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Sound Traumas: Curricular Attunements for Care and Educational Understandings

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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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Queer Ecologies
One Year Later

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IT'S HOTTER THIS YEAR. Much hotter. The sounds are the same—at least they seem so. Motors. Birds. Louder motors. More birds. Crunch-crunch-fwap-fwap: my footsteps are heavier, and my breathing as well. I am sweating a *lot* more. I have to pick my days carefully for revisiting the two locations, much more carefully than last year, because I don't want to get stuck in a sudden torrential downpour or thick cloud of smoke and dust from Canadian wildfires. News anchors pleasantly tell us this "hottest summer on record" is probably going to be called the beginning of the rapid upward trend we will nostalgically look back upon in a decade or so as the last time we were comfortable. We already experience the pain of extreme climate disasters to come, a living *bukimi*[1] (Appelbaum, 2011) of anticipation for the turning point beyond livable to slow and excruciating human extinction (Aravamudan, 2013).

I am re-visiting sites of a sound-art project I contributed to an exhibition last year, "We're Where? Hear Here: Que're Queer?" Hosted jointly by the William Way LGBTQ Community Center of Philadelphia and Bartram's Garden National Historic Landmark, the Queer Ecologies project sought to "explore our relationship to nature as a queer community—how we are inspired by, engaging with, and perhaps most importantly, understanding ourselves as part of nature" and to ask, most importantly, "How are we, in turn, leveraging our experiences to provide unique solutions to the social and environmental challenges we are facing?" (WayGay, 2022, para. 2). The proposal I had submitted juxtaposed the artificial binary created by the two sponsoring institutions and the intention to locate works of art in the two locations—one in the heart of urban Philadelphia, the other a nature preserve outside the center along the Schuylkill River—with other common binaries relevant to queer ecologies.

The very structure of two locations, separated geographically, culturally, and in terms of their histories and missions, served as an analogy for the ways that binaries operate in our culture and society in general: binaries such as male/female, straight/queer, concerned/unconcerned about climate change, urban center/outlying nature preserve, and so on, establish in our thinking simple assumptions and potential solutions to problems and crises. Posters and signs explained the work in strategic locations for both sites, with a QR code that serendipitously brought curious visitors to the installation website. The website introduced the project and offered several options for

soundwalks beginning near the signage, curated streaming sounds accompanying instructed paths to follow while listening. Visitors following the instructions walked along paths for soundwalks that took place at the *other* site, streaming to their earbuds.

What was a sound art installation for the purposes of procuring a grant from the exhibition (I now own very nice recording equipment purchased through the stipend, and the installation website is still live with the purchased domain name, Appelbaum, 2022) was simultaneously an experiment in public pedagogy. My return to the sites is a form of embodied reflection one year later. I ask myself, after a community-based art provocation designed to confront assumptions about human-nature dichotomies through a queer lens and during a period of increased catastrophic climate change experiences, how do we continue to pursue public, arts-based curriculum projects? What can be proposed as "knowledge," "ways of knowing," "ecological expertise," "categories of people," or "institutions of learning"? Reflection on these points of significance raises questions for arts-based curricular practice. Can we hear the destruction of our planet? Are we listening? What are the sounds of sufficient change?

The "one year later" in my title ironically evokes theories of "queer time" informed by queer theory (Freeman, 2007; Halberstam, 2005). Queer lives often experience time in non-linear ways (in comparison with normative, linear time)—coming out, dating, and forming intimate relationships for the first or second time, transitioning, becoming sexually active, and so forth, come earlier, later, overlap with each other, and defy sequential description. Futures are enacted as already present—in the present. In this version of time and space, the question, "What are we going to do?"—once translated into objectives with justification ("Why are we doing *this*?")—becomes, "Do I know or even need to know right now, why I am doing this?" In other words, it is not, "What are we going to do?" but instead, "This is what I am doing, and I am doing this because …" (a) It is something I feel I need to do in order to meet my own expectations; or (b) I want to work with these particular people, because …; or (c) I enjoy doing this!

Yet, even as we project one year later from the presentation, the publication of this article is going to be even later than the reflection, which in turn is one year later than the exhibition that sparks the reflection. Nested "laters" anticipate and evoke memories of past futures. And future pasts.

My key entry into ecological curriculum theory (Dentith, et al. 2022; Payne, 2006) is my conviction that direct study of crises and catastrophic predictions reproduces the anthropocentric fixation (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2016) on "What knowledge is of most worth?" (Spencer, 1860, as quoted in Schubert, 1985, p. 4). The soundwalks were inspired by this conviction. I seek with David Abram (as quoted in London, 2023) alternative provocations in all of my recent curriculum projects: "It is not by being abstract intellects that we are going to fall in love again with the rest of nature. It's by beginning to honor and value our direct sensory experience" (para. 52). Knowing things is magical, empowering and individually self-fulfilling. Yet, we can learn from those indigenous traditions in which the magicians and shamans simultaneously offer prayers and ritual gestures to other animals and to the powers of the earth and the sky. Otherwise, they might heal someone in the community and someone else would fall sick, and then they would heal that other person, and someone else would fall sick, *ad infinitum*. The obligation is to ensure from the edges of our village that we always return something back, that we maintain a two-way flow, guaranteeing that that the boundaries between human culture and the rest of nature stay porous and

overlapping. What we know will not cure the world. Sharing what we know will not save the world. Developing forms of leadership, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement that enrich and expand reconnection with stewardship has a chance to do so.

Taking a walk in the urban neighborhood surrounding the community center or in the natural grounds of the Bartram's Garden estate was designed to return the walkers to their presence in place. What we need, suggests Abram (2010), are new kinds of storytelling that direct us back to our physical senses in our locations. Returning our bodies to our senses in our embodied location refers to the practice of becoming more aware of our physical presence in the world around us and using this awareness to inform our actions. Nevertheless, sounds streaming in our ears while we are walking, step by step by step along a path in a particular place, destabilize the "where" of the "here we are" … and forcing them to come "from that other place" was intended to mirror the problematic binaries established by the exhibition design. What someone thinks they are experiencing and how they are understanding their environment is not so obvious. How different are these two places? What are the differences? What a natural environment "is" or "is not" varies depending on how one understands location, place, and space, and sound has the ability to help people to "hear" the "here" they are living. As Gershon (2019) eloquently interrogates, sensory understandings are forms of educational, relational politics; the interwoven visual, auditory, olfactory, and emotional encounters both challenge our senses of balance, place, and time, and implicitly ask why we carry "those" expectations into this collection of appellations.

The artist's statement, found on the website, proposed some initial questions to visitors:

- What is the relationship between LGBTQIA+ identities and the natural environment? In what ways does each serve as a metaphor for the other?
- What is a "natural" environment? One in which someone naturally fits? Something to do with nature?
- In what ways do our experiences of man-made "nature" and naturally man-made experience mirror assumptions that people make about identity, fluidity, change, and the natural itself?
- What sounds like nature to you???
- What is naturally sound (logical) in your experience?

Whether we are located on the grounds of Bartram's Garden or in the William Way Center neighborhood, the general soundscape is surprisingly similar! One would have thought that the grounds of Bartram's would be dominated by nature sounds—animals, birds, the wind rustling through the trees, the water lapping at the dock … While expectations for the streets of Philadelphia's Gayborhood promised traffic, construction, sirens, crowds … In actuality, the soundscapes are more similar than different! They are both dominated by the humming of motors, and the piercing refrains of birds! A potential binary of nature versus human-made sounds is revealed a false notion by the Queer Ecologies in this project! The "nature sounds" of Bartram's Garden and the "city scape" of the Gayborhood surrounding the William Way Center neither purely adhere to the expected binary nor blend or blur boundaries between the binary. Instead, the overwhelming sound of motors takes over virtually all experience in any soundwalk we attempt. And, despite the dominance of humming motors, a duet of birdcalls and wind is present at all times of the day, demanding respect in the face of the onslaught of never-ending motor sounds.

- Listen to the sounds of either location, where you are, or with the streaming sounds that have been collected through countless hours, at numerous times of day, in both locations, and you hear much the same thing! If there were ever a way to deconstruct a binary, this is surely it.

Susan Edgerton (2023) recalls the beginning of the pandemic lockdown, "walking around the city where all the closed businesses and offices looked like a kind of war zone … It was quiet. Animals began to retake the streets and parks" (p. 43). Susan believes the pandemic offered a unique opportunity, a glimpse in real time of a revitalized environmental commons. Yet, she evokes curriculum theorist Chet Bowers (2016) as she writes that we have returned to the pre-pandemic scene: we should not underestimate "the power of mythical thinking to distort awareness of what should be obvious to everyone … [including] how the exploitation of the natural environment is not leading to progress, but to greater scarcity and impoverishment" (p. 43). Contrasting "the pandemic experience" with the Queer Ecologies exhibition helps us hear Tyson Yunkaporta's (2021) point that the natural world is taking its own actions to restore balance. Can a soundart curriculum make this lesson better heard?

Human experience is rarely "in the moment." Whether a person is listening to the sounds of the Gayborhood while strolling the grounds of Bartram's Garden or streaming the sounds of the dock at Bartram's Garden at a location in the Gayborhood, the streaming sounds serve as a metaphor for typical human life, never only in their body's "place" at that precise clock time. Our experience of time and place folds in on itself in layers and intersections … While in one "place" we are thinking about what happened or will happen in another location. While listening to one sound, its meaning, and our understanding of it, is a reverberation of our lifetime of events that coexists with similar sounds. What we are seeing "now" unfolds through our memories and unconscious projections of our futures. What we are hearing now is very much the same sort of non-linear, layered tapestry of past, future, future dreams of possible pasts, and past dreams of possible futures. We are never really just "here" "now" but are always in, at, around, through, over, under, with, against, where, and when we have been, will be, were, never will be, and more.

Queer time captures well the disturbing *bukimi* of rapid climate change through its recognition that the traumatic anticipation of catastrophe does not match up with common cultural expectations for a sequence of milestones. Slow understanding "over time" of non-normative experience, recognition of community(ies), establishment of personal relationship(s) with one's identity(ies), and so on, form a cultural encounter that is importantly distinguished by the lack of an "appropriate" or expected sequence of experiences through which one achieves "maturity." All ecologies are "Queer Ecologies" (Anderson, et al., 2012; Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 2010; Seymour, 2020). Ecologies are relationships with Queer Time and Space.

Sound collection for the original installation, as is the case for these return visits, was somewhat random, or perhaps a better word is "serendipitous." I visited each site numerous times, at different times of the day, on different days across weeks of sound collection. Nevertheless, specific sound files and specific walking path locations were edited, curated, sequenced, and organized through a painstaking process similar to what a poet, painter, or sculpture might experience … working as a sound artist required me to consider how my work interacts with the conceptual motivation for the project itself, the subject(s) of my art, and the medium(s) that I am working with. Decisions about my placement of sounds within the particular walking paths created dialogues and references to other works of (sound) art in the history of this kind of artistic effort.

- Some may call this a "game" I am playing with art historians and critics. Others, I hope, recognize the specific choices as important commentary on my subject, the processes of sound art creation, and potential futures for sound, art, ecologies, queer theory, and so on. Do you think you heard a connection to another work of art, or a version of queer ecologies? Share this with others!

Now What? Past Futures, Present Pasts

Public pedagogy is amorphous and ephemeral. While the installation website continues, any one soundwalk encounter is gone in the very moment it happens. Some visitors listen to the soundwalks vicariously without even following the curated paths described on the site. Others engage with the website and its conceptual provocations without even attempting the intended re-embodied sensual experience of place and time. Any possible engagement is a curriculum; what can be said about this?

The curricular "content" of the project might be described as applying the metaphor of non-binary and fluid queer identities and life experiences to the embodied experience of place and time. Do we need to worry about demonstrating that content objectives have been reached when we create such a form of public pedagogy? Anecdotal evidence of observed site visitors confirms the disorientation caused by the common sounds from each location (mostly birds and motors) that belie the differences, and that call attention to the ways that both human and "natural" forces permeate space and time. The installation amplified the porous two-way flow among boundaries identified by Abram (2010) as critical. Initial disappointment at finding the sounds to be remarkably similar slowly dissolves for many into an epiphany: human impact is everywhere, a violent incursion symbolically represented here by the motors of industry, the motors of transportation, engines of mechanization; yet nature is always seeping into the cracks of civilization, as evidenced by the cutting sounds of bird calls even in the densest construction sites and through the blaring of music above 90 decibels. How might this be leveraged for future extrapolation?

The original installation mostly disrupted location and facilitated recognition that a person is never "only" in one place at one time—we are always in this place recalling other times in this same place, projecting ourselves in this place in futures, experiencing this moment mediated by memories of other places and times similar or different, not able to be in this place if we are listening to sounds from the "other" place, and so on. This article further disrupts the location in time for the theorist-artist. Imagining a future "complicated conversation" inspired by the Queer Ecologies experience, I struggle to hear memories of first thoughts about the initial proposal, the joy of receiving funding and purchasing good recording equipment, the countless hours of recording and selecting excerpts, the design and making of the website, and previous reflections, with my hopes for future projects that will call people to assembly, action, and social change. What stories are told, were told, and might be crafted in the future, about the future, about our pasts?

I honor the Indigenous de-colonization of education as differentiating among "proper stories," "wrong stories," the "law of the land," and the "right stories" (Yunkaporta, 2021, n.p.). "Proper story" is a living landscape model permitting the belief that you can make predictions, delineating limits and obligations of your relationship with the land and teaching how to move with it as it transforms over time. It is an ongoing aggregate of the knowledge of many people who speak for different aspects and diverse bioregions. This approach promotes decentered governance

structures and distribution of power, knowledge, and resources throughout social systems in patterns that align with the complex ecosystems we have inhabited over hundreds of millennia. It is in this sense that "story" speaks the law of and in the land. The "right story" regenerates each entity of its landscape in perpetuity, including our own species, conceived as the custodial species of the Earth. "Wrong stories" take on the character of gossip, facilitating curses, illusions, bad faith, and denial. When wrong stories become the baseline data for modelling, self-termination algorithms blossom in all landscapes all over the planet, including digital landscapes. Nature eventually takes care of these lawless combinations, imposing limits. This natural law acts as a kind of immune system response to multipolar traps in which bad actors seek to misuse landscape for personal advantage, forcing others to adopt the same behaviors at scale or be outcompeted.

We pour our energy and convictions into public pedagogy actions. And then we want to sustain such work through a belief in its efficacy. What other "measures of value" are available to the curriculum maker in this sort of work, other than the self-satisfaction of pursuing art for art's sake? Surely, the joys of soundart making, securing funding, inclusion in the curated exhibition, even in saving a few of the posters are all meaningful. But how do we know if there are people out there who went to the historic garden on a pleasant summer day, happened upon the sign, used their cellphone to listen as they walked, and now are talking about the environment differently with friends, or voting differently on climate-related policies, or choosing a climate-related career path? What forms of motivation do we have, other than to share our personal crisis of self-confidence at an education conference?

Sound's Wrong/Sound Ethics/Listening to the Land

When we take sounds out of their place and by proxy our sensation of sound away from our presence in that place, what sort of trauma are we performing upon these sounds? Maintaining the porous boundaries necessitates a shift away from the human hubris enacted by assuming humans can "own" any sound they "capture." The language there signals an important issue: How can we become more accountable to the factual reality that our lives and welfare are subsidized by a violent and unsustainable (that is, colonial) system, while gesturing toward different horizons, horizons beyond that offered within that system (Stein et al. 2020; Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022)? Stein and colleagues (2020) strategize a simultaneous unlearning of the assumptions of that system and their associated modes of thinking, being, feeling, sensing, desiring, and relating, as well as learning to be taught by other ways of thinking, being, feeling, sensing, desiring, and relating without repeating harmful colonial patterns of engagements across difference (including extraction, appropriation, instrumentalization, romanticization, and consumption). What are the ethics of appropriating sounds of a location for our (perhaps altruistic) intentions, for our own creative (well-meaning, pedagogical) productions? If they reconstruct ways of working and knowing endemic to the very ecologically devastating epistemologies and metaphors responsible for our current traumatic *bukimi*, we need to shift from them to new relationships and new ethical principles. If we insist on a cost-benefit analysis that justifies the use of sound files in the service of "awareness" or "provoking change," we are in essence preserving the unsustainable economics.

Just as visitors to the *Queer Ecologies* exhibition expect to hear entertaining differences between the sounds of their embodied location and those of the other site, I return to the urban center and the grounds of the historic garden expecting to discern in sounds one year later the changes wrought by a lack of human action on climate and environment. We are deaf to reality.

We refuse to listen to the trauma, finding comfort (for now) in our air-conditioned, air-purified buildings. The history of sound art in general seems to be a collective pursuit of impact, to serve a public pedagogic role (Appelbaum, 2019).

The very juxtaposition of sound in the liminal terrains of imaginative and creative efforts, scientific data, medium of expression, craft and technical skill, and social interaction, as aesthetic rumination, advocacy or abstract investigation, calls into question the boundaries of conventional scholarship and supposed scholarly distance, the ethics of art, and the relationships between the artist or scientist or craftsman or advocate and their worlds, material, social, political, cultural, and ideological. Is "impact," therefore, a primary criterion of sound as technology of knowledge, as medium of art, as tool of advocacy, as location of inquiry? Can we shift our epistemologies and methods toward strategies of unlearning, as suggested by Stein and colleagues? Manipulating sounds to create a "story," as if the sounds themselves are neutral, is not going to work well. It is not as if the sound editor is the location of the ethics alone. Nor is it ethical to displace responsibility onto the visitors, who use or hear the soundwalks according to their own interests and pleasures. Yet we cannot ignore the ways that coloniality grows and flourishes in music, sound art, and sound studies of any kind, as much as any other social institutions and flows of consumer products, knowledges, and cultural capital.

Tyson Yunkaporta (2020) proposes that we listen to the "yarns" that emerge from a group mind rather than write our own stories to compare. Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvaez (2022) shift my attention from soundscapes to "existencescapes," which embraces me within reciprocal sensations of my place, more than using one of my senses, such as hearing, to guide a cross-sensory way of being "here." The "problem" with sound art as public pedagogy, if there is one, is the way that the "curriculum" distances the listener from the place, even in place. The message has been there all along: listen to the trauma of humans treating the place as a commodity. Buzzing motors and blaring horns interrupting the ecosystem of the nature preserve along the river. Transportation and multistory fortresses collaborating on the insistence that culture unfolds independently of the animals, plants, air and water between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. "You are looking for the way home, without realizing you never left," says Brilliant Miller (2020, n.p.), and Tyson Yunkaporta agrees, elaborating that looking for the connections you see in your experience of the land enables you to live in a new way with that land. Our listening to how the rivers and rain, wind and mountains, hear *us* brings us to knowledge rather than trauma.

Cities expect unlimited growth based on finite material, combined with by necessity outsourcing the consumption of materials beyond themselves (Yunkaporta 2020). In some ways, cities define civilization, that is, contemporary human existence. Receiving signals from the land helps us see that cities push the pain and trauma away from people who can't see or hear them. Outsourcing pain is temporary. You will eventually hear the screams and, then, feel the pain yourself. I can create soundart for myself and others, but I probably should not imagine it as a transformative public pedagogy unless it takes the form of transforming our ways of listening to our place. But of course, I knew this before I even proposed the curated soundwalks. This is not a tale of progressive knowing moving through linear time.

In anticipation of the gathering monsoon, Harshavardhan Bhat (2022) begins with the body and its senses, the "stickiness" of living inside an ocean that has taken to the air (p. 221). The Monsoon is all around us, through seasons and cycles, worlds of wetness very different from a personified Rain, yet still establishing relationships with us. Stickiness refers to a kind of clinginess, a dependency, a fondness of sorts, an undetachable form of trouble and something that is also sensed between different beings, processes, and materials. It is an embodied connection

with monsoonal atmosphere and is a relational descriptor that can be used to deploy ambiguities and uncertainties opened up by the monsoon: its weather, climates, waters, relations, and so on (Bhat, 2022, p. 221). Bhat's personal experience of Monsoon connects with others' stories, not by individualizing the Monsoon as a thing to which one relates, but as a sticky collection of cosmologies, approaches, materials, and processes by monsoonal stickiness itself. It is through this characteristic of many different artifacts—rains, winds, airs, relations—that stickiness emerges with its own methods and implications. "To study the monsoon," writes Bhat, "to follow atmospheric concerns, to collaborate on it, is in many ways also about the monsoon making presence and study possible" (p. 222). It seems to instigate conversations with "multispecies others" (Bubandt et al., 2022; Khan et al. 2023; Kirksey & Helmreich 2010).

I began with sounds that engulf me, saving them and treasuring them to share with others. I turned them into things rather than listening to how they changed my life in place. Bhat began with the quotidian relationship he lived in Dehli, noting how winter conditions for thick, soft, smoggy, misty air came together to establish respiratory allergies to nothing in particular. Aerosols as matters in and of the air contribute temporalities that sparked Bhat's interest in the ways they swayed the monsoon in various ways, collecting, remaking, and being made by them. Agricultural burning, postharvest rice stubble, and their increased additions to air following industrial "improvements" are examples of what is called anthropogenic atmosphere factors that transform monsoon metabolism and becoming ("Anthropogenic" is a term for environmental changes caused by people.). The haze of these anthropogenic clouds participates in disrupting what the monsoon becomes, both as concept and as lived reality. Bhat learned through his grandmother's stories that monsoons (which she referred to as the "time of rains") were in conversation with other times of rains before and yet to come. His mother has had mixed success in predicting the extent of monsoons from year to year yet notes that she is "still doing better than they are" (p. 219), by which she means state institutions. She notes that the scientists learned the importance of monsoon records and predictions from the colonized, "suggesting that the cosmologies of power that held weather knowledges were possibly collected and reassembled from one system of power to another," in the development of colonial science, and monsoon histories do in fact often speak of the role of upper-caste assistants and data collectors in the assembling of colonial science (p. 219).

Steven Khan, Michael Bowen and Douglas Karrow (2023) also evoke rising anthropogenic changes. They wonder about the effects on "the breath in our bones" while drawing upon an analogy with the *abeng*, Ghanian for an animal's "horn" (p. 1). The blowing of the horn in the West Indies called enslaved people to the cane fields and allowed Maroon armies to communicate among themselves (Cliff, 1984/1995). Khan, Bowen and Karrow (2023) "take 'the breath in our bones' literally, that is, how the literal atmosphere through its poetic meanderings comes into the myriad and endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful of some of our multispecies kin" (p. 1). They experience the

> Anthropocene, like the *abeng* as a call to gather, to band together, resist and assist others in their struggle for freedom against current *sequalae* of infections by pathogenic plantation structures, logics, embodiments, and systems, which reduce all of life and life's processes—the breath in our bones—to economic and exchange value. (Khan et al., 2023, p. 28)

They are impatient and worry that curriculum planning and evaluation distracts from the urgency of the *abeng*. Yunkaporta, with Khan, Bowen and Karrow, and with Bhat, Topa and Narvaez, hear

the curriculum already present, without mediation by the artist, collected artifacts of our everyday life experience that function as touchstones for new relationships, at once a call of urgency to communal activity.

The meadow on Bartram's Garden's land feels the stickiness of barge motors on the Schuylkill River, trains rushing along their tracks, air conditioning condensers for the visitors' center, and chomping footfalls of the sound artist exploring the wooden platform walkway over the swampy slope along the river. The streetscape near the community center feels the stickiness of hawks swooping down to catch a rat scampering in the alley, a pair of workers speaking to their cellphones about plans for the evening. The singing birds are allergic to the sticky fumes from buses and cars and steamy dryer vents from the apartments, seeking solace in the shade of chimneys or the leaves of a tree. I trace the paths I chose a year ago, hearing both the sounds streaming on the website from the other landscape and those of the living more-than-human participants here and now. Sounds from the past? Sounds of a future we might be able to hear one day? Time and place are actually *one* (Yunkaporta, 2020).

It's hotter this year. The air makes me cough, orange and red against the sky. I hear birds and motors and engines and horns. I hear wind blowing through the trees, whistling through the alleys. The recorder makes the wind sound louder than the way it sounds when I listen as I walk. I hear the birds more in the recordings. I think they are pleading with us to stop driving cars and cooling our homes with so much energy from fossil fuels.

Notes

1. Inhabitants of Hiroshima used the Japanese *bukimi* (weird, ghastly, unearthly) to describe the experience of impending catastrophe combined with uneasy, continued good fortune in the months before the nuclear bombing (Lifton, 1967; Saint-Amour, 2000). Theorizing as *bukimi* enables us, too, to name this nightmare of alarm, fear, and celebratory delay.

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From *Currere* to *Ambire*
An Ambient Curriculum

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It is 5 p.m. on a Thursday in October, still light enough in the early fall for a walk

fall of 2020

the soft whistle of wind instruments and chimes honks of traffic

string instruments thrum ever-present rumble of buses

there on the threshold of the park dissonance

orchestral sounds unceasing, unrelenting blare of ambulance sirens

the way the sun glints over the water

the rustling in the trees the lilting tones of a flute

at the edge

beyond this one the sounds skip ahead

crisp autumn air

months of teaching online rush to return to school nauseating pit of election anxiety

the makeshift hospital on the east field.

And then a warm weekend in November

a jazzy trumpet the Frederick Douglass sculpture at the traffic circle

drivers tooting their horns in a call and response with passersby

the sidewalk

one more body amid the crowds in the unseasonably warm air

Curricular Conversations in a 'New Normal'

THE SCENE IS NEW YORK CITY, autumn of 2020. After a term that ended with the chaos and anguish of the coronavirus pandemic, schools are mere months into various states of teaching through in-person, remote, and hybrid settings and navigating school closures and quarantine policies. Ms. S's school is set on returning to in-person teaching. It is safe, they say, though she has never felt more unsafe and fearful for her more vulnerable students and their family members. "No, you're not listening!" she wants to shout. If they heard, they gave no indication; Ms. S has "never felt more gaslit." She finds herself in the classroom some weeks later, crestfallen at the desks in rows with plexiglass between them—even as the privilege of having resources such as plexiglass dividers creates a knot in her gut. She swore she would not be this teacher with desks in rows, she mutters to herself, as she fiddles with wires and mics. She is crushed when her fourth graders joining virtually tell her to mute them so they can better hear her. After teaching to silent screens for months, it pains her to see bodies in person and then be required to enforce silence because to shout and sing is to increase the risk of spreading a deadly disease. How does she navigate this scene in relation to the progressive principles of her teacher preparation program and commitment to social justice?

Feeling unheard and missing the sounds of her students, Ms. S left her apartment one day after school to listen to *SOUNDWALK* by Ellen Reid (2020), an orchestral audio-scape in Central Park. The poem that opened this essay was derived from Ms. S's account of that experience. This article considers how this piece of site-specific sound art enters the complicated conversation of curriculum—a conversation that is as aesthetic and playful as it is dialogic and biographical (Latta, 2012; Pinar, 2008). When everyone is worn out and just trying to survive, it might seem Pollyannaish to argue for aesthetic explorations. It was a year that readers of the *Washington Post* described as exhausting, lost, chaotic, relentless, surreal, stifling, suffocating: a "dumpster fire" (Goren et al., 2020)—they might as well have been speaking from the perspective of teachers, school leaders, parents, students.

Berlant (2011) used the term "crisis ordinary" to refer to this state of protracted trauma, when the 'new normal' is an ordinary marked by ongoing crisis and its wake. A new ordinary created by crisis could be characterized by affects associated with the politics of trauma, which others in this special issue might take up as they intersect with sounds: grief, depression, anxiety, anger, numbness, and a general feeling of just trying to survive and get through it. As Berlant wrote *Cruel Optimism*, the context was the AIDS pandemic; 9/11, which precipitated the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the then-ongoing Iraq War and the War on Afghanistan; and the Great Recession of 2008. Berlant might just as well have been writing about the coronavirus pandemic though, when they observed that "mediated political sphere in the United States transmits news 24/7 from a new ordinary created by crisis, in which life seems reduced to discussions about tactics for survival and who is to blame" (p. 225). Through the pandemic, teaching life became centrally concerned with tactics for survival and who was to blame: face masks, hand washing, six feet, Fauci, Trump, administrators, teachers.

The parallels in these contexts—'new normal' or "crisis ordinary"—led me to Berlant's (2011) essay, "On the Desire for the Political," in *Cruel Optimism*, an analysis of how an individual and a body politic might maintain a desire for the political while detaching from a relationship of cruel optimism to politics as usual. Cruel optimism is a structure of attachment to something that, while promising to improve a situation, hinders those aims. For example, cruel optimism structured both an attachment to returning to in-person learning *and* an attachment to stalling that return.

Neither created space for collective re-imagining of the purpose and forms of schooling, for disrupting patterns of privilege and injustice working against those aims; neither resolved the impasse. In such an impasse, Berlant turned to three pieces of sound art as "cases in which the body politic in the politically depressive position tries to break the double-bind of cruel optimism, *not* reentering the normative public sphere while seeking a way, nonetheless, to maintain its desire for the political" (p. 230). In other words, when politics as usual are not fulfilling their promise, these artists use sonic interventions to sustain alternative ways of being political together.

They create alternative political objects, relationships, attachments. Berlant drew on the work of Cynthia Madansky, the Surveillance Camera Players, and Ultra-Red: activism-oriented art interested in the sounds of silence. Berlant argued that, "literally, by changing the sensorial experience of immediate things in the world [these works] have interfered with that pattern of treading water in the impasse" (p. 249). This is not to say that all sound art "interferes with the feedback loop whose continuity is at the core of whatever normativity has found traction" and secures an alternative genre of being in the world (p. 249). Instead, I suggest Berlant's analysis of sonic strategies of contemporary art, in a historical present marked by ongoing crisis and the upending of any sense of 'normal,' has remarkable resonance with experiencing Ellen Reid's (2020) *SOUNDWALK*, during a global pandemic, in the midst of the United States' political turmoil and the chaos of schooling and being a student/parent/teacher in New York City and the effort to keep going on in the midst of it all, to find modes for enduring and for resisting returns to a normal that was already not working.

This "new crisis ordinary," wrote Berlant (2011), "is engendering secular forms of something like 'ambient citizenship'—politics as a scene in which the drama of the distribution of affect/noise meets up with scenarios of *movement*" (p. 230, italics original). As an amorphous contact zone, an affective atmosphere produced by sounds and movement, ambient citizenship draws our attention to "the way the political suffuses the ordinary" (p. 230). Ambient citizenship is a way of thinking about political belonging in ordinary scenes at the intersection of sound, movement, and affect. To understand what *SOUNDWALK* might do to and for curriculum designers and educators, I extend Berlant's argument into an exploration of "ambient curriculum" to get at the way *the curricular* suffuses the ordinary and how sound contributes to and disrupts the stuckness Ms. S faced in navigating the challenges to her curricular commitments at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

From *Currere* to *Ambire*

Pinar's (2008) *currere* is a method of self-study bound up in time. It involves an examination of the past and imagination of the future to better evaluate, act within, and "awaken from the nightmare we are living in the present" (p. 5). Pinar's (2008) *currere,* a journey run linearly, if recursively, turns to *ambire*, in Berlant's (2011) formulation. Berlant drew on the meaning of ambience's Latin meaning, *ambire:* "to go around," as in surrounding and soliciting for votes, as in a movement around, a gathering, a surround, a contact zone. Emphasizing *ambire* instead of *currere* though suggests that, instead of a course run (by humans), curriculum runs around us. To go from *currere* to *ambire* is to "approach the assemblage itself as inherently pedagogical" (Wozolek, 2020, p. 122). Ambient curriculum elaborates on this pedagogical assemblage, and elucidates how, when educational leaders raise alarms over "learning loss," they miss the way that students are already engaged in curricula all *around* them: at home, on social

media, on the news, in conversations with friends, at workplaces, on the bus, in the skatepark, in their bedroom. The idea of an ambient curriculum builds on decades of Reconceptualist and critical curriculum scholarship that theorized the informal, hidden, and null curricula. Even Ms. S's own teacher education, which likely reinforced the separation of "school knowledge" as it gave language for these categories, becomes part of the "ambience" of Ms. S's identity as a teacher and understandings of how learning happens (Britzman, 1991/2003). Scholarship in public pedagogy also advances a critical understanding of how we learn constantly from our surrounding environment, materials, media, and social relations (Ellsworth, 2005; Sandlin et al., 2010). More recent works on educational assemblages (Wozolek, 2020), ethologies (Snaza, 2019), and meshes (Springgay & Truman, 2017) emphasize the more-than-human, affective, shifting nature of curriculum, in constant intra-action with the human subject. Ambient curriculum's intervention is to bring together an analysis of sound and movement with knowledge and power, to unsettle and expand what is included in curricular conversations.

Attending to informal and immanent forms of knowledge, curriculum theorists have long urged scholars in the field of curriculum studies to take up sound metaphors. Ted Aoki (1991), for example, argued for increased attention to sound and sonic metaphors in curriculum theorizing, dispelling Western ocular-centrism and opening the field to different ways that curriculum circulates. Janet Miller (2005) understood silence as the ambient noise of oppression; something to be interrupted by voice. Drawing on the earlier work of W.E.B. DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper, Gershon (2017) demonstrated the curricular significance of the onto-epistemological entanglement of sound and the human subject. While much scholarship on sound and curriculum focuses on music education, or using strategies of music making (improvisation) as metaphors for curriculum and pedagogy, or on music as a text (song lyrics, etc.) related to class content, Gershon (2017) emphasized the constant physical and affective presence of sound:

> No matter where you are or what you're doing, you're gaining sonic information. And, regardless of what those sounds mean or their impact on your person, just as you are but a small part of the deep matrix of sonority, you are at once a node in sound ecologies and a contributor to these ever-emergent, undulating vibrations, always a medium and a media. (p. 26)

The onto-epistemological entanglement of sound and the human subject means that sound has always been part of how we know the world. This can be biological, as when tinnitus or loss of hearing induced by very loud noises affects one's orientation to people and space. It is sometimes preconscious, or affective: our body reacts before our mind thinks when a sudden sound startles us. The interpretation of sounds as dangerous or soothing, as appropriate or not, as taken-for-granted background noise or a noteworthy shift in the atmosphere of a room, is socio-culturally conditioned (Robinson, 2020; Stoever, 2016). Dernikos et al. (2020)'s "affective scratch," which drew in turn on Weheliye's (2005) study of sound technologies and modernity, introduced a sonic metaphor of interruption—the nails on chalkboard feeling, the groove of a vinyl disc—that brings the potential of an ambient curriculum to disrupt the "backgrounding" of dominant interpretations of sound into relief. As "ambient citizenship registers the normative distinctions in terms of who has the formal and informal rights to take up soundspace" (p. 231), ambient curriculum too registers the intersection of sound, movement, power, and *knowledge.*

Ambient Sound, a Curricular Surround

To consider the intervention of *SOUNDWALK* (Reid, 2020) into an ambient curriculum, I turn to how sound scholars have discussed sound art and ambience. Brandon LaBelle (2015) also defined sound as inherently spatial and social, produced from vibrations moving through space, bouncing off bodies and the built and natural environment, and moving through and beyond bodies (the bass of a car passing on the street that causes my writing desk to vibrate; the rumble of a subway that rattles the classroom's windows). For LaBelle, "the sonorous world always presses in, adding extra intensities by which we locate ourselves" (p. xiii). LaBelle traced the development of sound art to performance and installation art in the 1960s and 1970s: art that sought to push the boundaries (within the Western canon) of site, participation, duration (e.g., John Cage, Brian Eno, James Turrell). LaBelle (2015) argued that the "ultimate contribution of sound art [is] to make audible the very promise of noise to deliver the unknowable" (p. xviii). Such a contribution would be a curricular one indeed, though not all agree with LaBelle that sound art succeeded in that intent. This claim is rooted in a model of ambience as the dissolution of foreground and background, a feature ironically *foregrounded* in the ambient music of Brian Eno. Such an emphasis on ambience as diffuse atmospheric effect threatens to position the audience as inert passive matter and to do away with difference and agency. This dissolution is known and unknown, foreground and background, agency and passivity and is what Seth Kim-Cohen (2016) took issue with in *Against Ambience and Other Essays*. Dismissive of this impulse toward the lure of knowing what cannot be known—itself a claim to certainty and mastery—in the "ambient" style of conceptual art, Kim-Cohen wrote, "This ambient moment is a last gasp, a burst of longing for what we know is lost … I thought we had reconciled ourselves to our irredeemable immanence" (p. 76). The desire for this dissolution between known and unknown is there when ambience is evoked in the work of Brian Eno and others in the genre of ambient music. But Kim-Cohen argues whether such a dissolution is actually true of Eno's work; I would argue similarly of *SOUNDWALK,* as what is unheard until the participant connects to the GPS-enabled score becomes foregrounded and as the listener contributes to the composition through their unique movement patterns in the park.

Kim-Cohen resolved the tension between the promise of these dissolutions and its actuality by turning to Tim Morton's notion of *ambient poetics*, which highlights the "and/norness" of sound's being and appearance (p. 30). Kim-Cohen elaborated on this *and/norness* of ambience:

> When Morton uses the term "ambient," he is not suggesting an undifferentiated wholeness. Rather, ambience is an experience of nowness that does not imply singularity or consistency. On the contrary, it is multiply multiple: every entity is already double—being and appearance—and ambience contains a proliferation of entities. (p. 30)

Ambient music's diffuseness is both foreground *and* background, but to force it to be one or the other at a single moment in time misses the point. As Manning (2016) put it, "[a culture of affirmation]'s noises are not so easily parsed as positive or negative, not so easily positioned or understood" (p. 211). Ambience doesn't deliver the unknowable, but suggests that something else might be known. An ambient curriculum is constituted by this quality of "and/norness," a scene of sound, movement, and affect that is both attached to and apart from objects of desire that are never solid or singular to begin with, whether politics or curriculum. An ambient curriculum operates through more sensory pedagogy and sensuous curriculum (Ellsworth, 2005; Gershon, 2011), where it's not so easy to put into words what you know.

Sounds, Walks, and Slow Ontologies

Ms. S's experience with SOUNDWALK was derived from my dissertation research, which looked more broadly at how participatory art events, the broad genres of new public art and social practice art, might suggest ways of rethinking the role of aesthetics and materiality in the complicated conversations of curriculum (Ellsworth, 2005; Latta, 2012) and intervene in the everyday assemblages of violence, and possibility, enmeshing schools (Wozolek, 2020). News of the coronavirus pandemic began circulating the day I proposed my study. By the next week, schools were closed, and the city ordered residents to stay indoors. I thought I might delay the start of this project by a few weeks and then a few months. As the next academic year began, it was clear I would need to change the study's design. No one was gathering in person for relational art events, and I certainly would not ask my participants—students and alumni affiliated with a school of education, many current teachers, curriculum designers, and curriculum researchers—to do so. I did not expect sound to play the role it did in this: how ocular-centric of me.

As artists and art institutions faced the same challenge, many turned to sound as a solution for distanced, shared experiences of art. Audio-narrated history walks and sound art proliferated in New York City. One of those projects was *SOUNDWALK: Central Park* (Reid, 2020), a GPS-enabled, site-specific piece of sound art composed by Ellen Reid and commissioned and performed by the New York Philharmonic, as well as the Young People's Chorus of New York City and the jazz ensemble Poole and the Gang. All 843 acres of the park are covered by sound cells (geographic circles of various sizes within the park) with distinct orchestral scores, jazz compositions, and spoken word poetry. Listeners access *SOUNDWALK* through a free app, typically using headphones, and compose their own experience as they move through the park; each unique path will result in a different sonic experience. A small group of curriculum designers and educators, including myself, took part in *SOUNDWALK* asynchronously and shared our experiences over Whatsapp, Padlet, and Zoom. In the following discussion, I follow one upper elementary school teacher, Ms. S, as she participated in *SOUNDWALK* while navigating the pandemics' disruptions to her principles of teaching and learning. Through her case, from which the introductory ambient-poem is derived, I sought to understand how participatory sound art might affect an educator's relationship to knowledge, particularly in the context of widespread trauma felt throughout the first year of the coronavirus pandemic.

As a genre of sound art or public pedagogy, soundwalks involve an engagement with environmental sounds or what's commonly understood as ambient sound. Andra McCartney (2014) traces the notion of "soundwalk" to the *World Soundscape Project*, based in Canada in the 1970s. Many of these soundwalks involved the participant as a recorder-researcher, listening and capturing environmental sound. Walks might happen in natural or urban environments, in group or individual settings. Hildegaard Westerkamp, a feminist composer associated with the WSP, invited participants to record sounds in public spaces according to guidelines in a score—a practice seen in the work of John Cage and Pauline Oliveros, as well as artists in a range of media influenced by the Fluxus movement, from Yoko Ono to education and arts researchers Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman. McCartney's (2014) *The Soundwalking Interactions Project* restaged one of Westerkamp's scores, as part of a series of sound installations, interactions, and collaborations that underscored how a soundwalk is composed by unique arrangements of listeners' bodies, sensibilities, negotiations, and interactions with their environment (McCartney & Pacquette, 2012). Similar to works in this tradition of soundwalks, Reid's (2020) SOUNDWALK involves the listener and environment (in this case, Central Park), in the

composition of the piece, through the listener's movement in the park, how long they stay in a single sound cell, which cell they move to next, and the conditions of ambient sound at the time of their experience. The role of listening in the performance of *The Soundwalking Interactions Project* and *SOUNDWALK* owes much to Pauline Oliveros's deep listening practices, developed from her sensitivity to the role of the body, affect, and environment in listening, as a feminist and lesbian composer. Reid herself overlapped with Oliveros in a year-long workshop for new pieces with the Wild Up band and The Industry Opera Company. Oliveros was cited as a "thought mentor for the group" of emerging composers, who "love the way she heard music in the world, where she found it—everywhere around us all, and how she approached all new music as practicum in finding ourselves in nature" (Rountree, 2013). This approach to music "everywhere around" and Oliveros's own commitment to the knowledge all sounds involve dovetails with an *ambient curriculum.*

Movement is a crucial feature of ambience, and soundwalks literalize *ambire*. Recalling Berlant's (2011) explanation, "as movement, as ambit, [ambience] is akin to ambition (whose Latin root means 'to go around,' as in soliciting for votes), but even then, it's a gathering modality" (p. 230). Soundwalks place a particular emphasis on listening in conjunction with movement through a space. The significance of movement and gathering resonated with Springgay and Truman's (2019) critical scholarship and research-creation on walking as methodology and pedagogy, which emphasizes an understanding of

> movement as inherent in all matter, endlessly differentiating. Movement as force and vibration resist capture. This understanding of movement is indeterminate, dynamic, and immanent and intimately entangled with transmaterial theories and practices. (p. 6)

This indeterminancy, dynamism, and entanglement of movement with matter was critical for thinking about how to approach *SOUNDWALK* methodologically. As participants engaged *SOUNDWALK* asynchronously, we each experienced a different sequence and duration of musical scores; we each experienced *SOUNDWALK* at different times, making the material environment unique for each of us. In short, each participant co-created their own ambient curriculum as they walked through the park and listened. Photos, text, and transcripts from Whatsapp and Zoom conversations generated a composite sensory image of those experiences.

According to McCartney (2014), "Soundwalks take the everyday action of walking, and everyday sounds, and bring the attention of the audience to these often ignored events, practices, and processes" (p. 215). Early soundwalks placed an emphasis on teaching audiences to slow down, listen to, appreciate, and analyze their acoustic environments. This slowness became part of the methodological orientation of this research, aligning with what Ulmer (2017) calls a "slow ontology" for qualitative inquiry. Not only does *SOUNDWALK* compel a kind of slowing down in space, the effects of the pandemic on academic production (particularly a dissertation) compelled an investment in slow scholarship. Ms. S spontaneously visited *SOUNDWALK* in October, when the event was first suggested, and then inadvertently missed an effort for the group of participants to listen to *SOUNDWALK* together in November. I also experienced *SOUNDWALK* multiple times over the course of nine months—twice alone and twice with colleagues or students. As Ulmer does in "Writing Slow Ontology," I write with the local landscape—in SOUNDWALK's case, Central Park—and sensory images to evoke the ambient curriculum during which Ms. S listened to *SOUNDWALK* and in which the orchestral score participated. For months, I walked while listening to recordings of my conversations with participants on Zoom and while listening to

SOUNDWALK in Central Park. These were, in a way, my ambient curriculum—my surround of audio data, through which I moved and with which I thought. During my writing process, I turned to these audio clips again and uploaded them to an audio editing program. I slowly sifted through fragments that, for me, evoked this atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, celebration, and wonder. The following soundclip contains audio from *SOUNDWALK*, alongside Ms. S's reflections on her visit to Central Park and audio from other participants. For me as a researcher, these creative efforts were "differently productive" (Ulmer, 2017, p. 201) and allowed me to inhabit the ambient curriculum in which Ms. S was situated—my hope is they evoke some of that ambience and spark other reflections for the reader here.

Listen to SOUNDWALK alongside environmental recordings and participant audio clips.

Scenes from *SOUNDWALK: Central Park*

It is 5 p.m. on a Thursday in October, still light enough in the early fall for a walk—the only activity, except for groceries and the periodic protest, for which she permits herself to leave the apartment in the fall of 2020. As she approaches from the east side, the soft whistle of wind instruments and chimes lures her further in, as the honks of traffic recede. String instruments contribute their thrum, nearly masking the ever-present rumble of buses now behind her. She stands there for a moment, on the threshold of the Park. The dissonance between these orchestral sounds and the unceasing, unrelenting blare of ambulance sirens stills her. As she continues her walk, she takes a left instead of her usual right. She cannot say what caused her to veer this way: perhaps it is the way the sun glints over the water or the rustling in the trees or the lilting tones of a flute. She glances down at her phone. The GPS marker on an aerial map of the park shows her location at the edge of a pulsing pink circle, and she wonders what the lighter crescent beyond this one might proffer. The sounds skip ahead. She finds her chest expands with crisp autumn air, her shoulders rise, her feet spring more with each step. Her breath puffs out a bit in the cold air ahead of her. She walks forward feeling a sense of excited anticipation, of curiosity and wonder that she had forgotten in the exhausting months of teaching online amid her school's rush to return to school, the nauseating pit of election anxiety, the grief and anger at relatives who send articles filled with falsehoods, the sight of the makeshift hospital on the east field. She will re-enter that so-called "new normal," but for now, she is here. Later, she describes the feeling as "solace." Ms. S calls her mom as she walks back toward home. Conversations with family on the other end of the political spectrum had been difficult, but she said, "Mom, you have to visit when this is all over and experience this; you'd love it."

Nearly a month later, on a warm weekend in November, she is crossing back through the Park from the northwest side: a familiar and pleasant path from the university to her apartment. If she had plugged into that same app and put on her headphones, she might have heard a jazzy

trumpet sound, a nod to the Frederick Douglass sculpture at the traffic circle by this intersection. She deliberately leaves her headphones in her bag; she does not even recall the app with the music that changed as she walked through the Park a month ago. Instead, she is caught up listening to the drivers tooting their horns in a call and response with passersby on the sidewalk, an exuberance that cannot be contained at the election's final call as the Saturday celebrations in the city spill over to Sunday.[1] She strides through the park, just one more body amid the crowds that have assembled to revel in the news, in the unseasonably warm air, in what might be the last chance to gather in a group with family and friends outdoors for a volleyball game, a birthday party, a high school photoshoot, until winter passes, and, with it, they hope, the rancor of this political climate and the devastation wrought by another wave of the pandemic. The crowds are oblivious to the composed soundscape, having created their own, and she has forgotten it too, every cell of her skin soaking in the chance to join them.

Feeling Like it Might Get Better

When Ms. S left her apartment to listen to *SOUNDWALK* for the first time, after the school day ended in October of 2020, she sought a feeling that things might be okay, if not better—that something else might still be possible. Anxiety and grief accumulated in the wait for a verdict on Breonna Taylor's case, and the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the morgues outside Mount Sinai Hospital, and the 2020 election debate coverage that Ms. S's students insisted on tuning into during lunch. The coziness cast by the twinkling lights strung in her apartment from where she strove to creatively teach and care for her students could not dispel the pressing sense of doom; nor was participation in periodic protests a sufficient outlet for pent up political feelings. Berlant (2011) observed that

> amidst all of the chaos, crisis, and injustice in front of us, the desire for alternative filters that produce the sense—if not the scene—of a more livable and intimate sociality is another name for the desire for the political. (p. 227)

The orchestral sounds accessed through *SOUNDWALK* provided an alternative filter to the shouts of outraged headlines and the despairing, nearly eerie silence of online teaching. The music in Ms. S's earbuds and the trees lining the empty paths of the park created an intimate, if solitary, experience. A performance for one, it still produced "*the sense*—if not the scene—of a more livable and intimate sociality" (Berlant, 2011, p. 227) and made it possible to conceive of occupying common public spaces with others: to desire the political again, to desire teaching and curriculum again as Ms. S stared at seats set up in rows separated by six feet; the classroom she swore to herself that she would never have in her progressive teacher preparation program years ago.

An ambient curriculum is ambulatory and ambitious—it goes around, surrounds, gathers. What an ambient curriculum gathers are the ways of knowing created and conveyed by "ordinary affects … a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges" (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1–2). In *SOUNDWALK's* response to the melancholy mood pervading NYC throughout most of 2020, its collision with the celebrations following the November 2020 election results, and design as a solitary experience, *SOUNDWALK's* ordinary affects consist of "public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of" (Berlant,

2011, pp. 1–2). For Ms. S, as she listened to *SOUNDWALK*, those ordinary affects included the strain of relationship with relatives whose politics differed from her own; the stress of teaching through the pandemic and taking care of herself; the concern for her students; and the anxiety of the 2020 election. A few weeks later, after Biden defeated Trump in the Presidential election of 2020, Ms. S walked through the park again. This time, she forgot about *SOUNDWALK*, joining the city's revelry. It was the soundscape of people gathering in groups and celebrating, the soundscape of a "scene of a more livable and intimate sociality" (Berlant, 2011, p. 227) that fed and fulfilled (at least in that moment) a desire for the political and hope that her classroom might again meet her curricular commitments.

Affects and Knowledge in an Ambient Curriculum

While deeper, more careful listening is often held up as the ideal of what *sound* curriculum might achieve (Gershon, 2017), scholarship in the field of sound studies has done much to disrupt normative, White, settler modes of listening (Robinson, 2020; Stoever, 2016). These scholars argued for reinterpretations of what is received as sonic information or noise (Hagood, 2019; Thompson, 2017) and posited the value in mis-listening (Schmidt, 2012). Ms. S did not claim to have become a better—more attentive, thoughtful, deep—*listener*. Instead, she described having her own patterns of moving through space interrupted; being emotionally affected by sound; and becoming hyper-attentive to the movement of other bodies in space (such as light, other people, music and voices, flora and fauna). An ambient curriculum, while involving sound, does not privilege listening. Instead, it works in a minor key, more like Manning's (2016)

> minor gesture within frames of everyday life [which] creates the conditions not for slowness exactly, but for the opening of the everyday to degrees and shares of experience that resist formation long enough to allow us to see the potential of worlds in the making. (p. 15)

SOUNDWALK created a sense of possibility in Ms. S's everyday routines by injecting a sense of curiosity and play (Dolan, 2001): what sound is around the next hill? What happens if I linger here? And, the ambient curriculum of walking through Central Park *without* listening to SOUNDWALK, on the day Biden was announced winner of the 2020 presidential election, and instead hearing the noise of celebration, made one of those other potential worlds—something better for Ms. S than the Trump presidency, if not a utopia—feel a smidge closer.

Moreover, Berlant (2011) argued,

> it is minor work of political depression that both demonstrates a widespread sense of futility about slowing the mounting crisis of ordinary life in the present, and still, makes a world from political affect in which practices of politics might be invented that do not yet exist. (pp. 228–229)

SOUNDWALK entered this scene of political depression. A "widespread sense of futility" was in the air (ambient, we might say): a sense that no one wants to hear the curricular conversation; that the dominant curricular conversations (debates over critical race theory, "back to basics" [again], learning loss) make it nearly impossible to draw attention to other scenes of study. And, alongside

that slow despair, there was a tremor of hope that we might have an opportunity to make worlds where different curricular practices might exist. *SOUNDWALK*'s interference with this scene offers a "minor" mode of curricular practice, creating the potential for something else to resonate (which, as Gershon [2017] pointed out in the technical understanding of resonance, can also produce dissonance). It interrupted the fear and frustration that educators felt and spoke of in the beginning of the audio clip above, offering, as a participant reflects in the end of that clip, "space to do that work, practice these skills of imagination and care in creative and different ways."

Typically, sound—and ambience—is taken as an inherently social experience. It impacts people together in a concert hall, on a live walking tour, through speakers installed in a park, as they pass a room or street, whether they intended to hear a particular sound or not (Gershon, 2017; LaBelle, 2015). That individuals share the experience of vibrations moving through all bodies at the same time (if not interpreted in the same way by each body) causes some to argue that sound produces a "visceral immediacy," an affective bonding over a shared sensorium, whether a site-specific orchestral piece or crowds gathering in a park (Berlant, 2011, p. 231; Dolan, 2001; LaBelle, 2015). Due to the coronavirus pandemic and technological affordances, *SOUNDWALK* was designed to be accessed digitally and listened to individually through headphones. Participants are literally not listening to the same thing (LaBelle, 2015, p. xiii). This might be better heard through Andra McCartney's (2016) framework of intimate and improvisational listening in her *Soundwalk Interactions* project. Such a framework, which assumes the agency of listeners or audience members and to some extent the environment, allows McCartney to attune to the creation of unanticipated knowledge, which emerges from situated and partial perspectives of participants in a particular place and might spring from "productive confusion" that ensues from those intersubjective meetings. Reflecting on the experiences of *Soundwalk Interactions*, McCartney (date) wrote that

> what excites [her] about intimate listening is that it is neither purely about contemplation nor about mastery—it is very much an in-between place, about touching and being touched, resonating, while realizing that that moment of touching is ephemeral and partial, ungraspable in its totality. (p. 52)

This position of the listener—one suspended between mastery and ceaseless mulling, felt and fleeting—resonates with the learners and teachers intuiting an ambient curriculum characterized by the quality of *and/norness.* Ambient curriculum can feel like dissonance or consonance or simply "abeyance": the lulls, hmms, sighs in a conversation (Berlant, 2011, p. 230). Ambient curriculum accumulates movements in the ordinary ambit of headlines and memes; school announcements and Facebook posts; school scenes that spill into home spaces through online learning or a child's story of the day (or the story withheld); the email from a parent on your walk to work. Ambient curriculum is there in the too-warm December day and other affective weather patterns (Manning, 2016); and it is there in the tension in the streets when police cars cruise by or residents spill out of apartments to join a protest. While a variety of people might share the same physical space of soundwaves, they experience that ambient curriculum differently. As one participant reflected in the audio clip above, "What are the sounds I'm not hearing, as a teacher, that learners are experiencing? … What does that do for them, and for me?"

It is significant that Ms. S's second interaction with *SOUNDWALK* is not listening to *SOUNDWALK* at all. Her headphones lie in her bag, as she deliberately listens to the day-long celebrations of Biden's election in November 2020: honks, cheers, grills, a rare sense of ease and

relief. But this scene of sociality, sound, and movement created its own ambient curriculum, in contrast to the one composed as Ms. S listened to *SOUNDWALK*, alone, tired, and anxious, in the same park a month earlier. Berlant (2011) writes that "ambient citizenship is a complicated thing, a mode of belonging, really" (p. 230), and I venture to extend this idea that both forms of ambient curriculum through *SOUNDWALK* affected Ms. S's relationship to her identity as a curriculum designer and sense belonging to a community of educators, as in the first case anxiety subsided and in the second a vision for the future was replenished. Soaking in both ambient curricula began to dislodge the stuckness of going on amid it all.

Notes

1. Celebrations over the 2020 presidential election results continued through the weekend in most of Manhattan and Brooklyn. See Hartmann (2020, November 7), "Watch: New York City Erupts in Celebration After Race Is Called for Biden."

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

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R*EADERS 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—"2*s 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 noleftturn.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.

* * *

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.

//

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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Chocolate Spectral Resonances
Calling Mr. Sun Ra, Calling Mr. Alton Sterling

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FATHER, SON, PARTNER, lover, comedian, and neighborhood CD salesman, Alton Sterling was forced into premature ancestralhood on July 5, 2016. Sterling's ascendance was due to the always endemically violent appendages of the police state, formulated in this context as the Baton Rouge police department. However, I struggle with the very way I engage in memory of Sterling, generally, and with Sterling's memory being solely connected with his death, specifically.

In many ways, Sterling's memory did not become present until I and many others, in my case accidentally, witnessed his lynching through murder porn cesspools of social media and various other news veins that have become matters of course about how people regularly are consumed by media. I cannot unsee the image of Sterling being treated as target practice for the Baton Rouge police department. Instead, I want to and fight to re-orient myself to witnessing Sterling as the father, son, partner, lover, comedian, and neighborhood CD salesman. Additionally, these words ring true in non-linear desires when I reflect on the premature ancestralhoods of Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Remie Falls, Daunté Wright, and so many other beautiful chocolate souls.

In my attempt to challenge a public discourse equating Blackness to death, I have begun to use phrases like "premature ancestralhood" to remind myself that their souls forever live within me and around us. Yet, like any bad habit, breaking this habit of over attentiveness to the drone of Blackness as being equated to death is difficult.

However, I am always lodged in a peculiar space of simultaneity in which I am constantly fighting to dampen the ways that the Enlightenment project bifurcates—Cartesian logics situated as the mind, body, soul within myself—to feel and hear those and many other ancestral voices. While I utilize "premature ancestralhood" to counter erasures of Black subjectivities, the phrase and first part of the paper's title, "Chocolate Spectral Resonances," pertains to the vibrancy of life in Blackness in spite of carceral predicaments that local, state, and nation attempt to apply (Dillard, 2012).

My discussion utilizes pianist, composer, band leader, and sound scientist Sun Ra, and his ensemble the Arkestra, to address sonic ethics in two ways: first to re-examine the treatment of

Alton Sterling and then to consider broader possibilities of how Afro-surrealist ethics, situated as sonic pedagogies, provide additional trajectories for action in ways that are simultaneously formal and informal educational spaces/places.

The discursive trajectory of this paper begins by addressing the contexts that inform the first part of the title, "Chocolate Spectral Resonances." In order to better unpack these in-depth meanings, I present my situatedness in addition to considering how George Clinton (aka Dr. Funkenstein, Clinton et al., 1975) and Dr. Cornel West (2014) form the foundation and gesture of this title. I continue looking to scholarship from David Marriott (2016), Christina Sharpe (2016), and Katherine McKittrick (2014, 2021), whose work is rich with possibilities to discuss and problematize the material and existential constructions of Blackness with death. This is not to say that Marriott, Sharpe, and McKittrick offer a clear way out. However, I do think they offer powerful ways to hold discursive spaces in re-imaging Blackness as living, regardless of acts that police states impose.

Following this discussion, I look to Sun Ra and the Arkestra to frame what I refer to as his "sonic ethics." I situate this framing in the parameters of the musical and extramusical. I continue with Sun Ra in relation to D. Scot Miller's (2012) *Afrosurreal Manifesto: Black is the New Black*. With awareness that my paper is in communion so much of the beautiful and robust scholarship from the fields of Afro-pessimism (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2021) and Afro-futurism (Drew & Worthham, 2020; Womack, 2013), I focus extensively on having this discourse through Afro-surrealism. This is in no assertion of hierarchical relations. Instead, Afro-surrealism is more fruitful for me in this argument than Afro-pessimism and Afro-futurism, due to what I think of as its looser polarity of analysis. It is this aspect that describes the philosophical leanings of Sun Ra in the context of this paper. Following a definition of Sun Ra's sonic ethics, I place Sun Ra and Arkestra in relation to Afro-surrealism with a brief historical situating of André Breton's (1929/1992) surrealism and its chocolate center before unpacking aspects of the film, *Space is the Place* (Smith & Ra, 1974), and the latter live performance of "Face the Music" (Ra, 2012) from that film. Altogether, witnessing Alton Sterling and his lynching via the police state are situated as an analytical meditation to challenge and dethrone the death ideologies in re-imagining him and overall Blackness as being equated with life.

The Contexts of Chocolate Spectral Resonances

The "Chocolate Spectral Resonances" in the title of this piece and the derivative references to chocolate utilized reside in my positionality as a Black, Queer, Non-Binary person, which is central to the discursive developments and connections I create in this discussion. I intentionally use Black to acknowledge the situatedness of myself and Black communities in global diasporas speaking across prescribed geopolitical borders. Additionally, "Chocolate Spectral Resonances" is inspired by a deep engagement and multiple decade love affair with Parliament's 1975 album *Chocolate City*, from the opening track "Chocolate City," which the narrator, George Clinton, abbreviates as "C.C." In this song, he identifies and proclaims Black spaces throughout the United States as "C.C.s" due to their predominantly Black populations. Clinton's prologue is prophetically poetic in his starting line:

> A C.C. … . they say you jivin' game and can't be changed, but on the positive side you're my piece of the rock, and I love ya C.C. Can you dig it? … A yah, we didn't get our 40 acres and a mule, but we did get you C.C. … yeah. (Clinton et al., 1975, n.p.).

In the spirit of prophetically speaking into existence, Clinton acknowledges that C.C.s speak into and hold spaces of and for Black subjectivity. His statement embodies a double-consciousness in his awareness of subaltern status assigned to C.C.s through scales of racism and classism (Dubois, 1903/1994). However, in spite of being well aware of the negative status assigned to C.C.s through outside hegemonic infrastructural discourse, the C.C. remains a radical space of Blackness, asserting Black folx reclamation and creation of home. My framing of Chocolate Spectral Resonances sits with the latter, attending to chocolatized consciousness and Dr. Cornel West's (2014) very public reminder that inquiry into local, national, and global challenges starts "on the chocolate side of the tracks" (n.p.). Overall, the collective of my Black, Queer, Non-Binary subjectivity resides in variances of Chocolate Spectral Resonances inspired by the generative simultaneities characterized by both Clinton's and West's senses of the prophetic that I detail here and are threaded throughout this article. While both men situate variances of their prophetic process as residing in Black spaces, it is Clinton who identifies the C.C. as a space of reclamation that creates home. In contrast, West's discussion of the "chocolate side of the tracks" simultaneously offers a material space and place of a C.C. and a reflexive space rooted in the embodiment of his Blackness. This is the bedrock of inquiry when facing problems on local, national, and global scales.

Spectral Resonances, the latter part of the title, addresses both the spectrums and modalities of Black beingness (Hurston, 1937/1990; Morrison, 1992; hooks, 2001). In response to the death sentence assigned to Black communities through the police state, spectral resonances are the assertion of the impossibility of killing Blackness. While there is an incessant witnessing of lynching and forcing into premature ancestralhood, Blackness is not eliminated. Rather, it lives on in the spectrum of communal embodiment, cultural expression, and stories, among other facets of Blackness. Additionally, "resonance" denotes the unsettledness of Black souls post transition, while also acknowledging how the unsettledness lives through inhabitation and haunting (Hendry, 2011; Wozolek, 2023).

The next part of my discussion challenges the idea of Blackness as stillborn. David Marriott's (2016) discourse about the corpsing of Black subjectivities as social death develops a rich context to describe how, even in birth, police states still attempt to give Blackness a death sentence.

Christina Sharpe (2016), like Marriott, identifies the historical to present conditions of Black subjectivities' subsummations into literal and conceptual wakes created by the vessel. Thus, Sharpe's wake work is an engagement that births an awareness of the livingness Blackness presents, even when thrown from the literal and conceptual enslaving vessel to the wake. Altogether, Black individuals' and communities' forced transformations into fungible state materials still exist and live in spite of attempted applications of social death. Finally, Katherine McKittrick (2014, 2021) shares Marriott's and Sharpe's belief that Blackness is life affirming by framing the material condition of Blackness in light, working to witness it in archival communing while also reintroducing traumas (Hartman, 2019). Collectively, these authors deal with Blackness as living in connection with the navigations one must engage while disrupting the stillborn paradigm applied to Blackness.

Stillborn Notions of Blackness

Blackness equated with expressions of being stillborn concerns me deeply. These stillborn modalities of Black folx are presented through lynching variances on local, national, and global scales. In my discussion, lynching exists materially in realms of the metaphorical and literal. Therefore, an example of metaphorical lynching would be rooted in bullying and spectacle, as witnessed in Black folx being enslaved and placed on auction blocks. In this situation, Black folx were subjected to nonconsensual stares, touches, and grabs of their bodies. Metaphorical lynching in context, among so many others, was the attack on the Black soul through white gaze and touch denoting dehumanization and fungibility of enslaved Black folx' bodies. Whereas, the literal lynching is exemplified in the attack on the physical presence of Black bodies resulting in maiming and/or premature ancestralhood as witnessed with the sodomization of Abner Louima by the NYPD officer's broken broomstick in 1997 (which he survived and due to which has been forced to endure numerous surgeries) and the 2020 murder of Breonna Taylor by Kentucky police officers. The metaphorical and literal lynching collectively advocate for the pushing of Black folx towards a stillborn status. The stillborn-ness of Blackness occurs through ranges of social media and/or news outlets, the erasure and silencing of Black existence through the discursive technologies. I can't help but reflect on the ways in which the Black communities and the public sphere are told Blackness is some variant of death. This is not to negate the material circumstances in which Black folx are presented with fates of premature ancestralhood. David Marriott's (2016) transposition and transferal of corpsing—the actor's loss of command of the character they are tasked with presenting, or as he would say, "the death of the theatrical artifice"—in relation to Black life, which further problematizes the social application of stillborn constructs (p. 31).

In Marriott's discussion, corpsing is in response to the social death prescribed to Blackness. Both in inquiry and response Marriott writes,

> This, then, is what corpsing is: the knowledge and loss of the rules determining the subject. But what of those subjects whose rule of life is to endure life under the ownership of another and consequently are said to live as objects and are regarded as subjects dead to law and who live in a state of permanent threat of inquiry? I think this condition of the slave is what the theory of social death is meant to explain and therefore deservedly calls attention to as a black state of exception. Therefore, race is a means by which corpsing comes to be a metaphor for social life, insofar as the slave fails to perform any juridical understanding of the subject as alive or sovereign, because it is perceived as having been born symbolically dead (*partus sequitur ventrem*) and therefore is reduced to an object, or res, whose prime value (if we define sovereignty as ownership) is a rule of life defined by its symbolic fungibility, which also denotes the end of life in terms of its reproducible nonexistence. (Marriott, 2016, pp. 35–36)

Marriott's application of corpsing is a vehicle that addresses the social perception of Black life. His description presents the trajectories of raced subjectivities, in this case Black folx and the connection to the slave. Marriott addresses the social death of Blackness, which is reified through a series of carceral logics, more specifically slavery and the slave. This is not to say that Marriott has subscribed to this idea of Blackness. Rather, his utilization of corpsing presents a description of structural fungibilities that imprison Black folx' subjectivity while also rationalizing the reducibility of Black subjectivity to purchasable units. Black humanity is not seen as human

through social death and, therefore, is property, not an uncommon problematic ideal. Along the same lines, Christina Sharpe (2016) addresses applications of fungibility to Blackness (see also Spillers, 2003).

Sharpe's social death is rooted in the collective ascriptions of Blackness to subhumanity, which produces and sustains parallel economies like the insurance industry. Thus, the social death of Black folx that is instituted as objective death, non-existence, is entrapped in wake. The wake being both metaphorical and literal, whereby the contact of vessels of enslavers with Trans-Atlantic waters created additional below currents.

However, within these points of contact, enslaved Black folx were subsumed. This subsummation into the wake functions as those Black folx being thrown once entering premature ancestralhood or electing to jump in an act of granting their liberation. Yet, Sharpe's theorization does not situate Black folx subsumed into the wake as non-existent. Rather, her consideration is in service to emphasizing how Blackness in person and ideas exists in spite of the circumstances. Considering this discourse, Sharpe's acquaintance, a quantum physicist, reminds her that the matter of these Black souls continues to exist regardless of the hegemonic apparatuses of state, creating illusions of objectivity through social death. Collectively, through Marriott's utilization of corpsing and Sharpe's wake work, the inevitable avoidance of existential struggle is produced. That personal struggle for me is aligned with Katherine McKittrick's (2014, 2021) discussion about simultaneity of leaning into discourses of Black trauma to bring awareness and that act producing traumas as well.

I am reminded of this struggle amongst many folx, especially those of the chocolate community when considering Katherine McKittrick's (2014) article, "Mathematics of Black Life," when she writes,

> I hold close the technologies of slavery and the archives that produce the scourged back. I can't let go of the incomplete stories and brutal violence, in part, because letting go might involve not seeing how these violent acts are reproduced now. (p. 23)

McKittrick struggles with the reduction and myopic death lens applied to Black life. For her, the mathematics around Blackness refers to both the violent and murderous ways in which numbers occur in reference to Black bodies. Her analysis problematizes the intersection of Blackness and numbers continually being formulated to represent and reinforce narratively deficit lies about Black folx' existence. In considering McKittrick's direct statement, the white supremacist gaze does not reside exclusively with white folx. Rather, she is identifying how oppressive technologies founded in white supremacy also work through her as a chocolate entity. McKittrick, desires to relinquish these technologies. And yet, this position on relinquishing Black harm leads to another conundrum about how giving up a focus on violence against Black folx also produces a violent action of forgetting, forgoing, and silencing historic and present atrocities against Black peoples that, in turn, are foundational to sustaining lynching regimes (McKittrick, 2021).

The trifecta of Marriott, Sharpe, and McKittrick functions as disruptor of myopias applied to Black life. Marriott utilizes corpsing to address the objective death illusions and social conditions in which Black life is situated. Whereas, Sharpe enacts modalities of wake work to uncover the epiphenomenal liveliness of Black life in the face of fungibility (Spillers, 2003; Wright, 2015). Finally, McKittrick presents the aporia of the archive and trauma. Her discourse is

the gentle parameter gathering the thoughts of Marriott and Sharpe for me regarding the personal and lived embodiment of my Black life.

Like McKittrick, I am stuck as well in anger and frustration at the constant rationalizations I witness, second-to-second, minute to minute, 24 hours a day, of why it is okay to murder Black folx. Additionally, I echo McKittrick in a desire to shift away from Black mathematics and lean towards joy and the acknowledgement of the immense life occupied by Blackness in spite of witnessing so much Black life being pushed towards premature ancestralhood (Mitchell, 2022). While my first steps have been to think of the Black lives touched by the lynchings as ancestors, the continuation of my re-orienting from a lens of Black mathematics to Black life will be engaged from a sonic consideration. Through this inquiry about Alton Sterling's life, I turn to the sonic ethics of pianist, composer, and sound scientist, Sun Ra and the Arkestra.

Sun Ra, the Arkestra, and Sonic Ethics

Sun Ra and his relationship to sound, both musical and extramusical, constitute a type of sonic ethics—variants of ethics rooted in sound absent of binaries constituting right or wrong and more so based in inquiry regarding the dynamics of responsibility one incurs through their relations developed throughout the public sphere (Derrida, 1992/2008; Mitchell, 2018). In one of many discussions, Ra (as quoted in Szwed, 1998) discusses the aspects of his sonic musical ethics in saying,

> in my music, there's a lot of little melodies going on. It's like an ocean of sound. The ocean opens up, it goes back, it rolls. My music always rolls. It might go over people's heads, wash part of them away, reenergize them, go through them, and then go back out to the cosmos and come back to them again. If they keep listening to my music, they'll get energized. They go home and maybe 15 years later they'll say, "Whoa, that music I heard 15 years ago in the park … it was beautiful." (p. 123)

Ra sees his musical compositions as medicine to cure humanity. His metaphoric utilization of the ocean describes the way in which his compositions envelop the listener beyond a mere cochlear engagement. The non-bifurcated, mind, body, and soul of the engagers are situated as liberated agents after being washed over by Ra's music. Even further, Ra frames the engager's change being an epiphenomenal communing with time. In other words, in the spirit of Michelle Wright (2015), the epiphenomenal being the past, present, and future are simultaneously experienced as the present. To also be noted, when Ra speaks about one's rejuvenation through encounters with his music, he emphasizes the continual chance to be experienced after the event of individual encountering his music. Regarding extramusical ethics Ra (as quoted in Szwed, 1998) says,

> So, this is my view on the race for space. We'll never get it until we Americans, collectively and individually, get us a new sound. A new sound of harmony, brotherly love, common respect and consideration for the dignity and freedom of men. (p. 138)

Contextually, Ra's statement references the race for space between the U.S. and Soviet Union. For him, the U.S. will only achieve their goal of space travel with the development of new alternative sonic possibilities rooted in liberations to be extended to humanity, globally. The sonic variant to be created must incite a harmonization that is uprooted from rigid musical notions, instead focusing on how the extramusical heals humanity's fractures. This harmonization is not metaphorical. Rather, Ra relinquishes harmonization from music and instead utilizes the sonic to build connections amongst humanities many transcendental divides.

Collectively, Ra's engagement with the sonic presented in the prior two examples come together musically and extramusically to formulate what I would describe as his sonic ethics (Gershon, 2017), a type of ethics whereby the point of transport is sound that travels simultaneously, non-linearly and linearly, wrought with possibilities for emboldening humanity's consciousness. The emboldening for Ra is the development of love, connectivity, and liberation.

Furthermore, regarding Black folx as socially equated to being stillborn, Ra's sonic ethics are a tool to re-orient the focus of Blackness as livingness in spite of the ranges of lynching on local, national, and global scales.

Sun Ra and the Arkestra are an essential part of the sonic consideration I will be turning to in the following part of my discussion. Specifically, I will be addressing two sonic elements, one being from the cult movie classic, *Space is the Place*, and the second from the musical composition "Face the Music" (Ra, 2012). In these two elements, Ra's philosophy of Blackness as life and living are witnessed. Afterwards I will come back to Alton Sterling to consider what might it mean "to face the music" regarding the sonic ethics of Sun Ra.

Facing the Mythssss

Sun Ra straddles musicological and extramusicological series of ethics with his sonic engagements. His ethics resemble a Derridean existence in that Ra is elevating a discourse about responsibility that is never stagnant and, therefore, impossible to fully understand without commitment to continually convening with the ethically impossible (Derrida, 2002; Mitchell, 2018). Smith and Ra's (1974) cult classic film, *Space is the Place*, straddles or rather melts binaries between Blaxploitation, Afro-Futurism, and Afro-Pessimism, further presenting Afro-surrealism's fluidity amongst analytic polarities. The main protagonist, Sun Ra, played by himself under his name is most concerned with the realm's disenfranchisement ascribed to Black folx through White supremacy, as well as disenfranchisement inflicted through Black folx to other Black folx. The film is set in Los Angeles, California. Sun Ra and his musical ensemble, the Arkestra, have tasked themselves with disrupting these variants of Black disenfranchisement. The most powerful way to do so is through their use of music—more broadly, the sonic combinations produced by him and the Arkestra, which, if proper balance was able to be found, would heal the violence ailing the world. *Space is the Place*, situated as simultaneously a biopic and fictive depiction of Sun Ra's life, is linearly presented with the main goal of Sun Ra and the Arkestra of providing a musical performance to the LA community in order to bring consciousness to those in attendance and in turn create positive change. However, in the process of preparing for this concert Sun Ra must endure carceral gazes of the FBI and its informants, implemented in his and the Arkestra's day-to-day activities.

In an earlier segment of this film, Sun Ra is witnessed in all his beauty, sensuousness, and whimsicality through his magical descendance upon the youth center. In the 23:30–25:09 segment

Sun Ra appears in his intergalactic and cosmic best before the Black youth at the neighborhood center and introduces himself by saying, “Greetings … Black youth and planet Earth. I am Sun Ra. Ambassador from the intergalactic regions of the council of outer space.” In the confused series of looks from the youth post examination of the extra-terrestrial Sun Ra, one young Black woman says, “How do we know that you fo’ real?” Sun Ra responds by saying:

> How do you know I’m real? I’m not real. I’m just like you. You don’t exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn’t be seeking equal rights. You’re not real. If you were, you’d have some status among the nations of the world, so we’re both myths. I do not come to you as a reality. I come to you as the myth, because that’s what Black people are, mythssss. I came from a dream, that the Black man dreamed long ago. I’m actually a presence sent to you by your ancestors. (Smith & Ra, 1974)

This exchange with the youth presents Sun Ra as conceptualizing the myth as reduced to being synonymous with a lie and simultaneously as magic. On the front end of his response, Sun Ra acknowledges the historic and present reduction of Blackness to subhumanity in U.S and global contexts (Gordon, 2022). For him, Black folx’s fight for a seat at the table in the context of hegemony, deployed through white supremacy’s constant reformulation of impasse to Black folx’s access to being human and overall equitable conditions, is the myth situated in a reductionist paradigm of being a lie. However, within this statement, Sun Ra is also dealing the with myth as magic and furthermore a variance of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994). Therefore, when Sun Ra explains that he and the Black youth are “not real” and completes the response by disclosing that he was a presence sent by their Black ancestors. Sun Ra is essentially framing the myth as hyperreality—a queered acknowledgement of the dreamworld, present moment, and Earthly existence. Thus, Sun Ra’s Afro-surreal project functions as a public disclosure of the chocolatized hyperreality of the Black myth (Baudrillard, 1994; Kelley, 2002; Ibrahim, 2014).

More importantly, witnessed in Sun Ra’s extrapolation of spectral meanings, the myth encompasses his broader ethics of sound—an ethics of sound that is both musical and extramusical and overwhelmingly rooted in consciousness building (Thompson, 1984). This moves me to consideration of the stanza from Sun Ra’s (2012) musical composition, “Face the Music.” In the song “Face the Music” Sun Ra (2012) and the Arkestra inquire, proclaim, assert and sing, “What do you do when you know, that you know... that you know that you wrong? You got to face the music. You got to listen to the cosmos song.” The collective performance and aesthetic presentation of “Face the Music” is an Afro-surrealist “awe hell naw” in the sense that Black folx will not be erased or only represented through a death paradigm. This lyric poses the inquiry as to what responsibility looks like with awareness that the basis of Earthly belief systems are rooted in bullshit. “Face the music” is the call get open to a series of hyperrealities through becoming vulnerable to the “cosmos song.” The cosmos song holds a number of meanings. One is about getting vulnerable to ancestral ruminations utilizing Sun Ra and the Arkestra as mediums to raise Earthly consciousness via sonic healing. Another meaning is about how, through disruption of the Enlightenment project, humanity must re-assemble themselves, absent of Cartesian bifurcations, as a way to come back in compassionate resonance with the broader ecosystem and overall cosmos.

In the continuum of meaning from Sun Ra’s discussion around the myth of Blackness, *Space is the Place* to the stanza of “Face the Music,” he challenges himself and those around him to move beyond the surface. Altogether, this continuum framed by Sun Ra comes as an urgent

reminder to Black folx of the necessity to re-orient understandings of their Blackness to being life as opposed to the hegemonic conscripts of death.

In the following discussion, I will come back to ancestor Alton Sterling and will consider how to re-orient consideration of Sterling towards of life. Additionally, Sun Ra's sonic ethics will serve towards disrupting the death ascribed to Sterling's life, memory, and spirit.

Re-orienting Toward a Living Sterling

The chocolate spectral resonances never rest. They are always alive serving as vehicles, communicating the epiphenomenal presences of Black folx. The stillborn status assigned to Blackness is a falsehood. The responsibility and possibility in disrupting these falsehoods is of the utmost importance in continual development of awareness and inquiry into the oppressive, re-packaged, ideological conditions assigned to Blackness. David Marriott, Christina Sharpe, and Katherine McKittrick provide the guiding light to witness these ideological conditions. Marriott's identification of Black folx' social death as it enmeshes with Sharpe's wake analysis that focuses on the disembodiment of Black presence from social memory identify the agents that create illusions of Black non-existences. Additionally, McKittrick presents what is born from the impasse of avoiding trauma as it works in tandem with a sense of sociopolitical and cultural responsibility to Black archives. This creates a feedback loop of sorts where ideas and events rooted in pain simultaneously speak truths while always already being met with artifacts that can re-trigger traumas. Therefore, Sun Ra's sonic ethics—which are situated as an Afro-surrealist entity and existent in musical and extramusical contexts of the myth—become agents that antagonize attempts for one's consciousness to go stagnant and accept the idea that Black beingness is stillborn. Altogether, when the discursive contexts that frame Black death are identified, the chocolate spectral resonance rears its head and refuses silencing.

Alton Sterling is one of many Black entities that comprise chocolate spectral resonances; always present, sounding out, similar to the tree falling in the forest (Yes!!!! It does make a sound). However, those of us in this dimension must acknowledge these sounds, even when we do not exist in the same space and place, when we do not sit directly with the falling tree's presence. Or, rather, we must turn toward "face[ing] the music."

Alton Sterling was assigned a death sentence before he was ever physically lynched by the Baton Rouge police department. While Sterling had done some prison time, his release was with a shortened taut leash to the police state. Due to being designated a felon, tautness was continually added to this leash through significantly lowered employment availability. Additionally, Sterling was a Black resident in Louisiana, a state with the statistically highest imprisoned population in the entire world. Like all Black folx, he was trapped in a carceral predicament before ever stepping foot outside of the womb. Additionally, as Black folx are all-too-well aware, the carceral state only serves to feed federal, state, and corporate greed as the targeting of Black folx continues and reducing Black folx to subhumans only becomes further normalized. As a result, Black folx are positioned as raw, consumable materials, fed to greed-machines of the prison industrial complex. This was the reality Sterling endured, something that only intensified throughout his Earthly existence. Sterling's prescribed fate executed by the carceral state did not happen in isolation. It is shared by both Sterling and more broadly by Black folx across time and contexts. Because such fates are presented endemically, as part of one's existence, Sun Ra's sonic consciousness-building

project is even more important as it stands as a point of radical refusal to such endemic understandings of Black folx.

I circle back to McKittrick's (2014, 2021) inquiry about what it might mean to relinquish and refuse spirit murdering (Love, 2019). I agree that relinquishing these tools altogether provides a continued rationale of erasure—the ability to overlook and refuse to acknowledge anti-Black trauma as it occurred, occurs, and is occurring, both nationally within the United States and on global scales. However, there must also be a project of re-orienting Blackness so that it is synonymous with life and living—a re-orientation project whereby, even in the violence of the police state, Black folx and their communities of accomplices are able to engage in possibilities and the multiplicities of Black life, something Sun Ra presents through his sonic ethics.

Situating Sun Ra's sonic ethics presents possibilities to commune with Alton Sterling through ancestralhood. The issue, then, becomes a concern about what it means when, in Earthly physical existence, we cannot feel the presence of Sterling within and around us. I would say that this is an Enlightenment issue. In response to this Enlightenment issue, I find myself reflecting on my first engagements with Sterling, which occurred via community vigil when I, crying, made direct contact with his son, Cameron Sterling, also crying. At this ancestral service, I was reminded of how Sun Ra re-orients me towards a Black livingness paradigm. As Sun Ra put forth in his Afro-surrealistic existence, acknowledging Black folx as myths is essentially the reminder of the magic he possessed, that Black folx possess, which Ra further embodied and emboldened though sound.

Sun Ra's call to face the music is a call to tear down the binaries imposed by the Enlightenment project through learning to listen empathetically and compassionately. Attending to Sun Ra's call and my engagement with it, I return to Sterling and find myself in deep reflection. In this reflection, there is a collapse of space, of time, of beings. I witness his homie, Abdullah Muflahi, who owned the Triple S Market where Alton was lynched. I hear them discuss how he and Sterling used to cut up and roast each other, something he mentioned at Alton's ancestralhood homegoing. I see the memorial mural of Sterling on the Triple S Market. He's smiling hard. I imagine the jams Sterling burned to CDs and sold to neighborhood folx in order to aid his family, and you know, I hear and feel Sterling's presence. This hearing and feeling are indications that perhaps I am becoming open to ancestralhoods, a re-orientation towards Blackness as unearthed from a death and murder complexes. My engagement with ancestralhoods is enlivened through Sun Ra and his sonic ethics.

In conclusion, I am left with an inquiry: What does it mean for the overall pedagogical and educational project when Blackness is equated with life through re-orientation away from McKittrick's (2014, 2021) notion of Black Mathematics via Sun Ra's sonic ethics? All I can say right now is that, as I live with this inquiry and I feel the continual intertwining presences of ancestralhoods, Sterling lives with me and among us.

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