
Senior Projects Spring 2020

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2020

Parts of Sound: Possibilities of Listening Historically to Collection, Broadcast, and Exhibition

Noah Henry Fry Nickerson
Bard College, nn9640@bard.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020

 Part of the [Africana Studies Commons](#), [Audio Arts and Acoustics Commons](#), [Ethnomusicology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Nickerson, Noah Henry Fry, "Parts of Sound: Possibilities of Listening Historically to Collection, Broadcast, and Exhibition" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 193.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2020/193

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Parts of Sound: Possibilities of Listening Historically to Collection, Broadcast, and Exhibition

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Noah Nickerson

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2020

Acknowledgements

Thank you Drew Thompson, Christian Crouch, Whitney Slaten, Laura Kunreuther, Tabetha Ewing, and my other Bard professors who continue to inspire me to think and work. Thank you family. Thank you music. Thank you friends for listening.

This thesis is dedicated to those gone unheard and purposively unlistened.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Song-hunters and Sound Ethnography | 17 |
| Broadcast and Constructing Liveness | 36 |
| Curation of Sound and Space | 55 |
| Conclusion | 74 |
| Bibliography | 80 |

Introduction

To listen historically is to distinguish from looking. It is to evaluate sounds in their intangibility, their frustrating material forms, and to illuminate sonic cultures unheard and unattended. Studying sound necessitates an acknowledgement of light-centered colloquialisms obsessed with illumination, brightness, shedding light on. It requires a further acknowledgement of those parts of common language and dialogue which privilege sound: this resonates with me, to echo your point, this color is loud. Aside from glaring etymological and linguistic examples, sounds permeate and define spaces, becoming realized in our hearing and listening. To this effect my interest lies in the ability to reproduce sounds, and the transformations in sonic texture which result. From a historical standpoint, this thesis attempts to work against visuo-centric and text-centered readings of various pasts. Sound's presence in the archive, upon which historical study and scholarship is based, is unquestionable; despite this, only relatively recently has scholarship considered sounds and musics for their material historical significance. The relevance of sound in the fields within the social sciences has been marked as worthy of critical study since the last quarter of the twentieth century. In this sudden relevance is an appreciation of sound's peculiarities, and begs a closer listening for what sound can contribute to historical thought and concerns with memory, pastness, and transforming identities.

There existed a monopoly of writing, and there now exists a monopoly of images.¹ The field of historical study once only took account of literary cultures. Oral histories, other elements of culture unwritten, were relegated to the pre-historical, unworthy of note or consideration. More recently visual and material cultures have been given much deserved weight in historical

¹ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 4.

thinking, reflected in scholarship, archives, and artifacts in institutional houses of produced knowledge (museums). An obsessive scientific concern with observation, monitoring, and abstracting meaning has historically been conducted often on visual terms.² Even more recently, a demand for the consideration of the sonic has come forward, one that examines recorded sounds within the archive and sound's presence in more tangible materials and text. These sounds are reproductions, and it is the rift between original and copy, between mediated and unmediated, that interests me particularly. A consideration of the sonic can reveal the ways in which meaning, historically, has been similarly ordered, catalogued, and defined through sound. It is this interest in sound that I am attempting to contribute to, as an imagistic world is theorized time and time again in place of a sonic one.

Put shortly, sound and listening are intensely personal. I arrived at the study of sound likely through my love of music; my personal investment in my piano-playing, which has been largely self-driven for much of my adolescence and young adulthood, surely contributes to my need to expand my understanding of sound. This music-making process becomes a field on which I can apply the sound-focused literature I have come to work through. Sitting before the keyboard, I am confronted with centuries of musical tradition and the possibilities of undoing, warping, and reapplying those conventions. The eighty-eight tones, arranged and voiced to my liking, communicate to me an intense deficit, a set of limitations imposed on sonic expression. At the same time, and perhaps more immediately, the keys become an expanse, a reflection of endlessness that comes from my capacity to listen. It is the practice of listening, after all, that foregrounds all work with sound, even those which are inaudible. It is also deeply emotional; I

² Attali, *Noise*, 3.

find that music's potential for expressing feeling becomes meaningfully intertwined with so much scholarly work on sound's significance. The two seem to at once reject and reinforce one another, creating an impact which explodes with uncertainty and a kind of mysticism. This is what drives me to think about sound critically, and to approach it and make sense of it through writing.

The accelerating field of sound studies, in its interdisciplinary approach, creates a space for thought around sound that highlights its ubiquity. Within this field sound is applied to all conceivable fields of study: the social sciences, the "hard" sciences, practices of medicine, the plastic arts, architecture, literature, film, music, and more. Sound studies and its emphasis on "critical listening" becomes a grounding force for this work, though its internal discourses and structure can certainly be challenged and indeed should be. Critical listening here goes beyond rationalization and linguistic communication; it begs the listener to consider sounds holistically, in all their parts, while also attending to the worlds which allow for and exist around the sound event. This might take many forms, requiring multiple listenings, each met with a shift in what one listens for, in an attempt to realize potentiality which exists in sound. In critically listening historically, this means an awareness of one's sonic associations and the factors which shape them, often social and cultural. It also means attending to the materiality of sounds and assessing methods of recording and preservation.

It is not enough to simply trace the development of sound recording technologies like the phonograph, the microphone. It is not enough to acknowledge the technologies which reproduce sound only for the purpose of marking a sound in time. Sounds of the past must be listened to in accordance with their material representations; that is to say, the "original sound" cannot be

separated from its reproduction. Of course these things can be considered separately, but a listening which concerns itself with context and historical treatment of culture must attend to the actors, human and nonhuman, that make sound's (re)production possible. It is for this reason that I concern myself with the process of transformation that occurs between "original" and "copy," between singular and multiple, and apply it to thinking about mediated conceptions of culture and identity. In examining historical practitioners of sound, those who held the possibilities of recording and reproducing sounds, I address the politics of sound reproduction that are made conceivable and thinkable in this moment. In this way, I am concerned with past and present politics of recording and politics of disseminating sound.

This work also aims to complicate the assumption that sounds are preserved and kept stagnant. Briefly, sounds are products of their times—they are created and heard based on contextual facts of life in a particular moment in time—but are reimagined and reconfigured through various media, altering their meaning. Listening creates meaning, and is undoubtedly contextual. This goes even beyond recorded sounds; the sound of a train pulling out of a station *sounded* very different to a passenger in the late nineteenth century than it does to me. It should be noted here that my capacity to listen is reliant on certain physical and bodily realities. That is, people listen differently based on their ability to hear, and I recognize my ability as making this work possible. Even if the sound of the train were "faithfully" reconstructed perfectly, with the same model of train, the same track infrastructure, the same train whistle, my understanding of the sound would be fundamentally different. This is how we must be responsible in our historical listening; we have to consider context, to consider the human who receives and interprets their sound environment. In doing so, I challenge the assumed neutrality of sound. Recorded sound is

thought to be indexical, faithfully referential to an original sound source, and thus presumed to be in the realm of the objective. I argue quite the opposite throughout this work; sound's non-neutrality is revealed not only through the possibility of manipulation, but in the actors/phenomena which surround the recording/reproduction process as well as the context in which it is replayed.

In the form of music, sound is perceived to be out of reach, relegated to the realm of the unknowable. The question of music's significance is too easily attributed to the individual or the genius, for it supposedly becomes too complex, too messy, to examine the tangle of musical expression and race. Part of the work I try to do in this piece is a demystifying of musical study, a recognition of musical sound's potential to meaningfully understand parts of the complexities of race and identity. This work, particularly in the third chapter, presents distinctions between sounds considered to be "music" and those under the label "sound art." "Sound art" and the discourses which surround it stand distinct from music. However, it is here that I want to tread lightly in my discussion of sound; much of the thinking which has contributed to practices of sound art, stemming from musicians and composers like John Cage, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and other members of the New York School, has worked within the realm of music studies to expand definitions of what music is and is not. Conceptions of "silence" and "noise" offered up by Cage become the background on which artists through the latter half of the twentieth century up to the present structure their work with sound and installation. Perhaps here it is more useful to consider the disparities between "signal" or "music" and "noise," both of which will be more fully fleshed out at a later point.

In its treatment of sound's role in articulating identity and culture, this work becomes about the intertwining of sound and race. More specifically, the histories which I explore through the lens of sound (as ironic as that phrase might seem) concern articulations of Blackness which are made possible by and shaped through the sonic. When discussing Black identity I refer to those members of what can be termed the African diaspora who live in what is now the United States. That is to say I refer to Black populations whose ancestors and relatives experienced the horrors of slavery in the United States, and those populations who were enslaved themselves. In an examination of Black music as such, I look to historians like Paul Gilroy, whose work *The Black Atlantic* devotes a section to musical ideas which travel between Africa, the Americas, and Europe. I by no means aim to define or theorize a broader "Black aesthetic" in my discussion of music and sonic expression. I merely approach this sonic material to examine different articulations of Blackness in historical moments which find the concept of Black identity to be shifting tectonically. The transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries in the United States becomes a major site for inquiry into different qualities of Black cultural expression through sound, both as a subject of study and a method of study, a tool for gathering information. The issues in a post-slavery United States, met with the enveloping throes of the industrial revolution, mark notions of modernity as being developed and characterized in relation to notions of Blackness³.

My study of history and my reading in the fields of anthropology and sociology shaped my thinking about sound, and were key in formulating some of the questions presented in this work. What is the place of sound in a mode of knowing which is reliant on the archive? When

³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 220-221.

engagement with the archive is so often tactile and visual, involving the reading of texts and the viewing of objects, a necessary adjustment must be made when dealing with archived sound recordings like phonographic records or digitized forms of analog recordings. Listening to the archive becomes a key practice in generating historical work on sound, and unique methodologies are required. What material considerations should be given to sound in its “preserved” form? The archival possibilities of sound come from its recording; we therefore have to attend to disparities between the “original” sound event and the recording process, adding a layer of mediation which is not necessarily inherent in visual or textual material. This attendance includes considering the method of recording and the medium of broadcast/dissemination; radio broadcasts must be treated very differently than wax cylinder recordings, which must be approached differently than MP3 files and compact discs.

What can be made meaningful from sound in thinking about and rethinking histories? This question, while perhaps most broad, points my thinking to sound’s place in the realms of the cultural and social. Manifestations of sound through oral histories, music, poetry, and entertainment become manifestations and expressions of culture. In looking at particular cultural and historical instances in which sound is highlighted and made meaningful, the significance of sonic understandings of our social worlds is slowly revealed. It is here that I turn to the fields of musicology and ethnomusicology, which are explicitly concerned with approaches to culture through sound. These fields must, of course, be tended to historically; tracing ethnomusicological approaches (though not always under that name) further uncovers the contextual meaning of sound to certain actors and institutions.

My studies within the field of history have been morphed and reoriented through the four years of my education, and it is helpful to discuss some of the literature which has informed my thinking and allowed me to arrive at a topic like sound. I began with thinking about the Americas in the early modern period, curious about formulations of identity under the framework of the “frontier” or site of cultural interaction. It was in studying these moments, particularly in a course concerning performance practices in early colonial North America and early modern Europe, that I was encouraged to think critically about the abstract archive and the materials which it privileged. Works like Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* broadened the scope of my thinking, advocating for an expanding of the archive to include those material elements of culture which were “intangible.” Notions of studying embodied culture as a means of sharing, storing, and transmitting knowledge⁴ undoubtedly influenced my understanding of culturalized voice and aural performance.

My explicit interest in sound began to develop during my enrollment in a course on the workings of radio in Africa, wherein I encountered the compilation *Keywords in Sound*. This text, which features twenty essays detailing the intellectual histories and implications of sound-related terms, intentionally serves as an introduction to sound studies. Particular essays like Mark M. Smith’s “Echo,” which, as the name suggests, concerns itself with articulations of pastness through sound and the problems of representing the historical sonically, became a bridge to my thinking within the field of history. This piece deals with problems in exhibiting sound in an informative/historically mindful manner, magnifying my interest in claims to authenticity through sonic representation. Other works in this course, like Fanon’s “This is the

⁴ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 16.

Voice of Algeria” and Jennifer Lynn Stoeber’s *The Sonic Color Line*, were seminal in introducing notions of Blackness to my thinking about sound, subjectivity, and culture. Thinking through sound in the African context, often under the framework of colonialism and resistance, paired with my thinking around the early modern Americas and the beginnings of the Atlantic Slave Trade, led my thinking around sound to the topic of Black American in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

My work became more expressly linked to technologies of sound during a course in the anthropology department entitled “The Voice in the Machine.” This encounter with the voice marked by social/cultural associations and mediated by technologies of recording, amplification, and dissemination paved the way for thinking about representations of the racialized voice in radio broadcasts and phonographic recordings. Brian Hochman’s *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology*, in introducing the notion of ethnographic field recording, allowed me to conceptualize the place of sound in larger anthropological and scientific projects of the era. I am very much indebted to these courses in the social sciences and their critical approaches to cultural memory, archival processes, notions of knowledge production, and technological mediation.

The literature I engage directly with in this work spans across the social sciences and music studies; I look at work from historians, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, media theorists, and philosophers. The first chapter works alongside scholars of folklore studies, examining the ways in which authenticity is theorized in relation to different cultural groups. This allows for a discussion of ethnography and the practice of field recording which is historically situated in the early twentieth century. The study of folklore is likewise fundamentally concerned with sources

which are non-textual. Oral history, music, and craft become important means of understanding “folk” cultures, and looking at different approaches to this kind of material greatly informed by thinking around my treatment of music and sound.

Much of the historical work I cite also deals with particular historical figures and their significance within academic fields as well as the public imagination. Historical work on figures like John Lomax came to provide necessary context regarding the state of the fields of anthropology and musicology in which he worked. Further, surveying the expansive body of literature on Zora Neale Hurston allowed for very pointed discussion of her methods and musicality, which could be corroborated by her own published work. Such autobiographical and scholarly work was similarly useful in the case of Duke Ellington, and was interestingly paired with musicological and musical-theoretical work on early jazz. Here I turn briefly to musical analysis which focuses on composition, only to demonstrate the social and cultural implications that are revealed in this music-making.

I also look to historians of media and media theorists like Jonathan Sterne as a natural starting point for any historical approach to sound technologies. His influential work *The Audible Past* informed much of my thinking about material histories of sound, particularly concerning the phonograph. It is through this work that I was able to consider phonographic recording in terms of embalming, of preservation and evasion of death. This becomes especially relevant in the context of ethnographic field recording in the early twentieth century, which sought to capture cultural materials before certain groups’ supposed imminent extinction. The “canning” of sound, as Sterne refers to it, becomes a useful symbol in further thinking around “faithful” sonic reproductions and disparities between “original” sounds and their duplicates. Much of the

historiographical work I cite is not concerned specifically with theorizations of sound, nor does it formally fall under the umbrella of “sound studies.” Rather, the historians I look to are often engaged in the relationship between music and history, offering an interdisciplinary look at sound’s meaning in a musical (and often musicological) context.

My primary source material for this work was accessed entirely on Internet archives and readily available sonic material through streaming services. For this reason, my time spent in the archives was certainly not typical of historical work which concerns the treatment of tangible materials and text. My experience here was purely digital, consisting of combing virtual libraries and databases, sifting through audio files on the websites of various institutions, and relying on engines like YouTube for media access. Here I was confronted with layers of mediation, the multiple steps of transformation undergone by the sounds I was hearing.

In the case of phonographic recordings, for example, the journey from original sound to my ears was complex: the sound was first recorded, its equivalent vibrations embedded in a rubber disc; this disc was then played back and digitized through an electrical process, likely compressed and uncompressed in its movement through databases and its changing of hands; the sound was then finally realized after being converted from binary code to an electrical signal, which travelled through the cables of my headphones, exciting small drivers which pushed air into my ears. It was only after all of this that I could hear and process these sounds myself, and engage in the kind of listening I sought to. I kept this mind as I attempted to listen historically, especially in my listening to the pops and hisses which emerged through the digital. These sounds transformed in materiality just as they did in meaning, realized anew through my listening in a current historical and cultural moment.

Possibilities of sound recording, nascent in the latter half of the nineteenth century, led to an assumption of indexicality in the sound reproduction. Often compared to the camera in its early uses as a tool of measurement, the Edison phonograph became a means of proving a thing's existence, of capturing and embalming a sound event. Just as vibrations were captured and replayed, so too were cultures; those communities perceived to be on the verge of extinction, particularly in the United States, could have their traditions kept and cemented, to be returned to periodically for study. While the people could not evade inevitable death, the essence of their culture could. Chapter 1 concerns itself with this phenomenon in the early twentieth century United States. Attempts at capturing "authentic" cultural material drove the practices of many academics and amateurs with phonographic recording tools at their disposal. The use of the phonograph by anthropologists and musicologists in their ethnographic field recordings became a method of making culture legible and knowable through sound. This legibility hinged upon the construction of space within recordings. Through looking at anthropologists like John Lomax and then Zora Neale Hurston, I lay out the ways in which pastness and presentness is articulated through the spatial aspects of sound, how assumptions are played upon and challenged, and how these recordings represent different notions of Black identity.

The recordings produced during Lomax's ventures into prisons of the American South reflect a nostalgic urge to represent an abstracted past slavery. The kind of Blackness which Lomax posits through his field recordings places emphasis on the working Black body, and the Black voice which is mournful, melancholic, and hopeless. This racial conception is achieved through spatial constructions of the worksite; sounds of hammers in some recordings serve rhythmic functions as well as indicate the authenticity of these cultural materials in their purest

form. The prison here served as a space of cultural limbo, in which Black prisoners were kept separate from a volatile and modernizing world, rendering their cultural expressions untouched and “undiluted” by influences of modernity. I further look to the work of Zora Neale Hurston to investigate alternative articulations of Blackness. As an interesting example of an insider/outsider, an anthropologist/participant, Hurston walks the line between engagement in and observation of the cultures which she studies. This was reflected in the process of field recording, wherein she often acted as a performer of folksong material she collected. Critically comparing and contrasting the anthropological work of Hurston and Lomax investigates the phonograph as a tool of creating racial information and articulating identities.

Where Lomax’s presentation of Blackness was reliant on a concern with the past, Hurston’s was concerned with the present; she sought to represent culture as ever-changing and fluid rather than fixed and preservable. This chapter then turns to Lomax’s relationship with performer Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter. A look at this relationship points to the nuances of an emerging music/entertainment industry which profited from Black performers and privileged “authentic” representations of Black folk culture. Through a careful listening to distinct recordings produced in different studios at different times, one can hear the ways in which the studio recording process transforms the sonic material of songs and opens up the possibilities for nuanced articulations or presentations of race.

The advent of the radio and the ability to harness radio waves dramatically altered the ways in which technical recordings were listened to. In the second chapter, I highlight the distinction between the phonograph and the radio; where the phonograph made recordings materially permanent, the radio allowed for an abstraction of space, achieving liveness through

the immediacy of “real time” broadcast. A different kind of mysticism was afforded to the technology of the radio: sounds were seemingly “plucked from the air,” absent of any visual indicator of presence or public knowledge of the inner workings of the radio receiver. The radio further presented cultural information in distinct ways. Looking again at the twentieth century, this time into the 1930s and 40s, I examine the ways in which Blackness is articulated through the radio voice and through the broadcasting of live musical performance. To do this, I listen to minstrel radio show personalities like Moran and Mack, who apply the performance practice of blackface to the disembodied voice, producing a racial ventriloquism. Recreating a horribly demoralizing and dehumanizing stage presence—which was often so reliant on physicality and the body’s presence before the viewer—on the radio involved an emphasizing of “Black voice” to imagine a physical space occupied by particular characters and bodies.

The second chapter also takes the figure of jazz composer/bandleader Duke Ellington as another example of the navigation between and through roles of representing Blackness. Ellington’s aura of genius and musicianship was considered to be twofold: he was at once the “Master of Jungle Music,” the spokesperson for an exotic and tantalizing (to white audiences) musical phenomenon referred to as “hot rhythm,” and the “Aristocrat of Jazz,” a sophisticated and refined auteur who proved his contributions to Western music through his mastery of what was called “sweet” jazz. This chapter engages cautiously with jazz studies and discourses of racialized genre surrounding these distinct musical styles. However, this engagement aids in an analysis of what parts of sound are privileged in particular contexts mediated by the radio. The technology of the radio succeeds in presenting reproduced sounds as “live,” offering an impression of the listener’s presence in the same space as the original sound. I take an example

of one of Ellington's works "composed for the microphone" to present an articulation of artistry and Black musicality which moves in and out of the roles he is supposed to occupy. Ellington is able to utilize the radio apparatus and the microphone as a musical instrument; in composing a piece where conventions of composition are manipulated and challenged, he accounts for the frequency alteration of electrical recording (and subsequently, of radio broadcast). This chapter's concern with immediacy and sonic imaginations of space paves the way for thinking about the ways in which sounds are exhibited.

While the first two chapters dealt with technologies of sound recording, reproduction, and broadcast, I wanted the third chapter to offer up a discussion of sound's exhibition and movement through spaces. Looking at various practices of sound art and sound installation in the history museum context, this chapter aims to shift discussions of sound and space in the previous chapters and include the notion of memory in this triangular relationship. I look to artists like Lawrence Abu Hamdan to examine this triangulation. Abu Hamdan's work *Saydnaya*, in partnership with Amnesty International, reconstructs a model of Syria's Saydnaya Prison, the site of death for around 13,000 prisoners. It constructs the visual through sound alone, building up an image through memory and associations with types of sounds (using a BBC sound effects library). Here we are able to see an almost seamless link between sound and memory; sounds with certain characteristics (the general sound of a key turning in a lock) conjure up more specific sonic memories, accessorized by and elaborated on with descriptions of those sounds to aid in the construction of a visual model. Looking at installation work from Abu Hamdan and others reveals some of the agentic possibilities of listening to sound in curated space. This led to a discussion of sound's presentation in the context of the history museum. Here I look to an

exhibition at the Media Museum in Odense, Denmark, which utilized what curators called “sound spots” in an empty room; visitors wore individual headsets which would play various radio broadcasts when the visitor was in one of the spots in the room, and would play static when they stepped out. Discussion here centered around the exhibition’s emphasis on the technology of broadcasting and the use of the body’s movement through space as a kind of transmitter of sonic experience.

This study of sound is at once particularly pointed and intentionally open-ended. The first two chapters are pointed in their investigations of race and sound in the United States, but their engagements with the sonic are not singular. While thinking around sound is peculiarly instantiated in these contexts, the conversations they unveil, those concerned with spatial constructions through sound, the cementing of racial stereotypes and caricatures in varying entertainment industries, and the racialized aesthetics of musico-cultural expression, become open to interpretation and further thought. The third chapter becomes less directed, communicating possibilities of engaging with these aspects of sound on a global scale. I do not pretend to offer final words on the subjects of sound and history. I do not present illusions of concreteness in correct “form” or methodology when approaching these subjects. Instead, I approach the sounds of history in a manner which is at once grounded and playful.

Song-hunters and Sound Ethnography

This chapter examines the ways in which racial identity and cultural authenticity are achieved and articulated through sound. The authentic, discussed here in the context of Black folk culture in the early-twentieth-century United States, is sonically collected and presented by technologies of sound recording. Conceptions of a technology like the phonograph as representing the scientific “real” (insofar as it captures vibrations which we can hear and reproduces them in a way we can meaningfully interpret) extend to thinking around the technology’s ability to represent the culturally “real.” A phonographic recording of a slave song contained in its grooves information about frequency and loudness as well as interpretable information about plantation life in the American South. Thus, the phonograph could not only expand the reaches of what we could hear and how we hear it, but it could represent and preserve cultures which were the subject of fascination in a particular historical/cultural moment.

The technical advent of the phonograph in the 1870s altered and expanded human possibilities of hearing. As an extension of both the ear and the voice, the phonograph could abstract sound from place. One no longer had to be present for the original event of a sound; it could now be seemingly replicated, faithfully copied by a vibrating stylus and embalmed in the grooves of a disc or cylinder. With mechanical recording now possible, speech becomes immortal.⁵ But the phonograph does not “hear” in that it does not interpret; it records all in the sound event that can be processed by the apparatus. The listener now hears a transformed and restructured sound which is removed and re-contextualized. Far from being an unbiased tool, the apparatus of the phonograph is operated by a network of participants: recorder, subject, listener,

⁵ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 21.

producer, performer. The social formations involved in the recording event⁶ are often realized in noticing who is doing the recording, who is being recorded, and who decides what is recorded.

In recordings of Black folk culture, sound is racialized. Sonic representations of Blackness and Black voices were facilitated by those actors with access to and control over nascent recording technologies. Some of the technology's first uses in the United States can be located in the field of anthropology and the practice of field recording. Collectors of cultural information, those standing between their audience and the Other, responsible for facilitating cultural understanding and creating knowledge, utilized the apparatus of the phonograph to supplement or replace previous methods of notation and recording based around writing. Anthropologists in the "field" were distinct in their recording practices from those based around the studio; the field provided a closeness to the authentic and an immersion in the studied culture which could not be achieved by the isolated space of the studio. The studio, however, would come to play partly facilitate the creation of the Black folk celebrity, a figure of pure commerciality whose Black identity centered around both visual and sonic representations of folk culture.

What is it about sound that is able to racialize and create a temporal record of authentic cultural expression? How does sound construct time in a way that serves cultural and commercial needs? The "capturing" of recorded sound allows for new pathways for disseminating and thinking about a consumable and identifiable Blackness. The works of John Lomax and Zora Neale Hurston are here read/listened to in conversation in an attempt to compare anthropological methodologies in practice and examine two very differing conceptions of Blackness in the same

⁶ When referring to the "recording event" I refer simply to the place and time of the recording. The moment of recording involves the process of performance and a resulting "original sound" which is distinct from the reproductions of that original which are listened to later.

historical moment. The recordings of John Lomax reveal a desire to hear the Black voice which is rooted in nostalgia for slavery and preconceived notions of the slave/working/outlaw Black body. Examining his spaces of recording and his relationship to Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter attempts to understand the ways in which sound works to construct a Black past and subsequently shape ideas of a current Black identity. Zora Neale Hurston’s work and recordings reveal the possibilities of recorded sound in creating a self-articulating Blackness, one which is situated in the peculiar moment of the early-twentieth-century United States. Investigating her dual-identity as observer and participant in her work with Black folk cultures and her own recorded performance/vocal practices, I explore the ways in which the racialized voice works as both an imposition and a self-articulation. Lomax is further concerned with a constructed Black past, while Hurston is intent on folklore’s immediacy and its role in a fluid and changing Black present.

Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century searches for the authentic were realized in ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological study. The space of the “field,” the natural environment in which culture could be faithfully recorded and later represented, became a site of experimentation for emerging technologies like the phonograph and the camera. It is important to note that desires to represent non-Western and folk cultures did not emerge with the advent of such technologies; interests in taxonomically cataloguing and organizing knowledge of cultural groups ran alongside scientific interests in biological classification of flora and fauna which grew out of Enlightenment thought. The projects of note-taking and representing natural phenomena which occurred under and would be used to justify colonial/imperial European efforts can be fundamentally traced to the development of fields like anthropology in the nineteenth century

and ethnomusicology in the twentieth century. It is from this recording impulse that the employment of the phonograph for anthropological purposes arises in the projects of figures like John Lomax.

In the wake of an industrial revolution and rapid urban expansion through the move from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, definitions of American culture were complex and disjointed. The project of defining a national culture separate from the tactile material achievements of wealth in the industrial boom became concerned with discovering something new: a culture which was vibrant, indigenous, and uniquely American.⁷ It is in this context that Lomax emerged as a seminal figure in anthropology and musicology. Born in Mississippi but raised in central Texas, Lomax was exposed in early childhood to cowboy songs, a site of fascination which would later culminate in *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, a collection of transcribed lyrics first published in 1910.⁸ The American South in which Lomax grew up, one grappling with post-Emancipation attitudes toward race, held a certain nostalgia for plantation society, Black folklore as quaint, childlike, and humorous became a common conceptualization by “New South” intellectuals which referenced and idealized a pastoral, preindustrial time.⁹ Lomax, during his work recording work songs in Southern penitentiaries, was not so optimistic in his imagining of Black folklore; he felt the forces of industrialization were threatening to destroy folk culture, and that increasing mass mediatization would phase out and eventually overtake “pure” folk music with technologies like the radio.

⁷ Filene, “Our Singing Country”: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past,” 606.

⁸ Stewart, “Adventures of a Ballad Hunter: John Lomax and the Pursuit of Black Folk Culture,” 100.

⁹ Hirsch, “Modernity, Nostalgia, and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax,” 184.

Thus, Lomax's study of African American folk culture arose in part from a concern about cultural disappearance and the inability on the part of African Americans to adequately record and interpret their disappearing culture.¹⁰ Narratives of loss and disappearance, reinforced by evolutionary thinking on cultural progress and survivability, lay at the foundation of Lomax's projects of sound recording and cultural preservation. The racially segregated communities of the South were to Lomax ideal for capturing and preserving folk cultures which would soon become extinct. He was in this way on a frontier looking backwards, aiming to record and disseminate cultures before their getting swept up in the linearity of industrialization. This project was carefully calculated and executed. Lomax's field recordings further reveal the ways in which staging and creating spaces through sound create racialized voices and reflect cultural/historical fantasies of hierarchy and social structure.

The penitentiary served as a small-scale model for the larger project of cultural preservation through "freezing" a moment in time. The act of recording achieved the production of sonic material to be later listened to, and the prison achieved the stasis required to preserve cultural memory. John Lomax himself is quoted as saying:

In the prison camps ... the conditions were practically ideal. Here the Negro prisoners were segregated, often guarded by Negro trusties, with no social or other contacts with whites, except for the occasional official relations. The convicts hear only the idiom of their own race. Many—often of the greatest influence—were "lifers" who had been confined in the penitentiary, a few as long as fifty years. They still sang the songs that

¹⁰ Stewart, "Adventures of a Ballad Hunter: John Lomax and the Pursuit of Black Folk Culture," 100.

they had brought into confinement, and these songs had been entirely in the keeping of the black man.¹¹

Lomax's statement regarding the "keeping" of the folksong in the Black man reflects a highly racialized authenticity necessary in constructing the folk identity. The prison serves as an insulator, a space where cultural knowledge is preserved and no new information has the opportunity to dilute cultural purity. The prison also functions as a means of preserving a historical moment directly referential to slavery. A certain nostalgia for slavery governed the Lomaxes' recording interests; as the time period/context in which these songs and folk material were created, the era of chattel slavery in the United States becomes a valuable cultural moment. The working Black body, the Black body which suffers and mourns, became the sought-after model for Black folk culture. The construction of the prison as home to Black authenticity was achieved in part through strategies of organizing sound in the recording process.

Lomax occasionally encountered difficulties in successfully capturing culture on his terms when met with the challenges raised by the technological capabilities of recording. The recording event was sometimes "ruined" by the physicality of a performer: Lomax recalls a particular performer, Uncle Billy Macree, who spoiled a recording of a "play tune" by stomping his feet and dancing during what Lomax thought to be the most dramatic moment of the song.¹² Here, a performance style which would presumably be considered "genuine" combats the capabilities of the recording technology (the microphone), rendering the recording event unsuitable for future dissemination and listening. Ironically, it was just this unfamiliarity with

¹¹ Bluestein, *The Voice of Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory*, 105.

¹² Stewart, "Adventures of a Ballad Hunter: John Lomax and the Pursuit of Black Folk Culture," 104.

recording equipment on the parts of informants that validated their authenticity in the first place. As the environment of the ethnographic “field” proved unsatisfactory here, Lomax found methods of staging appropriate auditory scenes which would perform the authentic in a recordable way.

The recordings I present in this work were accessed through various sound archives accessible to the public. Many of Zora Neale Hurston’s work recorded during her trips to Florida in the 1930s are digitized on the Library of Congress website. Lomax’s recordings were similarly digitized, displayed on the website of the Association for Cultural Equity. The sounds I discuss have been through several stages of mediation; they have been performed, recorded by the phonograph, and then converted to binary code to create digital audio files. In both cases, audio files are organized by date, geographic place, anthropologist, and by collection. Aside from this descriptive, classificatory information, the songs stand on their own and can be played through media players which are a feature of each website’s design. Recordings of Leadbelly were accessed through YouTube, through which users have posted mp3 versions of Library of Congress recordings and recordings made by the American Recording Company (ARC).

The following recordings discussed were accessed through the online archive of the Association for Cultural Equity’s (ACE) website. This organization was founded by Alan Lomax, John Lomax’s son, in order to “stimulate cultural equity through preservation, research, and dissemination of the world’s traditional music.”¹³ These songs were recorded by John and Alan during a particular session which took place in December of 1947 at Parchman Farm in Mississippi. Many of the recordings feature multiple vocalists singing in unison with

¹³ “About the Association for Cultural Equity,” <<http://www.culturalequity.org/ace/about-ace>>.

interspersed chants and spoken additions. Prominent also in these recordings is the sound of hammers falling; this creates the impression of a work environment, situating the listener as an observer of a candid experience. Songs like “Stewball (I)” and “Don’t You Hear Your Poor Mother Calling?” both feature the sounds of the hammers’ fall to start the song. The percussive nature of the tool and its function in keeping rhythm indicates a link between work and musicality, a connection which Lomax makes in his imagination of the Black slave whose daily work is coupled with song. The reality of the work environment represented in these recordings is certainly questionable; the Lomaxes were known to add props and instruments to recorded scenes when they could not record work songs in the fields.¹⁴

If this scene was in fact staged, the intentional representation of a working musical body was achieved through a purported recording of “authentic” activity. Indeed, Lomax noted that prisons were ideal for cultural preservation not only because of their similarities to slavery but because of their mimicry of the “natural habitat” of Black culture and its folk expressions; this culture was mournful, melancholic, and to a degree hopeless.¹⁵ This essentialism comes from an understanding of American Black culture as being rooted not only in an African past but in a necessarily troublesome and distressing one. Lomax conceives of the working Black body and the enslaved Black body as natural; this naturalness can be considered cultural “purity,” a source material from which folk culture sprouts and can be catalogued and commodified. Here the performance of folk culture through music is not only contingent upon the performers’

¹⁴ Filene, “Our Singing Country”: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past,” 618.

¹⁵ Hirsch, “Modernity, Nostalgia, and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax,” 194.

expressions and actions. It is largely up to the recorder and the observer, who constructs sonic images of characterized and stereotyped Blackness.

The role of the anthropologist and the field recorder was one which generally hinged upon a positioning “outside” of the culture under study. Lomax occupied this role in several ways; not only was he an outsider to the Black culture which he recorded, but he went about studying music without any formal musical training. His lack of formal musical training, in the eyes of representatives at the Library of Congress who commissioned some of Lomax’s work, ensured that his projects were cultural rather than musicological or music theory oriented. Lomax’s responsibility was then to simply facilitate the recording process; by systematically interacting with performers and overseeing the technical process of recording, Lomax could theoretically be objective in his work. Zora Neale Hurston’s work in the collection of folksong and folk culture warps this notion of the outside observer through complex racial politics and practices of performance for the recording event.

In the introduction to her 1935 autoethnographical work *Mules and Men*, Hurston details her process in studying Black folklore and highlights her relationships with participants. Her unique position as a Black collector of Black folk culture is underscored by her shifting use of personal pronouns when describing her experience:

And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, “Get out of here!” We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what he is missing. The Indian

resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries.¹⁶

Here Hurston's linguistic transformations break the traditional anthropological division between folklorist and informant. She speaks in the first sentence of "the Negro," only to resolve this distance with the use of "we" in the next part of the statement to identify herself with the same group. This shifting in pronouns serves as a textual example of Hurston's navigation through inside/outside, Black/non Black dichotomies. The racialized voice, here spoken of only in academic language, comes to be realized through sound and the event of recording.

Hurston was able to work within, around, and through the roles of insider and outsider, of the objective observer as well as the one whose culture is under observation.¹⁷ Through changes in visual presentation, varying uses of speech and language, and in-depth immersion into cultures under study, Hurston diverged from the methodical approach to capturing the authentic which Lomax employed. Hurston was Black, educated, and middle class; she had the conceived-of position of simultaneously accentuating and deemphasizing her racial identity, which provided distance for objective observation while retaining a necessary insider status.¹⁸ This movement through and around social roles was achieved partly through the sung and spoken voice. Hurston's class and social status were illuminated by her voiced linguistic expressions, which could be manipulated and shaped to fit anthropological and logistical needs in different social/cultural circumstances. Hurston's voice was not only used in the context of

¹⁶ Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 2-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 145.

communicating with participants; many of the songs she collected she performed herself, to be recorded under the supervision of her anthropological colleagues. This active performance complicates Lomax's assumption that the "purest" folk culture is expressed in the moment of performance, as Hurston's role in the collection process was so consistently fluid. Her unique approach to ethnographic engagement represented Blackness in a multifaceted and self-articulated manner. Where Lomax's personal conception of Blackness was based on a fictionalized past slavery, Hurston's was founded upon a lifelong grappling with Black identity and negotiating of this identity in the professional field. Recorded sounds express these conceptions and are foundational in realizing the distinction between Black folklore as "past" and Black folklore as "present."

The Federal Writer's Project (FWP), a New Deal effort to give work to out-of-commission writers during the Depression, employed academics like Hurston, Lomax, and folklorist Herbert Halpert, and became a significant commissioner of work in the realm of folklore studies. In June 1939, a recording session took place in Jacksonville, Florida in which Hurston, Halpert, a representative from the FWP, and a "group of railroad workers, musicians, and church ladies" sat around a recording device similar to a phonograph and exchanged stories, songs, and information on folklife.¹⁹ Recordings of this session can be accessed via the Library of Congress website through the American Folklife Center. Hurston was positioned at the center of this session, switching seamlessly between the role of ethnographer and that of participant/performer. Her rendition of the song "Halimuhfack" stylistically mirrors the song's lyrical contents and the oscillating movement by which Hurston navigated the recording event.

¹⁹ Brooks, "'Sister, Can You Line It Out?': Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood," 621-622.

Lyrics like “You may go but this will bring you back,” sung as a taunt, a playful gesture, but drawn out in melancholy, point to the emotional wretchedness of departure and abandonment. Daphne A. Brooks notes that songs like “Halimuhfack” capture the “sounds of collective play and individual despair” which responded to the pressures of the Great Migration and the Depression in the 1930s.²⁰ The duality of the tune’s lyrical content, expressed in equivalent dualism in a performance by Hurston, mirrors that of Hurston’s individual fluidity in the context of the recording session.

Brooks further notes that Hurston’s unique voice, its placement in the range of second soprano and its raspy timbre, has the ability to represent both a communal vocal experience and a solo singer.²¹ In sonically mediating a space which includes both one voice and many voices, Hurston creates a performance which is interpretive and historically pointed. Different considerably from Lomax’s formulation of folk culture which is “kept” from an abstracted past, preserved, and frozen in time, Hurston’s folk culture is fluid, interpretable, and present. The ability to simultaneously represent one and many voices further speaks to Hurston’s role in simultaneously representing culture and participating in it. The necessity of objectivity as an ethnographer and folklorist and the supposed inevitable subjectivity created by being a member of a studied culture create a tension within a constructed Blackness perpetuated by these recorded sounds. Hurston’s own articulation of this tension, both through writing and speaking about it explicitly and in her expression of aesthetic vocal performance, is a self-articulation of

²⁰Ibid, 622.

²¹ Ibid, 622.

Black identity; this, though in different ways to Lomax's articulations of Blackness, contributes to a certain sonically canonized folk culture.

The latter portion of *Mules and Men* features an account of a trip to Polk County, considered by some to be a mythical place of origin for African-American folk expression.²² It was here that Hurston's distance from her participants made itself abundantly clear visually: "They all thought I must be a revenue officer or a detective of some kind. They were accustomed to strange women dropping into the quarters, but not in shiny gray Chevrolets. They usually came plodding down the big road or counting railroad ties. The car made me look too prosperous. So they set me aside as different."²³ She recalls some tactics used by participants which were normally reserved for white visitors, techniques for avoiding questions or refraining from sharing certain pieces of information. Hurston is able to skirt the suspicions of community members by making up a story to explain her dress from Macy's: "'Oh, Ah ain't got doodley squat,' I countered. 'Mah man brough me dis dress de las' time he went to Jacksonville. We wuz sellin' plenty stuff den and makin' good money. Wisht Ah had dat money now.'"²⁴ Here, it is Hurston's use of language and vernacular speech which conveys her dual status as observer and participant. Within the text of *Mules and Men*, Hurston employs two different writing styles: that of "Standard English" to signify the scientific voice of authority in her ethnographic observation and that of the Black vernacular as a means of communicating her "native" speakership.²⁵ The sounded voice here, reproduced in text based on phonetic interpretation, is a social signifier and a marker of culture. Hurston's presence as a Black woman in Polk County is charged by her

²² Stewart, "Conjure Queen: Zora Neale Hurston and Black Folk Culture," 156.

²³ Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 60-61.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

²⁵ Stewart, "Conjure Queen: Zora Neale Hurston and Black Folk Culture," 156.

financial circumstances and educational background; this is offset by a vocal expression of culture, a method which Hurston would later employ in her personal recordings of folk songs. Here cultural and racial performance is achieved through sound which is loaded with cultural and racial characterization.

I want to now turn to the emerging music industry of the early-to-mid twentieth century United States. While we have established Lomax's role in canonizing folk culture and creating popular conceptions of the folksong, it is also important to note his direct stake in folk culture as entertainment. Lomax, while operating primarily in academic fields, created relationships with participants over the years which would lead him to commercial projects of recorded folk music. The emergence of the "folk celebrity," a marketable figure whose status as a participant in folk culture could be articulated in the studio as well as on tour, codified certain stereotypes of Blackness which were already being shaped by Lomax's anthropological work. Lomax's relationship with folk performer Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter famously reflects his conceptualizations of Blackness, serving as an example for the ways in which race and abstract past are articulated through the collection of sonic material.

Lomax met Ledbetter at Angola prison during the summer of 1933, where Ledbetter was incarcerated for murder. After Ledbetter's release in 1934, Lomax reached out to him and began a professional relationship which would produce recordings for the Library of Congress, concerts and benefit performances, commercial recording sessions, and a newsreel documentary.²⁶ The figure of "Leadbelly" is not revered for his influence on rock music and blues, and stands

²⁶ Filene, "Our Singing Country": John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past," 602-603.

alongside figures like Woody Guthrie as “originals” in a canon of American folk music. Lomax saw economic opportunity in his relationship with Ledbetter as well as an opportunity to continue his project of preservation through ethnographic recording.

Ledbetter was an appealing candidate for a marketable, characterized folksinger for several reasons. He was considered to be a storehouse of old songs that were “slipping away,” disseminated orally and not held materially by notation or written recording of any kind. This generated a kind of novelty; only certain performers and communities were privy to this cultural “information,” thus making Lomax and other “song hunters” responsible for an empirical recording and cross-cultural translation of culture through sound. His imprisonment was also appealing; his isolation from a quickly modernizing world (and from a “white” world because of the racial segregation which existed in prisons) made his performances more authentic in that they transcended the boundaries of time which functioned outside of the prison. His lack of exposure to the information technologies of modernity, his being “cut off from the phonograph and from the radio,” meant a certain liberation from what the Lomaxes saw as the culturally destructive force of mass mediation.²⁷

Ledbetter, characterized as an outlaw and a killer, was thus at once dangerous and entertaining. Lomax was fundamental in shaping this character, as displayed by media interviews and writing by Lomax in his transcriptions of songs recorded by Ledbetter. An article in the *New York Herald-Tribune* from 1935 quotes Lomax stressing Ledbetter’s rapacity, saying he “had served time in a Texas penitentiary for murder ... he had thrice been a fugitive from justice ... he was the type known as ‘killer’ and had a career of violence the record of which is a black epic of

²⁷ Ibid, 609.

horrifics.” Lomax further introduced Ledbetter to reporters by explaining that he “was a ‘natural,’ who had no idea of money, law, or ethics and who was possessed of virtually no restraint.”²⁸ Here Ledbetter is presented as being potentially dangerous to the public; as someone with “no idea of money, law, or ethics,” Ledbetter is uncivil and purely instinctual, almost animalistic. Lomax’s “black epic of horrifics,” while likely using the descriptor of black as grim or dark, can also be read as indicating a racialized criminality. Ledbetter, as a prisoner, is one of many like him, Black men whose criminal character and racial isolation create a kind of purity in culture and performance.

A figure like Ledbetter represents a complicated attempt at articulating a new American culture. Situated as the Other, Leadbelly was depicted as being both marginal and similar to an ideal picture of the American. Pure American culture here was nostalgic for a past which was pastoral and plantation slavery-based, preferred by figures like Lomax to the industrialized urban United States of the moment. Ledbetter’s simplicity and “folk-wise” sensibility was further placed against a perceived empty pretentiousness of modern America.²⁹ This theorization was clearly inverted by Lomax, however; the “folk” personality which was appealing in its simplicity and down-to-earth nature becomes a dim-wittedness and impulsive violence. Ledbetter and the Black folk celebrity is at once revered, held as a subject of nostalgia and idealism, and cast to the margins of Otherness.

While claiming to represent the authentic, Lomax and other actors involved in the commercial recording process made changes to folksong material to meet the needs of mass

²⁸ "Lomax Arrives with Lead Belly, Negro Minstrel," 1935.

²⁹ Filene, “Our Singing Country”: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past,” 616.

mediation. There was appeal in recording traditional music in its “pure” form, but this ideal was not held so rigidly as to stop these actors from “softening the music’s harshest elements.”³⁰ To illustrate this, I take two recorded versions of the same Ledbetter song titled “Mr. Tom Hughes’ Town.” The song expresses a desire to flee home and enjoy the illicit pleasures of Fannin Street, the red-light district of Shreveport, Louisiana of which Tom Hughes is the sheriff.³¹ Ledbetter first recorded this song with the Lomaxes in 1934 for the Library of Congress while being held at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. One year later, he recorded the song commercially for the American Recording Company (ARC) in New York City. These sessions were both arranged by the Lomaxes, and differences between the recordings reveal what sounds and content Lomax thought to be appropriate for a mass audience.

Softening the harsher elements of the music involved altering lyrics by omission. Two verses found in the original Library of Congress recording were omitted in the ARC session:

I got a woman livin’ on the

Back side of jail

[Makes a livin’ boy by

Workin’] up her tail

and

I tell you the truth

I keep on [sides]

That baby got somethin’ lawd

³⁰ Ibid, 620.

³¹ Ibid, 613.

I sure would like.³²

Both of these verses are sexually suggestive, and may have been removed in an effort to prettify the song's contents. Deliberate changes are also made to the sonic aesthetics of the recording in the ARC session. Where the 1934 field recording features a fast tempo, some undecipherable lyrics, and a more emotive vocal line and guitar solo, the ARC recording makes use of a slower tempo, more clearly articulated words, and a less audibly enthusiastic performance. Further, the ARC recording begins with a spoken introduction, allowing the listener to more easily follow along with the song's storyline. This loss of intensity and "bite" in the ARC recording illustrates a deliberate attempt to mask some of the harsher elements of Ledbetter's performance style in an attempt to construct marketable sonic material.

Constructing and representing folk culture through sound involves an engagement with a past and present in which the culture exists. For figures like Lomax and other Southern intellectuals, processes of representing folklife references an idealized pastoral past, one which expresses nostalgia for plantation slavery and the working Black body. Blackness is constructed sonically based around these principles; prison and work songs showcase the physical working body through sounds of hammers and collective voices in rhythmic unison. Recordings as such are culturally "pure," existing in a space out of time, isolated from the influences of modernization and mediatization. This is all made possible by the phonograph, which is thought to faithfully capture and make widely available cultural information through sound. In embalming voices and thus preserving cultures, the phonograph creates a racial voice canonized in folk music.

³² Ibid, 614.

Zora Neale Hurston presents a unique self-articulation of Black identity through sound; as both observer and participant in the ethnographic method, Hurston uses the recorded voice to navigate dual identities and further her investigation into Black folk culture. Her active engagement with Black communities in the South and her participation in performing songs and stories she collected indicates investment in folk culture which is concerned with a present rather than a past. Sound here is interpreted by a performer who is also an observer and disseminator of cultural information; in listening to Hurston's recordings, we can make connections between the material sounds of her work and her writing about them. I end with an examination of Ledbetter's career to move into thinking about the display of sound to different audiences. Where ethnographic recording efforts were concerned with preservation and embalming through the technology of the phonograph, commercial recordings were concerned with monetary gains and public popularity. The ways in which the authentic is altered or framed changes in the switch between these recording methods. These are changes we can hear.

Broadcast and Constructing Liveness

The invention of the accessible radio receiver—the crystal set in the 1900s and later the vacuum tube in the 1920s—and the ability to harness the capabilities of radio waves brought forth a very different set of problems than did the phonograph. Perhaps most obviously, radio did not necessitate the same material parts to access/reproduce sound; listening through the phonograph required physical discs and records, whereas listening to the radio required only a receiver located in wave-accessible space. Thus, radio placed the listener in a space of reliance on the unseen. Sounds which were “plucked from the air” produced a certain sense of wonder absent in phonograph listening; while the mechanical processes which allowed the phonograph to (re)produce sound were likely not understood in depth by the average listener, the visual element of the phonograph, lost in the practice of listening to the radio, undoubtedly made the process more palatable. Radio’s prominence in public media consumption in the 1920s and 30s became a force in constructing and presenting live performance. Radio bridges distance, abstracting sound from space and providing the possibility for listening “live.” Phonographic records created a disembodied voice, and one that could travel distances through the material disc; however, their construction of space through sound did not extend to the real-time presentation of liveness which the radio became popular for.

Phonographic recordings, unlike radio broadcasts, are preserved in a state of permanence. They become physical records whereas radio broadcasts are fleeting, existing in the time of their airing if not recorded. To consider recorded sound historically is to acknowledge this material difference in sound dissemination. Radio broadcasts were often recorded to phonographic records, allowing for their continued presence in the archive (often after another process of

digitization and placement within Internet databases.) I want to focus presently on the material conditions of the radio and their influence on processes of listening and remembering. The faculty of liveness, with which this chapter concerns itself, is arguably the most striking difference between the radio broadcast of the 1930s and 40s and the preceding phonographic recording process of the first decades of the twentieth century with which the previous chapter was concerned. In a historical manner, radio broadcasts and their surrounding discourses allow us to determine which sounds resonate with what people; the next step in this historical process is examining what parts of sound allow for this resonance, and determining how these parts of sound are propagated by what media.

To echo Jonathan Sterne in his influential work on histories of sound reproduction³³, the radio, like any technical medium, is not simply a technology; it is a set of social practices that are mediated by an apparatus but not determined by it. Those with control over the apparatus, who seek to negotiate its possibilities, perpetuate these practices in order to create a soundscape that determines how people hear, what people hear, and how they come to understand their listening.

³⁴ Information mediated through radio, and the information which radio produces in the process of broadcasting and receiving, becomes a way in which notions of reality and meaning are articulated and understood. The early twentieth century United States was entangled in issues of modernization, industrialization, national identity, and race. To reiterate from the previous chapter, the movement of Black populations to urban centers, primarily in the northern states, resulted in sites of contact between racial groups, including those immigrant populations which made up a new workforce in American cities. In what anthropologist Raymond Williams calls a

³³ Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 247.

³⁴ Jenkins, "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," 419.

period of mobile privatization, in which the modern urban form of living gave rise to dual tendencies of mobility and the self-sufficient home, radio became a method of contact which accounted for dispersal and distance and functioned as a new way of gaining access to the world.

³⁵ Racial information, those identifying factors which informed understandings of race and race relations, was inevitably a part of what was communicated in the process of broadcasting.

The period of the 1920s and 1930s in the United States is defined, in the context of racial thinking and mediatization, by the continued prevalence of Jim Crow law, frequent lynchings and violence directed at African-American populations, and the increasing complexities of adjusting to the coexistence of white and Black communities in public spaces and businesses. Moving beyond the early days of reckoning with emerging industrial urban landscapes, this period's media environment became arguably defined by the communicative possibilities of radio broadcast and reception. The differences between the phonograph and the radio which I described earlier in this chapter are very much relevant in discussing varying representations of sound through the lens of the historical. The ethnographic impulse of recording and *preserving* gave way to an impulse to recreate liveness and focus entertainment on immediacy. Developments in the sciences of recording facilitated this process; as electrical rather than analog recording became more popular in the early days of accessible radio, musical and nonmusical aesthetics of sound transformed in accordance. As will be described later, the popularity of exploitative Black entertainment and the fascination with emerging "Black aesthetics" (though this term had not yet been developed) transformed with the immediacy and liveness which radio offered.

³⁵ Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 20-21.

Early radio listenership in the United States was made up of an overwhelmingly white audience; that is, cultures of American radio listening in the first decades of the twentieth century were concerned with “Black” cultural material but not Black audiences. That which was considered characteristic of Black culture was contained not only by the white ownership of radio stations but also by the manipulation, invention, and expropriation of Black comedy, speech patterns, and music, which were performed by whites on the radio.³⁶ Histories of Black minstrelsy and minstrel performance in the nineteenth century heavily informed conventions of entertainment on the early radio. Musical cultures surrounding early jazz, shaped and made accessible by the radio, were influenced by codified sounds experienced in minstrel shows of the nineteenth century. I am by no means attempting to equate cultures of jazz and minstrelsy; to do so would be a deaf analysis of racialized practices of listening and would be to miss the point of realizing self articulations and Black definitions of what is decidedly “Black music.” I aim instead to explore, through the musical work and personality of esteemed composer Duke Ellington, the ways in which discourses *surrounding* jazz, radio minstrelsy, and characteristics of “Black music” create spaces and immersive experiences through sound’s “liveness.” Further, I want to examine the ways in which Ellington’s navigation of dual roles in mediating Black/white cultural relations through music constitutes a self-articulation of Blackness based on imposed conventions of musicality. Listening *around* jazz allows then for a listening *through* the music to determine technically specific ways in which liveness becomes a part of Black articulations of Black American culture. A brief description of minstrelsy is first required to attribute its cultures of performance to a certain liveness.

³⁶ Jenkins, “A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio,” 420.

The popularity of minstrelsy is inextricable from its relationship to slavery and a collective reckoning with emancipation. The “borrowing” of Black cultural materials for white dissemination and profit ultimately depended on the material relations of chattel slavery; however, the minstrel show obscured these relations by presenting an idealized slavery which was amusing and natural.³⁷ Positioning the Black body (which is often the white body in blackface) in this way goes beyond escapism; it becomes part of a concerted effort to present Blackness and Black culture as something which is simultaneously dangerous, infectious, violent, harmless, humorous, and unthinkingly primitive. Minstrelsy’s place on the radio was, of course, one which did not offer a visual verification of the performers’ race. Radio programs could thus borrow structural and material elements from minstrel traditions while at the same time creating a more modern form of minstrelsy.³⁸ This form would rely heavily on vocabulary, accent, dialect, and music which was considered characteristically Black. While this modern minstrelsy relied on the nascent technology of the radio and the unfamiliar phenomenon of the voice divorced from its sounding body, the appeal of radio minstrelsy was occupied with a nostalgia and idealization of a premodern past.

A few monolithic Black characters/personas emerged from stage performance around the 1820s in the United States. Thomas Dartmouth Rice’s “Jim Crow” character, a comic song-and-dance figure whose name would come to describe realities of segregation and Black control later in American life, came to synthesize conceptions of the Black body as humorous and naively entertaining. The ubiquitous “Zip Coon” character further stretched conceptions of Blackness to the urban setting, representing the “Black dandy” whose urbane persona and

³⁷ Lott, “Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy,” 23.

³⁸ Johnson, “A Date with the Duke: Ellington on the Radio,” 373.

faux-aristocratic nature created an amusing dissonance between body, voice, and dress for white viewers.³⁹ These Black characters were decidedly “safe” and harmless, presented as unquestionably ignorant, pathetic, and humorous. Musical performance of what were marketed as “coon songs” served as a musical accompaniment to, and an expression of, the values presented in the minstrel show. These songs were presented as characteristically “Black” in their rhythm and syncopation, labelled as “dance music” to appeal to white audiences as entertainment and “happy music” when placed alongside/within minstrel performance.⁴⁰ Minstrel shows employed music and language in Black dialect to achieve a multifaceted representation of Blackness.

Minstrel performance had a unique place on the radio; despite the disappearance of physical blackface, shows like *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Two Black Crows* remained popular well into the twentieth century when stage-oriented minstrel shows fell out of fashion. The Black disembodied voice was able to exist as a commodity by itself. The white performing body was rendered invisible, creating a listening experience in which one was “immersed” into representations of Black culture if not fooled into believing the disembodied voice’s body to be Black. I argue that this move from the visual to the sonic necessitated a continued emphasis on the “live” show. The bodily humor and bodily representation of Blackness through blackface created an association which could be remedied through specific sonic strategies on the radio. When minstrel shows moved to visual media (film and television), the dissonance between the unmarked body and marked voice led to the downfall of the explicit bodily blackface tradition in the twentieth century. The stars of *Two Black Crows*, Charles Sellers and George Moran, often

³⁹ Dormon, “Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The “Coon Song” Phenomenon of the Gilded Age,” 451.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 453.

performed aural blackface in the form of a sketch comedy. Their broadcast, mediated uniquely by the technology of the radio, relied on particular elements of “Black speech” and dialect to inform and render a sonic event visual. I feel it appropriate to listen closely to these broadcasts to better understand the ways in which Blackness is constructed in a nonmusical but still sonic manner.

The broadcast recordings I accessed were reissued on 78rpm records and later digitized and made available on an Internet archive.⁴¹ According to the description provided alongside the recordings, the issue date for this audio is March 14, 1927. The clip opens with a clip of ragtime piano music and the sound of a train whistle. Two voices then begin to engage in small talk, stereotypically Black in their dialect. One part of their conversation revolves around the popular saying “the early bird catches the worm.” For the purposes of my own text transcription, I’ve decided to represent the two voices in alternating lines of quotes:

“The early bird catches what worm?”

“Why, any worm!”

“Well, who cares about that?”

“Everybody knows the early bird catches the worm.”

“Well what of it? What about it?”

“Catches it, that’s all!”

“Well let him have it!”

[...]

“Well, what’s the worm’s idea being there?”

41

<<https://archive.org/details/TwoBlackCrows--moranAndMack--parts1-6/TwoBlackCrows--moranAndMack-pt.1.wav>>.

“Why, the worm lives there!”

“He live where?”

“He live where he is.”

“I don’t even know where he is. I don’t know that.”

“Well he’s at home, that’s where he is.”

“I’d rather not hear any more about it.”⁴²

This conversation, making up almost one minute of a 3:30 minute comedy bit, presents the two characters as hopelessly speaking around a phrase whose meaning they will clearly never really grasp. Representations of Black ignorance, blissful naivete, and lack of common sense are apparent in a sketch such as this. The Black characters represented here are harmless, stupid, entertaining, and oblivious. However, their blatant misunderstanding of a common saying can be read as a certain rejection of conventions of language. In making the saying seem arbitrary and nonsensical, these characters create a sense of uncertainty in the English language as such. While one could also just as easily write off this recording for its treatment of Black dialect and its role in presenting the characters as “ignorant,” I see this broadcast as exposing some of the fears and instabilities of white American culture in a modernizing world which is making room for new forms of Blackness. The content of the sketch challenges these seemingly stable conventions of speech and language, while the form of the broadcast attempts to create visuality through extending the blackface tradition to the voice. The place for mediatized representations of Blackness now lies in the sonic. Threats to convention and parts of codified culture were characterized and otherized as “Black” on musical terms as well. Airing at the same time as

⁴² Ibid.

shows like *Two Black Crows*, broadcasts of jazz performances similarly posed a threat to Western aesthetics while also serving as mass entertainment and spectacle.

Examining histories of early jazz musicality and the period delineated the “Jazz Age,” spanning across the 1920s and 1930s, reveals racial tensions present in radio and sonicity more broadly. In discourses on this history, consensus on the origins of the term “jazz” and the exactitude of its emergence has not been reached. I deal here specifically with the music which existed alongside the establishment of jazz as a popular music, one which was present primarily in American metropolitan scenes. It is important also to note that discourses surrounding the development of early jazz take into account varying degrees of Western and African influence; instead of intervening in these discourses, I choose to examine period-specific conceptions of how jazz represented different kinds of Blackness and “Black music.” Genre conventions during this period were, however, certainly distinctly racialized. As jazz arose as a uniquely American popular music, differences in musical stylings became, in part, the means of distancing white listeners from a Black “primitive” sound while also articulating an alluring and exotic form of entertainment. These conventions of genre are significant in discussing the development of radio and its reproduction of liveness; their shaping of listening practices in clubs and concert halls inform in part the ways in which radio sought to reproduce sound.

The music termed “jazz” became multifaceted. It became realized both in what white audiences called “jungle music,” characterized by certain rhythmic conventions and instrumentation, and in orchestral arrangements which more closely resembled an extension of Western art-musical practice. This two-fold representation of jazz can perhaps be best articulated in the terms “sweet” and “hot” used to describe musical stylings. The figure of Duke Ellington,

jazz bandleader and pianist, becomes an interesting example of the ways in which representations of hot and sweet jazz could be navigated through and negotiated. Ellington's character becomes at once dissonant from the "hot" music he plays and arranges while also shaping racialized conceptions of the jazz musician and the club entertainer. I argue that Ellington's unique positioning, wherein he is caught between white expressions of admiration and disgust, is particularly relevant to the white practice of "slumming" and the sonic representation of club events and live performance over the radio. Moreover, Ellington becomes a key player in new self-articulations of Blackness through jazz; discourses around rhythm and "hot rhythm" allow for a Black certainty emerging from a white uncertainty. To show this, it is helpful to describe the implications of hot and sweet jazz and histories of conceptualizing Blackness through music by Western standards.

Binaries of hot and sweet governed the white/Black split in jazz practices in the 1920s and 30s and their media representations. Generally speaking, "hot" jazz connoted musical and cultural Blackness, rhythm, freedom, improvisation, and primordialism. Conversely, "sweet" jazz suggested whiteness, melody, structure, composition, and refinement.⁴³ White bandleaders often led orchestras in the latter style, and while acknowledging the Black roots of jazz, many sought to "reform" the music and rid it of its "primitivism." Musicians like Paul Whiteman, in his statement expressing his desire to make a "lady" out of jazz, alludes to a racialization which marks hot jazz as primitive and masculine and sweet jazz as refined and feminine.⁴⁴ Here discourses which occupied a certain eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century white imagination are realized in white reactions to the emergence of the jazz genre. Primitivism, a means of

⁴³ Jenkins, "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," 427.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 421.

articulating difference and Otherness, becomes a descriptor of certain rhythmic structures and musical practices which stray from Western musical tradition. The “naturalness” of hot rhythm which is attributed to the Black body, I argue, then becomes a means of underscoring a racial divide while also articulating an emerging hybridized national self.

On the radio, this music presented a set of problems surrounding the new accessibility to sounds and the commonality of everyday listening. Again, early radio listenership in the United States was overwhelmingly white, and most radio-listening took place in the domestic space of the home. Black music, so-called hot rhythm in particular, became thought of as an epidemic discussed very explicitly in the language of the body. Discourse on Black music was entangled in eighteenth-and-nineteenth century race ideology which emphasized the Black body and its terrifying excesses. Black music epitomized the outer limits of white understanding of Blackness and modernity which were, under these historical circumstances, inextricably linked.⁴⁵ Stemming from fears of racial hybridization with waves of immigrants entering the United States and a recently emancipated Black population (the “Negro Problem”), this epidemic implied human transmission through music. Radio here becomes relevant; songs broadcast over the airwaves could permeate the ears and infect cultures, beckoning listeners to fall prey to “hot rhythms” which were literally and figuratively expressions of the “primitive” body. As we will see, however, such primitivist orthodox thinking would come to ironically reinforce Black racial pride and allow for real self-articulations of Black identity.

Practices of white viewership of Black performance, affirmed and reinforced by the prevalence of minstrel shows, informed metropolitan nightclub scenes in cities throughout the

⁴⁵ Radano, “Hot Fantasies: American Modernism and the Idea of Black Rhythm,” 462.

United States. Historian and music theorist Chadwick Jenkins argues that this fascination with Black performance and the positioning of the Black body for viewing and listening-to can be considered a method of containment. This distinctive treatment of Black musicians, Jenkins claims, is expressed as a containing force both in live performance and in the broadcasting of Black music on the radio.⁴⁶ The popularity of “slumming,” the attendance of a Black club or Black performance as a white audience member in nightclubs in places like Harlem in New York City, showcases a complex outsider/insider relationship; white viewers are positioned outside, creating the impression of an intrusion of space or an indulgence in the exotic or the dangerous. This practice would come to inform engagement, both white and Black, with jazz as popular music and reflects the binary conceptions of hot and sweet, rhythm and melody.

In his work *Music and the Racial Imagination*, Ronald Radano highlights the ways in which the white anxieties revealed by Black music are turned on their head by an embracing of “natural rhythm.” Essentialisms that occupied white thinking about Blackness as primitive, prehistorical, and naturally rhythmic was turned into an enabling force which allowed for dynamic performance practices and an embracing of modernizing, urban personhood which resulted from Black migration from the South.⁴⁷ The presentation of Black culture as “out of time” creates a stability in the wake of an increasingly complex and dynamic white culture in the early twentieth century:

As a vestige of human sound prior to civilization’s development, [hot rhythm] made audible an originary sound world that had existed prior to the emergence of ‘music’ as such. Echoing forth from its pre-civilized and accordingly pre-musical origins, hot

⁴⁶ Jenkins, “A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio,” 416.

⁴⁷ Radano, “Hot Fantasies: American Modernism and the Idea of Black Rhythm,” 471.

rhythm assumed an absence that also ironically destabilized the certainty of European-based presence.⁴⁸

Here Radano points to the instability of Western musical practice in the case of jazz's emergence as popular music. Practices of slumming were evidence of this; realizing the fears of racial hybridization, white attendees of Black clubs at once acted as voyeurs of an exotic performance and "gave in" to its allure. The radio facilitated, to a certain extent, the popularity of this phenomenon. As a mediator of liveness, the radio made widely accessible the experience of jazz club attendance. This was achieved by the use of certain features of sound, which was able to construct space and create a simultaneously aural and visual experience. Consistently respected and heralded as one of the most gifted composers and arrangers of jazz, Duke Ellington found success as a radio personality and regular performer. Ellington serves as an example of a figure whose navigation through preconceived notions of Blackness allowed for an exploration of musicianship, artistic expression, and new formulations of "Black music." This was all made possible by the technology of the radio.

Edward "Duke" Ellington achieved the status of radio celebrity during his 1927-1930 residency at Harlem's Cotton Club. Ellington grew out of an upper middle-class background; raised in Washington D.C.'s West End with two pianist parents, he began playing piano at an early age, around which time he also began cultivating his dapper, refined persona (resulting in the nickname "Duke.") Ellington recalls his parents' active engagement within Black communities in the area, organizing and protesting Jim Crow laws limiting education.⁴⁹ During his time at the Cotton Club, his musical authority travelled between two personas, each

⁴⁸ Ibid, 474.

⁴⁹ Johnson, "A Date with the Duke: Ellington on the Radio," 372.

representing different styles/conceptualizations of jazz. As the “greatest living master of jungle music,”⁵⁰ Ellington served as a public representative for the hot rhythms of jazz. The term “jungle music” becomes a clear indicator of a “primitive” African past, suggesting also a musical expression which is heavily reliant on drums, rhythm, and physicality in performance. As “Harlem’s Aristocrat of Jazz,”⁵¹ Ellington became a mediating voice between the hot rhythms of jazz and the white audiences who found exotic fascination in the music. As a radio personality, Ellington presented as metropolitan, refined, and cultured based on Western standards of musical genius and intellect. In navigating the space between these two roles, Ellington found room for expression in the radio’s technological capabilities, namely its capacity to reproduce liveness and simulate a Harlem club setting.

Ellington’s navigation through these roles, as well as his successful self-establishment as an artist “beyond category” and as a musical genius, is sonically realized in several broadcasts depicting a scene at Harlem’s Cotton Club. I access the sounds in the following discussion from an album titled *Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club*⁵², a collection of broadcasts which feature live performances by Ellington and his orchestra, fragmented and arranged somewhat arbitrarily. Songs occasionally flow into one another, creating the impression of liveness and physical attendance at the performance, while some are cut off, transitioning to an inarticulate musical narrative wherein the listener is unsure what year, band, or session is being represented in song. Liner notes indicate that these recordings were taken from Cotton Club broadcasts in 1937 and 1938, with one exceptional song broadcast from Stockholm in 1939. In discussing these pieces, I am listening both for musical aesthetic conventions in “hot” and “sweet” jazz as well as

⁵⁰ Ibid, 370.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club*, 2010.

nonmusical sounds (that is, the voices of musicians and announcers, sounds from the audience, etc.).

The album opens with the track “Swing Session” and a spoken introduction by a radio announcer. He introduces “The Duke” and engages in a short dialogue with him regarding which songs would be played first. Ellington’s voice is somewhat muted, indicating his place at the piano, distant from the announcer’s microphone. Audience applause is heard at the end of the track, and Ellington plays on the announcer again, reaffirming the set’s song order. We are here given what is almost a visual representation of space; based on the sonic information given, one can assume the announcer’s place at the front of the stage, with Ellington and his band behind him. Glasses clink and the audience chatters later on in the album on tracks like “Oh Babe, Maybe Someday.” This song is decidedly an example of hot rhythm; while glasses clank at the introduction to the song, a percussive piano line interjects quickly. The prevalence of the “downbeat” underscores a growling muted trumpet and Ivie Anderson’s expressive and rhythmic sung melody. The radio announcer introduces the track “Three Blind Mice” by calling it a “rhythmic story,” recalling conceptions of Black culture which assume natural/cultural rhythmic talent. As a version of a traditional song, this track serves also as an example of the supposed “disfigurement” which jazz enacts on Western classical music principles.

These recorded broadcasts, compiled finally into a compact disc album, further render the aural visual and physical through references to dance. At the opening of the track “Solitude,” the announcer states: “We continue dancing now as we listen and dance to one of Duke’s most famous compositions.”⁵³ The listener here is included in this address and assumed to be dancing

⁵³ Ibid.

alongside the attendees of the Cotton Club. The inclusive “we” suggests a lack of distance between the radio receiver and the live sounds which it reproduces. It is through the ability to broadcast live that this is made possible; sounds are arriving at the ears of listeners at the same time regardless of their physical presence in the club. The exoticism and danger which accompanied attendance at jazz performances is now supposedly transferred through the airwaves to receivers in domestic settings.

However, not all of Ellington’s “dance music” on the album could be explicitly described as “hot.” Tracks like “Mood Indigo,” one of Ellington’s most famous compositions, with its slow and melodic hook, sweeping horn lines, and tentative rhythm section, could surely fall under the category of “sweet” jazz. In this way, Ellington fulfilled white audience expectations of hot rhythm and the musically “primitive” while creating space for his own artistic exploration. His work as an entertainer surely relied on the radio, and its ability to broadcast his live orchestral performances provided a unique opportunity for Ellington to weave in and out of hot and sweet jazz. Radio’s role in constituting and canonizing racialized voices is exhibited by broadcasts like those from the Cotton Club.

Ellington’s relationship to the radio also extended to his practices of composition. As radio broadcast became popularized and normalized in the 1920s, so did practices of “electrical recording,” reliant upon the process of converting physical vibrations into electrical signals. Fascinated by this recording method, Ellington began to think of the microphone as an instrument itself. Resulting from this interest in electrical sound came his first compositions specifically written for microphone transmission: “Black and Tan Fantasy” and “Mood Indigo.”

In Ellington's autobiography *Music is My Mistress*, he recalls his use of the "mike tone" and strategies for manipulating composed notes:

When we had made "Black and Tan Fantasy" with the growl trombone and growl trumpet, there was a sympathetic vibration or mike tone. That was soon after they had first started electrical recording. "Maybe if I spread those notes over a certain distance," I said to myself, "The mike tone will take specific place or a specific interval in there." It came off, and gave that illusion, because "Mood Indigo"—the way it's done—creates an illusion. To give it a little additional luster for those people who remember it from years ago, we play it with the bass clarinet down at the bottom instead of the ordinary clarinet, and they always feel it is exactly the way it was forty years ago.⁵⁴

Ellington's emphasis on the illusion created by his composition relates the musically aesthetic directly to the medium through which it is presented. In changing instrumentation to account for electrical microphone transmission and subsequent radio broadcast, he subverts traditional compositional practice and complicates the assumed roles of different instruments in achieving particular sounds. Chadwick Jenkins aptly describes this process of orchestration and its ultimately revolutionary implications. In switching the roles of the trombone (normally placed at the bottom register but now at the top), the clarinet (normally placed at the top register but now occupying the bottom), and the trumpet (playing in thirds above the trombone), Ellington's opening to "Mood Indigo" surely mystified and confused the radio listener.⁵⁵ The "space" to which Ellington refers in his autobiographical account suggests a distance both between the microphone and the instruments and between the played notes themselves. Aside from taking

⁵⁴ Ellington, *Music is My Mistress*, 79-80.

⁵⁵ Jenkins, "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio," 433.

into account the microphone and the process of recording, Ellington was equally cognisant of the ways in which the tune would reach listeners' ears: electrical radio broadcast.

In the process of recording electrically *for* the radio, Ellington placed radio transmission within his composition as its condition of possibility.⁵⁶ The promise of aural mystery which radio offers, of plucking sounds from the airwaves, is fulfilled by Ellington's unique compositions. In the process of doing so, Ellington subverts listeners' expectations (even those familiar with jazz broadcasts), obfuscates clarity, and skirts conventional practices of orchestration and composition. Amidst the exploitative nature of reconstructing the visual and the physical in radio broadcasts of jazz performances to cater to white audiences, Ellington succeeds in creating a space for artistic expression and arguably avant-garde performance practice.

Duke Ellington provided a public listenership with two nearly conflicting presentations of Blackness (the master of jungle music and the aristocrat of jazz), finding room within and around these stereotypes to explore and establish his own creative endeavors. In the way that Moran and Mack's broadcast threatened notions of conventional English language speech while also appearing as mindless entertainment, jazz became at once a phenomenon of danger to art and an exotic performance. I do not by any means want to equate the radio minstrel show to Ellington's broadcast performances; to do so would be reductive and disregarding entirely of performers' agency in the process. Rather, I would like to highlight the consistencies in white representations of Blackness through sound at this time, facilitated by a liveness made possible by the radio.

My interest lies in the physicality which is emphasized by different practices of recording and broadcast, from liveness facilitated through minstrel radio shows and the Cotton Club

⁵⁶ Ibid, 436.

broadcasts to the sonic illusions projected by Ellington and his compositions for electrical transmission. I feel it important to question practices of white “slumming” and the appeal of the physical in the context of sonic representations of Blackness. Why are those parts of sound which create space, which render a visual image/experience the most pronounced in these radio contexts? Are sounds, in their materiality, necessarily relegated to the realm of the visual in these processes of mediation? Such questions are presented to get at the place of sound in creating and negotiating understandings of race in the realm of modernization.

I would further like to acknowledge and imagine the ways in which self-articulations of Black identity and culture are constructed through the performance event, the space of which is (re)produced again through broadcast. Ellington’s composition for electrical transmission succeeds in creating a kind of sonic space different from that achieved by live broadcasts from the Cotton Club. His space of confusion stands apart from the space of clarity and knowing which the Cotton Club broadcasts communicate, further attesting to his slippery and navigable personas as different types of arbiters of “Black culture.” Ellington’s musicianship works against the conventions of an entertainment industry which thrives on and profits from expectations of Black performance. Exoticism which becomes expected, cultivated through the visualizations of club-going and “slumming” made possible by radio broadcasts. Ellington’s sounds work within an imposed realm of otherness to achieve self-articulation, just as Zora Neale Hurston’s sounds work within anthropological convention to self-articulate. Because of this, these sounds act subversively. Ellington rejects clarity and liveness, using the very medium that lends itself to those very phenomena.

Curation of Sound and Space

The triangulation of memory, space, and sound is helpful in understanding spatial/sonic relationships as they relate to informed practices of listening. By this I mean that sound is inextricable from physical space, and that memory is housed in particular spaces and sounds. Acoustic environments are never neutral; they are always conditioned in some way by a space, within which social actions and interactions take place.⁵⁷ It is from examining these acoustic environments—how sound moves through them, the histories of the inhabiting space, the processes of recording and broadcast that allow for the sounded instance—that we can think about the spatiotemporal qualities of memory. How do engagements with certain types of musical and nonmusical sound facilitate different experiences of remembering? How is the “past” not only constructed sonically but imprinted on sound and space? This chapter attempts to investigate the role of sound installation and “sound art” in constructing and reconstructing past and present. It looks at the distinction between “place” and “space,” between “music” and “sound art,” and attempts to uncover what is revealed about culture and memory through deliberate engagements with sound.

Drawing these distinctions is not only useful in determining different approaches to discussing different content and media; it is also necessary in establishing the varying *parts* of sound that are privileged in different sonic environments. Independent scholar Marie-Laure Ryan articulates a distinction between “place” and “space” that becomes helpful in our thinking about sound and memory:

⁵⁷ Brusila, Johnson, Richardson, *Memory, Space, and Sound*, 3.

While space is an abstract collection of points separated by certain distances, place is a concrete environment with which people develop emotional bonds; while the points in spaces are interchangeable, place has its own unique character; while space is an empty container for discrete objects, place is a network of interrelated things; while space is open and infinite, place has boundaries; while space is anonymous, place involves a community and a lived experience; while space is timeless, place is shaped by history. In short, while space is a mathematical concept, place is a social concept.⁵⁸

This distinction clearly relegates the concepts of culture and memory to the place rather than the space. A place, by this formulation, is recognized as a sum of social and historical factors which are somehow revealed; that is, a space is a kind of blank slate or template, teeming with potential for meaning. It is the *things* present in the space, material and immaterial, that imbue it with meaning and transform it into place. We can certainly challenge this distinction and push against its insistence on binaries: what are spaces that cannot possibly be defined as places? Are we meant to think of places as purely concerned with human occupancy and sociality? Rather than proposing answers to these questions, I want to use this distinction between space and place to inform my thinking around sound, culture, memory, and installation. Considering place as an embodiment of experience and relationships is helpful in thinking around sound's role in individual and collective expression and memory. How is a space (or place) altered when it is reconstructed through sound? What meaning is added or imposed by sound, and how does it represent/work alongside the visual? Going further, how do intentional installations of sound work within the space in which they are presented, and do they succeed in transforming space

⁵⁸ Ryan, "Space, Place and Story," 108.

into place? A general definition of sound art and its position as distinct from music is necessary before delving into examples of this kind of thinking about space and sound.

Sound art is often articulated as separate from music through a common distinction between performance and exhibition. This distinction suggests, among other things, a difference in venue (performance space vs. installation space) and temporality. Where a musical performance might be structured to account for individual songs, each lasting several minutes to make up a singular performance of a more-or-less fixed time, an installation might have no time limit to its presentation of sound. It is important to note that these installations are often not portable; they are not, as in the case of phonographic records, CDs, or MP3 files, transferable and movable through space with ease. Rather, the space which the installation occupies, where it “lives,” becomes an integral and intentional part of the work itself. The work comes to at once inhabit and exhibit space; the inevitable construction of space that sound denotes meets the space which houses the projected sound. Where we once considered the space constructed by John Lomax’s recordings of Black work songs, we can here introduce a layer which includes the way his recordings move through the space in which the phonograph is placed.

Sound art, though thought of as distinct from conventional Western musical practice, draws from developments in composition and musical-theoretical thought in the early-to-mid twentieth century United States. These shifts in thought drew attention to a “transcendental or intensive domain of sound”⁵⁹ which diverged from traditional concerns with rhythm, harmony, and melody in Western art music. This thinking ran parallel to changing understandings of “noise” and “silence,” mediated in part by composers of Western art music like those in the New

⁵⁹ Cox, *Sonic Flux: Sound, Art, and Metaphysics*, 113.

York School (Cage, Brown, Feldman, Tudor, etc.). While we could dive into the intricacies of discourse on noise and silence, it might be most helpful to consider these developments in thought as more careful considerations of “nonmusical sound.” We can think of noise or background noise as the constancy of sound, its pervasiveness in all aspects of life, or those sounds which the Western ear, in its privileging of “musical” sounds, are often deaf to. In his work *Genesis*, Michel Serres writes: “Background noise is the ground of our perception, absolutely uninterrupted, it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic.”⁶⁰ It is from this formulation of noise that alternative considerations of sound were made possible through sound art in the West. While I mention Western art here, I aim to explore practices of sound art globally. This chapter aims to expand outward from a previous discussion of the United States, taking into account discourses on sound which have privileged noise and its aesthetic possibilities but complicating those very discourses. Noise, conversely, can be thought of as sounds which are unwanted or unappealing, even damaging. It is from this line of thought that artists like Lawrence Abu Hamdan, a contemporary artist born in Amman and based in Beirut, engage with sound and the political.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan makes art which engages with sound in an expressly political way. His work often emphasizes alternative modes of listening, often as a means of counter surveillance or resistance to state apparatuses which employ listening devices or sonic weaponry. He works also with consideration for the sounded elements of language, accent, and spoken testimony in legal battles, framing sound as evidence in projects of repression or subversion. Abu Hamdan has described himself in this respect as a “private ear,” making work about mishearings

⁶⁰ Serres, *Genesis*, 7.

that lead to criminal cases as well as lie detector technologies.⁶¹ I want to look at one of Abu Hamdan's pieces as a direct example of space reconstruction through sound. In this instance, sound and silence are weaponized, creating a bodily sonic experience which is then transduced to create reproductions of space visually. I want to highlight again the distinction between space and place that was articulated earlier and think about the role of memory and trauma in creating spaces and places through sound. The reimagination of sounds also speaks to a simultaneous repressiveness of sound in its violent potential and a subversiveness in its ability to reimagine visuals which were never seen. Where the first chapter explored constructions of work spaces through recorded sound, and the second chapter tackled recreations of club and stage spaces through radio broadcast, this chapter attempts to use sound art and sound installation as a more direct, perhaps more literal relationship between sound and space. In these examples, I privilege sound's movement through spaces and places rather than their explicit mediations.

In 2016 Abu Hamdan worked on a report for Amnesty International, interviewing six survivors of Saydnaya prison near Damascus, Syria. Notorious for consistent practices of abuse and torture (an estimated 13,000 people have been killed by Bashar Al-Assad's regime)⁶², Saydnaya became the subject for Abu Hamdan's piece by the same name. Working alongside Forensic Architecture, an agency that uses architecture to investigate human rights abuses, Abu Hamdan used spoken accounts by former prisoners and descriptions of sounds to reconstruct and reimagine visually the space of the prison. Sound effects from the Warner Bros. and BBC sound-effect libraries were utilized as prompts, intended to incite sound associations and assist in the recollection of sounds through prisoners' memories. Such sounds included but were not

⁶¹ Higgins, "Silence or death."

⁶² Ibid.

limited to doors opening, water dripping, objects being dropped on the floor, keys jangling, and footsteps. The internalizing of certain sounds and the intensely careful practices of listening carried out by prisoners was a means of survival and communication about the layout and size of the prison, inaccessible to the eyes of prisoners who were blindfolded during transportation through the space. From such information, corroborated by other prisoners, Abu Hamdan and his colleagues constructed a 3D image of the prison which became the centerpiece of the Amnesty International report.⁶³

The report, published online as an interactive piece, showcases these reconstructions and the interview processes which facilitated them. Survivors describe their experiences in arrival trucks which brought blindfolded prisoners to Saydnaya, solitary confinement and group cells, answering questions about echoes, sounds of different lock mechanisms, and guards' footsteps. The homescreen of the website, featuring a 3D modeled overhead shot of the prison (fig. 1), features ambient sounds of wind, birds, airplanes passing overhead, trucks, gunshots, and occasional shouts from prison guards. In the digital manifestation of this project, each redirect page is paired with similar ambient sounds, reminding the listener of the methodologies which made the exhibition possible while also entering them into a distinct sonic environment; the viewer/listener attends to reimagined sounds in this reimagined space.

⁶³ <<https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/>>.

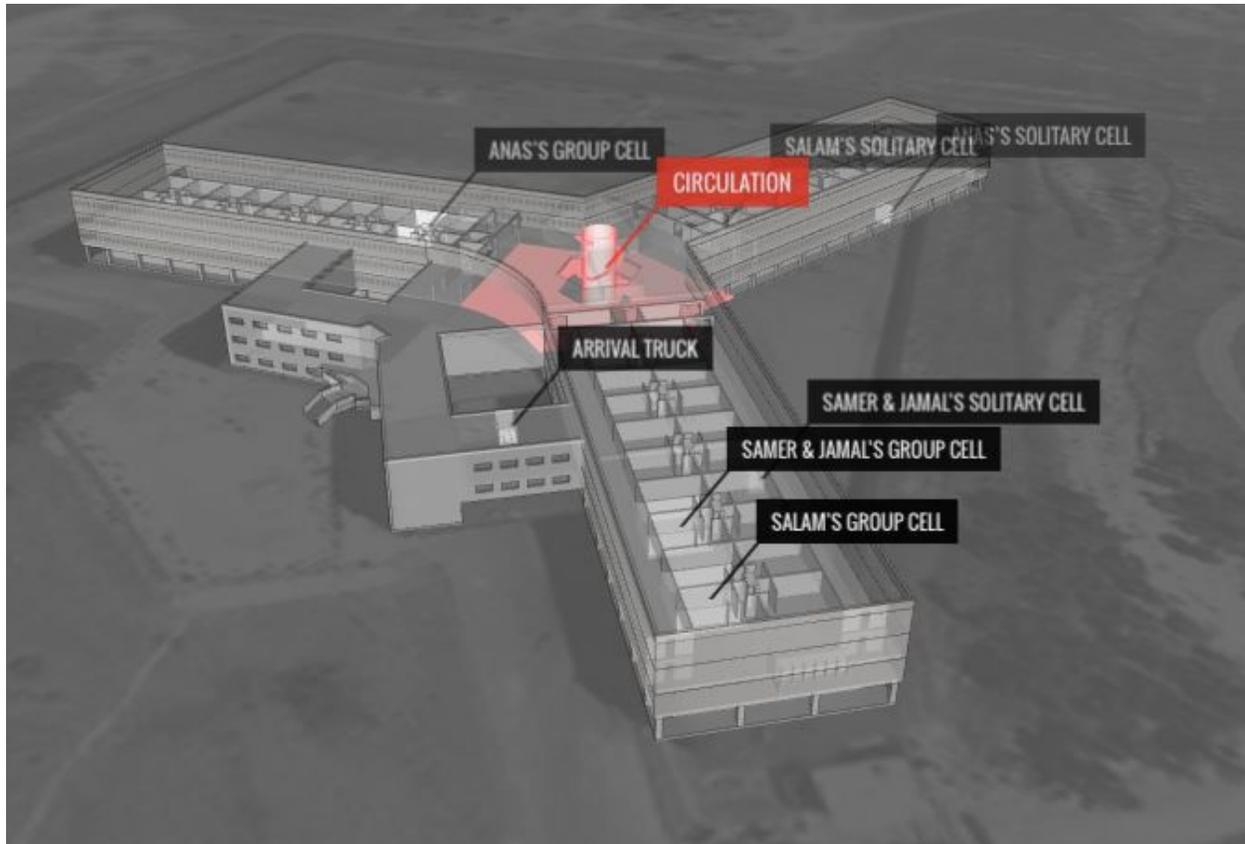


Fig. 1. Screenshot from <<https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/>>.

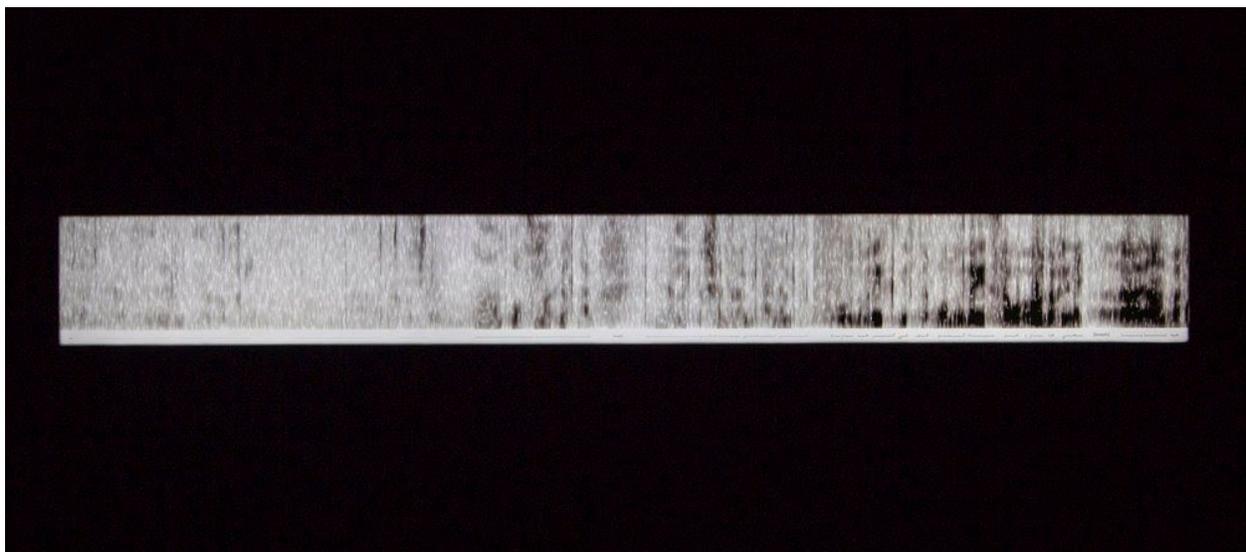


Fig. 2. *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)*, 2017.

This piece directly engages sound's significance in memory. The visuality of the piece (as well as the aural) is reliant solely on the collective sound memories of the survivors, the experiences of whom were shaped by their sound environments. Here we are privy to the importance of sound in memory, especially in the event of limited if not absent visuality. In the process of reconstructing this physical space, we are alerted to the elements of sound that resonated most with the prisoners as they make sense of the space which they occupy: sounds of door hinges and locks, screams of pain of fellow prisoners, shouting voices of guards, footsteps, sounds of food being dropped and exchanged, water dripping. For these survivors, sounds were used to construct the very space they inhabited, becoming a mode of survival as well as a weapon of psychological torture. I want to return for a moment to the space/place distinction put forward at the start of the chapter. I worry that Ryan's description of place is presented as romantic, as preferable to space, and as a construction which ultimately benefits those social actors involved in imbuing it with meaning.

The space of Saydnaya prison is indeed transformed in the process of reconstruction, and the space presented in Abu Hamdan's *Saydnaya* is certainly different from the "actual" physical space of the prison. The "place" that results from this transformation through sound is mediated by the network of actors (the six survivors) in their corroborating narratives and sound associations. Indeed, this place is social in that its construction and imagination is made possible by these participants when widely circulating visual information (like photographs) is unavailable. This is not to say, however, that the emotional bonds formed in the place (and which allowed for the creation of this project) detract from or justify the circumstances under which they were necessarily formed. I want to be clear in my engagement with the space/place binary: I

argue that the space of the prison and its architecture, applicable perhaps, as Ryan suggests, to other similar prison structures, becomes a place through the articulation of sound memories in shaping a visual imagination of the prison. The production of knowledge and of truth here, while eventually assigned to the visual as an end product, is facilitated by practices of listening to situate oneself in physical space. The result, rather than being directly indexical, is a presentation of truth through lived and listened-to experience.

An extension of the *Saydnaya* piece, *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* emphasizes the haunting absence of the visual. The work takes place in, or is perhaps made up of, a shipping container-style boxed-in room; the room is shrouded in darkness save for an illuminated visualization of a soundwave at the far end of the room (fig. 2). A mixing board sits alongside this lit visual, and viewers/listeners are invited to sit in chairs placed at the back of the room. The looped audio clip begins with an abrasive tone, reminiscent of those used in hearing tests. Various volumes of this tone are played in quick succession, with the artist's spoken description of an example of a sound whose volume matches that of the tone. Some of the loudest tones are matched with the sound of a Boeing jet, a kitchen blender, and a vacuum cleaner on carpet. The tones get progressively softer, eventually reaching near silence. It is here that the final tone is matched with the sound of Saydnaya prison.⁶⁴ The spoken section is then extended, going on to describe the role of silence in the prison and its effectiveness as a mode of torture and control.

This piece emphasizes silence through the abstraction of sounds, representing them only as expressions of volume/loudness in a simple tone. It is perhaps in the abrasiveness of this tone that the damaging experience of silence is articulated; prisoners living in near complete silence,

⁶⁴ Caner, "Lawrence Abu Hamdan 'earwitnessing' the Syrian civil war."

as was communicated by Abu Hamdan's *Saydnaya* piece, become more attuned and more sensitive to the clarity and loudness of sounds which, outside of the prison context, are commonplace, bearable, and often overlooked. Silence is presented in this work as a kind of relief, a sonic space of comfort, following the annoyance of the louder tones of the Boeing and the blender. It is through the space in which the work is presented, a dark room occupied by listeners unfamiliar with the silence of Saydnaya prison, that the notion of harmful silence is presented and further discussed. Where *Saydnaya* centered around a curated visual representation facilitated by sound, *Saydnaya (the missing 19db)* centers around a listener-based individual imagination of space. Largely blind to the intricacies of their surroundings, listeners/viewers are thrown into an imagining of the space of the prison through the silence existing in the room they occupy. Thus, listeners/viewers presented with a certain blindness are encouraged to attend to silence, listening based on the absence of loudness but also on the uncomfortable distinction between loud and silent.

Engaging with sound in the space of the museum, both in terms of physical space and the more figurative institution, becomes a platform for thinking about sound's spatial elements and textures. Another piece which engages sound and visualization is Tristan Perich's *Microtonal Wall*. Originally exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the work consists of an array of 1,500 speakers, each emitting a different tone. Upon entering the room of the installation, the viewer/listener is confronted with a wall of white noise, sounds at an even loudness of a wide variety of frequencies whose simultaneity render each individual tone nearly unrecognizable. As one gets closer to the speakers, the individual tones reveal themselves and are more easily heard; lower frequencies are positioned at the left of the array and higher

frequencies at the right, allowing for an incrementally structured experience of tone. But if the viewer/listener once again steps back a few steps, the individual tone falls back into white noise, the sum of all possible frequencies.

The piece's allusion to microtones in its title engages with discourses on music and the division of tones. Clearly distinct from the twelve-tone system of Western musical tradition, *Microtonal Wall* presents tones split in extremely narrow intervals, drawing attention to "pure tones" not often heard in combination in Western music traditions. While these traditions are not approached from a non-Western perspective, it is surely through an eye and ear critical of Western sonic/musical assumptions that this work is presented. The work subsequently plays with ideas of harmony, highlighting the combination of many tones through the creation of noise. While challenging to the paradigm twelve-tone musical system, the piece is very mathematical in its approach to tonality. Tones are split evenly to create a spectrum of frequency, the combination of which presents what the artist calls an "extension of harmony, the sum of all tones."⁶⁵ The visual display of the speakers thus renders the mathematical physical.⁶⁶

Microtonal Wall highlights a certain agency in listening; despite the unavoidable white noise which occupies the installation space, the viewer/listener of the work can decide what tones to give attention to and in what order. One can decide to stand back and experience the tones as "noise" or move across the array vertically and horizontally, travelling through the work as one's eyes move across a piece of visual art. Here meaning is found in sound's parts (individual pure tones) and sound's "whole" (white noise, a theoretical sum of all tones). Different emphases on these elements of sound are determined by the viewer/listener and their

⁶⁵ Galperina, "Artist's Notebook: Tristan Perich."

⁶⁶ Ibid.

movement throughout the space of the room and the space of the speaker array. In this way, the experience of the viewer/listener is rendered three dimensional, mimicking sound's spherical movement within the room.

We have thus far looked at the space of the art museum in facilitating experiences of sound, examining particularly what sound art reveals about the spatial qualities and possibilities of the sonic. I want to shift this thinking now to the space of the history museum and to notions of reconstruction and reimagination of the past. In looking at these different presentations of sound in different institutional contexts, we can again uncover what parts of sound are privileged under what circumstances. I feel it valuable also to examine the different forms and triangulations of space, sound, and memory in the distinction between sound as art and what Christian Mortensen calls "sound as heritage."⁶⁷ Here we can directly confront the problems of representing the historical through sound, and their realities played out in a major purveyor of historical knowledge to the public: the museum.

In her piece "Ears-on Exhibitions," Karen Bijsterveld presents a series of cases in which sound is utilized by curators and historians to create meaningful and informative exhibits. She grapples with notions of "authenticity" and its shortcomings, placing sound within a discourse which is concerned with undergoing responsible and meaningful historical work. Historians and curators of historical exhibits attempt at the transformation of space to place highlighted earlier. Such exhibits attempt to utilize sound in the creation of a multisensory environment which creates meaningful experiences for museumgoers and which adds another material dimension to

⁶⁷ Mortensen, "A museological approach: radio as intangible heritage," 22.

our understanding of the past. Examining the ways in which sound is used in the history museum thus emphasizes the historical struggle of marrying contemporary and contextual meaning.

Historians have a responsibility to not only communicate what sounds were audible in a particular past, but how those experiencing the sounds *listened*, how sounds worked for people occupying that particular past.⁶⁸ Rather than presenting reproductions of sounds, sounds must be meaningfully contextualized and presented in a way that accounts for their social and cultural significance. Emily Thompson opts for a study of the “auditory landscape” rather than the “soundscape,” or the physical sonic environment. Studying the auditory landscape includes looking at a way of perceiving that environment.⁶⁹ Listening historically in this way allows for an awareness of historical shifts in what people consider sonic signs, music, and noise. Such shifts are often facilitated, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in part by changes in sound technologies and methods of disseminating and listening to sound.

To engage with this thinking in a museological context, I want to look closely at historian Christian Hviid Mortensen’s work on the Media Museum in Odense, Denmark. His piece “A museological approach: radio as intangible heritage” discusses methods of utilizing sound in a history museum context, using an exhibition at the Media Museum titled *You Are What You Hear* as a case study in applying theoretical engagements with “sounds of the past” to interactive physical space. In looking at Mortensen’s work and the exhibition at the Media Museum, I aim to draw distinctions between exhibition practices in the realms of sound art and historical sound. I want also to find common ground between these representations in their dealing with space and movement as it relates to listening and seeing. I argue that different engagements with sound

⁶⁸ Bijsterveld, “Ears-on Exhibitions: Sound in the History Museum,” 76.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics 1900-1933*, 1.

technologies in the exhibition of sound yield different results and reveal different things about sound's significance in the context of installation. I further want to return to the notion of the space/place distinction, examining how the space of the museum is transformed into place through a particular exhibition in which visitors engage with the social and cultural through sound.

Mortensen theorizes that it is only in the context of the museum that materials become "artifacts," thus imbued with cultural and historical meaning in an institutional manner. Certain objects are therefore marked as elements of cultural heritage; a flint axe, for example, is materially separated from its utility when placed on display in a museum. The flint axe, however, is only an example of what Mortensen calls "tangible cultural heritage." Its presence in the space of the exhibit is visual, and it occupies physical space in the archive. The intangible elements of cultural heritage are often considered to be song, performing arts, ritual, and practice.⁷⁰ Sound therefore falls under the category of the intangible. It is not, however, immaterial; sound requires human and nonhuman technologies to facilitate its perception and directly recognizable meaning. Another layer of mediation is thus required, making the presentation of sound in the history museum a complex and laborious issue.

Sound artifacts, for Mortensen, are different from sound effects. This distinction advocates for a treatment of sounds "in their own right" rather than as making up the soundscape of an exhibition, which might prominently feature tangible artifacts. Sounds, therefore, should not be treated as accessory to the tangible, and should have around them structured exhibitions which carefully consider sound's materiality and uniqueness in representing various pasts.

⁷⁰ Mortensen, "A museological approach," 24.

Sounds can also be considered events rather than artifacts.⁷¹ It is from here that the problem of temporality moves to the fore; in exhibiting a radio show, for example, how does one meaningfully clip the program down to a palatable scale? Many questions arise from this: what is the artifact, then, after the sound has been altered? Is it the entire radio show or the parts of the original sound that are exhibited? It is the process of musealization⁷², which Mortensen describes as a material's transformation into an artifact, that makes the sound historically meaningful? These are examples of the problems which arise in the exhibition of historical sound, as its intangibility requires a unique treatment of the methods by which sound is recorded, broadcast, circulated, and exhibited.

The exhibition can be described as “information space,” where externalized knowledge produced and constructed by curators and historians is carried through the exhibition in the form of “information.” This information is then received by the museumgoer, creating a process, albeit a one-way process, of communication between curator and visitor. Stuart Hall notes the often asymmetrical relationship between the externalizations of the curator, transduced into linguistic or symbolic form, and the internalizations of the exhibit's viewer/listener.⁷³ A narrative is thus constructed in the process of curation; while the artifacts are presented with a certain surety and claim to “authenticity,” it is the process of curation which shapes the ways in which meaning is created by the exhibit's visitors. This is not to deny the meaning which materials carry with them; I only mean to cast a critical eye over the presentation of an exhibition's contents as “truth,” and the resulting thinking of the curation process as insignificant in relation to the materials presented.

⁷¹ Ibid, 25.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Hall, “Encoding, decoding,” 513.

Where emphasis in sound art practices might often be placed on the materiality of sounds, to their textures and movement through space, emphasis in history museum exhibition seems to be placed on the purposeful curation of sound to send a message. This is not to say that curation of sound art installations lacks a pointedness; the distinction I'm creating speaks more to broader discourses on different values or meanings created in exhibiting art vs. exhibiting historical materials. I only mean to point toward a clearly different process of communication present in these two exhibitions of sound. The strategies which Mortensen presents are more concerned with how to facilitate sound's movement through space that is educational and communicative than with sound's aesthetic qualities in that movement. Mortensen's approach to strategizing public historical engagement with sound does, however, directly engage with the materiality of sound and its mediumship through an engagement with the radio.

The exhibit *You Are What You Hear* at the Ordense Media Museum features a room in which visitors can listen to sounds of past radio broadcasts. The room itself is decidedly bare and dark to emphasize the sonic. The construction of the exhibit is unique; visitors are invited to wear individual headsets and move around the space of the room, which consists of scattered "sound spots":

When not at a designated sound spot, the visitor hears static noise. Each sound spot is a virtual sphere with a diameter of one metre. If the visitor closes in on a sound spot, the sound is slowly faded in, until the visitor arrives at the exact spot and gets a clear signal. This creates the effect of using the body like a tuning dial on an analogue radio set.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Mortensen, "A museological approach," 31.

As the visitor moves through and around the sound spots in the space, signal and noise become blurred. The movement of the body through space becomes a means of altering sounds and changing sonic information being heard. Like *Microtonal Wall*, this exhibition allows the participant to control their own listening experience, creating a space where movement renders sounds knowable and unknowable, tonal and atonal, signal and noise. This allows visitors to engage both with sounds of the past and methods of listening from the past; while the radio is still a popular means of listening and broadcasting sound, the notion of fine tuning doesn't often appear in the radio-listening process. Therefore, the radio apparatus and technology becomes an artifact itself alongside the sound artifact of the broadcasts.

It would even appear that the technology is highlighted as the artifact under question more than the contents of the broadcasts:

The auditive artefacts have been selected according to the different situations in which they are heard. There are mundane artefacts, such as a segment from a morning show on a random day in 2006, but also a unique recording of the sabotage bombing of the Always factory during the German occupation of Denmark in 1945.⁷⁵

Mortensen's description of the artifacts as "mundane" suggest an attention paid to sounds' distinct materialities when broadcast and received by a radio in favor of the sounds' contextual coherence in the same exhibition. While the mundane for Mortensen is not necessarily historically insignificant, the overall incoherence of the broadcast clips communicate an emphasis of the radio apparatus; radio technology binds the sounds represented. Here the broadcasting technology becomes intertwined with the presentation of the sound and its

⁷⁵ Ibid, 32.

movement through the space of installation. If the body becomes a tuning dial, the space itself becomes the internal workings of the radio receiver. Interestingly, the space begins to mimic the potential of sound, as it exists in the form of radio waves, before it is even realized in a space by the radio's speakers. This construction allows for a certain kind of sociality; if visitors were travelling in groups, they were found to travel in clusters so as to experience the same sonic events in their own individual headsets. While the sonic experience was individualized, the construction of the space allowed for a common understanding of movement through the space, of where each "sound spot" was, and of how to navigate it. In this way, I argue that space is transformed into a place of occupation which is a "network of interrelated things," "has boundaries," and is "shaped by history."⁷⁶

We have examined the ways in which sound and space are inextricably linked, formulating a triangular relationship alongside memory. In examining practices of producing and exhibiting sound art, we have seen that the visual, or lack thereof, is used to highlight the viewer/listener's navigation through space as well as to highlight the possibilities of sound associations in facilitating memory. In drawing the distinction between sound art and historical sound in the exhibition context, I have noted differences in temporality and different concerns with listening to sounds of the "past" and sounds of the "present." While there are clearly different methodologies and theorizations of sound present in these two fields, I argue that much of this work is inevitably drawn to the method of sound's reproduction and recording. Abu Hamdan's pieces use stock recordings of commonplace sounds in an archive to recall memory and reconstruct. Perich's piece deals explicitly with the loudspeaker and the functions of

⁷⁶ Ryan, "Space, Place and Story," 108.

representing tone. Curators of *You Are What You Hear* turn human participants into actions on a radio tuning dial, melding the human and nonhuman in sonic experience. It is the intangibility of sound that necessitates this engagement with sounds reproducibility, and which makes sound uniquely meaningful in its movement through space and time.

Conclusion

Through different investigations, sound's meaningful relationship to space has been partly uncovered through listening. The spaces, both physical and abstract, which sound assists in constructing can tell us about different possibilities of articulating identity and culture in different peculiar moments. These possibilities are marked by different points in time, place, and the technologies of sound mediation that accompany them. In a broader global sense, work with exhibiting sound and reconstructing environments through sound speak to different possibilities of interacting with sound in space, and present possibilities of presenting historicized sounds meaningfully. All of the sounds which I discuss are shaped by and experienced through their media; technologies of sound which allow for recording and dissemination do different kinds of work to articulate identity and culture in distinct contexts, and are engaged with directly in exhibiting historical sounds.

In the ethnographic context, where sound serves as cultural material to be collected and recording technologies serve as a gathering tool, sound becomes distinctly racialized. Certain sounds—folksong here becomes most prominent—are privileged for their roles as artifacts, as relics of culture and communications of cultural value. The recordings of John Lomax certainly work to preserve particular aspects of culture through phonographic recording: the idealized slavery past of Black communities in the American South. The space of the ethnographic “field” becomes an indicator of authentic cultural representation here; Lomax's prison recordings give the impression that the listener is privy to a mournful experience of working, indicated by the rhythmic fall of hammers. This kind of recording, like the Cotton Club broadcasts which I

discuss in “Broadcast and Constructing Liveness,” situates the listener as present and immersed in a sonic (and implicitly visual) environment. It constructs a space which is racialized: in Lomax’s recordings, the field in which the Black body works sorrowfully, in the Cotton Club broadcasts, the club which allows for white voyeurism of exotic and dangerous Black musical performance. However, Lomax’s work also works to construct an abstracted space of pastness and nostalgia which Black culture occupies. The anthropological work of Zora Neale Hurston, however, emphasizes the presentness of Black folk culture and cultivates a certain immediacy, similar to the liveness constructed by recordings of radio broadcasts.

Hurston’s navigation of dual roles, those of anthropologist and participant, succeeded in communicating the living nature of the cultures she represented. Her recordings, of which she was the featured performer, achieve this through personal interpretation of folk songs, communicating the process by which this “cultural material” was disseminated and kept alive. Her interpretation of such songs was indeed a participation in cultures which relied on oral dissemination and “lining out.” Her recordings, while not taking place in a literal “field” space, constructed a presentness under which these cultures existed. Duke Ellington similarly navigated multiple and often conflicting roles, those of the “aristocrat” and the expert on exoticized “jungle music.” Ellington’s work as a bandleader and performer already necessitated an immediacy and liveness. His navigation through roles worked alongside performance practices which were consistent with white viewership and listenership.

The emergence of the Black folk celebrity through figures like Huddie Ledbetter relied on claims to authenticity which were “cleaned up,” eliminating some of the elements of Black folk culture deemed harsh or unpalatable by white audiences. It also, however, relied on

caricatures of the Black criminal, the violent and ruthless prisoner, and the “primitive” without conceptions of law or ethics. The dueling conceptions of the folk-wise, dimwitted but harmless Black character and the violent, exotic Other came to inform representations of Blackness in a white-dominated entertainment industry through phonographic records and radio broadcasts alike. Minstrel radio shows like *Two Black Crows* utilized the former for entertainment purposes, presenting characters which were charming in their blissful naivete. I argue, however, that such programs often revealed an uncertainty surrounding certain white cultural conventions which were now rendered unstable by an appropriation of and reproduction of Black culture in the American mainstream.

Racial associations within discourses of “hot” and “sweet” jazz in the 1920s and 30s marked Black performance as dangerous and alluring. The exoticism of “hot” jazz became articulated partly in a sensational and sensory performance event. Like visual performances of blackface in minstrel performances, this hinged upon a kind of physical, bodily presence in witnessing performance. White “slumming” involved a voyeurism which made the performance that much more sensational and powerful; in translating such performances to radio broadcasts, liveness and presentness had to be constructed sonically, through sounds of immersion like background conversation and clinking glasses and guided imaginations of visuals through narration. This representation of Black performance and musicality is determined in part by the technologies used to disseminate information. Where ethnographic recording utilized the archival and plastic components of the phonographic disc to further anthropological study and “preserve” culture, radio minstrel shows and jazz performance broadcasts made use of radio’s

ability to immerse and disseminate sound live, even if that “liveness” was manipulated or constructed.

While the chapter “Curation of Sound and Space” is undoubtedly set apart from the two previous, I see an examination of various international approaches to sound as helpful in working through the questions presented in the first chapters of this thesis. It deals specifically with the processing of sound and its presentation, theorizing in some ways the possibilities of working with historicized sounds and mediated sounds housed in various archives. Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s work points to sound’s ability to both control and subvert, engaging with sounds associated with trauma, with extreme hunger and bodily violence, and using these sounds to reimagine and visualize. Such reimaginings are certainly present in the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Duke Ellington. Among white representations of Blackness in the 1910s-20s and the 1920s-30s respectively, Hurston and Ellington were able to self-articulate identity and reimagine representations of Black culture through their play within roles, both imposed and self-made.

Abu Hamdan’s work with *Saydnaya* involves a kind of subversiveness—prisoners denied sight come to visualize their previous surroundings through sounds—while also revealing sound’s relationship to memory. Recalling sounds and associating sounds with other sonic or visual material becomes a way of reconstructing lived experience, just as Hurston’s interpretations of folk songs bring culture to the present, and Ellington’s compositions for the radio reimagine liveness and play on audiences’ aesthetic expectations. Valuable also in Abu Hamdan’s work is the attention to silence; silence becomes devastating and powerful, highlighting for me the voices and articulations of cultures and people which have gone officially “unheard” by being unrecorded by sound technologies.

I deal deliberately with the history museum as a site of sonic engagement to close out the final chapter. I wanted to consider practical applications of thinking about historical sounds, and found that Mortensen's work on the *You Are What You Hear* exhibition interestingly confirmed some of my thinking around technologies of sound recording and dissemination. The piece, in its reliance on movement through space to generate different instances of signal and noise, privileges a presentation of the technology of the radio over the content of the sound clips played. In some ways, it is this relationship to sound's materiality that I find so compelling and so valuable in historical engagements with sounds of the past. Of course content is always significant in historical listening, and was certainly the focus of some of my work in this thesis. But paying attention to those things which surround the sound—the crackle of vinyl, background noise, the implications of phonographic recording and electrical recording—have just as much to say about the quality of what we listen to as the message being communicated, and indeed shape and transform that message. I hope to work further with sound in an archival setting and continue to tackle some of the questions I pose in the introduction.

Had I more time with this work, I would've liked to explore the possibilities of listening to the sounds I investigated in multiple forms. It may have been valuable for a critical listening which took place in a non-virtual archive, where discussions of phonographic recording could be met with a listening to phonograph records, and where discussions of sound art exhibitions could be met with an actual attendance of the exhibit. The editing of this thesis took place under extraordinary circumstances. Had I more time to edit and reflect on previous work, I would've liked to embed more of Ellington's work in "Broadcast and Constructing Liveness," both in terms of music and autobiography. I would've also liked to further weave together threads of

thought surrounding the technology of the radio in Ellington's work and the *You Are What You Hear* exhibit, perhaps finding certain trends or meaningful similarities and differences between two modes of manipulating radio technology. I feel that there is potential for meaningful listening and work in considering Ellington's work on the radio that was not fully fleshed out in my analysis.

Going forward, I feel it impossible for myself to not continue reimagining sounds and pushing my understanding of the aural in many directions. Because of its multifaceted nature, and my interest in so many of its facets, sound presents a number of possibilities in future work. I have interests in radio and broadcast, in archiving, in recording and engineering, and in playing music. I feel somewhat aimless and overwhelmed with different paths in this respect. I want to and am driven to continue reading and writing about sound, reckoning with my relationship to it personally. This work has transformed my thinking about history, about how peculiar it is to have intangible but direct and listenable engagements with the past through processes of mediation. It has transformed my thinking about sound and those who control practices of recording. It has made me listen differently, caused me to attend more carefully to layers and parts of sound. It has made me see differently, to consider imagined and implied sounds and the sonic qualities of visual objects. It is powerful and exciting to feel shifts in sensory engagement. It is meaningful to listen closely.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Amnesty International. "Saydnaya: Inside a Syrian Torture Prison." amnesty.org.
 <<https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/?kind=explore>> (accessed March 1, 2020).

Sound Recordings:

Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club. Storyville Records, 2010. 2 x CD. Mono.

Kennedy, Stetson, Herbert Halpert, Zora Neale Hurston, Herbert Halpert, and Zora Neale Hurston. Halimuhfack. Jacksonville, Florida, 1939. Audio.
 <<https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000014/>>.

Lomax, John and Lomax, Alan. *Stewball (I) and Don't You Hear Your Poor Mother Calling?*, with Richardson, Benny Will, Dew, Hollie (Bull) and Unidentified Prisoners, Association for Cultural Equity,
 <<http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-ix.do?ix=recording&id=10268&idType=sessionId&sortBy=abc>>.

Exhibition Reviews:

Galperina, Marina. "Artist's Notebook: Tristan Perich." *ANIMAL*. August 19, 2013.
 <<http://animalnewyork.com/2013/artists-notebook-tristan-perich/>> (accessed March 8, 2020).

Higgins, Charlotte. "Silence or death: Turner finalist Lawrence Abu Hamdan on recreating a horrific Syrian jail." *The Guardian*. October 1, 2019.
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/oct/01/silence-or-death-turner-finalist-lawrence-abu-hamdan-on-recreating-a-horrific-syrian-jail>> (accessed February 27, 2020).

Primary Literature:

Ellington, Edward. *Music is My Mistress*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men*. Reprint, New York: Harper Perrenial, 1990.

Secondary Literature

Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. The University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Bendix, Regina. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

Bijsterveld, Karin. "Ears-on Exhibitions: Sound in the History Museum." *The Public Historian* 37, no. 4 (2015): 73-90.

Bluestein, Gene. *The Voice of Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1972.

Brooks, Daphne A. "'Sister, Can you Line it Out?': Zora Neale Hurston and the Sound of Angular Black Womanhood." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 55, no. 4, 2010.

Brusila, Johannes; Johnson, Bruce; Richardson, John. *Memory, Space, and Sound*. The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Cantwell, Robert. *If Beale Street Could Talk: Music, Community, Culture*. University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Cox, Christopher. *Sonic Flux: Sound, Art, and Metaphysics*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Dormon, James H. "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The 'Coon Song' Phenomenon of the Gilded Age." *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 450-71.

Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Filene, Benjamin. "'Our Singing Country': John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past." *American Quarterly* 43, no. 4, 1991.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.

Hall, S. (1999). "Encoding, decoding." In: During, S. (Ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Routledge.

- Hirsch, Jerrold. "Modernity, Nostalgia, and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax." *The Journal of American Folklore* 105, no. 416 (1992): 183-207.
- Hochman, Brian. *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Jenkins, Chadwick. "A Question of Containment: Duke Ellington and Early Radio." *American Music* 26, no. 4 (2008): 415-41.
- Johnson, Aaron J. "A Date with the Duke: Ellington on Radio." *The Musical Quarterly* 96, no. 3/4 (2013): 369-405.
- Kittler, Friedrich A, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, and Michael Wutz. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- "Lomax Arrives with Lead Belly, Negro Minstrel," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 3 Jan. 1935, 21.
- Lott, Eric. "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy." *Representations*, no. 39 (1992): 23-50.
- Mortensen, Christian Hviid. "A museological approach: radio as intangible heritage." in *Sound Effects: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2012).
- Novak, David, and Matt Sakakeeny. *Keywords in Sound*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Radano, Ronald. "Hot Fantasies: American Modernism and the Idea of Black Rhythm," in *Music and the Racial Imagination*. The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Space, Place and Story," in Stephan Füssel (ed.) *Medienkonvergenz – Transdisziplinär*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.
- Serres, Michel. *Genesis*. The University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Duke University Press, 2003.
- Stewart, Catherine A. *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project*, 91-119. University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. New York: NYU Press, 2016.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Thompson, Emily. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.