Sound Traumas
Curricular Attunements for Care and Educational Understandings

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SOUNDS CONVEY IMPORTANT INFORMATION about our worlds through an inseparable combination of what we, through European sensibilities, often call pitch, rhythm, and haptics. How we interpret that information and our understandings of sonic information are always at the level of perception, always a combination of personal experiences and sociocultural norms and values. I (Walter) remember being so excited as a young person when I understood that human animals had created machines that could move through the air faster than the speed of sound. What took me longer to realize is that, outside of thunder, few if any things that move faster than sound are positive for ecologies on earth, and one's take on thunder is directly related to one's proximity to the lightning that caused that sonic boom.

In addition, loud sounds that can be damaging to our ears are often the result of machines made by more than human animals (Daniel, 2007). For example, the sounds of amplified musical instruments and heavy machinery used in construction and demolition can be harmful for user and audience/receiver alike. Yet, in everyday experiences, loud sounds are often considered a nuisance or anathema to concentration rather than a source of trauma (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2012). This is because, in no small part, we tend to understand trauma to be acute and harmful, specific and less frequent events. Such tendencies mean that we often do not think about everyday, little harms as traumatic unless we constantly receive those sounds due to conditions we cannot escape (Wozolek, 2023). These experiences run the gamut from a classroom air conditioning/heating unit to an ambulance moving past or moving into a house that just happens to be in the new flight path for a local airport. Yet, in keeping with recent developments and awareness about the everyday nature of traumas and their impacts on ecologies and things including (more than) human animals (e.g., Abram, 1997; Myers, 2019), sounds need not be loud or even audible to be traumatic. The sound of a closing bedroom door for young children, a moan of pain from a loved one (or anyone), or the whimpering of a frightened animal can all be the quietest of sounds. Or, as many of us have

experienced in our personal lives or lives as educators, a blanketing silence can be the most traumatic sound of all.

Although it was not the impetus for our special issue, it is important to note burgeoning fields of trauma in education and trauma-informed pedagogies (e.g., Alvarez, 2020). This literature calls our attention to how educational ecologies often do not either interrupt or attend to children's harm before, during, and after school and schooling. We agree that this literature is significant and that its underlying understandings of how one might attend to young people's attunements in order to lessen the trauma they receive in formal educational contexts and, relatedly, find ways to abate the trauma that children have already absorbed, is important.

Our understanding of trauma in schools, as Boni has addressed in her last two books (Wozolek, 2021, 2023), stems from fields of Curriculum Studies and Educational Foundations. We understand, for example, that learning is always traumatic at some level in at least two key ways: a) a point where study and practice fall short before one moves forward and b) sociocultural norms and values that are foundational to everyday interactions create and maintain categories of differences as deficits (e.g., compliance, racism). Or, as Walter (2023) noted in a recent talk at the Bergamo Conference for Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, if you know standardized assessments are harmful to children and you also want to note how well students in your classroom did on those assessments this academic year, you are hurting children. Whether through a historical understanding of U.S. schooling as a eugenics project (e.g., Winfield, 2007) or noting how those trajectories manifest in schooling (e.g., Love, 2023; Rist, 2002; Woodson, 1933) and everyday classrooms (e.g., Gershon, 2017a; Metz, 1978; Page, 1991; Wozolek, 2023), it is our claim that trauma has long been central to U.S. educational ecologies (e.g., Ares et al., 2017; Helfenbein, 2021). The contributions to this special issue also hew more closely to qualitatively educational and socioculturally traumatic intersections that are often less the focus of work in trauma-informed scholarship that tends to focus more on the sociologically and psychologically statistical.

Our special issue on sound traumas is meant to explore what it might mean for sounds to be an informational conduit for our perceptions of anguish and suffering. In keeping with North American constructions of curriculum—the notion that there are multiple forms of curricula that operate within and form educational ecologies both within and through schooling as well as outside of formal institutions—we conceptualize curricular sound traumas as sonic information. This sonic information teaches us about our worlds in ways that allow us to recognize that which is concerning and harmful—whether to ourselves, other people, or any-thing that might contribute to an educational ecology. This is to say that, just as any ecology can become educational and, as such, inform and be informed by the curricular, any sound can become traumatic. Similarly, what is traumatic to one person may not be so to another, and although some sonic experiences are likely more universally traumatic, the sounds of war for example (Daughtry, 2015; Goodman, 2012), one must be very careful about claims of sonic ubiquity and universality of experiences.

Acts of listening are always already connected to questions of privilege and power (Moten, 2003; Stoever, 2016), who has the ability to listen and what and who can be heard, for example (e.g., Bull & Back, 2003; Russel & Carlton, 2018). Sounds are omnipresent and endlessly polyphonic. Further, because there is never a single sound and sounds are never singular—and the name for the experience when an instrument that is designed to produce a singular sound is made to produce multiple, simultaneous sounds—our engagement with the sonic can be understood as multiphonic polyphonies or multipolyphonies (for more on this possibility, see Gershon, 2023,2024).

An understanding of sounds as multipolyphonic is, however, a bit disingenuous, as any sound, even that which is often articulated as a singularity (a tea kettle whistle, a baby laughing), is a series of sounds. Along similar paths, whether they are audible or beyond one's hearing, sounds are also affecting and affective physical waves that pass into, bounce off of, and emerge from things and the ecologies they combine to create. Further, the haptic nature of the sonic touches our emotions; a beautiful sound and the sound of agony can both cause a person to cry, another aspect of sonic haptics.

Metaphorically, these endlessly emergent, liminal multipolyphonies form resonances that, when in motion, become reverberations. Both resonance and reverberation are understood not to be beholden to Western notions of consonance and dissonance, as both are sociocultural constructions, nor are they intended to express constants or be replicable. Rather, as used here, any-thing can resonate with any other thing, as when one steps into a space for the first time and it "feels right" or when a particular history speaks to you. These can be amplified and dampened, intentional political actions made by those with the power to do so, for few, if any, things are truly erased; otherwise, we would not know of them . All of which is to say that sounds can be traumatic in their intention, attention, attunement, expression, and reception (for more on the concepts presented in this paragraph, check Gershon, 2020).

In light of the omnipresent, endlessly polyphonic nature of the sonic, sociopolitical processes through which we listen and work to be heard, histories, contemporary contexts, and identities are necessarily and irrevocably enmeshed (Robinson, 2020; Sterne, 2012). The sounds that are produced, received, interpreted, and inform one's actions create emergent consequences that further impact our theoretical and material understandings (Lordi, 2013; Nancy, 2007). One only needs to reflect on how the sounds of music and speech shape cultures and communities (Erickson, 2004; Weheliye, 2023) or how violent events can form and inform our daily lives (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Wozolek, 2021). Just as sounds can heal, the sonic can traumatize.

What is important to keep in mind when considering what sounds do and their impact on bodies is that sound trauma is inevitable. Our bodies are constantly producing and being affected by sounds, endless waves that pass around and through us, as well as from us. We are refracting, reflecting, echoing, embodied resonant chambers (on bodies as resonant chambers, check Robinson & Martin, 2016; on resonances and reverberations, Gershon, 2017b, 2020). As but one extreme example from J. Martin Daughtry (2015), the reason many people die in the blast radius of an explosion is not from the initial explosion itself but instead because of its shockwave. Sounds travel faster through solids than through gasses. When an explosion sends out a shockwave, it moves through the air until it hits a body where it rapidly expands, eviscerating organs, especially lungs.

Then there are metaphorical, continuing, embodied sound traumas. This is the case not only for those who have experienced the sound of falling ordinance in wars but also how an adult can still hear the painful words uttered to them by the adults in their lives when they were young, not least of whom are parents and teachers. The trick here is that, although a sound may no longer exist in a physical reality, its reverberations across spacetime continue to harm our bodies in material, sonic, and haptic ways. Sounds hurt. This is why the mean words thing in middle grades children is so devastating, a peer using sounds in the shape of words to cause bodily harm.

What is particularly of note in these contexts is that, in many Western knowledge systems, there is an understanding that physical objects hurt more than words ("sticks and stones…," as it is said). While this may seem to be a relatively minor concern, consider significant differences regarding police violence against people of African descent, Indigenous Peoples, and Latinx

people in the United States. A national example is Eric Garner's last words as he was being murdered by New York City police officer, Daniel Pantaleo: "I can't breathe." Although Pantaleo did not testify, his partner, Officer Meems, explained that he felt justified in his choice not to interrupt this murder because Meems did not "focus on any one spot" and thought that Garner was "just playing possum" (City of New York v. Police Officer Daniel Pantaleo, 2014, p. 22). Such a claim is only possible from an ocular perspective of framing (Aoki, 1991; Gershon, 2017b). A sonic perspective calls our attention to the Officers' focus on the ocular and disregard of the sonic, an active decision not to listen to the sounds of Eric Garner struggling through suffocation to be heard. When placed alongside Meems's testimony, an example of visually driven epistemologies emerges, understandings that are often expressed through racialized, gendered, and anti-queer actions (Bull & Back, 2003; Eidsheim, 2019).

As Garner's words reverberated across news and social media outlets, they were heard differently as communities of color and activists deeply listened (Oliveros, 2005) to their resonances, hearing the metaphorical and literal chokeholds of Black and Brown peoples by American sociocultural norms and values (Butler, 2018; Taylor, 2016). Garner's final words became the cry heard throughout the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, not just because they were indelible but because they have been echoed across sociohistorical moments (Crawley, 2016; Gershon, 2017b; Wozolek, 2022). As Garner's words have been uttered by more recent victims of police violence (e.g., George Floyd) and repeated by BLM activists, it can be argued that Garner's final sounds are amplified and dampened reverberations (Gershon, 2020) of past, present, and future sound(ed) events.

Yet, when violent events occur, it is not unusual for media outlets to censor images while allowing viewers to listen to a 911 call or audio pulled from a video source (e.g., check the last chapter of Gershon, 2017a). The rationale behind censoring such images is often described as a way to avoid traumatizing viewers and to prevent the proliferation of normalized violence through the associated images (Benjamin, 1966/2003). While viewers close their eyes to avoid visual contact with violence, it is impossible to close an earlid (Kim-Cohen, 2009) and avoid being impacted by the sounds of dying and death. As people listened, their interpretations and re-actions were connected to questions of privilege and power as subjectivities and agency emerged from listening—from the "Back the Blue" and "Black Lives Matter" binary to those who assumed that they could hear past such violence and instead insisted that they were participating in colorblind discourses (Eidsheim, 2019; Stoever, 2016).

The work of sound studies in education is similarly silenced through continued Western privileging of the ocular (Gershon, 2016; Gershon & Appelbaum, 2019; Hilmes, 2005; Pinar & Irwin, 2005). Then there is scholarship that seeks to make sounds into literacies and or use the language of text and lines to explicate the sonic, bounding sounds into words for the sonic to be understood as significant. To be clear, writing about sounds is not the same as insisting that sounds be conceptualized by a conversion to writing. Although this may seem like a distinction without a difference, it is one thing to use text to think about sounds and quite another to insist that sounds be understood as text to be significant. It is the difference between making something textually audible and rendering the audible textual.

The same holds true for questions of multimedia and multiliteracies that have the same ocularcentric, Western colonizing roots. The "multi" in both multimedia and multiliteracies means "other than text." It is one thing to talk of an experience as being multisensuous and quite another to note that the experience was another form of text or talk. From the position of this special issue, insisting sounds become text is another form of sound trauma that relegates significance to text

while delegitimizing sound. Such practices are, for example, how "oral traditions" are thought to be "primitive" when compared to the importance of written communications including laws, policies, and practices, as well as how such conceptualizations are, for example, essential tools for (settler) colonialization and the deep othering of eugenics. They are also the ways that non-written musics are considered to be "improvised" and, therefore, lesser and how Western critical theorists from Kant to Deleuze fetishize the linear at the expense of any other perception or conceptualization.

In light of such understandings, writing about sound may seem to be, at first, a knowingly obtuse approach to conceptualizing the sonic in general and sound traumas in specific. As Walter has noted in previous publications, working to take the sonic seriously and noting ocular and textual concerns is neither intended to replace text/ocular understandings as a matter of course, nor is it to overly demote writing and critique as strong ocularcentric modes of perception (on sonic modes, Gershon, 2023). This concern is as much about how to wonder and write sonically as it is to elevate the sonic, as such interruptions and challenges to our fetishization of sight and sound possibilities need not be constrained to either a Western five senses sensorium or to only that which can be heard in literal fashion.

Or, inverted, why is it everything can be a text but sounds and other sensory understandings should "stay in their lane." One answer is certainly that the ocular cannot stand as sacrosanct in the face of thousands of years of knowledge systems that exist primarily through stories told aloud to one another. Another is that the ocular is not the only way to tell a story, and the more we strongly consider how our perceptions engage our sensibilities, the more we can counter their harm and pernicious intent, irrespective of what sense is foregrounded or sensorium utilized to make such decisions. This is to say, while writing sounds need not be relegated to conceptualizing those understandings through a textual lens, the sonic, as with all sensibilities, harbors a combination of what we think is socioculturally normal and valued with our own personal preferences and experiences. Sound writing (Gershon, 2024) may interrupt the ocular, but that does not mean it is either apolitical or inherently ethical.

Considerations such as these lead us to this special issue on sound traumas. We thought it important to locate our discussion in the field of Curriculum Studies as a way to question broader educational ecologies, as our field has sought to operate since its reconceptualization in the 1970s, and as a tool to interrupt our field's (and our own/Boni and Walter's) continued, though often unintentional, ocularcentrism. As both of our work continues to take a turn towards emphasizing joy and possibility, it remains important that we document how sounds can hurt so that there is no (incidental) conflation of soundness-as-goodness, replicating our nation's and educational system's eugenic roots where soundness is shorthand for the very white, male, straight, middle class, English speaking, "able bodied," Eurocentric constructions many of us seek to interrupt. We would also be remiss if we did not note that fields such as sound studies (e.g., Steingo & Sykes, 2019) and music theory (e.g., Lee et al. 2023) are working to make similar strides in disrupting similar colonialisms; simply because it is sonic does not mean that it is either decolonial or inherently ethical.

In keeping with the trans/inter/disciplinary nature of North American Curriculum studies, contributors to these special issues on sound traumas approach and interpret both what a sonic trauma might mean and how it can function from a variety of perspectives and positionalities. Although our special issue is comprised of two parts, we understand the questions, possibilities, and challenges to resonate across and between each contribution. Irrespective of their placement

or relations within a given volume, we conceptualize each contribution this double special issue as a multipolyphonus whole.

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Our first volume begins with Peter Appelbaum, who provides a reflexively performative exploration of soundart installations he created in response to a call to create queer-centered public artworks in Philadelphia that also functioned as a form of public pedagogy. Situated at the nexus of sound, ecology, and knowledge traditions, Appelbaum's is a nuanced dance between his intended displacement through queering space and time and how much his work contributes to anthropocentric amplifications that recenter the "human" at the expense of interrelations that are in many ways endemic to the field of Curriculum Studies.

Next, in "*Currere* to *Ambire*," Sarah Gerth van den Berg utilizes Lauren Berlant's construction of "ambient citizenship" to explicate how an elementary school teacher negotiated her formal curricular mandates during a global pandemic. Focused on how the teacher utilized Ellen Reid's SOUNDWORK provided an opportunity for students to maintain the safety of social distancing while learning across situated physical and virtually sonic ecologies to create a form of knowledge construction she conceptualizes as an always already present ambient curriculum. By this v.d. Berg means that the sonic life worlds that form our knowledges are omnipresent in a Cage-like fashion and can be as traumatizing as they are an inherent part of our everyday soundworlds, soundscapes that inform how we know and be.

In the following contribution, Bessie Dernikos takes up Christina Sharpe's (2016) construction of monstrous intimacies as "more-than-human sonic entanglement" in order to document how everyday violences of subjugation and compliance in schooling had two overarching affects for first graders in the classroom that is the focus of her study. Not only did participation in literacy events put school children into positions where their bodies were increasingly "vulnerable to monstrous intimacies," but such trauma caused crescendoing harm for young Black boys whose will required attenuation to the point of social exclusion.

Completing part one of this special issue, Reagan P. Mitchell's paper uses an Afro-surrealist dialogue and, specifically, the work of Sun Ra and D. Scot Miller, to consider a set of sonic ethics to engage with what Mitchell calls the "premature ancestralhood" of Alton Sterling. The purpose of this work is to re-orient readers with/in an ethos where Blackness is not considered "stillborn." In an important provocation to end part one of this double issue, Mitchell's work asks readers to consider a sonic ethic where folx like Sterling live within and among us, through musical and extra-musical presences rooted in conscious building.

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Emphasizing D/deaf and disabled sound artists, the second special issue opens with Albert Stabler's work which seeks to problematize institutional uses, and abuses, of information and communication. Stabler uses sousveillance, or the act of observing from underneath with a politically-engaged focus, to consider the violence against disabled artists, as well as how the arts provide equitable and accessible educational models. Stabler challenges readers to think about the

"detour(s)" (Sterne, 2021) that disabilities provide; those filled with hope, improvisations, ingenuities, and resistance to and against an ableist world.

This work is followed by a piece from Allyson Compton that attends to how liminal sonic events can cause continuing sound trauma, the sound of violent memories and affective efficiencies that create feedback loops of harm over time and space. Compton asks us to think about the sonic life of film sounds of violence when they are played as part of classroom lessons irrespective of their curricular purpose, whether intended as part of a formal classroom lesson or as a kind of respite from everyday schooling. Our focus on the ocular, Compton contends, causes us to overlook the sonic trauma of gun violence in U.S. schools.

Next, Leah Panther and Hannah Edber use the narratives of three young people to consider the importance of listening deeply to youth experiences and stories in ways that resist and refuse using sounds as a mechanism of hierarchical control in classrooms and familial contexts. Through a writing workshop, Panther and Edber observed the many ways that sounds can interrupt everyday norms around literacies as they relate to noise and compliance. This paper thinks critically about the power of young people to use sound as a point of subversion against the often unexamined violence at the intersections of sound and literacies.

Documenting how student narratives of place and race form sonic simultaneities, Maureen Flint argues that such resonances create a collapsing of affective experiences so that contexts not only serve as referents for one another but also allow categories to affectively be one another. In these ways, Flint articulates how "the South," "Alabama," and the "University of Alabama" become what Walter would call a multiphonic expression of ontologies that speak to race and the construction of differences as participating in continuing racial violence. This, in turn, claps back at ocular binaries in ways that more clearly enunciate continuing trauma for people of African descent and other people of color as matters of course in the South.

Our final contribution is from Peter J. Woods who argues that earwitnessing noise can serve as forms of pedagogical potential for acts of witnessing and can serve to challenge traumas in every widening ecologies that contextualize more immediate sonic acts. Noise, Woods contends, can attend to what he understands to be "the political shortcomings of witnessing" through pedagogical moments that open possibilities that allow one to "critically reimagine affective economies." These understandings are then, in turn, grounded in the album by noise artists Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck that provides an iteration of these understandings as material sonic curricular practices.

In conclusion, we would like to thank contributors for their thoughtful, thought provoking possibilities to our call for wondering about sound traumas in education. We are grateful for their willingness to work with us as we thought with contributors about their work and are proud to present this special issue. We are similarly grateful to the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* for allowing us the space to present this double issue, a journal that is a continuing central voice in North American Curriculum Studies. Last but not least, we would like to note that our attentions here on sound traumas are intended not as a desire to focus on pain as either a form of so-called scholarly sexiness or in any way as the mode for thinking about how the sonic operates in schooling or educational ecologies in general. Instead, we understand this special issue as a critical reminder of how sonic harms are often literally overlooked. We do so in order that we might work with greater care in ways that allow our educational interactions, in all their forms and expression, to provide greater dignity and breath for those who study, especially those whose everyday experiences continue to be rearticulated as disenfranchising deficits.

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