tells the story of German language instruction at Waterloo County’s schools. 1871 had marked Germany’s victory over France and the proclamation of the nation state. Yet for young children in Waterloo County, the year had an additional significance: since the School Act of 1871, all kids between the ages of 7 and 12 had to attend school. In the same year, the county’s newly appointed school inspector banned German as the language of instruction and discouraged the teaching of German in public schools, even though more than 50 percent of all children, sometimes even 100 percent, only started English when entering the school system. Three decades later, protests erupted as the powerful German-Canadian social elites of Waterloo County demanded German in the schools’ curricula. Most parents did not see the need for German instruction at school as their children already spoke German at home—learning English ensured their membership in the German-English world. What’s more, an increasingly large number of German-Canadian parents chose to speak English at home. Yet the German School Association, with its members largely stemming from middle and

upper classes, successfully campaigned against the school inspector. Starting in March 1903, each of Berlin's four elementary schools received a classroom for German language use. Shortly thereafter, two full-time German teachers were hired to serve all four elementary schools and German was properly reintegrated into the curriculum. With the beginning of World War I, German language instruction was removed once again. Lorenzkowski concludes this chapter by explaining that introducing Standard German into the curriculum from above did not strengthen German ethnicity in Waterloo County, but was indeed too rigid and elitist for the majority of those whom it affected. The majority of German-Canadians continued speaking pidgin German in public and private life, proving that they could perform Germanness through an English-German hybrid language.

Chapter 3, "Speaking Modern," chronicles the construction of German in Buffalo's schools from being a language of ethnicity to a modern language. Lorenzkowski describes "ethnic chauvinism" and provides examples of elitist outlets such as the *Demokrat* and the *Amerikanische Schulzeitung* which denigrated both the Celtic language and those of Slavic descent ("even the roughest Germans were preferable to the best Slavs"; 2010:90). All the while, ethnic leaders explained that the German language with its "cultural importance or commercial value for Americans" (2010:90) should be taught as it was a "special gift to the world" (2010:89).

Looking behind the scenes of this perceptual shift from above, Lorenzkowski shows how the organization *Lehrerbund* partnered up with the Modern Language Association, the National Education Association, and Buffalo's superintendent of the German Department. Joining forces, the team set out to change the American school curriculum but ended up concentrating on changing German language pedagogy in particular and foreign language pedagogy in general. Two models of language teaching could be observed: grammar translation and the communicative approach ("the natural method"; 2010:92). The debate became not whether German had its place at school but *how* it should be taught. With this, Buffalo was on the vanguard of foreign language pedagogy in the US in the 1890s. According to an 1894 publication by the National Education Association, studying modern languages

will train their [children's] memory and develop their sense of accuracy; it will quicken and strengthen their reasoning powers by offering them at every step problems that must be solved by the correct application of the results of their own observations; it will help them to understand the structure of the English sentence and the real meaning of English words; it will broaden their minds by revealing to them modes of thought and expression different from those to which they have been accustomed. (2010:94)

Current Musicology

In an essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2012, nearly 120 years later, foreign language advocate Michael Geisler writes: foreign language learning

improves scores in math and language arts, verbal skills (in the foreign language *and* in English!), it tends to improve SAT scores, it is positively correlated with higher performance in college, it improves memory and, at the other end of our lifelong learning trajectory, it helps offset age-related memory loss. We also know that students who have acquired a foreign language (or two) tend to be more successful problem solvers (since they have had to learn how to look at any given issue from multiple perspectives). (Geisler 2012)

As one can see, the arguments have not changed since the nineteenth century in North America. Learning foreign languages has even more benefits than those stated here, yet foreign-language advocates must still justify themselves to the monolingually oriented public school curriculum.

After three chapters on the sound of language, in the second half of her book, Lorenzkowski switches gears and considers the sound of music. In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali writes: “Now we must learn to judge a society more by its sounds, by its art, and by its festivals, than by its statistics” (Attali 1985:10). Language is open for those who speak it—occasionally a small circle. Music, as many argue, is a universal language open to all who perceive it. Chapter 4, “Tunes of Community, Melodies of Race,” feeds off of this notion as singing was not only a means of mass entertainment but more importantly allowed for the public display of German ethnicity for those who spoke German as well as for those who did not. Yet for an 18-page long chapter with “Race” in its title, the actual section on race is surprisingly short and does not fulfill the high expectations the reader had before reading this chapter. In only a bit more than four pages, Lorenzkowski describes the racial discourse of the time in the context of immigration. The *Commercial Advertiser* encouraged America’s “fair-haired Saxons” (2010:120) to mingle with the “Teutonic race” as the latter stood for “industry, order, and respectability” (119), which was far more desirable than the “dirty, ragged, dark, and choleric Celt” (2010:117). The Buffalo *Sängerfest* was seen as a perfect meeting place for non-Germans to make connections with German-Americans. While the discourse on Black Irish is an interesting addition, the material presented here is not inquisitive enough to warrant the chapter title. The topic of race is also absent from the chapter’s conclusion.

Lorenzkowski’s examinations of national discourse are more penetrating. In the eighteenth century, constructions of a German nation merely referred to the German language in its spoken and written manifestations: although there was no nation state at hand, the land of the *Dichter* and *Denker* had its

own national literature from which to derive national feelings. The early nineteenth century brings a national sound into the game as many *Liedertafeln*, choirs, and singing clubs formed in Germany and shortly thereafter in German North America. Lorenzkowski concentrates on the perception of the 1860's *Sängerfest* in Buffalo, which, with over 500 singers, was the biggest pre-Civil War festival of song in the US. While the German-language newspaper *Demokrat* was critical about the performances, the overwhelming majority of English-language newspapers received it as, in Lorenzkowski's words, an "earth-shattering event" (2010:114). It is important to mention that Lorenzkowski does not demonstrate this to be a nationalistic event. Ernst Moritz Arndt's "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" and Hoffmann von Fallersleben's "Deutschlandlied" were not observed to be sung, although they had existed since 1813 and 1841 respectively. The emphasis was on German ethnicity, created through song and *Gemütlichkeit*—"that amalgam of conviviality, social harmony, casual socializing, exuberance, and group feeling that is impossible to translate and yet represents a key element of German chorus culture" (2010:122). This *Gemütlichkeit* both enwombed German immigrants as well as non-German speaking singers and visitors. In fact, Lorenzkowski writes: "By the turn of the century, they [English-speaking audiences] had claimed the singers' festivals as 'ours'" (2010:214).

Chapter 5, "Germania in America," begins with the German North American soundscape over three days in May of 1871, when the victory over France and the end of the Franco-Prussian war was celebrated in Berlin, Ontario. Sound events consisted, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this review, of cannon shots, speeches, applause, cheers, singing, and fireworks. This spectacle and "audacle"—i.e., an aural spectacle—displayed German unity in sight and sound, yet Lorenzkowski also illustrates how German-Canadians' identity started to become distinguished from German-Americans' identity. Many of those who had left Germany for the US after the failed German revolutions of 1848/9 quickly realized that the victory over France could not be equated with freedom and civic liberty. They remained critical of the mighty Bismarck and his powerful Prussia, which aligned them more closely with the politics of their new chosen home. They encouraged their fellow German immigrants to, in the words of Francis Brunck, "preserve, with all our might, the Republic in North America" (Lorenzkowski 2010:145). Just across the Lake in Waterloo County, Canadians did not question the German immigrants' loyalty to their new or old home—German immigration had its own place in the nation building of Canada; Lorenzkowski states that it was undisputed in Canada that the "cultural norm was German, not British" (2010:148). It certainly helped that German-Canadians acknowledged the British Empire and celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday alongside that of Wilhelm I.

Chapters 6 and 7, “Soundscapes of Identity” and “Making a Musical Public,” go back to the creation of German ethnicity through song by visiting the eight singers’ festivals in Waterloo County which—inspired by the 1871 peace jubilee—took place from 1874 to 1912. “Making music,” as Lorenzkowski argues, “was a trans-ethnic venture in which the hyphen in ‘German-Canadian’ symbolized not an imposing cultural boundary that shielded German folklore from the outside world, but rather a space of cultural interaction” (2010:188). What makes these festivals an interesting study is that they were both homegrown small-town events that nonetheless foregrounded the transnational (and not transatlantic) divide.

Discussing negotiations between “fine music” singers’ festivals and the establishment of large German *Fests* in Buffalo, Lorenzkowski strolls through the grounds of the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901. The German Empire had sponsored the erection of Alt-Nürnberg, a town square bordered by several medieval looking buildings, with brass players on the streets and plenty of beer available for their visitors. In short: German ethnicity was not only equated with, but also publicly performed as Bavaria.

These last two chapters fall a bit short in comparison to the outstanding first five chapters. Both are overly celebratory in that they only describe these events as successes. Additionally, the format is inconsistent. Almost every chapter ends with a “Conclusion” to touch upon the most important points; unfortunately, two chapters (including chapter 7) do not include conclusions which makes for a somewhat asymmetrical format.

Sound Studies Revisited

In “Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?,” Michele Hilmes describes Sound Studies as an “emerging field” that, for more than 100 years, has been “always emerging, never emerged” (Hilmes 2005:249). She suggests that there are not enough scholars or an enthusiastic audience. A different—and all the more interesting—proposition is her comparison of the relationship between scholars of Sound and of Visual Studies with that of ear and eye: the first is “constantly subjugated to the primacy of the visual, associated with emotion and subjectivity as against objectivity and rationality of vision, seen as somehow more ‘natural’ and less constructed as a mode of communication” (2005:249).

Another reason for Sound Studies not yet having fully emerged is the scarcity, for events during the time period Lorenzkowski studies, of audio recordings relative to visual footage. Sound recording only came about in 1860 (Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville’s *Phonoautograph* without a play-back option) or 1877 (Edison’s *Phonograph*), and these devices were

not available to the masses until more than a decade later. The Library of Congress has many (silent) video clips of the Pan–Am in its collection, yet audio files are missing—even the welcome speech of President McKinley (his last public speech before his assassination a day later) is only available as a silent film. Lorenzkowski overcomes the obstacle posed by this lack of audio sources by basing her explanation of sound upon written sources: she examines visual documents, admittedly an impressive variety, for her excellent portrait of the sounds of the past. Yet I wonder if Lorenzkowski could have found sound recordings of the later festivals, recordings of German–American and German–Canadian bands, and choirs, as their examinations would have enriched this study. I am also curious about other German–American or German–Canadian sounds outside of language and music: did the German experience differ acoustically from other immigrant experiences? An aural investigation into the German workforce, extra–musical pastime activities, religious rituals, etc., would add to our understanding of the sound of German ethnicity in the Great Lakes region.

Lorenzkowski writes about sound using many visual metaphors such as “fireworks *displays*.” A scholar on language and sound should have addressed this in the introduction. At the same time, this shows that visual metaphors abound in English, as Western culture is visually oriented and the use of metaphors, i.e. language, is an expression of that culture. But it is even more complicated: to concentrate on hearing instead of on seeing alone, does not mean to simply exchange visual metaphors for vocabulary from the aural realm. No, one has to consider new “habits” and rethink one’s own cultural practices. Barbara Lorenzkowski’s book is a gripping tale of the performance of German ethnicity through sound at a time when German identity was in flux in North America and abroad. By illustrating how history can be investigated through acoustic experiences, *The Sounds of Ethnicity* is an important contribution to scholarship in History, German Studies, and Sound Studies.

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Ulysses Kay Special Collection: Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

The following brief essay by Jennifer B. Lee, curator at Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, contains biographic information on African-American composer Ulysses Kay, as well as a brief guide to his recently acquired collection in RBML.

African-American composer Ulysses Kay (1917–1995) wrote more than one hundred forty compositions in a wide range of forms—five operas, over twenty large orchestral works, more than thirty choral compositions, fifteen chamber works, a ballet, and numerous other compositions for voice, solo instruments, film, and television.¹

Born in Tucson, Arizona to a musical family, Kay was encouraged by both his mother and her brother, Joe “King” Oliver, to study piano, violin and saxophone. He entered the University of Arizona in 1934, receiving the Bachelor of Music in 1938. For the next two years he studied composition at the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson, and received the Masters in Music in 1940. From 1941 to 1942 he studied with Paul Hindemith at Tanglewood and at Yale University. Compositions from this period include the “Sinfonietta for Orchestra,” the ballet “Danse Calinda,” and “Three Fanfares for Four Trumpets.”

During World War II, Kay served in the U. S. Navy, playing with and arranging for the Navy Band, stationed at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. His most prominent composition from this period is “Of New Horizons” for concert band. Commissioned by Thor Johnson and performed by the New York Philharmonic, its premier took place in Lewisohn Stadium on July 29, 1944.

Upon discharge from the Navy, Kay received the Alice M. Ditson Fellowship for creative work at Columbia University, where he studied with Otto Luening from 1946 to 1947. During the summers, he was a resident at the Yaddo Festival in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he would return six times, later joined by wife Barbara, through 1971. Major works from this period include: “Danse Calinda Suite;” “The Rope” for solo dancer and piano; “Concerto for Orchestra;” and the film music for “The Quiet One,” a documentary film about Donald Thompson, then ten years old, by Janice Loeb, Sidney Meyers, and Helen Levitt, with commentary by James Agee and additional photography by Richard Bagley.

Many honors and scholarships followed, including a Fulbright Scholarship, grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship. From 1949 to 1952, Kay received two “Prix de Rome” awards that allowed him to travel and study in Italy. The first African–American to receive the prize, it gave him residence in the American Academy in Rome, along with his new bride, Barbara Harrison of Chicago, whom he had married on August 20, 1949. Compositions from this period include: a piano quintet, a string quartet, a brass quartet, “Sinfonia in E” for orchestra, and “Song of Ahab,” a cantata for baritone and ten instruments.

Returning to New York, Barbara taught music in Manhattan, and Ulysses accepted a position with Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) that would last from 1953 until 1968. Turning down several teaching positions, he obtained a job that gave him a regular schedule, allowing him to compose as much as possible. Compositions include: “A Lincoln Letter,” an a cappella work for mixed chorus and bass soloist; “Six Dances for String Orchestra;” “Fantasy Variations for Orchestra;” and two operas, “The Boor,” and “The Juggler of Our Lady.”

In 1958, Kay was a member of the first delegation of composers to the Soviet Union, a part of the U.S. State Department’s Cultural, Educational and Technical Exchange Agreement. The others in his group were Roy Harris, Peter Mennin, and Roger Sessions. During the month–long trip, Kay appreciated the interest in jazz expressed by Russian composers and he played them recordings of the music of Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, Louis Armstrong, and Johnny Richards, among others. He also attended performances of his own compositions, those of his fellow delegates, and the works of Russian composers. Upon his return, *Hi-Fi Review* published his account of the trip entitled “Thirty Days in Musical Russia.”²

Over the decade from 1958 to 1968, Kay received a large number of commissions, writing a total of forty–one compositions. These included music for the film “New York: City of Magic;” “Phoebus, Arise,” a cantata for soprano and bass soli, mixed chorus and orchestra; “Forever Free,” for band; “Markings,” for orchestra, written in memory of Dag Hammarskjöld; “Aulos,” for solo flute, string orchestra, two horns and percussion; and “Choral Triptych,” a work using Biblical texts, written for mixed chorus and string orchestra. Other vocal works composed during this period include Kay’s settings of texts by William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Stephen Crane, and Walt Whitman.

Barbara Kay was no less busy during these years. She participated in the Mississippi Freedom Rides during the summer of 1961. Arrested in Jackson, she was held in three jails including the Parchman Penitentiary for a total of about 60 days, after receiving a six–month sentence for disturbing the peace.

William Faulkner once called Parchman “Destination Doom.” Returning home, she participated in the first sit-in in the North, when Englewood residents took over city hall to protest racial segregation in the schools in 1962. Again arrested, she recalled that the only time that she was shackled was while being transported from the Englewood Jail to the county jail in Hackensack, New Jersey, where she was held for two weeks. During the boycott of the Englewood, New Jersey schools, she held a Freedom School in the basement of the Kay home. In 1966, she joined James Meredith’s “March Against Fear” in Mississippi. Later she continued to be active in the New Jersey chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. She recorded many of the details of her civil rights work in interviews conducted in 1979 by the Columbia University Oral History Office.³

In 1968, at the age of 51, Kay left BMI to join the faculty of Herbert H. Lehman College, City University of New York, as Professor of Music, where he taught theory and composition until his retirement in 1988. During his twenty years of teaching, he produced three more operas, “The Capitoline Venus,” “Jubilee,” and “Frederick Douglass.” Other works from this period include: “Theater Set,” for orchestra; “Five Portraits,” for violin and piano, commissioned by the McKim Fund of the Library of Congress and premiered in 1974 by Ruggiero Ricci, violin, and Leon Pommers, piano; “Scherzi Musicali,” for chamber orchestra; “The Western Paradise,” for narrator and orchestra; “Jersey Hours,” for voice and three harps; “Tromba,” for trumpet and piano; “Chariots,” for orchestra; “Festival Psalms,” for solo baritone and mixed chorus; and “Visions,” written to commemorate the 80th anniversary of William Grant Still’s birth. It should be noted that Kay conducted many of the premiers and subsequent performance of his own works, including the Suite from “The Quiet One,” premiered by New York’s Little Symphony at Town Hall in 1948, and “Chariots,” premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra at Saratoga in 1979.

Ulysses Kay died of Parkinson’s disease in 1995 at the age of 78. His final commission, unfulfilled, was to compose a work for the 150th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic in 1992. Barbara Kay died in 1997 at the age of 71. Although health and family obligations resulted in Mrs. Kay becoming less publicly active in her pursuit of civil rights by the mid-1970s, she continued to inspire others, and in her Columbia University Oral History interview she said: “Fear is the first thing that you’re going to have to confront. And what I have learned to do from this first freedom ride is to confront anything that gives me any problem, either my ideas or thinking about them—confront them. Never push them away in my mind. Never try to forget them. And always speak up. The more I’m afraid, the more I’ll speak up. And then after you do that, you lose the fear.”⁴

Ulysses Kay Special Collection—an Overview

In 2009, the Kay family chose Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library as the repository of their parents' archive. Through the Columbia University Libraries' Graduate Student Internship Program in Primary Sources, Columbia graduate student in musicology, Elliot S. Cairns, completed the organization and housing of the musical scores and related materials for use by researchers. The three series available at this time are: Series I: Diaries; Series II: Music by Kay; and Series III: Programs.⁵ Still in process are the correspondence and business records kept by Barbara and Ulysses Kay.

The bulk of the seventy-nine boxes of material processed to date is in Series II, arranged chronologically by date of composition as much as possible. This series includes Kay's sketches, holograph scores and published scores, augmented by other related materials such as texts and libretti used in his vocal compositions, pertinent correspondence, and notes.

In some instances, Kay's notes include the basic structure of a work. For "Five Portraits," this includes his 12-tone matrix. For the opera "The Juggler of Our Lady," there is his "sequential analysis," and for the opera "Frederick Douglass" his notes regarding "centers" (i.e. key areas). Examples of related correspondence include that with Vladimir Ussachevsky, who wrote the libretto for Kay's one-act opera "The Boor" (1955), Donald Dorr, his librettist for four of his vocal and opera works, and with John Solum, the flutist for whom Kay wrote "Aulos" (1967).

The works in the archive are comprehensive with a few exceptions. For instance, only Kay's preliminary sketches and notes for his "Concerto for Orchestra" (1948) are present. For his "Aulos" for flute and chamber ensemble, and for his opera "Jubilee," full sketches are present but not his holograph full scores.

The location of some of the missing material is known. For instance, the commission from the McKim Fund for "Five Portraits" for violin and piano, written in 1971-72 and premiered in 1974, stipulated that the original manuscript be given to the Library of Congress.⁶ A photocopy of the holograph full scores, with markings, is in the RBML Kay Papers.

Unpublished compositions in the archive include many of his early works, such as his "Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra," given its premier by Robert Sprenkle with the Rochester Civic Orchestra in 1940, Howard Hanson conducting; "Harlem Children's Suite" for school orchestra (1973); and a late work, "Two Impromptus for Piano" (1986). Series II also includes Kay's transcription of "The Waves," (1978) with words and music by Hillary

Kay. The youngest of their three daughters, Hillary Kay is a composer who performs her own music with Kate Freeman as Wildsang.

The ongoing work of processing the correspondence and business papers of Barbara and Ulysses Kay has turned up further important material, such as an inscribed copy of Langston Hughes' libretto "Soul Gone Home." Other ongoing work includes a Kay online exhibition featuring images of his sketches and scores, supporting documents, programs, photographs, audio excerpts of his works, and audio interviews with both Barbara and Ulysses Kay. We encourage performers and conductors to reexamine Kay's large and wide-ranging output for new repertoire and we welcome all researchers to make use of this important new collection.

As stated by Constance Tibbs Hobson and Deborra A. Richardson in *Ulysses Kay: A Bio-Bibliography* (1994): "Kay's contribution to America's cultural life and to its contemporary music scene is outstanding. His distinguished career, reflecting personal industry, discipline, and will, sets an encouraging, honorable, and inspiring example for all who follow. His message to aspiring composers strongly advocates continued study and growth in order to better express one's vision and individuality."⁷

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Notes

1. For this information and much of what follows, I am indebted to Constance Tibbs Hobson and Deborra A. Richardson for their indispensable *Ulysses Kay, A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994).
2. Ulysses Kay, "Thirty Days in Musical Russia," *Hi-Fi Review*, 2 (February 1959):35-38, 53. Kay's daily account records his impressions of concerts, meetings with composers and musicians, social gatherings, and their tours through the arts and political centers of the Soviet Union.
3. The link to the record for Barbara Kay's Oral History transcript is available through:
<http://oralhistoryportal.cul.columbia.edu/document.php?id=ldpd_4076977>.
4. Barbara Kay, "The Reminiscences of Barbara Kay," Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1980:12-13.
5. The link to the Ulysses Kay finding aid is:
<http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_7341105/summary>.
6. The link to the finding aid for the McKim Collection at the Library of Congress is:
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7. Hobson and Richardson, p. 25. Quoting David N. Baker, Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson, *The Black Composer Speaks* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978):142.



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Charles D. Carson, Ph.D., is a musicologist whose research addresses issues of race and class in contemporary popular musics. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Musicology/Ethnomusicology at the University of Texas at Austin, where he teaches courses on African–American music history, jazz, popular music, and 20th–Century art music. He is currently completing a manuscript exploring the role that jazz has played with respect to shifting ideas about race and class in Philadelphia. His more recent work centers on the ways in which African–American musics—from jazz to hip–hop—are used by local communities in a variety of global settings. He has presented and published in a number of venues, on topics ranging from theme park music to smooth jazz.

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Florence Feiereisen, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of German at Middlebury College, where she teaches classes on German literature, pop culture, national identity, gender, and sound. Current research includes investigations into the relationship of selected German contemporary literary texts with other media such as photography and sound. Pertaining to Sound Studies, a recent

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Seth Mulliken is a Ph.D. candidate in the Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media program at North Carolina State University. His research is an intersection of critical race theory,

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