

# Sonic Legal Spaces: An Essay of Overdubs

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## Abstract

*This essay explores the contestation and liberatory potential of various sounding and listening practices within the metropolitan area of Chicago, especially in relation to the city as a racialized legal space of segregation, gentrification, and private property. While considering listening in terms of the individual or community is important, we should also consider how the state listens and what disciplinary effects such listening enacts vis-à-vis legal definitions of noise. What counts as sound or noise, far from abstract fact, is determined by social dispositions of taste materialized into cultural preferences that are further concretized into municipal ordinances. While this essay attends to the sonic legal space of the city as regulatory, it also examines the role sound plays in setting up the potential for radical encounters and speculative relationalities. As such, it outlines a form of sonic mutuality that refuses to gloss over the challenges of living in a noisy city while also refusing the state's authority to transform social disputes into criminal matters. Sonic mutualism requires new orientations to the problem of overlapping sonic desires within the complexities of urban life. How might we understand our sonic dispositions and tastes apart from the territorial logics of capital, property, and control? What might it look like to form extralegal social arrangements that mediate conflicting audio desires beyond criminalization? To ask these types of questions is to challenge the reduction of the city to an abstract zone of commerciality, and instead hear the city as a sonic commons.*

## The aural materiality of a bucket

As a longtime Chicago resident working in the Loop or downtown district, I find myself on occasion captivated by the spectacle of five or six Bucket Boys collectively drumming on a busy sidewalk. Generally, one hears them before one observes them, [bearing auditory](#) witness to an unseen event. It is an intensely acousmatic experience— one hears the sound without visually observing its source or cause. This is especially true if we consider Nina Sun Eidsheim's framing of the acousmatic question as related either to mechanical playback or in-person enunciation. Whether the speaker is positioned far away and therefore hard to see, or speaking right in front of the listener, the foundational question asked in the act of listening to a human voice is, "Who is this?," "Who is speaking?" At the same time, we can augment the question of "who is this" to "who is making this sound?"—a question which draws us beyond the timber of voice.

Sat upon milk crates at a busy intersection and drumming furiously on upturned buckets for tips, the Bucket Boys transform public space into a temporary stage and passersby into a provisional audience. Unacquainted groups of passersby become linked through their engagement with the event. When the performance is done or the performers are chased off by the police, the itinerant stage dissipates back into the indeterminate potential of the city as a sonic commons. The contrast can be striking between enthralled tourists and the informal group of street musicians, the latter typically black youth from some of the city's most dispossessed areas. Despite casual appearances and improvised banter, the Bucket Boys are precise, drumming in regimented

unison, flicking their heads from side to side, chanting together, peering dramatically into the distance with equal parts detachment and concentration. They elaborately spin worn-out drumsticks and go into bewildering solos defined by rapidity and exactitude. It is a display of expertise and showmanship meant to rival and even contest the aesthetic legibility of the collegiate drumline with its austerity and controlled automation. The humble materiality of a plastic five-gallon work bucket, it turns out, can generate a wide array of tones and pitches in skilled hands—from resounding bass reports to compact rim shots, to high-end clicks made by striking the hard outer edge. The sound of drumming bends around street corners, diffracts along avenues, echoes up and down looming skyscrapers. It reaches people in unexpected places.

Brandon Labelle describes listening as a practice that follows sound, “already moving elsewhere.” “I may hear something,” LaBelle explains, “but that something is never only for me; rather, it travels, it migrates—it always leaves one in wait” (2013, 19). The Bucket Boys’ booming sound echoes and refracts, coming in and out of range, moving through and past its listener, finding an audience in waiting as it circulates among strangers. It comes to me and others belatedly as a form of public speech moving through space. Elements of the built environment not designed to distribute sound carry it all the same. The city is full of noise “oscillating and vibrating over and through all types of bodies and things,” which in turn produce “complex ecologies of matter and energy, subjects and objects” (LaBelle 2013, 7). Unintended listeners and potential publics, strangers among other strangers in a world of ears, hear all kinds of sounds simultaneously meant for everybody and nobody in particular. But these “everybodies” and “nobodies” are not unspecified abstractions. Just as listeners hear from a specific embodiment—one forged by history and social pressures—they also hear situated within specific landscapes, milieus, and contexts similarly forged. Sound not only produces complex “ecologies of...subjects and objects” in general, as LaBelle puts it (2018, 7), but specific subjects and objects of cultural intent, spatial contestation, aesthetic dispute, political investment, and social interpretation. What counts as music, sound, and noise is not a matter of abstract sonic fact but determined by socially attuned perceptions and dispositions of taste materialized into cultural preferences and norms. These are further concretized along legal vectors as sound and noise ordinances.



Fig. 1. Vashon Jordan Jr. *The Chicago Bucket Boys, the sound of the city*, 2017. Digital photography. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 2. Vashon Jordan Jr. *The Chicago Bucket Boys, the sound of the city*, 2017. Digital photography. Image courtesy of the artist.

## Bucket banger noise in your home

On January 22, 2021, the image of an unassuming flier taped to a utility pole appeared on Twitter. The public notice reads:

Neighbors Request: Do you dislike hearing “bucket banger” noise in your home? Help your neighbors. Call 911 and report. Bangers’ frequent location is 835 N Michigan Ave.

Framed as a sociable yet menacing appeal, the anonymous author situates themselves as a concerned neighbor requesting the help of other neighbors. The flier is posted on a utility pole across from Water Tower Place, a large vertical indoor mall situated along a vast tourist and shopping corridor. The address provided—835 N. Michigan Ave.—places the flier and its author within Magnificent Mile, just north of Chicago’s downtown retail district. The Magnificent Mile Association hails the Magnificent Mile as “one of the most vibrant and successful commercial, residential, cultural and tourist destinations in the world,” demarcated by “premier retailers, individual boutiques, distinctive restaurants, popular attractions, [and] world-class and award-winning hotels” (Magnificent Mile Association 2022). Intermixed throughout are high-rise luxury apartments adorned with floor-to-ceiling windows, sweeping views of the city and lake, private balconies, pricy marble, and lush hardwood floors. “[E]ach apartment is meticulously planned and executed to engulf you in comfort,” one advertisement claims (Luxury Gold Coast Apartments for Rent, n.d.). The same high-rise advertises two-bedroom apartments for as much as \$5,978 per month. Another lists a four-bedroom apartment at \$13,858 per month (Near North Side, Chicago Luxury Apartments for Rent, n.d.). If the grievance-laden flier conjures the imagined community of a neighborhood, it is a neighborhood defined by financial privilege, elite verticality, and neoliberal individuation. Given that it is mainly populated by temporary residents and tourists, it is hardly a place most people would consider a neighborhood at all.

The flier urges its reader to call 911 on noise makers who spoil the sonic space of pristine high-rise existence. Given the cycles of urgency and national attention that surround police-related killings of people of color, the question emerges: does the flier ask for police involvement despite or because of the known dangers police pose to black life? Either way, it is no accident the unnamed author uses the pejorative “banger,” linking the sonic activity of beating on buckets to gang banging, with its deeply entrenched racial associations. Far from cultural neutrality, noise is transformed into “bucket banger” noise, encouraging concerned high-rise neighbors and businesses to hear the city along racialized lines. Linked by the flier to criminality, “bucket banger” noise “as the other of rationality, as the other of the proper” exceeds the capitalist logic of “peace and quiet” (Crawley 2017,140). Tacitly referring to the performers as gang members is particularly insidious in the context of the Chicago Police Department’s infamous gang database, which tracked and tagged people as gang members without clear oversight. Largely viewed as a racist abuse of police power, the database underwent review by the Office of the Inspector General in 2019. The report concludes the overwhelming majority of people in the database had “no specific gang membership listed and no reason provided for why the individual was listed as a gang member” (City of Chicago Office of Inspector General, 3). Furthermore, “those with inaccurate designations have no opportunity to clear their name and mitigate the impact of



incorrect or outdated gang designations” (3). Gang affiliations were ostensibly arbitrary and permanent.



Fig. 3. Utility pole across the street from Water Tower Place. 2021. Digital photography. Image from @\_\_YanYe\_\_ Twitter account.



Fig. 4. Google map image of downtown Chicago with Magnificent Mile and Water Tower Place indicated in red. 2021. Image courtesy of the author.

### Interlude: public space as auditorium

Property is not only theft, it is not only fraud, and it is not only a legal fiction, although in one way or another it is all of these things. Property is a way of thinking extending far beyond the limited sphere of title to goods, land or intellectual creations. Property-thought, or thought of the proper, regulates not only the distribution of resources in society, it regulates our conceptions of self, knowledge, group identity, sexual identity, law, and language. Property is no longer a thing, a relationship between a person and a thing, or a network of relationships between persons with respect to a thing. Property is not even a bundle of rights. It is a metaphor for an array of concepts centered on hierarchy, purity and limitedness: exclusivity - property - sovereignty - self-identity - law - territory - boundaries - title - limits - unity. (Davies 1998, 1)

*You can hear it can't you?*

Property-thought is an audible phenomenon. It is sounded out in every siren, whistle, shout, or swing of a baton. It is sounded, even, in the muted actions of cities and states as they attempt to securitize and regulate social life—both of which, regulation and securitization, reinforce the hierarchy of purity and limitedness. There can be no excess in the work of property-thought. Everyone and everything, by nature of the very idea of property, must be containable, governable, civil, and obedient. Every fence, wall, and border is a consequence of property-thought, and a manifestation of its persistent drone. But sound exceeds property. It exceeds law, privilege, and value. We may refuse to listen but each sounding can be heard by someone, most often those closest to the source. Attuning our senses to who is listening and what is heard, allows us to understand not only the sonic ruling class (those imbued with enough power to determine what is and isn't acceptable in the auditory sphere, but also the emergence of counter-publics who are called into relation through a resurgent sonic social life that positions itself against the sonic ruling class.

As political theorist Kate Lacey notes, because political action is bound up with the listening world

...it might make sense to think about the public sphere as an auditorium, a space in which the political is, literally, sounded out. Although the notion of the public sphere is no longer exclusively associated with the model that Habermas (1990) set out, it is nevertheless, thanks to a creative translation of his term *Öffentlichkeit* (public), that the spatial metaphor of the 'sphere' takes root (Peters 1993, 542). This accident of translation is perhaps particularly fortuitous for an analysis of listening as a public activity. Marshall McLuhan long ago described acoustic space as 'spherical,' contrasting it to the linearity of visual space. By this he meant that sound surrounds, and can be approached from any and every direction, whereas the visual field is fixed and has to be presented face-on. (Lacey 2011, 8)

And as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have illuminated for us, the surround besieges that which seeks to contain its excesses, "...the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure. The surround antagonizes the laager in its midst while disturbing [the] facts on the ground with some outlaw planning" (2013, 17). Planning made audible in the sonic commons of our refusing to be silenced by the sonic ruling class.

### **At night in Burnham Park**

On May 2, 2021, after 11:00 p.m. on the southern end of Chicago's Burnham Park—a six-mile expanse of public space on Lake Michigan from the city center to 56th Street—pockets of teens, families, and friends gathered late into the night. Reconvening after over a year in pandemic isolation, the palpable spirit of celebration was marked by cookouts and eruptions of laughter. As I walked south across the stretch of the park starting at 31st Street, [Baby Keem's "Hooligan"](#) blasted loudly from a portable speaker while a group of friends recorded a video of themselves dancing on the concrete path at the water's edge. One dancer turned toward the water, joining



Baby Keem in singing, “For the ones down, I say, ‘Free y’all’ / I start to question what freedom is” with hands cupped to her mouth to direct the sound out into the expansive darkness over the lake (Keem 2020).

The moment, and Baby Keem’s question, reverberate with a particular contextual and historical relevance when considering the sonic legal frameworks constructed to discipline the forms of social life, of relation, we were enacting that night. Burnham Park was closed, and we were violating the law with our physical presence and the loud sounds emanating from our gatherings. While I expected a police patrol to appear at any moment and empty the park, they never arrived—an absence that was unusual, notable, and welcome. On other nights the police were inescapable, pulling up with word of noise complaints that quickly escalated into searches and sometimes resulted in arrests. In recent years, the residents of the condominiums surrounding the eastern section of the park between 53rd and 57th Street have filed an increasing number of noise complaints regarding nighttime activities in the park, [including a petition in the Summer of 2020](#) signed by a group calling itself the East Hyde Park/Kenwood Coalition that boasted membership from eleven homeowners associations in the area. While next to nothing can be found about this organizing body, the petition urged 5th Ward Alderman Leslie Hairston and the Chicago Park District to close the interior portion of the park two hours earlier, citing, “the playing of loud stereo music that disrupts the peace of the neighborhood and imperils the safety of the residents well into the early hours of the morning.” The same coalition filed a second petition with the City of Chicago asking for “a meeting with 2nd District Police Commander Joshua Wallace to develop a plan to address the ‘illegal behavior’ taking place, and to follow up on that plan with monthly written reports.” The group also asked for a meeting with Mayor Lori Lightfoot “to secure her commitment to this course of action” (Belanger 2020).

### **Scalar logics of legal space**

Legal scholar and geographer Nicholas Blomley poses a provocative question, “what sort of a legal space is a city” (2012, 1)? As it turns out, the city is not a single type of legal space, but a multifaceted and contested set of legal spaces defined by various scales of jurisdiction—municipal, state, national, and even international. While we may think of legal space as terrestrial or as grounded, what does it mean to extend or augment this question of the city as a legal space to also consider the sonic legal space of a city? The various legal scales or spaces of a city are neither distinctly separable nor seamlessly nested into a clearly defined hierarchy. Moreover, the various legal spaces of a city are not purely spatial in a geographic sense, especially as sound moves, is on the move, and migrates in a way that transgresses beyond enclosure. Blomley writes suspiciously about law as divided into sterile dominions “whereby rights are construed as ‘national’, and/or ‘constitutional’ and thus ‘above’ everyday, ‘local’ matters”. If the city is a “legal space of jurisdiction,” as Blomley writes, it matters “which law is authoritative” at any given moment as “[I]aw is spoken in multiple and sometimes competing registers” (2012, 2-3). Because scales of jurisdiction are more defined by their overlapping interconnectedness and relationality, legal conclusions are contingent on what line of authority is prioritized. Critical legal theorists tend to conceptualize the law in terms of legal indeterminacy or “the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome” (Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris 2001, 5). The result is that law cannot be taken as a perfectly interlocking and cohesive machine into which conflicts are dropped resulting in precise outcomes. The assuredness of the law as a unified whole,



whether it is national, state, or municipal, produces worrisome effects including the risk of “unduly narrowing the conversation” (Blomley 2012, 8). If we frame the notion of rights—the right to housing, healthcare, or food, for example—as strictly a national or constitutional issue, we exclude such concerns when contemplating or agreeing upon local city codes, which have a disproportionate impact on day-to-day living.

It is unsurprising that the East Hyde Park/Kenwood Coalition called upon the overlapping jurisdiction of multiple scales of authority to police neighborhood coalition—the ward, the park district, the police department, and the City of Chicago. As Blomley notes, “Each could be thought of as a distinctive platform, operating at different levels. The language we use to describe jurisdiction (above and below, national and local) points to a reified conception of actually-existing scales. [...] In sum, the effect is to militate against an interstitial conception of legal space” (2012, 6). It is precisely in the interplay of scalar logics of law that Blomley unpacks how the authority of legal space congeals through accumulating jurisdictional power that is continually reinscribed as *a priori*. “At work here is a view of space as a series of categorical, nested containers. Such a zero-sum form of categorization relies upon a spatial model of meaning, in which law can be ordered into discrete ‘areas’, surrounded by hard boundaries. This, in turn, draws from a topographical view of space as [real], rather than, say, relational” (2012, 6). Property-thought, or the logics of propertizing humans, lands, and things, is inseparable from the spatially oriented conception of law described by Blomley, in so far as conceptions of space, law, self, other, and cities are inseparable. As Cheryl I. Harris has noted, “[t]he origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination.” (Harris 1993, 1716)

In “Whiteness as Property” Harris writes, “it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination.” (Harris 1993, 1716) It is worth quoting Harris in full, as the framework laid out is crucial for understanding not only the need to securitize and regulate physical property (land, buildings, public monuments, etc.) but also the privileges masked by such environments (whiteness, wealth, purity, etc.), which are themselves precarious forms of property that demand to be secured.

The hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people themselves as objects of property. Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race—only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property. Similarly, the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites in Native American land. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights. These distinct forms of exploitation each contributed in varying ways to the construction of whiteness as property. (1716)

To understand the tension over sonic legal permissibility in Burnham Park is to observe the ways in which the development of racially exclusive models of property and individualized ownership (including whiteness as a form of property) continue to be weaponized as law against forms of

sonic sociality that defy the bounds established by, and continually reproduced through, colonial logics of elimination and subjection historically developed in parallel through chattel slavery and Indigenous genocide. As Blomley notes, property offers “an important means by which we assign order to the world, categorizing and coding spaces and people according to their relationship to property. This has both material and symbolic effects.” And later, “this can be powerfully regulatory—expectations of appropriate social activities within certain spaces clearly serve to discipline social life. The location of activities can affect the way in which they are socially policed” (2003, 123). Harris adds, “Possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites.” (1993, 1721) In contemporary practice, legal power vis-à-vis property arrangement plays out in innumerable ways that hinge upon historically instantiated formulations of whiteness, and by extension, cultural practices which can be understood through their proximity to whiteness as the basis of law.

However, often overlooked among the tools used to advance property-thought as it expresses itself in the logics of race is the policing of sound. For instance, while most of the people enjoying the park after curfew on May 2nd were Black, demographic information on the surrounding Hyde Park neighborhood suggests that the owning class is predominantly, and increasingly, white (47.6%)—nearly double the size of any other group (26.8% Black, 12.1% Asian, 8.5% Latinx) (Statistical Atlas). One might assume that, like me, many of those enjoying social life in public space near the lake at night do so in the few hours of the day not consumed by work. Often, the desire to extend that time—the pleasure of continuing on into the night—takes priority over the consequences of tomorrow. While our sonic presence during these hours can be perceived through the windows and walls of the surrounding buildings, in what way can it be truly heard or understood as meaningful and worthy of consideration in the determination of law by the owning class inside? In the capital logics that necessitate the control of space surrounding private properties, subjects are produced as legal or illegal, as visible or heard, by way of what financial value they produce. In the dark, our stereotypes are relational, contributing to an environment of kinship which doesn’t appraise well as a commodity. In this way, the otherness of our socio-sonic practices might be interpreted as uncivilized obstruction, trespassing on territory from the surrounding wilderness, unsettling the hours designated for sleep by the clock of capital. The underlying threat of our disruption to “the peace of the neighborhood” (never mind who is and is not considered a neighbor) becomes troublingly conflated in the colonial fantasy of private property. As the petition notes, our presence “imperils the safety of residents” (Belanger 2020). One might argue that the actual threat we pose lies in disobeying the contemporary practices of Manifest Destiny surrounding us. But to sound out at night in public space is to impair the silence needed for tomorrow’s productivity and someone has to pay.

### **The sonic ruling class**

In the summer of 2009, a *Chicago Tribune* story reported on “changes to the city’s noise ordinance introduced by downtown Ald. [Alderman] Brendan Reilly . . . who said he’s received complaints from people who work in office buildings along the [Magnificent] Mile” who “can’t get their jobs done at times because of the racket on the street below.” (Blake) Without a doubt, the racket described by Reilly, who has represented Chicago’s downtown 42nd Ward since 2007, includes the Bucket Boys. Noting the gap between law as abstraction and law enforcement Reilly

cautions his downtown constituents, “[w]hether or not (police) are able to go and apprehend all these suspects everytime they receive a complaint remains to be seen” (Blake). Such law-and-order language reifies the ideological and material will of the sonic ruling class—the real estate developers, downtown professionals, high-rise residents, and municipal administrators who oversee and surveil the city’s most privileged real estate domains. Reilly’s rhetoric marks the Bucket Boys as “suspects” to be “apprehended,” transforming the act of making so-called noise from a common social dispute to a carceral possibility. In a separate *Chicago Tribune* article from 2004, a downtown resident refers to the Bucket Boys as both “hoodlums” and “little criminals” whose interference with the seamless flow of commerce is constituted both racially and legally (Cholo). There is a perpetual back and forth in the debate about the Bucket Boys—are they “little criminals” intruding on the space of capitalism or “just trying to make a clean buck” (Alamo 2014)? Either way, the only horizon through which subjectivity can be understood in the city as a space of commercial exchange, whether formal or informal, is the horizon of capitalist production. In the total commercialized city, a person’s right to exist is perpetually caught up in the matrix of use and exchange-values. While Chicago’s noise ordinance prohibits a street performer from making sound “louder than an average conversational level at a distance of 100 feet” what counts as an “average conversational level” is not only contingent on unknowable sonic calculus, but on culturally produced thresholds of wanted and unwanted sound as they interject themselves in the space of use- and exchange-value (Chicago Municipal Code).

For the sonic ruling class, who have the ear of the police and city administrators, the Bucket Boys and other disruptive musical street performers must be perpetually curtailed through ongoing regulation, license revocations, fines, and community service, which are designed to produce hardship for those already financially marginalized. Anticipating a potential class critique, Reilly concludes, “[t]his is not an ordinance for the rich versus the poor, this is about allowing people to get work done downtown with some peace and quiet in their homes, which they pay quite a pretty penny for in property taxes” (Blake 2009). Despite the Alderman’s protestations, municipal law cannot be parsed from class any more than class can be cleaved from racialization or the space of the city. It is a typical political act to disingenuously gloss over the fundamentally different ways people from distinct classes experience the same city and its rules and regulations. Invariably, it is the city’s tax base—the urban developers, private property owners, and municipal administrators—who are empowered to determine the range of sonic sensations allowed. The “peace and quiet” of the affluent, perceived as a natural right and pre-given condition of capital, is produced and maintained not through dialogic exchange or a shared idea of the city as a polyvocal commons to be co-authored in mutuality, but through top-down class-based and racialized policies starting with property and ending with law-and-order.

An important aspect of any sound ordinance that supports the sonic ruling class and their racialized ideas about noise, is the relation between sound, power, and site, which includes regulating when, where, and how people sonically activate public space. Stavros Stavrides writes extensively about the ideological and spatial construction of the metropolis—its expansive potentials and authoritative curtailments. “In the same way that blood circulation is considered as the most important condition for the sustaining of life,” Stavrides writes, “circulation in cities appears to be the grounding precondition for the sustaining of urban life” (2006, 129). Any sonic activity that causes onlookers to congregate on the walkway interrupting the city’s flow is not only an annoyance or inconvenience but may require police intervention backed by the threat of

the carceral. As a technologic and financial fiction, the city must remain in motion, articulating and disarticulating itself in unison toward a mythical future that promises tomorrow will always be better than today, a future of never-ending commodities and resources extracted from far-flung and nearby locals. As Franco Berardi writes, “[e]xhaustion plays no role in the imagination of Modernity” (2011, 34). The modern city in motion is the site *par excellence* whereby a vast multiplicity of experiences, social positions, and cultural practices are regulated into the seamless coherence of progress. For Stavrides “city streets represent a world of social disorder that needs to be controlled through planning policies and authoritarian interventions in a direct clash with practices that appropriate the street as a possible common space” (136). A “common space,” in Stavrides’ understanding, is far from a container of reduction or the forced homogeneity of perfect equivalences. Instead, it is a shared site where denizens come to editable and in-process understandings of their meaningful differences and desire for mutuality. To prioritize a sidewalk’s use according to rationalized commercial criteria, or the so-called rights of property owners, all but destroys the city’s potential as a space of radical encounter or speculative relationality. Parks, boulevards, and other public zones function more as glittering cultural lures in the global economy of tourism than sites of mutual good or indeterminate and irreducible collectivity.

### **Toward a sonic mutualism**

To examine the sonic legal frameworks that determine permissible sociality at Burnham Park or criminalize the Bucket Boys’ sonic audacity is not to privilege the practices of those othered by the law but to suggest the need for new orientations to the problem of overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, desires in the sonic multiplicity of urban life. How might we see and hear these desires apart from territorial logics of ownership-as-control? What might it look like in practice to form extralegal social arrangements to mediate conflicting desires? What might the enactment of mutualism—a radically communal sonic sociality—look and sound like? To ask these questions is to demilitate the interstitial space concealed by the scalar logics in legal space. In response to the demands made by the East Hyde Park/Kenwood Coalition, a [counter-petition](#) was filed with the Alderman opposing both early closure of the park and the over-policing of noise complaints. Interestingly, the counter-petition noted, “We, too, are bothered by the noise and trash on South Shore Drive in the summer. Some of us have asked people to turn down music, organized trash clean-up groups, and engaged in other positive, community-building approaches to solving this problem.” The two bullet points under “What we don’t want the City to do” explicitly list, “Use armed police to solve a problem that is an annoyance but not a safety issue” and “Criminalize behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana, or playing music, which pose no safety threat” (Lucy 2020). By decoupling sound’s presence from safety and emphasizing direct negotiation over sound in shared space, the petition draws into question the state’s ability to articulate and mediate the complexity of our overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, sonic desires. Why play jurisdictional telephone when we can encounter one another? Furthermore, it lifts the accrued residue of the supposition that territory and its policing are the only means by which we can navigate becoming or conceiving new formulations of ourselves in relation to each other.

While the dueling petition groups were unable to reach an agreement, both approaches were enacted. The Alderman erected [six new signs](#) along the 5400 block of South Shore Drive in



2020. They read, “LOUD MUSIC IS NOT PERMITTED ON PARK DISTRICT PROPERTY VIOLATORS ARE SUBJECT TO ENFORCEMENT BY THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT MUNICIPAL CODE 8-32-070.” At the same time, supporters of the counter-petition have organized a new neighborhood group called [Hyde Park Together](#) that regularly cleans and beautifies the shared space of the park while facilitating conversations with cleanup-day participants resulting in a [series of proposals](#) for a shared future. At every point of capital structuring and restructuring, the city is spatially impacted along economic and racialized vectors of regulation, but also along new vectors of potential mutuality and co-belonging. As sound theorist Steve Goodman writes, “rhythmic decisions still get made, collectives mobilized, and potential futures produced,” even under the acoustic dispositions of the sonic ruling classes who see relations as capitalist exchanges, who can only imagine the city as a commercial zone of enclosure, and who uncritically default to police oriented solutions. When the Bucket Boys and people celebrating in Burnham Park make noise, to be sure it is a rejection of the city reduced to capitalist space, as well as a critique of capitalist temporalities. But it is also a celebratory noise that broadens the possibility of sensations allowed under the regime of property-thought, which strives to enclose into conformity what otherwise might exist as the persistent process of our unresolvable being together in social sonic space.



Fig. 5. Image of a sign at Burnham Park along the 5400 block of South Shore, Chicago. 2020.

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