Monstrous Intimacies
The Sounding and Mis/hearing of *Will/ful Literacies*

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READERS WORKSHOP-TIME (First-Grade, NYC)

[Several students talking and laughing, some while reading; a motorbike whizzes past the back window]

"2s up!"

Sound waves pulsate throughout the room—invoking warning … inviting repetition … pulling bodies in just like an undertow.

Taking their cues from Ms. Rizzo—whose voice never falters—children stop what they are doing (e.g., talking, laughing, slouching), attempting to still their "noisy" bodies while repeating their teacher's gesture (raising their index and middle fingers up in the air).

Ms. Rizzo: Remember, I'm looking for those who look and sound *ready* …

* * *

Early childhood literacy classrooms are full of vibratory motion (Wargo, 2017; see Gershon, 2013a, for vibrational affect): the chatter of voices, the roar of laughter, the bustle of things, the hum of the ordinary (Gershon, 2018, 2013b; Jackson, 1968; Stewart, 2007). In the above vignette, the buzzes, booms, and whirrs associated with Readers Workshop entangle, creating vibrational frequencies that simultaneously resonate joy and violence (McKittrick & Weheliye, 2017). With two bursts of air—"*2s up!* "—soundwaves wash over once animated student bodies, shifting our attention to the intimate impact of the sounds of bodies attempting to become "in tune" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 49), to *look* and *sound ready* for learning. I say intimate because, as Berlant (1998) reminds us, intimacy involves world[un]making, it "creates spaces and usurps places meant

for other kinds of relations" (p. 282). Thus, how we hear and experience relational sensations—e.g., the aural, haptic, visual—requires a consideration of power and positionality (Daza & Gershon, 2015; Gershon, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Goodman, 2012; Snaza, 2019; Sterne, 2012; Wozolek, 2020, 2023).

Although not the intention of Ms. Rizzo, who was simply "doing school," the sounds emanating from her body created spatial relations that spread throughout the classroom, operating like an affective straightening device to organize what could be learned, said, and done (e.g., Gershon, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Brownell, 2019; Gallagher, 2011; Shannon, 2022; Wargo, 2023; Wozolek, 2020, for sound/[re]attunement/power). According to Ms. Rizzo, "successful readers" were rational individuals who could use their "ready" minds to actively take control of their emotions (e.g., refraining from laughter while reading), voices (e.g., ceasing to speak when hearing "2s up!"), and bodies (e.g., upon command, their backs straighten). In other words, children were expected to use their "rational" mind to still their "irrational" body—which presumably had no place in knowledge production.

While it has been almost eight years since I visited Ms. Rizzo's first-grade classroom (my dissertation research site[1]), that time in my life continues to both inspire and humble me, as it shaped my understandings of pedagogical love, joy, intimacy, and violence. Following Wozolek (2020), I situate violence as ordinary rather than exceptional or antagonistic to educational contexts. While these mundane violences aren't generally acknowledged to be horrific (here, believed to promote literacy readiness) (e.g., Baker-Bell, 2020; Delpit, 1995; Dillard, 2012; Willis et al., 2022; see also Wozolek, 2020, for discussion of hope, love, joy, and curricular violence), I contend that the tolerance for and presumed necessity of such violence within educational spaces can be thought of as *monstrous intimacies* (Sharpe, 2010).

Building on Sharpe (2010), I imagine these intimacies as more-than-human sonic entanglements that highlight how the ongoing violent processes of educational subjectification (read: the making of ideal educational subjects/successful literacy learners) are affectively linked to intimacy (e.g., goodwill) as well as the material-discursive codes of the Enlightenment (i.e., the age of reason), slavery, and post-slavery. Specifically, I argue that the making of successful literacy learners within this first-grade classroom involved *will* (Ahmed, 2014), or attempts to immobilize matter as an active vibrational force in order to affirm children as rational, thinking subjects disconnected from the "body of the classroom." Such *will* ignored how sounds, bodies, spaces, and "things"—as a collection of affects—extended relationally into children, participated in literacy events, and made children's bodies vulnerable to monstrous intimacies—particularly boys of color who were often excluded for transmitting willfulness.

Inspired by Sharpe's (2010) call that thinking, intimacy, and care need to stay in the wake of slavery, I take an "undisciplined" approach in this piece in order to tell a story that troubles the violence of the academy, which leaves little room for sitting with uncertainty, playing with data, sharing anecdotes, offering fragmentary musings, or engaging in any number of "incoherent" practices that help form a "mass of resonances" (Tomkinson, 2023, n.p.; cf. Gershon, 2018; Wozolek 2020, 2023). Following Tomkinson (2023, who draws on Stewart, 2004), I am more "interested in conjuring an atmosphere rather than an argument—provocations and attunements and residues rather than 'evaluative critique' … 'dependent on closure and clarity'" (n.p.). The classroom moments I have chosen to include here, thus, offer a "strategic sketch," or "an invitation to an alternative means of experiencing data—to think and feel with the possibilities of the data and not 'over' them toward conclusion" (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 26). Strategic sketches are provocations (Wargo, 2018) that invite us to experience literacy practices as more-than-human

scenes of entanglement (Dernikos, 2019). Such provocations create a sense of liveliness that enables us to consider not what a particular scene "means" within a representational frame but, rather, what it may offer once we "plug into" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) and play with different conceptual theories: namely, monstrous intimacies (Sharpe, 2010), will, and willfulness (Ahmed, 2014).

Researcher Sensibilities and the Current Historical Moment

By *re-turning* to past data-scenes here (Thiel & Dernikos, 2020), I attempt to tune in differently (Ahmed, 2014; Gershon, 2013a, 2018), to tell these moments *otherwise* (Crawley, 2017). Admittedly, these are moments that have served to trouble me over the years: moments when my sense-making faltered, my confusion/joy/longings/susceptibilities proliferated, and my own feelings and "mishearings" (Gershon, 2018) made me, at times, complicit in re/producing acts of violence (e.g., Dernikos, 2020). As Dillard (2012) reminds us, we (as researchers and human beings) have all been "seduced" by racialized histories of oppression to forget the "cultural memory of the Middle Passage" and slavery in ways that enable us to "read and hear differently and at varying depths" (p. 3). Put another way, the afterlives of slavery continue to differentially texture our ways of knowing, our becomings, our relationships with others, and our reading, listening, and inquiry practices (cf. Sharpe, 2010, 2016). For me, then, telling these moments *otherwise* involves attending more closely to the afterlives of slavery, the fluidity of spacetime, and the resonances of sound. As Gershon (2013b) reminds us, "sounds resonate in ways that texts cannot" (n.p.). That said, by attuning to sound here, I do not aim to privilege one mode over another. Rather, I conceptualize sound and sight as relational forces that impact human sense- and world- making across space and time (Gershon, 2013a, 2013b, 2018). I am thus interested in how attuning to and amplifying sound can serve as a *relational* tool (Brownell, 2019) to interrupt commonly held assumptions/ideologies, "queer" contemporary thought, and "make previously hidden understandings audible" (Gershon, 2013, p. 258; cf. Sterne, 2012).

With these ideas in mind, I *re-turn* to Ms. Rizzo's first grade classroom during a historical present (Berlant, 1998) marked by racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic educational politics, put forward by local representatives, media, and parents alike. For instance, in Florida (where I live and teach), recent laws have effectively limited what can be taught and discussed in PK-12 schools regarding race, gender, and sexuality. These laws primarily ban any curriculum designed to indoctrinate students into "woke" ideology, which is positioned as inherently racist or oppressive. Essentially, advocates of these laws not only assume that racism is a "taboo" thing of the past (where, for example, critically discussing/engaging with race in schools equates to "sowing divisiveness and hate;" see nolefturn.us, 2023), but also that (White) students/Americans cannot be held responsible for any ("past") effects of slavery or the U.S.'s racist history (e.g., Moms for Liberty, 2024).

As a scholar and human being who identifies in a multitude of ways (e.g., Greek American, child of immigrants, bilingual, middle class, White, woman), I am both familiar with the material effects such politics have on bodies (e.g., of children, knowledge) (Dernikos, 2015), and troubled by how they are positioned as acts of goodwill meant to protect children from "harmful" leftwing ideologies in order to preserve "traditional" American values (e.g., Moms for Liberty, 2024). In fact, there has been little mainstream attention given to the ways these political acts tune in to whiteness and, in turn, do violence (e.g., re/produce racism) to those bodies out of tune with white

supremacy (Ahmed, 2014; Stoever, 2016). Overall, my hope in this paper is to create a lively narrative thread that sonically resonates (Gershon, 2018; Vannini, 2015) to trouble the current historical moment, so that we may all begin to sense and, ultimately, *reimagine* the monstrous intimacies circulating with/in educational spaces, literacy education in particular.

Sound and Curriculum Studies

The sounds circulating with/in curricular spaces are pedagogical, forming embodied knowledge systems that work to reify, challenge, and/or reimagine sociocultural norms/habits/values/affects (Gershon, 2018). As such, sounds can maintain existing power relations/ways of knowing and/or open up new ways to conceptualize curriculum and instruction (in terms of spaces, relationships, identities, agency, and so forth) (e.g., Brownell, 2019; Gallagher, 2011; Gershon, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2018; Hackett & Somerville, 2017; Shannon, 2022; Wargo, 2018, 2023; Wozolek, 2015, 2020, 2023). That said, since curriculum studies has continued to privilege "the primacy of the eye" (Aoki, 1991, p. 182), there has been less attention given to the potentiality of sound and the ways it helps us to understand the (visual, sonic) framing of students in less than human ways (Gershon, 2018; Wozolek, 2020); for example, how classroom sounds (such as school bells) are used to police/"reattune" students of color, or how resonances and reverberations attached to particular bodies are heard/read as academic deficiencies (e.g., Brownell, 2019; Dernikos, 2020; Gershon, 2018; Wozolek, 2020).

Moreover, the field's tendency to deprivilege African American intellectual traditions has "added to Western, Eurocentric understandings of the sensory" (Gershon, 2018, p. 7; cf. Wozolek, 2015) which, overall, serve to normalize dehumanization. As Crawley (2017) reminds us, whiteness is an ocularcentric way of knowing that offers us a genre of humanity (read: Man) that begins with violence and objecthood (cf. Snaza, 2019; Wynter, 2003). Weheliye (2014) adds that posthuman scholarship, in particular, would be better served interrogating other humanities, not abandoning the category of the human altogether, or problematically equating humanity to White, neoliberal subjects.

Sound↔Affect

Following Gershon (2013a, 2018), I conceptualize sound as producing reverberations and resonances, where bodies (writ large) are never still, lifeless materials waiting to be de/coded. Even when there appears to be silence and stillness, movement is always occurring, as "sounds are already in motion; they are always reverberating, bouncing off objects" (Gershon, 2018, p. 56). Gershon (2018) writes, "everything vibrates and everything resonates. Resonance is produced by the oscillations of vibration, the peaks and valleys of some thing in and out of phase with itself, and its surrounding nested layers of ecology" (p. 463). Sounds, then, are vibrational waves/frequencies moving and affecting matter (Gallagher, 2011, 2016; Henriques, 2011), where affect can be transmitted through both linguistic (e.g., voice, words) and nonlinguistic utterances (e.g., gestures, movements) that are relationally entangled and mutually co-constituted (Daza & Gershon, 2015; Hackett & Somerville, 2017).

Attending to sound as affective highlights the local, global, ecological, and political nature of the sonic, that is, its potential to connect, change, and im/mobilize in/human bodies in distinctive

ways (Gallagher, 2011; Gershon, 2013, 2018; Goodman, 2012; Wargo, 2018, 2023; Wozolek, 2020, 2023). Sounds reverberate and resonate all kinds of affect (joy, discomfort, fear, etcetera), creating atmospheric shifts that echo through bodies and change the tenor of spaces (Dernikos et al., 2020). For example, scholars have explored the "fugitive" and "open-endedly social" (Crawley, 2017, p. 62) ways the affect of joy "sounds out" with/in classrooms (e.g., via clapping, laughing, Dernikos, 2020; Gershon, 2018; Wargo, 2017); dancehalls (via the pulsating of Reggae dance rhythms, Henriques, 2011); churches (via Black Pentecostal praise/singing/whooping, Crawley, 2017); and neighborhoods/streets (via Black music/hip hop, Love, 2017; McKittrick & Weheliye, 2017).

The acoustic force of sounds also has the capacity to assault listeners (Goodman, 2012). For instance, some sounds may produce fear, dread, anger, sadness, and even physical harm: the slavemaster's crack of a whip and the agonizing screams attached to such violence (see e.g., discussion of Aunt Hester's scream, Sharpe, 2010; Moten, 2003; also Crawley, 2017; Sharpe, 2010, 2016; Stoever, 2016, for race/sound); the terrorizing sounds of bombs dropping in warzone areas amid civilians' cries for help (see Goodman, 2012, for sonic warfare); and the wailing of a "willful" child as they are removed from classroom activities and sent into isolation for their "inappropriate" behavior (Dernikos, 2018). As such, sounds can serve as vibrational mechanisms of de/humanization and in/justice (Gershon, 2013, 2018; Wozolek, 2020, 2023)—investing and/or robbing a body of affective capacity.

Within educational spaces—where sonic violence is presumably not the intention—teachers, students, and administrators often employ a range of "aural tactics of power" (Gallagher, 2011, p. 48; cf. Gershon, 2013) (e.g., shushing, bells, intercoms) to not only affectively straighten out the "willful"/"disobedient" child, but also to (re)align children to white neoliberal sensibilities (Dernikos, 2020). While such aurality works to enforce schooling as a violent project of white, cis-hetero patriarchy (e.g., Wozolek, 2020, 2023), other sounds (e.g., student silence; shrieks of joy) circulate to trouble such violence, thereby serving as forms of refusal against those sonic frequencies and affective rhythms that make social and cultural discriminations possible (Dernikos, 2020; Gershon, 2018; Mitchell, 2022; Moten, 2003; Wozolek, 2020).

The Formal and Hidden Curriculum of Violence

As students and educators, we have learned, taught, and participated in violence, both via the formal and the hidden curriculum (i.e., the powerful implicit and explicit messages/norms that students unofficially learn in school) (Jackson, 1968). According to Wozolek (2020), the racialization of the formal curriculum exacerbates the movement and effects of the hidden curriculum, particularly as it relates to the transmission of values, behaviors, habits, affects, and practices that perpetuate white, middle-class norms, while re/producing anti-blackness and anti-brownness. Racialized histories of oppression, thus, seep into classroom spaces to amplify eugenic echoes (Gershon, 2019), discipline children's bodies (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2003), and haunt curriculum (Dillard, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Mitchell, 2022) in ways that contribute to the "slow, normalized daily maiming" (Wozolek, 2023, p. 11), "lynching" (Gershon, 2018; Woodson, 1933; Wozolek, 2023), and "spirit murdering" (Love, 2016) of students of color, black children in particular. Such violence regularly revolves around bodily surveillance, symbolic wounding, punishment, and shaming, as well as the denigrating of children of color's languages, literacies,

cultures, experiences, and personhood (e.g., Baker-Bell, 2020; Delpit, 1995; Dumas et al., 2016; Hill, 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Souto-Manning et al., 2018; Smitherman, 1979; Willis et al., 2022).

Wozolek (2020) goes on to say that this hidden curriculum of violence—which can be thought of as "any forms of violence that are normalized through schooling" (p. 282)—is inherently pedagogical, teaching us about the social while impacting bodies of all kinds. As such, violence is never a singular act. It ebbs and flows through complex assemblages that always exist in relation to sociocultural histories, norms, affects (such as love, joy), sounds, and a host of other bodies (Wozolek, 2020).

Monstrous Pedagogies

As participants moving with/in such assemblages, violence shapes our pedagogies and subjectivities in material, visceral ways. In this paper, I am particularly interested in how violent racialized histories shape listening (Stoever, 2016; in curriculum, see Gershon, 2018; Wozolek, 2020) and literacy practices, as well as literate identities. According to James (2020), the dehistoricizing of sound has led to the naturalization of practices that discipline human beings into neoliberal sensibilities, or white, patriarchal ways of knowing, being, and doing. Moreover, as Gershon (2019) notes, since the majority of teachers identify as white, middle class, those sounds that differ "from Anglo, middle-class norms and values" are constituted as inappropriate and the bodies attached to such sounds, academically "deficient" (p. 160).

As I have explored elsewhere (Dernikos, 2020), the historical construction of whiteness in relationship to silence/rationality/discipline/humanity and blackness to noise/irrationality/excess/barbarity has remained largely invisible due to white supremacist attempts to "suppress, tune out, and willfully misunderstand some sounds and their makers and histories" (Stoever, 2016, p. 6). Thus, the relationship between body, affect, sight, and sound is both sociohistorically contingent and based upon power relations, where we as educators have learned to privilege student stillness/silence as rational/efficient/right and unsanctioned movement/talk as noisy/excessive/wrong. Put differently, sounds circulate throughout curricular spaces to articulate literacies, identities, relationships, affects, habits, ideas, and pedagogies that have been coded into↔out of white, patriarchal models of knowledge production/transmission (Dernikos, 2020). For this reason, students of color often get heard/seen/coded in a myriad of violent ways, for example, as ungovernable, out of control, inappropriate, terrifying, noisy, bothersome, violent, discardable, antagonistic, and in need of remediation (Hill, 2016; Souto-manning et al., 2018).

As all pedagogical encounters move in and through such "assemblages of violence" (Wozolek, 2020, 2023), some scholars have even described pedagogy itself as "monstrous." For instance, Lesko et al. (2008) argue that all pedagogy exists alongside horror with its ability to "disturb and unsettle relations among knowledge, self-mastery, and social networks for all involved" (p. 1562; cf. Wallin, 2008). Likewise, Kuby et al. (2019) take up the figure of the monster in relation to literacy pedagogy to argue that all pedagogical practices involve monsters, which produce both intended and unintended consequences, e.g., caring for some and suffering for others. They offer up posthumanism to re-consider our roles (as educators, students, etc.) in more-than-human "monster-making" relations. While these scholars all acknowledge how violence can generate discomforting affects (for example, despair and anxiety), they do not view "monsters" as

necessarily bad. In fact, they see the figure of the monster as potentially wondrous, as it can help educators to better sense and trouble the "ordinary" horrors of inquiry and pedagogy (cf. Wallin, 2008).

Theorizing Monstrous Intimacies

I build on the above scholarship to imagine educational spaces as entangled with/in monstrous intimacies. Put another way, pedagogical violence and the making of educational subjects are inextricably linked to intimacy as well as Enlightenment metanarratives and their historical ties to slavery, an ideological system of dehumanization that persists into the present. According to Sharpe (2010), processes of subjectification cannot be divorced from the discursive codes of slavery and post-slavery, which un/make all post/modern subjects. For Sharpe (2010), monstrous intimacies are "a set of known and unknown performances and inhabited horrors, desires and positions produced, reproduced, circulated, and transmitted, that are breathed in like air and often unacknowledged to be monstrous" (p. 3). She likens these horrors to seduction. We are seduced by the familiarity and ordinariness of this violence (cf. Dillard, 2012), which works to make us complicit in violent acts of reading, seeing, labeling, fixing, and, I would add, sounding the social. These master narratives of violence involve intimacies that are read as consent and affection, yet produce shame, trauma, objectification, and their transgenerational transmission. Sharpe (2010) adds that, while Black subjects are most impacted by such violence, monstrous intimacies affect everyone. That is, new forms of subjectivity arising from these familiar, ordinary horrors are also produced for Europeans and other subjects. By doing so, she problematizes how "the history of slavery (and race) in the United States tends to be regarded as an issue of and for black people *about* black people and involves a persistent erasure of white[ness] [participation]" (p. 154). In other words, we are all aural and ocular witnesses to the "traumatic insistence" (p. 176) of slavery's transmitted violence—"unwilling" participants in a past "that is not yet past" (p. 154). And we remain so namely because monstrous intimacies are hidden behind "good management, intimacy, affection, even love" (p. 170), promising us some (future and beneficial) pleasures. In education, for example, one such pleasure would be the neoliberal promise of "college and career readiness" (Common Core State Standards) for "successful" literacy students (Dernikos, 2015, n.p.).

Monstrous Intimacies, Enlightenment Metanarratives, and Will/fulness

Attuning to monstrous intimacies involves not only acknowledging that we are living in the violent wake of slavery (Sharpe, 2010), but also that such racialization attempts to create pure, categorical distinctions, or hierarchies of humanity, which, as Crawley (2017) argues, is the "*problem* of Enlightenment thought" (p. 11). Grounded in Enlightenment metanarratives or Western humanist discourses, whiteness, as a more-than-human encounter, violently produces these categorical exclusions by privileging reason, individuality, autonomy, stillness, and disembodiment. These metanarratives create an ontological distinction and a hierarchical dualism between mind (i.e., the seat of consciousness) and matter. Within such logic, rationality can only be achieved by splitting the mind (coded as white and masculine) from the emotions and body—that is, splitting the active subject of knowledge (Man) from both the "passive" objects of

knowledge (i.e., things) and those deemed "undesirable" (e.g., Blacks, women) (Crawley, 2017; Thiel & Dernikos, 2020). As whiteness is a project that seeks racial purity (Crawley, 2017), this knowing, enlightened subject essentially equates to a racialized subject— that is, White Man, the only "true" producer of knowledge. While these racialized processes of whiteness produce a genre-specific subject (Wynter, 2003) that is also gendered, classed, and heterosexualized (among other things), the point here is that post/slavery as well as anti/blackness cannot historically be understood outside of Enlightenment metanarratives. As Crawley (2017) so aptly puts it, "to think theologically, to think philosophically, is to think racially" (p. 12).

As many scholars have argued (e.g., Kuby et al., 2019; MacLure et al., 2012; Snaza, 2019), Enlightenment discourses continue to shape present-day conceptualizations of teaching, learning, and literacy. According to Meachum and Buendia (1999), Enlightenment philosophers widely regarded rational analysis as the only objective way to process knowledge. In turn, "literacy [was] looked upon as a 'visible sign of reason'" (p. 511) that led to knowledge, freedom, and progress. In line with Enlightenment ideas regarding rationality and mastering matter, the production of successful students/literate subjects, then, involves controlling or suppressing students' bodies and desires—*willing* one's body in the right way (Dernikos, 2018).

When we think of *will*, the word willpower may come to mind—the idea that an individual subject can decide on something and use their rational mind to control a given event. Ahmed (2014) argues that, while the meaning of will has shifted historically, essentially it has been linked to rationality—an innate faculty all "normal" subjects possess. This idea becomes significant within educational spaces, where *willfulness* or to "will too much, or too little, or in the wrong way" (p. 3) signals a problem. As I have argued elsewhere (Dernikos, 2018), willfulness can attach to both student bodies (e.g., describing behaviors) and objects, specifically literacy related texts. A willful student is someone who, in some way, refuses rationality. A willful object (e.g., a text, the read-aloud rug area) has the agentive capacity to stick to students' bodies, intra-act (Barad, 2007) with other social bodies (e.g., whiteness) and produce surging affects that shape a subject's more-than-human will or agency (see Bennett, 2010, for distributive agency).

According to Ahmed (2014), willfulness marks a state of deviance that limits a child's capacity to survive and thrive. To exert will, the teacher must affectively discipline children who are out of tune with whiteness (e.g., talking during workshop-time versus sitting still and silently reading), as they—in one way or another—do not meet "the criteria for being human" (p. 15). Child, then—much like race and gender—becomes a "sonic construction" (see Gershon & Applebaum, 2019) with the potential to produce ontoepistemic injustices (Murris, 2016). Good, caring teachers must aim to eliminate willfulness by "straightening the [out-of-tune] child out" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 72), where disobedience presumably leads to moral turpitude, social disharmony, and unhappiness. In this way, willfulness is as much an affective project as it is a moral one, as "a good will is one that is 'affectively' aligned" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 68) in the "right" way. Conversely, a willful child feels or desires "irrationally" (Ahmed, 2014) and, therefore, must be both affectively realigned and reattuned (e.g., by voicing, "2s up!"). Taken together, I contend that monstrous intimacies invite us to feel, hear, see, and think anew about the normalized "everyday intimate brutalities" (Sharpe, 2010, p. 26) associated with will/willfulness—in other words, the becoming and un/making of educational subjects constituted by the material-discursive codes of the Enlightenment, slavery, and post-slavery.

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It is 8:15 a.m. on Wednesday morning when I promptly enter Ms. Rizzo's first grade classroom. As I inch closer to the back of the room, where Ms. Rizzo's table is located, a feeling of disorientation envelops me. Countless sounds swirl around my body, carrying me underneath, alongside, and above the vibratory frequencies that can be felt and heard (Crawley, 2017). And, just like that, I realize that the intimacy I feel for this place is not entirely dependent on a human heartbeat (Chen, 2012), but some-*thing* else…

The calls of the street seeping in through the open window- ***BEEEEEEEEP! …***

Shrieks of laughter bubbling up at Table 2 …

Bodies quivering with excitement …

Children's talk resonating, expanding, spinning off …

But then…

-scratch-

"2s up!"…

(moments later)

Ms. Rizzo: *Sh, sh, sh!*

Students: (repeat chant) *Sh, sh, sh!*...

Sounds that change the tone and tenor of the room, threatening sudden panic, anxiety …

Sounds that hang in the air, reverberating throughout bodies of all kinds—

(Ms. Rizzo claps loudly) ***CLAP, CLAP, CLAP CLAP CLAP***

(Students repeat hand gesture) ***CLAP, CLAP, CLAP CLAP CLAP***

Visceral jolts that call our attention, snap our bodies back into place (see Dernikos et al., 2020, for "scratch" discussion), will us towards "the right way" to know/be/do.

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The very things that make classroom sounds distinctive (e.g., laughter, chatter, squeals, vibrant bodies) strike most of us as noisy, inappropriate, and wrong (Gershon, 2018; Wozolek, 2020). As Ahmed (2014) notes, educators unconsciously learn to internalize discourses of will/fullness, which are historically linked to whiteness. As such, they have an "untrained ear" shaped by "white-constructed racializing listening practices" (Stoever, 2016, p. 33): an ear that inevitably *mishears* (Gershon, 2018). This mishearing is further complicated by the ways will/fullness entangles with intimacies. Caring educators—like Ms. Rizzo—who align themselves with "moral" educational aims (Ahmed, 2014, p. 63: e.g., "obedience as virtue") are *expected* to rely on mechanisms of re/attunement (e.g., *2s up!)* to drive out willfulness via processes of objectification, obedience, and forced submission.

As illustrated in the opening vignette, Ms. Rizzo employs such mechanisms to "ready" her students for learning. In other words, in this first-grade class, successful literate bodies were those who could be willed in the right direction or *reattuned*. Specifically, they were obedient students who could rationally take control of their voices and bodies to efficiently execute any number of controlled gestures during Readers Workshop-time (e.g., using their rational minds to will their 2 fleshy fingers in the air). By employing these mechanisms, Ms. Rizzo believes that she is expressing care for her students (see Dernikos, 2015, 2020)–redirecting them in the right way before they become "stuck" in willfulness (again, a path presumably leading to moral turpitude, social disharmony, and unhappiness) (Ahmed, 2014).

Will/ful Literacies

The relationship between will and willfulness, however, is rather tenuous, particularly as it relates to the making of successful literacy students. Willing, as an educational imperative, relies on a subject that is "out of time with itself" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 29). Put differently, students are under pressure to obey a non/linguistic command (such as *2s up!*) that has *not yet* been followed but nevertheless set in motion, as sounds are always reverberating (Gershon, 2013a). This pressure is also affected by the presence of frequencies that are in tension with will/willing: alternative sounds coded out of white supremacist patriarchal modes for knowledge transmission (James, 2020). As Ahmed (2014) argues, willing is a "bent" process that does not follow a linear trajectory, suggesting that multiple spacetime frequencies exist within any given moment (cf. Gershon, 2018; Sterne, 2012). Within such spacetimes, not only do alternative sounds emerge, but also past histories (Sharpe, 2010).

We witness these competing spacetime frequencies and echoes of the past resonate with/in the next vignette with Al, Aamir, and Ms. Rizzo,[2] which takes place in the read-aloud rug area. Depending on which frequencies we attune to, Al's participation either becomes constituted as a legitimate form of literacy engagement or willful "noise" (Crawley, 2017). While the below vignette describes a brief exchange, such interactions were typical during workshop/read-aloud time, especially in relation to Al, whose behavior was often heard/read as willful (e.g., off-task, disruptive, distracting).

[Read-aloud on Hawaii]

Ms. Rizzo: Anyone remember what this place is called?

Al (calls out): "Hawaii!" (slouching his body, which spills beyond his individual rug spot/square and into Natasha's)

Ms. Rizzo: Sit ready and raise a quiet hand. (Aamir gives Al a side look before raising his hand) Aamir.

Aamir: Hawaii.

Ms. Rizzo (nods affirmatively): How was Hawaii made?...

Here, whiteness resonates in subtle ways by linking literacies to white aesthetic values, namely, rationality, stillness, and silence (e.g., rationally using one's "ready" mind to still/silence the body/body parts). Al, however, appears to be tuned into an alternative sonic frequency. By enthusiastically offering a response ("Hawaii!") to Ms. Rizzo's question ("Anyone remember what this place is called?"), Al experiences the body on his own terms (James, 2016), as some-thing other than a self-contained object to be rationally controlled. Joyfully shouting out his response while spilling his arms and legs into Natasha's rug square, he becomes open, "borderless," vulnerable (see Crawley, 2017), while creating spaces for read-aloud time to become lively, relational, and affective.

Yet, since Ms. Rizzo was not attuned to the same frequency as Al, she misheard this moment. As Al was unable or unwilling to repress/control his body, he becomes out of tune with the rigid and rule-bound norms of read-aloud time. His enthusiasm (read: the enemy of rationality) for learning here can be thought of as irrational (Crawley, 2017), or an aural and visible sign of willfulness. As James (2016) argues, whiteness demands that we exert mastery over our bodies, or as Ms. Rizzo might say, "Use your ready minds to still your noisy body." In this way, a willing student must experience their bodies as sites of control, not free play or sensory pleasure (as in the case of Al).

To remedy Al's error of will (Ahmed, 2014), Ms. Rizzo first publicly calls attention to his offending behaviors (e.g., his calling out). She then ignores his response, even though it was correct, thereby sending the message that only certain behaviors on the rug were expected of rational literate bodies. Her words carry a vibrational charge, the force of which works to restrict Al's actions and talk so as to (momentarily) direct vibrational frequencies toward those normative practices that (re)produce literacy/literate subjects in relation to Western Man (Snaza, 2019). Al's willful behavior on the rug results in a kind of metaphorical dismissal of his body. His bodily utterance ("Hawaii!") is ignored, and unless he can will himself to *sit ready* and *raise a quiet hand*, his body itself remains a site of repudiation (note Aamir's look) and unrecognizability (Al's talk emanating from his irrational body does not seem to count). In this way, discipline and "docility legitimated the flow between teacher and students" (Sheehy, 2004, p. 100) and produced a geographical *thick place* where power relations circulated and intertwined with other sounds, bodies, spaces, and things (e.g., bodily utterances, joy, Natasha's rug square, discourses of will, racialized histories, students' physical bodies) in ways that directly impacted Al's status as a literacy learner and human being.

These ordinary, familiar moments in Ms. Rizzo's class offer us a "vague but compelling sense" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4) that something monstrously intimate is happening, as we become aural and ocular witnesses to a past that is not yet past (Sharpe, 2010). As Sharpe (2010, 2016) reminds us, the violence of U.S. slavery has an ongoing afterlife. Due to the long historic interrelationship between white supremacy and listening (Stoever, 2016), most educators do not realize how auditory information is used to inform and reify racial ideologies, for example, the conflation of whiteness to silence/rationality/discipline/will/success and blackness to noise/irrationality/excess/willfulness/failure (Dernikos, 2020). Or, how forcing students to show signs of aural obedience—i.e., to perform a disciplined listening stance—has connections to dehumanizing techniques used by White slave masters to command whiteness, for instance, expecting enslaved Blacks to quickly snap their physical bodies back into place or smile when spoken to (Stoever, 2016). These hidden histories and intimate brutalities seep into classroom spaces, shaping what it means to be a successful literacy learner or willful failure. Yet, what would happen if, instead of demanding a disciplined listening stance, educators began to recognize how the neoliberal notion of a successful, willing student works to fuel the afterlives of slavery by re/producing whiteness and anti-blackness as normative?

While I have chosen to focus this vignette on Al, a young Black boy, I would like to make clear that the training of will impacted all students in the room, as it worked to re/attune them towards white hegemonic literacy practices, although the effects on students varied—from silencing, to blushing, to laughing, to crying (see Dernikos, 2020). That said, a "proper" will marked a student as developmentally "ready" to read, write, and learn: a successful literate body in the making. By contrast, an error of will/willfulness, made a student's body vulnerable to categorization or branding: a literacy failure in the making. However, as the above vignette illustrates, willfulness transmits at a different frequency than whiteness. As such, literate bodies only appear "willfully unreasonable" to an untrained ear (Crawley, 2017, p. 159) shaped by "white-constructed racializing listening practices" (Stoever, 2016, p. 33). So, while willfulness may be heard and seen as failure, it is in fact a refusal of whiteness, anti-blackness, and other exclusions (James, 2016).

Tune In …

Although willfulness is presumed to be an obstacle to obtaining both happiness and a good education (Ahmed, 2014), I invite you to tune in to these classroom scenes again and again (Stewart, 2007) in order to question your tolerance for will/willing as an everyday, violent mode of educational experience, that is, as a racialized (gendered etc.) project producing monstrous intimacies. A closer attention to the ordinary, mundane violences that mask as educational goodwill (e.g., Moms for Liberty, 2024; noleftturn.us, 2023) feels more vital than ever in these politically charged times, marked by ongoing racial and social upheaval as well as widespread curricular censorship (e.g., in the U.S., Canada). This discourse of "goodwill" not only discounts the complex, ongoing effects of slavery's profound violence, but it also *does* violence (e.g., re/produces racism) to those bodies out of tune with white supremacy. As Sharpe (2010) reminds us, we feel/hear/see the force of the ongoing wake of slavery when (White) Americans "white" themselves out of scenes to preserve white innocence: a specific example in Florida schools would be the banning of any books that reference race/racism because they may make White children feel bad/uncomfortable (Ferguson & Dernikos, 2023). Such moments work to erase whiteness—

by making it "unreadable"/inaudible—*and*, at the same time, amplify it—by making it "more readable"/audible (Sharpe, 2010, p. 182). Yet, this "compulsion to disremember" (Sharpe, 2010, p. 5) and tune out the legacies of slavery—which is "symptomatic of the ways that American post-slavery subjectivity is constituted, conferred, and (not) acknowledged" (Sharpe, 2010, p. 154)—is precisely how the material-discursive codes of the Enlightenment and post/slavery are able to transmit into the present—to survive and thrive as normalized violence in our daily lives and in the daily life of classrooms like Ms. Rizzo's.

//

Shhhhhhh …

Silence. Stillness. Or so it seems … Al's silence leaves echoes, impressions, traces that sound out and reverberate (Stoever, 2016) … signaling a site of struggle, tension, violence, and possibility. His silence invites us to tune in otherwise, as an ethical involvement (Crawley, 2017) … to care differently (Sharpe, 2010) … to ask:

> *What monstrous intimacies go un/heard as violence in educational spaces?*
>
> *How might you be complicit in such violence?*
>
> *And, how can you use sound as a tool to attune to otherwise frequencies out of sync with will (Ahmed, 2014)—sounds that the "hegemonic listening ear" is untrained to hear (James, 2020; Crawley, 2017)?*

Shhhhhhh …

Can you hear it?

Notes

1. See e.g., Dernikos (2015) for study context.
2. The participants in this scene identified as Black (Al), Asian (Aamir), Hispanic (Ms. Rizzo), and White (me, as researcher).

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