

The “Noisy Sphere”: Sonic Geographies in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract

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While many geographers have studied the role of music and sound in the construction of space, place, and identity, very few have studied noise as a political player in systems of governance (exceptions: Matless 2002; Connell & Gibson 2004; Saldanha 2005; and Reville 2013), and none have examined noise’s function in the social reproduction of capitalism. This thesis develops a method for studying noise in both of these capacities. In particular, I look at how noise is conceived and implemented in several different artifacts, including an ethnography on noise in the English hospice (Chapter 2), US legislation on noise control (Chapter 3), noise complaints from Seattle residents (Chapter 4), and the scientific practices and technologies used in measuring the “soundscape” (Chapter 5). My analysis of these “sonic worlds” focuses on the ways in which the treatment of noise reinforces, obscures, and challenges dominant social relations. In all my sources, I find a general shift around 1970, not only in how noise figures within the logics of governance but also in assumptions of ontology. For a range of histories and geographies, noise helps trace the emergence of an ideology that Alain Badiou (2013a) calls “democratic materialism.” I explore the political consequences of this ideology in the context of each “sonic world”—how it is constructed, in part, through sound and how it works to obscure relations of domination under global capitalism. In the end, I offer some (sonic) strategies of resistance for how we might use sound to map the possibilities of a ruptural present.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
List of Tables & Figures	vii
Abbreviations	ix
Preface	xi
Introduction	1
I. Noise in the Study of Geography and Governance	15
II. The Noise at the Door: Sounds of Alterity and Structural Haunting	41
III. Noise-Control Legislation in Seattle and the US	55
IV. Seattle Noise Complaints	85
V. Schafer, Soundscapes, and Aural Governance	121
Conclusion	145
Works Cited	149

List of Tables & Figures

Table 3.1	Federal Policies on Noise Control, 1960–1979	80
Table 4.1	Types of Noise in Seattle Complaints, 1893–2006	89
Table 4.2	Descriptions of Sound in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006	96
Table 4.3	Threats Cited in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006	109
Table 4.4	Rationales Cited in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006	117
Figure 5.1	Soundmarks of Vancouver, BC, 1973	122
Figure 5.2	WSP Sound Analysis of Bissingen, Germany, 1975	124
Figure 5.3	Isobel Map of Stanley Park, Vancouver, BC, 1973	127
Figure 5.4	Hum Map of the World, World Soundscape Project	129

Abbreviations

BE	Alain Badiou, <i>Being and Event</i>
C, I	Karl Marx, <i>Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I</i>
C, II	Karl Marx, <i>Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. II</i>
CF	Clerk Files (Seattle Municipal Archives)
D&P	Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison</i>
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (US)
ER	William S. Burroughs, <i>Electronic Revolution</i>
HS	Michel Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality, Vol. I</i>
LW	Alain Badiou, <i>Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II</i>
NCA	Noise Control Act of 1972
SF	Subject File (Seattle Municipal Archives)
SNO	Seattle Noise Ordinance of 1977
TS	Alain Badiou, <i>Theory of the Subject</i>
WS	World Soundscape Project

Preface The Sound of Failure

This is a thesis rooted in failure. Early on, when I first started thinking about noise in relation to geography, I believed it might be possible to use pre-existing sound monitoring data to “make audible” some of the structural inequalities that eluded other kinds of empirical analysis. At the time I was inspired by a handful of geographers who held up the aural in counterpoint to what they saw as a bias in the social science towards visual ways of knowing (Pocock 1989; Rodaway 1994; Smith 1994, 1997; Ingham et al. 1999). Convinced by these arguments, I became interested in the potential of non-visual research methods, like sound diaries and sonic ethnography (Anderson 2007; Wood et al. 2007; Duffy & Waitt 2011; Simpson 2012), for mapping social relations that might otherwise remain inaudible to traditional geographical analysis.

I’m still concerned with these kinds of issues. An attention to the aural can, I believe, help us to understand and to critically engage space in ways that elude ocularcentric methods of research. But I came to realize there was a major catch. As a preliminary project for further research, I performed a GIS spatial analysis of noise monitoring data in King County, Washington. The project sought to pinpoint regions in King County where sound-level differentials might reveal deeper social and political conflicts. In particular, spatial analysis was used to select areas in which high (or low) degrees of noise disturbance occurred in tandem with different demographic factors such as median household income, minority population, and gender ratio.

To identify these locations, I selected the following research question: “Which groups of individuals—defined in terms of class, gender, and race—experience the highest (or lowest) levels of noise pollution, and do these groups tend to be in historical positions of exploitation (eg, are they minorities, low-income individuals, or women)?” What I wanted to know was the extent to which high sound levels reflect and/or help maintain systems of inequality within King County. Obviously

data from noise monitors would indicate some degree of inequality—the question was where and how much.

As it turned out, this assumption was entirely mistaken. Not only did my analysis fail to establish a strong correlation between a high incidence or magnitude of sound disturbance and the presence of exploited groups, but it suggested the opposite: that noise pollution in King County tended to occur predominantly in areas of structural dominance. Among the thirteen documents analyzed, there were 2.6 times as many noise monitors in areas within the top quartile of percentage male, percentage white, and average median income than there were in areas in the lower quartile of these categories (ie, heavily non-white, female, and poor).

Yet such a story is misleading. In reexamining my data sources, I quickly realized I had (erroneously) taken it for granted that noise monitors would be evenly distributed across space. This was not the case: areas in positions of power registered a higher incidence of noise levels (Leq) exceeding King County Code for maximum permissible sound levels, but they also had 2.7 times the number of sound monitors in place than did exploited areas. What this meant was that socially dominant groups had *greater access to the measurement of sound itself*, possessing the social and monetary capital necessary to bring to bear in their neighborhoods the technologies, tools, and rationalities behind sound monitoring. They were able to construct their own stories, told through the noise monitoring data, which reframed well-off areas as (sonically) dominated and in need of governance, while rendering actually-dominated areas invisible to government and to regulatory aid, at least in terms of sound control. These were stories that glossed over material inequalities by offering a reactionary counternarrative: “whites, males, and the rich are not always so well off after all.”

What this study has made me realize, therefore, is that sound—along with research methods for which it is an object of analysis—does not necessarily “reveal” structural imbalance. In no way is it critical in and of itself. Rather sound, like anything else, is always political, meaning that it is always

mediated—whether through someone’s vocal chords or through some form of technology like the sound monitor. Mediated, sound can be oriented towards certain ends, made to serve and to speak for certain ideologies.

My GIS analysis was an excellent example of this, insofar as its use of noise-monitoring data literally produced a world wherein lines of exploitation were blurred and even inverted, such that the exploiters appear as their opposite. To maintain a critical stance I needed to shift my analytical lens: from the data itself to *the material conditions* under which this data was gathered, recorded, and disseminated. To avoid validating a logic that mystifies social relations in King County I had to treat noise monitoring as an object rather than as a medium of critique. In doing so I realized that it was the positionality of certain groups (whites, males, wealthy) that enabled them to monitor sound in the first place, and that such a technology was structured on, while reproducing, the uneven material relations it worked to obscure. In this way, noise monitoring offered a means through which dominant social actors were able to generate and secure their own conditions of existence by invisibilizing that which would threaten their position.

This invisibilization poses problems for the way we conduct research. Methodologically, what my GIS study demonstrated is the political danger of any methodology that restricts its object of study solely to *what is*. As is clear in the case of noise-monitoring data, positive knowledge always presupposes and is produced against a “negative” (eg, black, female, poor) body that it makes inaudible. Thus to focus merely on what appears in a “world” (such as monitoring data), without acknowledging what necessarily “inappears” as a result, is not only to tell half the story but is also, in some cases, to corroborate a logic that legitimizes and reproduces class, gender, and race violence. Such an analysis, to echo Brenner et al. (2011: 233–4), fails to account for “the context of context”: focusing on “the materials themselves” (ie, the noise-monitoring data) without considering the “political-economic structures and institutions in which they are embedded.” This is the same

mistake I committed when I produced sound-monitoring maps before theorizing the inequalities these maps naturalized and obscured. Locating these structures requires an investigation into the *transcendental conditions*—the path-dependent, macrospatial regimes—under which certain bodies (male, white, wealthy) and certain knowledges (noise monitoring data) appear in a given world. This is an ontological approach to analysis: of tracing the limits not just of knowing but also of being and existing.

Such an approach is what I seek to develop in this thesis: to use noise as means of theorizing the relations between *what appears* and *what cannot appear* (“inexistents”) in specific historicospatial worlds. This is not to discount the material, but to reimagine and resituate it within a wider socioeconomic context. Indeed, the additional sound monitors I counted in my GIS study were certainly “material.” And as such, they could be rendered so as to make the situation of inequality within King County quite understandable. In what follows, I explore the extent to which an attention to sound can “make audible” other relations of dominance, how it can reveal the inevitable and noisy failures of every attempt to manage and obscure the crises of capitalism.

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I'd also like to thank Matt Sparke for reading my work and for his helpful advice early on in the thesis process when I had little idea of how I should go about researching “noise.” Michael Brown helped me write and refine the literature review that would become the initial impetus for

this project. And it was from him that I learned the importance of method and the value of rigorous empirics. Although I did not end up including the chapter on which he gave wonderful feedback, I want to thank Chandan Reddy for challenging me to think about my topic beyond the issue of governance. It's been a pleasure to learn from someone so articulate and so thoughtful. From him, and from everyone mentioned above, I can only hope that some of their insight has rubbed off on me.

In addition, I would like to thank everyone who helped me during my long visits to the Seattle Municipal Archives, especially Anne Frantilla. Not only did Anne point me in the right direction for noise complaints, but she was generous enough to pull hundreds of files and to hold them for me in my own special cart. The collections provided an unexpectedly fruitful source of data, which turned out to form the empirical heart of this thesis.

Finally, I'd like to thank Kat Cerny-Chipman for putting up with me during the writing process and for our many conversations on my topic. Sometimes I wonder who the real geographer is.

Introduction The Noisy Sphere

The consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the limits of the market or of the sphere of circulation. Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this **noisy sphere**, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face “No admittance except on business.” Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced.

–Karl Marx (*C*, I: 279)

Today noise reigns supreme over human sensibility.

–Luigi Russolo, “The Art of Noise” (1967 [1913]: 4)

In Volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx argues that capital’s logic can only be grasped outside the “noisy sphere” of the marketplace. Noise, in this context, is somewhat of a red herring for the political economist. Phenomenologically, it indicates the “surface” of exchange and provides traces of capitalist production. Indeed, most nineteenth-century accounts of industrialism tend to associate the development of capital with the proliferation of noise: “the crunching of wheels of machinery, the shriek of steam from boilers [...] those are the noises from which you can never escape,” writes Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 (1982: 306). Yet these accounts fall short, according to Marx, in revealing capital itself—how it is produced.

In one sense, noise might be thought of in the abstract as something that obscures and prevents an accurate critique of capitalism. By focusing on the “noises” of exchange—that is, only on the empirics of *what is* (“in view of all men”)—economists fail to question how this situation is structured by a logic that resists the sensible. Without acknowledging the exploitative processes by which noise is produced, the “noisy sphere” *appears* as the “very Eden of the innate rights of man,” in which subjects “are determined only by their own free will” and in accordance “with the pre-established harmony of things” (Marx *C*, I: 280).

But, of course, for Marx the dialectician, every moment presents its opposite. While noise may conceal the logic of capital and produce an illusion of harmony, in its negativity it also beckons us towards an analysis of the labor and surplus value by which it is produced. In Josh Epstein's (2014: 1) words, "Hearing the noise of the marketplace as a symptom of deep economic distress, Marx's Mr. Moneybags leads us, like Vergil leading Dante, from the surface of noise of trade into the complex of labor." Within this inferno, appearances of harmony collapse into discord: a relationship of domination is revealed. "When we leave this sphere of simple circulation," Marx (*C*, I: 280) writes, "a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*" which become divided between the capitalist and the individual who "follows as his worker." Rather than possessing free will, the latter is forced to bring "his own hide to market and now has nothing to expect but – a tanning" (Marx *C*, I: 280): the laborer awaits the sounds of exploitation.

As that which simultaneously masks and reveals capitalist relations, the dialectic of noise is at the heart of this thesis. Given a particular spatiotemporal situation, I seek to understand how a study of noise can (or cannot) help us grasp the ways in which certain subject positions are reproduced, invisibilized, or contested. How might noise—as a sensible phenomenon, institution, practice, and technology—naturalize but also reveal structures of inequality within a specific geography or within global capitalism in general, in terms of class but also race, gender, and sexuality?

What's powerful about such an analytic is that, as Marx has shown, noise points not only to what appears in a world but also (in its negativity) to what or who is prevented from appearing. Further, in noise we often get a glimpse of how the invisibilization of certain bodies—racialized, classed, or gendered—*structures* the rules of appearance itself. Both in its production and consumption, noise determines and reinforces a particular "regime of the sensible" (Rancière 2013: 18), providing a sensible rubric for who or what can and cannot present itself in a situation. What

sounds, what voices, are deemed illegal or impermissible within a space? Who is silenced, and how do these silences structure what is audible?

Ontological Analysis

Ultimately these questions rely on an analysis that moves beyond (but not past) empirical observations and into considerations of ontology,¹ or more accurately, of appearance. What is the relation between appearance and inappearance? This is the essential problematic of this paper, as well as its major theoretical contribution. Through the analysis of sound, I argue that studies in geography, or in any discipline maintaining science as a positive project, must maintain a concern for the negative: for how material situations are secured by who and what they exclude. In some sense, this is familiar terrain for scholars within and outside the social sciences who take seriously the aims of deconstruction. Yet sound as an empirical object helps to develop a method that does more than deconstruct: it also traces a radical politics for which rupture lies in the movement of the negative, in the bodies and spaces of the silenced.

The discussion of structuring requires a philosophical vocabulary, most of which I borrow from philosopher Alain Badiou whose most recent major work, *Logics of Worlds* (2013 [2006]), develops a theory of appearing and of bodies.² In order to avoid crude generalization in the analysis of noise and silencing, I use Badiou's concept of "worlds" to describe and differentiate situations of appearing. A world, for Badiou (*LW*: 598), is "the place in which objects appear," or more formally,

¹ In a formal sense, "ontology" is problematic here and throughout the thesis. "Ontology" for Badiou (*LW*: 361) refers to *being* while "logic" is the proper domain of *existence* (and of appearing). For this reason, Badiou (*LW*: 527) draws a distinction between *onto*-logy (being) and *onto*-logy (appearing). The latter is what I'm concerned with here. However, to avoid confusion, and at the risk of simplifying Badiou, I do not differentiate these terms. Instead, ontology is used to refer to the study of both being and appearing.

² These theories supplement Badiou's already-established theory of being.

that which “designates *one* of the logics of appearing.”³ Each world is equipped with a “transcendental,” which Badiou (*LW*: 596) defines as the “order-structure” sanctioning what does and does not appear in a world, and to what degree. The transcendental, in other words, is the law that organizes a world’s multiples. In reference to noise, these two concepts—worlds and transcendentals—are useful in conceptualizing how certain sounds and bodies are highlighted, muted, or barred from appearance. It enables noise and silence to be thought in structural terms, as part and parcel of deeper logics of domination.

Artifacts: Scope and Scale

This is no grand theory. Empirically, the goal of this thesis is to examine sound within an array of worlds, all with different geographies, histories, and scales. I ask not only to what extent conceptions of noise reflect, reinforce, and undermine material relations, but also how noise can help identify temporal and geographical breaks *within* these relations, between the boundaries of worlds. Each chapter sets out to tackle and demarcate one specific world (or matrix of worlds), which it investigates through a particular set of sonic artifacts. These include an ethnography on hospice noise (Chapter 2), legislature on noise control (Chapter 3), noise complaints (Chapter 4), and the scientific practices and technologies that make possible the notion of the “soundscape” (Chapter 5).

Geographically, I’ve limited these artifacts to the US, Canada, and the UK, with particular emphasis in chapters 3 and 4 on Seattle and its surrounding region. I’ve chosen these two scales—the national and the municipal—for reasons of data practicality and access. Legal and regulatory approaches to noise control, for instance, do not as of yet extend beyond the national scale, and continue to be applied most heavily at a local level. From existing data, it would be difficult, empirically speaking, to defend any transnational or global reading of noise. That said, some of my

³ A “world” is very similar to Ranciere’s idea of the regime of the sensible. In fact, elsewhere Badiou (2012: 85) defines a world as the “regime of relations of identities and differences.”

sources, when referencing to systems of hierarchy, point to assumptions and practices that often extend across national boundaries. They allow me to attempt—speculatively perhaps—to move from the bodily scales of listening to the logics of globalization. While recognizing the critiques and dangers of “totality,” the goal would be to provide a *sonic* cognitive map, in Fredric Jameson’s sense,⁴ that would help us better understand the geographies, logistic networks, and exchange relations we aim to challenge.

General Method and Argument

For each world examined, I seek to map out the transcendentals by which certain bodies appear or do not appear, and how this logic reflects, challenges, or complicates that world’s social hierarchies. These relations I identify in the (sonic) strategies, technologies, and practices of governance explicit or implied in my artifacts. I then ask how these forms of governance presuppose certain transcendental (ontological) assumptions about appearance. Obviously, these assumptions—along with the approaches that unearth them—vary by world and by dataset.

It’s my intent that no single world or method of analysis should take precedence in this thesis. My reason for taking such a hybrid approach is twofold. First, as some scholars (eg, Schwartz 2011) have pointed out, noise poses challenges for empirical studies, and not only in terms of its measurement. Frequently invisible to the observer, noise appears as an unwieldy object for a discipline like geography that which has historically preferred the visual.⁵ Given this, I examine

⁴ Jameson first developed the idea of cognitive mapping in his 1984 article “Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism.” Building on the work of urban planner Kevin Lynch, Jameson (1992: 62) defines the aesthetic of cognitive mapping as a pedagogical and representational practice that “seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system.” This project has been recently revisited in Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle’s *Cartographies of the Absolute* (2015). Toscano and Kinkle give an overview of Jameson’s aesthetic of cognitive mapping and bring it up to date with the crises of today.

⁵ For geography as a visually-biased discipline see Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove & Daniels 1988; Smith 1994, 1997.

aural events from as a range of perspectives so as to develop richer and more comprehensive conclusions about the relations between sound and capital.

Second, by reading across worlds and by identifying a set of ontological assumptions between them, I develop a historical and larger-scale, but by no means universalizable, argument. This allows me to ask: In terms of the artifacts examined are there any major shifts in how noise is talked about, conceived, and used in the twentieth century? Indeed, throughout my sources I find that the treatment of sound tends to alter, often drastically, sometime around 1970. The periodization, like any other, is neither unproblematic nor absolute. I develop it, rather, in an attempt to understand the role of noise in the obfuscation of global capital, and how this obfuscation might assume particular (onto)logics in different places, times, and situations.

In this regard, by posing an historical break in the treatment of noise I aim to trace the emergence not only of a form of governance but of an ideology that stands in the way of revolutionary politics. I refer to this ideology as “democratic materialism,” a term I take from Badiou (2006 & *LW*).⁶ The main axiom of this ideology is that “there are only bodies and languages” (*LW*: 1), the “empirical correlation” (*LW*: 35) of which constitutes “life” (ie, “*what is*”). While earlier treatments of sound often gesture towards a suprabodily ideal, those after 1970 tend to take “life” as their epistemological border. Indeed, in the artifacts I examine, sound becomes a site of intersection—or more accurately of bondage—between bodies and language, but also between subject and object, interior and exterior. These are worlds whose transcendentals operate *immanently*, making no reference to a “beyond” but establishing a series of connections between its elements, constructing a limit for each: bodies bound by language, language bound by bodies.

The linking of bodies and language, in this case through sound, functions to secure and stabilize a coherent sphere of Life. This occurs through the naturalization of social hierarchy and the

⁶ For Badiou (*LW*: 2) other names for democratic materialism include “postmodern,” as well as “minoritarianism” in politics, “bioethics” in science, and “biopolitics” in philosophy.

deferral of rupture. Rather than constructing ideal worlds beyond experience, the “correlationism” (Meillassoux 2013: 15) of democratic materialism conceals the bodily and linguistic excesses of *what is* (ie, negating its negative). Sounds and bodies can only appear within democratic-materialist worlds as unthreatening, as always-already inscribed in a language that presupposes the reproduction of *what is*.

A non-sonic example of this is the rise of liberal multiculturalism and the idea of racial “color blindness.” Under both of these assumptions, the category of race, along with the structural inequalities it reveals is expunged from the situation. In its place emerge the bodies of *tolerant* liberal subjects, those who, to quote Marx (2005: ii), are “indifferent to one another” except as “subjects of exchange.” As a result, to legitimately appear—or to *sound*—in a situation is to do so as a body dressed up in a particular (liberal, capitalist) language. By establishing a correlation between bodies and language, *they appear as all there is*: the limits of every world.

What democratic materialism can never do is admit an exception to these limits or to think beyond the plane of bodies and languages. This is a problem for Badiou because it precludes the possibility of the event, a real change in which an in-existent (*what-is-not*) comes to occupy a place of maximal existence (*what is*). Sonic ontologies after 1970, I argue, tend to pose a universal *Body* that silences or suppresses all divided subjects (cf. Badiou *LW*: 60), all those whose appearance would insert a failure into the *what-is* of their world. Instead of negating the post-evental present (ie, its ruptural potential) in the reactionary sense, noise as conceived under democratic shrouds this present, indirectly, by silencing the in-existent bodies (of the racialized, classed, gendered) who bear its possibility. The subject produced is an “obscure subject” (Badiou *LW*: 61), for whom structural conflict goes unheard.

My goal in all this “ontologizing” is a practical one: to appropriate noise into a Marxist critique of global capitalism. In the last instance, I ask how the obscuring of bodies serves to

reproduce the relations of capital, how making some “audible” or others “inaudible” might function, in certain spaces and at certain historical moments, to reinforce or mask the divisions necessary for accumulation, while also ensuring and managing a pool of surplus labor. To be made inaudible in a world is to be cast out of a system of liberal governance—and also, in some cases, out of the wage relation altogether. This is why, in many of the sources I look at, to be sonically obscured or passed over in silence is often part and parcel of a process of immiseration: of the flexibilization and de-skilling of labor and the production of words marked by austerity, incarceration, and death. This is not an issue of political representation, but of how an ontological blurring produces a body at the limits of capital, as excess labor but also as a threat that must be kept in silence.

Nevertheless, while noise (and silence) targets certain bodies for obfuscation, paradoxically it must always *reveal* these bodies through its targeting. It’s in this way that the figure of noise might be made, not just a tool for academic critique, but also as a weapon for resistance. If noise implies and helps to uncover the inexistents of a world, how might we redeploy it to serve a politics of rupture? What are the tactics and strategies through which noise, its production and consumption, may advance the current cycle of struggles against racism, sexism, and global capitalism (in Ferguson, Baltimore, and elsewhere)? Such strategic reflection is the foundation and the goal for all “theory” in this thesis. For, as Jasper Bernes has argued (2013), theory is useful only in the didactic, when it “tells us what to do, or *what is to be done*.” To quote the late Stuart Hall (1992: 286), theory is posed here not as “the will to truth” but as “a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect.”

Outline of Thesis

Why use something as ephemeral as noise to discuss governance, ontology, and ultimately to develop a materialist critique of capital? **Chapter 1** seeks to provide such a justification. The first

half of the chapter presents a brief overview of the subfield of “sonic geography.” I indicate a major gap in this literature concerning the role of noise in issues of governance and biopower—a topic recently taken up in studies outside geography. I then show how noise, as an object of study, has much to contribute to the geographic discussion of governance.

When incorporated into governmental studies, however, noise problematizes the notion of governance itself as an analytic for understanding the exploitative logics of capital. The second part of the chapter develops this critique, taking as its target a conception of power that is solely positive, an idea that underlies Foucault’s genealogical method when taken crudely, as well as the influential field of governmentality studies. What this kind of analysis cannot fully account for, I argue, are the negative (ie, disciplinary and coercive) components of global capitalism, especially the violent domination of bodies that are otherwise unaffected by (silent to) state governance. Drawing on the work of Jacques Attali (1985), I show how an attention to sound, as equally coercive and productive, collapses the divisions between positive and negative conceptions of power, while demanding an *ontological* form of analysis that can describe worlds in which certain bodies and organs are held in silence.

Chapter 2 develops this argument from the scale of the body and at the point of death. It begins by looking at a 2013 study conducted by sociologist Yasmin Gunaratnam on the sounds of the dying in an English hospice. From this point of entry, the aim of the chapter is to develop a theoretical framework, to be used in the remainder of the thesis, for conceiving noise’s relations to the movements of capital and to the figure of the subaltern, the body-subject-to-silence. How can the sounds of the body, the chapter asks, be read in conjunction with larger socioeconomic structures? The general argument is that the noisy subaltern—positioned at the margins of social hierarchy—poses, and reveals, the contradiction in capital’s need for a “spatial fix” (Harvey 2001, 2007). While the accumulation of capital depends on the constant incorporation of “noise,” on the

creation of new pools of reserve labor and new zones of investment, the extraction of surplus itself requires fixed assets and the reproduction of semi-permanent relations of exploitation. The state, in Marxist theory, plays a role in the maintenance of the latter, as an apparatus for securitizing the radical and threatening aspects of noise. These strategies of silencing, moreover, give rise to a politics of identity that seeks to “give a voice” to those who lack it. As tempting as it may be, this kind of politics shares an ontology with the (sonic) governance it seeks to combat. I end the chapter with an examination of this ontology, which I call “correlationist” following philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2013), to the extent that it binds subject and object, interior and exterior, as well as body and language. I attempt to theorize a materialism that would avoid this coupling, and to hear in the noises of the subaltern the possibility of a politics that inserts a rupture or negativity into the situation of global capitalism.

Chapter 3 applies and particularizes the arguments of the previous chapters through an analysis of US noise-control policy during the 1970s. The question I pose is: how do legal institutions manage and represent excessive noise? How might this treatment play a part in the reproduction of unequal material relations and in normalizing the extraction of surplus capital? Two documents are highlighted: the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Noise Control Act of 1972 (NCA 72) and Seattle’s noise ordinance of 1977 (SNO 77). By examining how these documents frame sound, I show how particular forms of legal governance are predicated on ontological assumptions about which bodies should appear in a given situation. In sum, I argue that NCA 72 and SNO 77 operate to secure the turnover of capital via the circulation of commodities. They do this, I argue, through a biopolitical governance of bodies, which they inscribe within a state-defined language of welfare, health, and safety. Such a language grants the state access to civil society, while naturalizing the flow of commerce and guaranteeing a surplus of labor.

Yet NCA 72 and SNO 77 also justify and produce the technical apparatuses for managing this surplus population. In soliciting research into noise technologies and in excluding military experiments from their jurisdiction, these policies help make possible the sonic weaponry now used by police for crowd control and by the military for counter-insurgency and torture. In this way, drawing on Achille Mbembe and geographer Trevor Paglen, I show how NCA 72 and SNO 77 are predicated on a form of necropower by which racialized, classed, and gendered bodies are removed from the “population” these documents seek to govern.

Chapter 4 brings this discussion back to the scale of the individual. By looking at over 400 noise complaints from Seattle, I strengthen—but also complicate and empirically nuance—my argument that noise can help reveal the transcendental structures of capitalist worlds, and how these structures are reinforced. The main question I ask is how conceptions of noise change, or do not change, over the twentieth century, particularly around the period discussed in the previous chapter (the late 1960s and 1970s) when comprehensive noise control was first developed on federal and local levels.

Spanning from 1893 to 2006, the complaint data were compiled from several trips to the Seattle City Archives. In my analysis, I indicate a contrast in how sound is treated before and after 1970. After this date, Seattleites tend to conceive sound in a way that binds the body to a set of liberal and non-empirical limits that obscure its material position. To demonstrate this argument I examine three aspects of the complaints: (1) descriptions of bothersome sounds, (2) what these sounds are said to endanger, and (3) the rationales individuals provide for making complaints. For the first category, I show how noise is portrayed in a much more visceral and corporeal manner after 1970 and how, against this, the body is framed as porous, polluted, and in need of protection. There is also an increase in complaints that deem noise a threat to abstract and difficult-to-measure concepts like “quality of life,” “emotion,” and “community,” as well as rationales that reference

liberal norms of “civility,” “fairness,” and “rights.” What these trends demonstrate is that Seattle noise complaints after 1970 are part and parcel of a process that “culturalizes” (Brown 2008: 15) and conceals material conflict, and in so doing produces “free” spaces in which the movement of capital continues unimpeded. This is the process of a democratic-materialist ideology structured on the normative equality of bodies and languages—on a liberal multiculturalism—while regulating and silencing those bodies and languages which fall outside and do “not deserve to benefit from this equality” (Badiou *LW*: 2–3). These latter are rendered surplus, either in terms of labor or in terms of existence itself.

Chapter 5 tests the validity and scope of the arguments developed in the previous two chapters on Seattle, by applying them to a different scale of analysis: the “soundscape,” as it was conceived and studied by R. Murray Schafer and others at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In examining the scientific practices and technologies that enable this concept, as well as detailing the ways in which it interprets noise, I identify two logics of governance at work.

The first I call modernist-idealism, which works, through noise, to situate bodies in a normative and essentialized world in which they are made amenable to measurement, evaluation, and intervention. This is accomplished through the dissemination of the “soundscape,” not only as a strategy for framing bodies, but also as a set of technologies and mapping practices that divide the sensible into binaries of good and bad, positive and negative.

The second form of governance discussed is that of democratic materialism. I show how Schafer’s notion of “schizophonia” (1969: 46)—sounds severed from their origins—describes the soundscape as product, as a technology that proliferates abstracted and originless representations of sonic space. Rather than indexing bodies within an essentialized and non-present world, the “schizophonic” soundscape renders its subjects always-already dematerialized within their situation.

As a result, the soundscape functions to naturalize *what is* (sonically intelligible) and to obscure *what is not* (recordable in the soundscape). To develop this argument, and to explore its political consequences, I turn to Badiou's (*BE*) remarks on representation and presentation, demonstrating that the difference between modernist-idealist and democratic-materialist governance is in how the former requires an acknowledgement of presentation while the latter obscures this altogether and operates, instead, through the normalization of representation.

In the end, the goal of this thesis is to provide a few tools for examining noise as a site of politics. In turning to issues of ontology, I intend to shift the conversation from the "noisy sphere" of phenomena—the world of languages and bodies—to the (often silent) structures of domination that make such a sphere possible. It's in this way that noise offers a sensible index, both theoretical and empirical, for understanding social relations that remain invisible to other forms of analysis. Noise is always something that, especially under global capital, requires management and policing. And while the movements of capital cannot be grasped by it alone, noise must be taken seriously by any politics that would seek resistance and rupture.

Chapter I Noise in the Study of Geography and Governance

Any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form. Among birds a tool for marking territorial boundaries, noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one's sustenance from it. And since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination.

—Jacques Attali (1985: 6)

I. The Study of Noise in Geography: The Need for Biopolitical Analysis

Introduction

The study of sound in its social and political dimensions has always involved varying degrees of interdisciplinarity. Indeed, no single discipline maintains a complete hold on sonic culture, despite recent attempts to formalize an all-inclusive body of study (see, e.g., Sterne 2012). Even musicology—an interdisciplinary discipline in itself—cannot claim sole ownership over the technical research of civil engineers and urban planners on issues of noise pollution, nor does it fully subsume aesthetic philosophy's attempts to place “listening” at the core of an ontology that moves beyond the visual.

But my aim here is not to catalog the long list of disciplines that have inscribed sound and music into their research agendas. Instead I focus on the field of geography, which, as several scholars have pointed out (Pocock 1989; Smith 1994; Jazeel 2005; among others) presents a particularly attractive arena in which to explore the intersections of culture, sound, and politics. “Music,” according to geographers Connell and Gibson (2003: 280), “is by nature geographical.” And as I show below, this axiom has been shared by many within the field human geography, which since the late 1960s has continued to develop a “growing interest” (Dalbom 2006: 314) in the spatial aspects of the aural—especially after Susan Smith's 1994 plea for geographers to take sound seriously.

Twenty years later, however, there is still much work to be done. A major gap in the literature may be addressed by discussions already occurring within the discipline. This underdeveloped area involves the role of sound in the spatial dynamics of biopower, particularly in reference to the dimensions of governance and social reproduction. Bringing sound into this conversation, as I argue below, has the potential to enrich and be enriched by geography's burgeoning interests in governmentality and biopolitics. In particular, sound and rhythm,¹ as *fluid patterns*, challenge rigidly structural conceptions of power while avoiding a poststructuralism that denies the existence of what David Harvey (1996: 7–8) calls “permanences,” organizations and institutional collectivities resisting the forces of flux. The viral and often (but not always) noncoercive nature of sonic vibration also provides an empirical example of the kind of power that scholars, since Foucault, have theorized as operating within global capitalism.

In what follows I briefly trace the study of music and sound as its been taken up by geographers. In doing so, I distinguish (1) an American tradition of scholarship that typically frames music as an objective cultural trait, from (2) a more recent British school of thought concerned with sound's political role in the construction of identities and space. It is within this second academic tradition that questions of biopower are implicit. Taking these questions seriously provides one way of linking sonic geography to critical geography as a whole. At the end of this section I explore how biopower, along with governance and social reproduction, are underdeveloped in sonic geography while immensely influential in the wider discipline, as well as for non-geography scholars working on sound. I will then show how—and why—both of these issues may be better addressed by sonic geographers and how such an attention would work therapeutically to challenge and to strip sound

¹ Unfortunately I do not have the space here to provide a literature review of recent geographers' dealings with rhythm (Elden 2004; Dodgshon 2008; Edensor & Holloway 2008; Evans & Jones 2008; Simpson 2008; Edensor 2009, 2010; DeLyser & Sui 2012; Pafka 2013; Revill 2013, 2014) which are typically indebted to Lefebvre (2013) and Bachelard's (2000) writings on *rhythmanalysis*. Interestingly, this growing body of (mostly British) literature is rarely connected to the geographic literature on sound (exceptions include Revill 2013).

geography of its affect-oriented tendencies, which deviate, in the last instance, from a critical materialism.

Music as Cultural Trait: The American Tradition of Music Geography

The earliest treatment of sound in geography was that of Finnish geographer, J.G. Granö, whose 1929 book *Pure Geography* sought a spatial study of “auditory phenomena” in “proximics,” providing a spatial description of noises on the island of Valosaari (as referenced in Matless 2005 and Pocock 1989). Grano’s work seems to be somewhat of an historical anomaly, however, as the four decades following the book’s publication are marked by silence—with virtually nothing written in the field of geography on issues of sound or music. This lull, Dalbom (2006: 314) and Kong (1995: 183) suggest, was partially due to the fact that many geographers considered music geography—particularly that which dealt with popular culture—as “unscholarly” and unworthy of study.

Despite geography’s silence, several researchers outside the discipline concerned themselves during this period with the spatial aspects of music and sound, producing works that would later prove influential to geographers. Most notable here for US geographers, according to Nash and Carney (1996: 70), are the works of ethnomusicologists and folklorists beginning with Curt Sachs’s 1929 *Geist und Werden der Musikinstrumente* (Sachs 1929) and including Bruno Nettl’s 1954 study and regional mapping of the distribution of Native American musical styles (Nettl 1954) as well as Alan Lomax’s taxonomy of folk song regions (Lomax 1960).

It wasn’t until the late 1960s that geographers began studying music seriously, beginning with Peter Nash’s 1968 article, “Music Regions and Regional Music,” which was according to George Carney, “the first scholarly article on music authored by a professional geographer” (Carney 1998). Nash’s article inaugurated a new geography of music that was from its outset positivist (Duffy & Waitt 2011: 120) in orientation and very much a North American phenomenon, drawing from the

work of Carl Sauer (1925) & the Berkeley school of cultural geography and spearheaded by Carney, “the ‘guru’ of geomusicology” (Nash, cited in Kearney 2010: 2).

From its beginnings, the American tradition of music geography was heavily influenced by ethnomusicologists and folklorists like Bruno Nettl and Alan Lomax, and as such tended to focus primarily on North American folk and popular music (rather than *sound* more generally). Carney (1998) suggests that this research direction was in part a response to renowned geographer Wilbur Zelinsky (1973) who in 1973 advocated for the study of folk music as a means of understanding the spatiotemporal dimensions of American culture. But as music geographies of North America experienced “limited but continuing success” (Dalbom 2006: 315) throughout the 70s and 80s, this geographic focus enlarged to cover other regions outside the US, as well as larger global scales.

According to Dalbom (2006: 315), traditional music geography (ie, the American tradition) conceived of music as a “cultural trait,” focusing on themes such as

distributions of music types at both the world and regional scales, diffusion of musical styles, cores of musical production and innovation, the spread of music through technological innovations (especially in telecommunications), and the music industry's effects on selected landscapes.

Carney (1987) provides a similar taxonomy that partitions the geographical study of music into four approaches:² (1) “History of musical traditions and their development” (Carney 1974; Carney 1987; Kuhlken and Sexton 1991; Carney 1999; Stillman 1999; Carney 2001; Graves 2009; Lindenbaum 2009; Strait 2010; Strait 2012); (2) “Regional studies and the production of cartographic representations of the location of musical traditions and spaces” (Nash 1968; Tavenor 1970; Zelinsky 1973; Gastil 1975; Horsely 1979; Carney 1979; Carney 1980; Crowley 1987; Lornell 1987; Gill 1993; Carney 1994; Che 2009; Finn 2009; Finn and Lukinbeal 2009; Strait 2014); (3) “Examination of cultural hearths and patterns of diffusion” (Gordon 1970; Ford 1971; Francaviglia

² It's important to note that neither Carney nor Dalbon acknowledge what I'm calling the British tradition of sonic geography.

1973; Nash 1975; Carney 1977; Francaviglia 1978; Glasgow 1979; Carney 1987, 1996; Glasgow 1987; Horsely 1987; Arkell 1991; Gill 1993; McLeay 1994; Stokes 1994; Bell 1998); and (4) “The perception of place in music” (Lehr 1983; Curtis and Rose 1983; Curtis 1987; Bowen 1997; Gumprecht 1998; Kruse 2005; Thompson 2006; Knight 2006; Kingsbury 2008; Daynes 2009; Kuhlken 2009; Pesses 2009; Romig 2009)

With works spanning a wide range of scalar and empirical interests, what holds the American school of music geography together is its Sauerian lineage, particularly its focus on music as cultural *object* rather than cultural *agent* (ie, as an artifact *produced by* culture, removed from any role in the *production of* culture). This statement is of course more of a general trend in American music geography than a hard-and-fast rule. To put it in Sauerian language, music in this tradition is generally deemed as belonging less to culture itself but rather to its material imprint, as a feature of the cultural landscape. It is this positivist- or empiricist-heavy conception of cultural landscape, as object not subject, that British geographers have challenged. For them, music—as well as noise more generally—is a *political player*, deeply imbricated in the production of space and identity.

Music as Political Player: The British Tradition of Sonic Geography

This challenge to American music geography arose as part of a wider critique of Sauerian cultural geography launched by British geographers in the 1980s (Kearney 2010: 6). As Susan Smith (1994: 232) points out, Sauer’s “positivist preoccupations,” particularly his influential idea of the “material imprint of the cultural world,” have been challenged by geographers like Denis Cosgrove (1984) and Steve Daniels (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988) interested in “the representation and interpretation of landscape.” For Cosgrove and Daniels, traditional approaches to landscape like Sauer’s overlooked its historical and social contexts (Smith 1997: 505). A cultural landscape, they argued, is not simply a material record but acts as a set of *texts* that could be read and interpreted to produce social

knowledge (Smith 1994: 232). But as freeing as this discursive treatment of landscape was for geographers wishing to trace its history and politics, British sonic geographers like Smith (1994, 1997) also found it deeply limiting in its bias towards visual ways of knowing. “The landscape idea,” Cosgrove (1984: 1) writes, “represents a way of seeing”³ and thus ascribes to sight an epistemological primacy over other senses like hearing. Sound, then, in landscape studies and cultural geography more generally has been singled out, particularly by British geographers, as a neglected area of study (Pocock 1989, following Porteous 1982; Rodaway 1994; Smith 1994, 1997; Ingham et al. 1999).

In many ways British sonic geography can be characterized as a reaction, starting in the 1990s, to a Sauerian notion of culture and an ocular favoritism within cultural geography. This new interdisciplinary- and constructivist-minded strain of sonic geography began conducting research (1) exploring the interrelations between music, listening, politics, space, and identity, as well as (2) seeking to expand questions of aurality into areas of study inside and outside the discipline previously dominated by visual concerns. Publication have clustered around, but are not limited to, the following themes: historical geographies of citizenship and nation-state (Smith 1994; Revill 1995, 2000; Busteed 1998; Leyshon et al. 1998; Stradling 1998; Gold and Revill 2006); connections between sound and the production of space and identity (Kong 1995, 1997; Valentine 1995; Smith 1997, 2000; Berland 1998; Cohen 1998; Herbert 1998; Hollows and Milestone 1998; Leppert 1998; Waterman 1998; Ingham et al. 1999; Duffy 2000, 2005; Sandahna 2002; Connell and Gibson 2004; Anderson et al. 2005; Jazeel 2005; Jones 2005; Matless 2005; Hudson 2006; Boland 2010; Gallagher 2011; Revill 2013, 2014); and the relations between sonic practices, geographies of affect, and nonrepresentational theory (NRT) (Smith 2000; Anderson 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006; Revill 2004; Wood & Smith 2004; Morton 2005; Wood et al. 2007; Kanngieser 2011; Gallagher & Prior

³ In his 1998 “Introductory Essay” to *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Cosgrove concedes the “principal weakness” of a theory of landscape based solely on the visual (1998 [1984]: xiv).

2013).⁴

The roots of many of these interests emerged, in part, out of a 1993 conference at University College London entitled “The Place of Music,” which provided the fodder for a theme issue of *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* in 1995 and a 1998 book, *The Place of Music*, edited by Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, all prolific figures in British sonic geography. In the book’s introduction, the editors (1998: ix) advocate for a “transdisciplinary” approach to the geographic study of music. And it is this emphasis on academic borrowing that has helped distinguish the British tradition of sonic geography from its American counterpart.

Running through the British literature, holding it together, is the work of French political economist, Jaques Attali (1985).⁵ In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali (1985: 4) argues that “music is a mirror of society,” offering not only a window into the current and previous processes of social reproduction but also prefiguring new forms of political economy to come. Sound, for Attali, is inextricably bound up with power and the production, policing, and surveillance of space.⁶ In light of this argument, Attali’s book has been particularly useful for sonic geographers interested in exploring the idea of noise as a form of social control or exploitation (Wood et al. 2007; Gallagher 2011); the politics of music and sound (Revill 2000; Smith 2010; Kannigieser 2011); sound’s role in identity formation and social reproduction (Anderson 2004a; Duffy & Waitt 2011); and economic geographies of the music industry (Leyshon et al. 2005).

⁴ These groupings were borrowed similar groupings in Anderson et al. 2005 and Gallagher & Prior 2013, and expanded on.

⁵ Published in French in 1977 and translated into English in 1985.

⁶ Attali (1985: 6–7): “[A]ny theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form. Among birds a tool for marking territory, noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one’s sustenance from it. And since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination [...] Eavesdropping, censorship, recording and surveillance are weapons of power.”

Sonic Biopower

While the influence of Attali helps us distinguish British sonic geography from its more positivist faction in North America, it also points to some underdeveloped areas within the discipline. Though Attali's conception of sound as a form of power has been taken up tacitly in several articles by geographers (eg, Saldahna's 2005 comments on rave tourism critique in Goa, India as entangled in uneven social structures, or Connell & Gibson's 2004 study of global power relations within the music industry), only a handful of articles⁷ explicitly attempt to map the relations between sound and social control. Out of this batch of articles only two (Matless 2002 and Revill 2013b) refer to the concepts of governance or governmentality. And surprisingly, with few exceptions, none of these authors engage the governmentality literature that has flourished in human geography over the past two decades (including Ó Tuathail 1996; Luke 1996; Murdoch and Ward 1997; Braun 2000; Flint 2003; Legg 2005; Rose-Redwood 2006). Nothing, moreover, has been written on the implications of sound for biopower or biopolitics, nor for issues of social reproduction. All three of these concepts—governmentality, biopolitics, and social reproduction—have the potential to expand our knowledge on sonic geography by helping to describe and theorize the ways in which power functions aurally.

Typically, geographers have drawn on governmentality studies with the rationale that “rule is organized and circulated through particularly situated bodies and places” (Rutherford 2007).

Governmentality, that is, operates via the production and configuration of space. Sound studies, too,

⁷ These works include Revill's (2013b) analysis of railway rhythms (reverberations) which he considers regimes of governance for the control of bodily experience; Gallagher's (2011) study of sound's role in the discipline and surveillance of school spaces; Jones's (2005) analysis of the use of music in the production of efficient industrial workers in twentieth-century Great Britain; and Matless's (2002) exploration of the links between sound and regional models of conduct.

imply a spatial component since sound waves must manifest across space and resonate differently according to their material hosts. So if sound is necessarily spatial, and if space constitutes the medium through which governance occurs, geographers (those who study space) *should* look more closely at the relationship between sound (and lack of sound) and governmentality, expanding on an already sparse and regionally limited literature on sonic power limited by region (eg, Matless 2005) and institutional focus (eg, Jones 2005; Gallagher 2011; Revill 2013b). A comprehensive study of sonic governmentality would draw from work in media studies (especially Goodman 2010 and Kittler 1999) to explore the ways in which auditory technologies have functioned (often for the purpose of) social and militaristic control, both through physical force and the diffusion of knowledge.

An attention to sound has much to give back to governmentality studies since, as a form of power that is simultaneously dispersive (insofar as sound waves flow out from a source, wax and decay) while also ordered (ie, formally imprinted with a set of amplitudes, wave lengths, pitches, timbre, etc.). Such a metaphor (and physical conduit) for power might help geographers theorize concepts like governmentality in ways that move beyond structuralist/poststructuralist debates. Sound—*noise*—is often thought of as the epitome of chaos (Attali 1985); the musical phrase, the inverse of stasis. Yet can't sound draw people together in dance, to reproduce its rhythms, to create an *organizing structure* that might also include the vibrating floorboards and the buzzing liquid in my cup? The theoretical wager here is that noise, though always in flux, asserts power through what Brian Goodman (2010: 148) calls “rhythmic assemblages,” semi-permanent collections of “speeds and slowness, clusters of sensation” that “synthesize flows of information, matter, and energy into a virulent rhythmic consistency.”

It's precisely the *virulent* quality of sound that makes it such an enticing object of study for geographers working on the social reproduction of capitalist, patriarchal, racial, and heteronormative

relations. The Marxist-influenced notion of social reproduction has received much attention in the discipline over the past decade (Katz 2004; Mitchell et al. 2004; Ward et al. 2007; Ansell 2008; Roberts 2008; Silvey 2009; Thiem 2009; Martin 2010; Hunter 2011; Strauss 2012). Put simply, social reproduction refers to the ways in which structures, institutions, practices, and material relations get reconstituted over time. Noise would appear to play a major role in this process, for as many sonic geographers in the British tradition have argued, music and sound work to construct space, identity, and place. Yet none of these geographers use the notion of social reproduction so important to others in the discipline.

Social reproduction, however, plays an important role for several non-geographers dealing with sound. Attali (1985: 118–119), for instance, sees the contemporary musician as playing a significant role in the reproduction of dominant power structures:

The musician has become an element in a new network of power...His function is no longer to invent ways of communicating or representing the world, but to be a *model for replication*, the mold within which reproduction and repetition take shape.

For Goodman (2010: 124 & 136), too, following William S. Burroughs, sound waves are potentially *contagious* and *viral* communication codes, “abstract machines—sets of rules that have become independent of their specific physical embodiments, thereby intensifying their powers of transmission, replication, and proliferation.” Sound’s ability to replicate and transmit makes it, in Goodman’s (2010: 153) eyes, a powerful tool for the reproduction of capitalist relations, particularly for corporate branding strategies designed to modulate consumer desire. This desire, maintained or produced in part through sound, is for Goodman (2010: xv) located at the “rhythmic nexus of body, technology, and sonic process.” Conceived in this way, noise stands at the juncture between body & power, social structure and the individual, and would thus provide geographers with an empirical site for the study of social reproduction, as it plays out across space, in and between bodies.

Because sound acts on—and has the potential to group—bodies in space, a study of sonic governmentality would also benefit from a consideration of biopolitics and biopower, concepts that have already proved useful in the geography discipline for thinking through issues of uneven social relations (Brown & Boyle 2000; Hannah 2000, 2001; Legg 2005). Although there is no agreed-upon definition of biopolitics, Mark Kelly (2005: 59) has defined the term as the technology “deployed to manage population.” *Biopower*, on the other hand, as Foucault sometimes suggests, occurs at the intersection of bio- and anatomo-politics (see, e.g., *HoS*: 140–141). In *Security, Territory, Population* (2009: 1) he sees biopower as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.” Sonic geographers, particularly those engaging the affective and bodily aspects of sound, are well positioned to employ these notions of biopower and biopolitics in their research.

Yet this proposed incorporation does something further: it works to *critique* the affective, NRT turn at the root of much of British sonic geography, which tends to be heavily phenomenological. According to Ruth Leys (2011: 443) affect theorists maintain an anti-intentionalism by positing “a gap between the subject’s affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes ‘too late’ for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action.” Such a gap, though, renders any sort of biopolitical governance meaningless since the ways in which we come to know and “appraise” ourselves—which are the conditions through which biopower is actualized—have no causal impact on our behaviors. Yet a recognition of biopolitics forces the acknowledgement that power in a late capitalist society functions primarily on this level of appraisal, by controlling the ways in which we conceive/perceive and are encouraged to regulate our bodies, our affects. In other words, biopower does not need to work *directly* (ie, coercively) on our bodies but instead accesses (*affects!*) them through the modulation of belief, intention, and meaning—precisely that to which the affect theorist

would deny causality. Thus, Foucault's notion of governance as "the conduct of conduct" might be reformulated here to read: "the affect of affect."

While the biopolitical critique of affect cannot be fully fleshed out here, I include it to indicate a justifiable path geographers might take in exploring the governmentality of aurality. But as Martilla (2013) points out, it's often unclear how the theoretical outlook of governmentality researchers influences their empirical findings. To avoid this discrepancy, a project geared towards the study of sonic governmentality—as well as biopolitics and social reproduction—must adopt a framework that allows for the empirical measurement of power structures.

In summary, while music and sound have been consistently studied by geographers since the late 1960s, very little has been written on sonic governmentality, especially in terms of biopower. Drawing from already-rich literatures on biopolitics, sonic geographers might problematize and enrich social-scientific understandings of power and space, using sound as a material locus for studying the ways in which bodies are included or excluded, made audible or inaudible, within systems of control. Such research calls for interdisciplinary efforts, drawing on empirics from the natural sciences—such as data from noise pollution, acoustics monitoring, and so forth—with qualitative methods in human geography in ways that help theorize how the body is (or is not) physically and affectively mobilized to support or undermine institutionalized structures of inequality.

II. Noise as a Critique of Governmentality

Introduction

Yet Geographers cannot simply graft governmentality onto sound studies, or vice versa. To do this would ignore the particularities of noise as an object of analysis—what it has to offer the discipline of geography. My argument here is that noise produces a failure within studies of governmentality,

especially ones that refuse to acknowledge the inaudible or in-existent elements that are produced under every situation of capitalism (eg, Dean 1995, 2009; Rose 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2009, 2013; Rose and Miller 2013; Rose et al. 2006). What these studies cannot account for is *structural domination*,⁸ or the silencing of certain bodies so as to ensure the reproduction of capital and the realization of surplus value. As such, this scholarship is based on a crude interpretation of Foucault's work on governance, ignoring the negative and disciplinary effects of power. Governmentality studies tend to "recognize that [Foucault's work on power] undermined the conventional view of the state as the origin, animator, beneficiary, or *terminal point of power*" (Rose et al. 2006: 86; italics mine). Yet Foucault's own words suggest something different. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality (HS)*, while insisting that we "not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset," Foucault (*HS*: 92) adds that "these are only the terminal forms power takes." Against what governmentality scholars argue, power does indeed *crystallize* for Foucault. At times it is "embodied in the state apparatus" (Foucault *HS*: 92). While these embodiments cannot be assumed before hand—"relations of power are not in superstructural positions" (Foucault *HS*: 94)—in a *given situation* they can certainly play the role of "origin, animator, beneficiary."

To overlook this is to adopt a distinctly post- or anti-structural framework that discredits the existence of what David Harvey (1996: 261) calls "permanences"—relatively stable assemblages of relations that resist flux, such as the prison system, private property, or wage labor. Equipped with this ontology, "governmentality studies" offers no real strategy of resistance against capitalism,

⁸ I use "domination" here as a term that includes, but is not limited to, the traditional Marxist concept of "exploitation." Besides proletarianization and the extraction of surplus value, "domination" also refers to the always-racialized production of not-even-workers and the management of capital's crises through the periodic casting out of bodies from the wage relation altogether, to homeless shelters, prisons, and death camps. In sum, "domination" is not restricted to labor but includes other forms of state violence. It is exploitation + exclusion.

patriarchy, or any other structure of hierarchy since it is unable to think those structures as coherent. To do so requires taking seriously a Marxism that works to uncover the logics of domination that produce invisible bodies and hidden spaces in the name of capital accumulation. Without an attention to domination, scholars reproduce and obscure the movements of capital, restricting their analysis to audible relations, to the positive effects of power.

This critique is formed on the basis of noise's inability to function within a governmentality framework, or the framework's inability to capture the full extent of noise and its (a)effects.⁹ I proved this empirically in the preface, as my GIS study of sound monitoring in King County, Washington failed to capture the structures of hierarchy present in the situation. Such a failure poses serious problems for governmentality studies as well as for any genealogical analysis that would only trace the positive effects of power (Foucault *D&P*: 194). Studying governmentality in terms of sound monitoring—charting the “techniques and procedures for directing human behavior” (Foucault 1998: 81)—overlooks the exploited spaces and bodies on which these techniques and procedures are *not* imposed. What my GIS project shows is that the institutions, calculations, and strategies of (sonic) governance cannot be read solely as positive, since they occur across lines of class, gender, and race, and as such, necessary invisibilize certain groups from the “regime of the sensible” (Rancière 2013: 18) they police. Thus, in neglecting the negative or in-existent of a situation—what exists but does not appear—the study of governmentality, but also any genealogical account of the positive effects of power, when taken alone, reinforces the material hierarchies it wishes to critique. An analysis that avoids such repetition would refuse to isolate negative and positive forms of power, a division vital to Foucault's program (eg, see *D&P*: 194).

In what follows I support this claim by expanding on how the study of noise complicates the division between positive and negative conceptions of power. Positive power I define, as Foucault

⁹ See the preface for an empirical proof of this failure.

does in *D&P* (p. 194), as a producer of reality, as that which “produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.” Creative positive power never “silences,” at least in the sense I discuss here. Rather, it is the architect of noise, meaning, and truth. This is the kind of power that most often concerns governmentality studies. To discuss positive power, I argue, is always to reference a rationality or form of governance invested in the manufacturing of particular truth-effects.

This is not true for negative power. The negative conception of power, which Foucault seems to reject in the passage of *D&P* cited above but not in others (see for instance *D&P*: 24), is defined here as what excludes, represses, censors, abstracts, masks, and conceals.¹⁰ Unlike its positive form, negative power *is not always explained in terms of governance*. Often, as in my GIS study, it resides in a *lack* of governance, in passing over certain bodies in silence and thereby rendering them supplementary, either to the labor relation or to “life” itself. It is for this reason that I divide negative power into two kinds: coercive (action) and in-existent (non-action). In terms of noise, silence is achieved either by forceful imposition or through non-governance. The latter is what concerns me in terms of the study of noise since in-existence provides the basis of repression (but also for governmentality) and is also its logical endpoint. This is because to fully censor is to erase or deny a subject’s existence, placing him or her in a zone of non-governance.

Paradoxically, then, non-action is always indicative of real violence to the extent that it makes possible certain actions of governance, exclusion, and repression in supplying their conditions of possibility. In terms of biopolitics non-governance works, like its opposite, to create apparatuses—demographic statistics, maps, surveys—that operate on the “life” of a population unevenly, placing particular groups in spaces of risk and of increased surveillance and policing. In

¹⁰ Although Foucault (*D&P*: 194) often implies a need to “cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms,” he does not deny the reality of negative power itself, as is occurs within systems of punishment, for instance. To deny Foucault negative power is to simplify his philosophical program and to repeat the mistakes of recent literature on governmentality. Rather than strictly positive, power for Foucault is never *merely* negative. Besides, what Foucault is rejecting in *D&P* is a negative *conception* of power, not negative power itself.

terms of necropolitics, non-governance works to create spaces of silence and irrationality, subject to violent intervention under the name of democracy. It is for these reasons that I argue negative power in its non-existent form is at the root of power effects. Indeed, the silencing of bodies provides the basis on which power itself can act.

In complicating the division between positive and negative conceptions of power, the study of noise problematizes and helps deconstruct governmentality studies and the (positive) genealogical method. As Lauri Siisiäinen (2013: 88) points out in *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing*, “the ‘auditory-sonorous’ becomes a problem in the framework of liberal governmentality.”¹¹ But rather than theorize sound, as Siisiäinen does (see 2013: 85), as that which constantly eludes governance and management, I point to the ways in which sound eludes research methods that take governmentality as a central problematic, as something that can be isolated from issues of coercive dominance.

Attali, Noise, and the Negative

In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali (1985) develops a historical materialist reading of sound that complicates a purely positive conception of power. “In noise,” says Attali (1985: 6), “can be read the codes of life, the relations among men.” “More than an object of study” (4) the organization of noise, in the form of music especially, “reflects the manufacture of society” (4) and “makes audible” (5) the “contradictions” of capital by which a “community” (6) is reproduced. As Attali admits, this reading is in itself nothing new. Music for Marx is the “mirror of reality,” for Nietzsche the “expression of truth” (quoted in Attali 1985: 6).

Yet as Fredric Jameson (1985: vii-viii) points out in his introduction to *Noise*, Attali does not conceive sound simply as the end product of economic relations. He refuses, in other words, to adhere to the “well-worn Marxian formula” in which “economics is generally considered to be a

¹¹ Siisiäinen (2013: 88): “Sound and hearing do not recognize the right of ownership over enjoyments; they resist the properness and the property-form of them.”

science of the base or infrastructure, whereas music traditionally counts among the [...] superstructural activities” (Jameson 1985: vii). Instead, Jameson argues (1985: xi), Attali is the first to have explored the consequences of the “reciprocal interaction” model: “the possibility of a superstructure to anticipate historical developments.” Not only a mirror held up to society, noise is for Attali (1985: 4) also a “herald.” It presages changes in the “base” insofar as its “style and economic organization” (Attali 1985: 11) are conceived as productive—as a “means of power” (6). “Any organization of sounds is [...] a tool,” he writes (6), “for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality.” As a “mode of communication between man and his environment” (9), sound is what “links a power center to its subjects.” In an Althusserian context, sound is thus what interpellates (literally, in the case of “hailing”) to the extent that it “indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it” (Attali 1985: 6). It’s for this reason, Attali (6) argues, “any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form.”

I lay out Attali’s argument in length here not only because it places noise in relation to power, but also because it has methodological implications for the ways we talk about and theorize power in the first place. On the surface, Attali’s reading seems to beckon a kind of Foucauldian genealogy of sound. As Foucault does for sex in *HS*, we might trace the positive “effects of power” (*HS*: 11) *produced* by technologies and institutions of noise. Drawing on the later Foucault, we might attempt to turn noise into a study of governmentality, charting the sonic “apparatuses of security” (Foucault 1991: 102) that incorporate, maintain, and manage a target population within and through the knowledge form of political economy. Unlike Foucault, however, Attali does not distinguish between positive and negative effects of power. On the contrary, his conception of noise conflates any such division. Mass music, for instance, plays a role in shaping and orienting individuals towards commerce and other (neo)liberal norms: it is a “powerful factor in consumer integration, interclass

leveling, cultural homogenization” (Attali 1985: 111). “Slipping into the spaces of activity” and “everyday life” (Attali 1985: 111), mass music might be placed within the Foucauldian tradition as a technology of the self, as a governmental apparatus “in which human beings come to understand and act upon themselves within certain regimes of authority and knowledge” (Rose et al. 2006: 90). Supporting this is Attali’s (1985: 9) claim that music “is therapeutic, purifying, enveloping, liberating; it is rooted in a comprehensive conception of knowledge about the body.”

While this may be true, Attali’s conception of mass music is equally coercive and negative, producing silent zones within and between bodies. “Beyond [integration, leveling, and homogenization],” Attali (1985: 111) argues, mass music

is a means of silencing, a concrete example of commodities speaking in place of people, of the monologue of institutions. A certain usage of the transistor radio silences those who know how to sing; the record bought and/or listened to anesthetizes a part of the body; people stockpile the spectacle of abstract and too often ridiculous minstrels.

Mass music functions, in the positive conception of power, to produce a commercial reality through the incorporation of individuals and their desires into the flows of commodity exchange. Yet this governmentality is made possible by a (negative) act of silencing. Coercively, mass music de-radicalizes parts of the body, according to Attali. Like a virus or military attack it breaches the perimeter of the self—“the general infiltration of this music” (Attali 1985: 111) seeps into the spaces of everyday life. Thus, at least in terms of music, governmentality (positive power) is never a seamless logic but relies on repressive acts of silencing. The production of reality comes at a cost.

Attali arrives at a dialectical view of power because unlike Foucault (eg, “Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared” [1990: 94]) he allows for power’s embodiment in structural positions of dominance. One of Attali’s (1985: 67) examples is the nineteenth-century conductor, who “as a leader of men, simultaneously entrepreneur and State,” becomes “a physical representation of power in the economic order.” Such an embodiment is a corollary of Attali’s

(1985: 143) treatment of noise, and thus of power, that which acts on and within the body: “music [...] directly transected by desires and drives, has always one subject—the body.” And as we have seen, sounds’ effects on the body are twofold, both positive (eg, Muzak encourages economic exchange [Attali 1985: 112] or else insanity) and negative (eg, body parts become “anesthetized”).

Admittedly, much of *Noise* is dedicated to the former. Attali spends the majority of the book examining what Foucault (1991: 102) refers to as “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise” of governmentality. Indeed, some passages of *Noise* appear to be pulled straight from *D&P*:

Eavesdropping, [...] recording, and surveillance are weapons of power. The technology of listening in on, ordering, transmitting, and recording noise is at the heart of this apparatus [...] to listen, to memorize—this is the ability to interpret and control history, to manipulate the culture of a people, to channel its violence and hopes. (Attali 1985: 7)

In a sense, these “weapons” govern without coercion—“at a distance” (Rose et al. 2006: 89)—in that they compile measurements and “statistics” (93). These metrics enable the biopolitical assessment of a population and help “nudge individuals towards certain paths over others” (Mitchell & Lizotte 2014: 68). For example, according to Attali (1985: 8), the American corporation Muzak “presents itself as the ‘security system of the 1970s’ because it permits use of musical distribution channels for the circulation of orders.”

Yet such “governing at a distance” (Rose et al. 2006) only functions, paradoxically, by way of an *immediate* and *bodily* silencing. The “monologue” (Attali 1985: 8) of Muzak helps produce spaces in which “no one has the right to speak any more.” Thus, not only does Muzak securitize neoliberal capitalism through discursive dissemination: for Attali it also directly and physically silences those who would speak out. This is why Attali’s conception of noise, as the embodiment and “source of power” (1985: 6) challenges the separability of positive and negative forms of power that enables

governmentality studies. As Attali shows, apparatuses of governmentality (and their positive effects) are always imbricated with those of discipline and exploitation (and the negativities these imply).

Such a framework allows Attali to pose a question that remains silent within governmentality studies and within Foucauldian analysis in general. This is the question of the negative. Within the terms of eavesdropping and surveillance it is: “Eavesdropping on what? In order to silence whom?” (Attali 1985: 7) What spaces and what bodies go untouched, passed over by sonic governance? And how does this passing-over create worlds in which groups of bodies are made exploitable as surplus labor or else eradicated entirely? In other words, how might governmentality be resituated within—as receiving its conditions of possibility from—a global capitalism that relies on (negative) acts of creative destruction? In this way, governmentality is seen as serving a dual purpose: not only does it (as Foucault shows) inscribe bodies within a liberal system of political economy but in its wake it also produces blind spots, areas or bodies of invisibility that may later serve as investment, labor, or management strategies in the growth of global capital.

Foucault vs. Badiou (Resistance)

In isolating the positive effects of power, governmentality poses an attractive framework for social scientists concerned with the empirical. Rid of any onus to attend to the invisible, in-existent, or to the body-not-governed, researchers need only map *what is*. Yet this methodology comes at a cost: it eliminates the possibility of a resistance that would fully undermine the structures of capital. Similar charges have been leveled against governmentality studies, as well as Foucault’s work in general (Frankel 1997; O’Malley et al. 1997). I contribute to this literature in drawing on Alain Badiou’s concept of “the event” to suggest that governmentality cannot account for a failure or act of resistance that leads to “real change” (*LW*: 582), one which, through destruction, opens a new “space of creation” (*LW*: 396). Failure and resistance, for Foucault, are never *ontologically*

destructive/creative since they always occur within a power network (see 1990: 95), ie, within *what is*. And as effects of power, resistance and failure are always “resituated” (Foucault *D&P*: 272) within the strategies and rationalities of liberalism (eg, see *D&P*: 277).

At the core of Foucault’s (and governmentality studies’) closing off of resistance is a dogmatic empiricism. For a true empiricist, like Foucault, there can never be any “transcendental” or “order-structure” outside experience (Badiou *LW*: 596). According to Badiou (*LW*: 527) even “the great discursive *dispositifs* that Foucault sets up under the heading of *epistemes*” are “relative to the body” and as such do not structure appearing-in-a-world. This is why Badiou (*LW*: 527) can claim, in a note at the end of *Logics of Worlds*, that “in Foucault there is no formal theory of the transcendental. And in this sense empiricism prevails.”

While Badiou does not expand on this any further, the stakes are clear within his philosophical program. Without a theory of the transcendental there can be no event, and without an event there can be no real resistance. One of Badiou’s (*LW*: 585) most succinct definitions of the event is that which “absolutizes the inexistent.”¹² What this means is that the event is a real change whereby a prior inexistent¹³—*what was not*—comes to occupy a position of maximal existence in a given world.¹⁴ The result of this change is a breach of that world’s transcendental laws of appearing: it is, in Badiou’s (*LW*: 386) words, “a localized dysfunction of the transcendental of a world.” This is why for Badiou (*LW*: 387), thinking the event constitutes a “break with empiricism” insofar as the event is the “advent of what subtracts itself from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendently discontinuous.” Placed in a Marxist framework, the post-evental subject would therefore include those who have been invisibilized and rendered surplus within the organization of

¹² A more formal definition: “An event is a real change such that the intensity of existence fleetingly ascribed to the site is maximal, and such that among the consequences of this site there is the maximal becoming of the intensity of existence of what was the proper inexistent of the site” (Badiou *LW*: 585).

¹³ Defined as “element of a multiple appearing in a world” (Badiou *LW*: 587) whose degree of existence is minimal.

¹⁴ Badiou (*LW*: 598) defines a world most simply as “the place in which objects appear.” Or more precisely, it constitutes “*one* of the logics of appearing.”

capital, either in terms of labor (its exploitable reserve army) or of existence (the illiberal subject, bare life, or the subaltern at the fringes of “society”). The task of politics, under the philosophy of the event, would be to insert this subject—the inexistent—into the repetition of *what is*, so that its emergence forces an interruption, a fermata in the melody of capital.

The study of governmentality, on the other hand, restricts its analysis to the empirical realm of *what is*. Rose et al. (2006: 99) affirm as much when they say that the “orientation of governmentality work” is an “empirical mapping of governmental rationalities and techniques.” Rather than producing a “theory of power, authority, or even governance” (Rose et al. 2006: 85)—ie, a theory of the transcendental—that would admit an inexistent, governmentality “asks particular questions of the phenomena that it seeks to understand, questions amenable to precise answers through empirical inquiry.”

Empirics are clearly important. I simply want to point out that an empirical inquiry, like that of governmentality studies, which does not theorize or leave open the possibility of *what-is-not*, cannot successfully critique—and in fact reproduces—the liberal/rational/capitalist power structures it attempts to map out.¹⁵ This is why, even within the larger analytic gambit of Foucault’s work, resistances and failures can never be “in a position of exteriority in relation to power” but are posed as “inside,” compatible with, and even necessary to “corroborate” (Foucault *HS*: 62) certain regimes of truth. Does this not close off the possibility of the event?

More than just the result of a dogmatic empiricism, though, such a closure is the consequence of Foucault (as well as governmentality studies) placing resistance within the strategic confines of democratic materialism. It is Foucault’s genealogical method, Badiou (*LW*: 35) argues, that provides the archetype the democratic-materialist method:

what democratic materialism calls ‘knowledge’, or even ‘philosophy’, is always a blend of a genealogy of symbolic forms and a virtual (or desiring) theory of bodies. It

¹⁵ For a more complete critique of empiricism see Althusser’s *For Marx* (2006), especially p. 228.

is this mixture, systematized by Foucault, which can be called a linguistic anthropology, and which serves as the practical regime of knowledges under democratic materialism.

As a result of this epistemological “mixture,” “life” (Badiou *LW*: 35) for the democratic materialist is precisely what “designates every empirical correlation between bodies and language.” Within this “life,” there can be no “prediscursive” (Butler 2006: 10) body outside or unbound from language, since to exist is to be always-already placed in a “genealogy of symbolic forms.” What’s also impossible, as we’ve argued above, is the conception of the inexistent: of a body undetermined by governance, unmarked by and thus invisible to dominant discursive formations.

This persistence of language is what in Foucault bars bodies from occupying any “absolute outside” to power (Foucault *HS*: 95) from which to launch resistance. There is no “single locus of great Refusal” (*HS*: 95–96). Instead, resistance is only possible as a “plurality” (*HS*: 96). This is because in Foucault’s framework acts of resistance are always-already bound to the finitude of bodies and to the play of discourse. They are, as for Badiou’s (*LW*: 34) democratic materialist, embedded in a logic whereby “languages let bodies actualize their vital resources.”¹⁶ As an example, in the first volume of *HS*, Foucault (157) argues for “a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the *claims of bodies, pleasures and knowledges*, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance” (italics mine). By this logic, resistance to dominant views of sex should not be formed on the basis of sex itself but somehow through the bodily discourses that surround it. “The rallying point counterattack against the deployment of sexuality,” Foucault (*HS*: 157) concludes, “ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasure.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Foucault, after all, does come from a vitalist philosophical tradition in France running from Bergson to Deleuze (Badiou *LW*: 7–8).

¹⁷ According to Badiou (*LW*: 34), for democratic materialism “[s]exual freedom is the paradigm of every freedom.”

Although Foucault fails to expand much on this point, the resistance strategy of “bodies and pleasure” is taken up in Judith Butler’s work.¹⁸ Towards the end of *Gender Trouble* (2006: 188–189) she develops a form of resistance she calls “gender parody” in which cultural performances like “drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities” succeed in denaturalizing “essentialist gender identities.” While in no way denying the importance or effectiveness of this kind of play, I question whether this strategy—which I argue is Foucauldian—can ground a revolutionary politics when taken alone. Ultimately, as Butler herself (2006: 188) admits, “parodic styles are [...] part of hegemonic, misogynist culture.” While this culture might very well be “denaturalized and mobilized” (Butler 2006: 188) such discursive tactics still bind, as governmentality studies do, the political subject to language, ie, to the limitations of *what is/can be said*.

III. Conclusion: Beyond Languages and Bodies

The limits posed by governmentality studies on research and resistance are part and parcel of the democratic-materialist ideology I outlined in the thesis introduction. Such an ideology is based on the axiom that there are only bodies and languages. For Badiou (2006), however, “there is not only what there is.” Indeed, Badiou’s (*LW*: 4) “materialist dialectic” states that “[t]here are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths.” Truths in Badiou are what are subtracted from, or exist as exceptions to, *what is*. This is certainly not the place for a proof of the existence of truths. Yet Badiou’s materialist dialectic is useful in revealing and challenging the assumptions of governmentality studies and in outlining a framework for a social science that can account for more than what is readily apparent in a situation, by studying the traces of inexistent elements beyond the limits of the body, language, and finitude.

¹⁸ In fact, Foucault’s passage serves as the launching point for Butler’s 1999 article, “Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures.”

Noise helps us put Badiou's materialist dialectic to practice. In a very real and even measurable way, noise exceeds the bounds of *what is/can be said*. Its effects and affects are circumscribed neither in recording nor in discourse analysis (an important method for governmentality studies). Of course the same could be said for any other sensory phenomenon: that it always resists analysis on some level. Yet noise appears as a particularly slippery object for geographers, as many have pointed to a bias in the discipline toward the visual (Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove & Daniels 1988; Smith 1994, 1997).

However, my argument is not simply that sound studies can account for aspects barred from sight. It is also that an attention to noise can help trace lines of domination that produce certain bodies and space as inaudible. As argued above, many of these relations cannot be accounted for through governmentality studies or through a positive conception of power that treats exploitation as the result of acts of noncoercive governance and as always operating within a system of discourse. Noise, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, can signify logics of exploitation and domination that are in their last instance based on acts of silencing that occur beyond the plane of discourse. As shown in my GIS study of noise monitoring, sometimes *not* governing, *not* placing bodies within systems of language and control, works just as well—if not better because of its indiscernibility—to maintain bodies in existing structures of inequality. When institutionally maintained, silence implies violence. *Pace* governmentality scholars, this violence often has nothing to do with governance, language games, or liberal rationalities. Rather, it is the silencing violence that guarantees the legitimacy of all these things.

Chapter 2

The Noise at the Door: Sounds of Alterity and Structural Haunting

In England . . . when people die, we are quiet, or cry occasionally. We do not scream and ululate. We do not, we do not, there's so many assumptions about how to behave and one of the most traumatic things for me was watching a . . . from the West Coast of Africa, I can't remember the country, um, a young woman dying of HIV and her mother going absolutely bananas and spare, you know with the grief and although I felt very frightened and felt out of control . . . It just looked different from our situation and thinking "what part do we have here?" Not because I'm a white British, but because we're staff and this is a professional situation for us . . . the fact that you're staff seems to imply that you should be in control of the situation and that we should be dictating, however subtly, or directing how the situation goes.

—Eve, an English hospice nurse (Gunaratnam 2009: 10)

I. Introduction

This brief chapter explores the relation between the sounds of the alter subject and the movements of capital within a global economy. How are the noises of the racialized or gendered policed, restricted, and represented by dominant subject positions? And how do these conceptions reinforce or challenge existing material relations? My argument is that the sounds of alterity are *hauntologized*—made neither present nor absent—within their worlds. The alter, I claim, poses and reveals a contradiction in capital's logic, between (1) the need for new bodies and spaces for exploitation and investment, and (2) the need for "spatial fix" (Harvey 2001, 2007) and for the reproduction of social relations. The alter—its sounds—is necessary for the growth of capital but simultaneously poses a threat in need of management and often, silencing.

The goal of this chapter is to develop a theoretical skeleton to propel—and be "substantiated" by—the series of artifacts I present later on. These artifacts will show how the hauntologic relations of capital become naturalized and masked in particular geographies, times, and material circumstances. What ties the artifacts together is that after 1970 sound and bodies are coded as always already within the spaces and flows of capital. In order to set up this claim and the empirical investigations that support it, at the end of this chapter I sketch out what I see as the

philosophical assumptions that confine critiques of this form of power to a “politics of *ressentiment*” (Brown 1995: 27) that repeats the violence of the metastructure by remaining bound to the task of resolving, in Roderick Ferguson’s (2004: 17) words, a situation’s “ruptural—i.e., critical—possibilities.” Originating with Kant, this set of assumptions is what philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (2013: 15) has called “correlationism,” which ties the object of knowledge to a universal subject, while limiting the subject to its “space of placement” (Badiou *TS*: 10). This kind of thinking, I show, is doomed to forever repeat the Same, while displacing its remainder—that which can interrupt and reassemble the real. Correlationism, in other words, functions to “interrupt interruption” (Badiou *TS*: 184), to re-establish the state of the situation by “keeping silent about what establishes it,” and ensuring that interruption, and the political subject that sustains its truth (Badiou *TS*: 173), remain “unheard-of” (Derrida 2006: 45). In this chapter’s conclusion, I briefly lay out some of the political implications of correlationism: as an axiom for identity politics and as something that must be undone if we are to develop effective strategies of resistance against the institutional structures which muffle the sounds of alterity.

The notion of correlationism is important in developing a theoretical base for the rest of this thesis and for exploring the ontological implications of noise across various geographies and histories. As I’ll show in later chapters, democratic materialism is often marked by the linking of bodies and languages, a correlationist process that nudges the former towards (or away from) a liberal system of governance and a world of exploitative labor relations.

II. The Death Rattle

In a 2009 ethnographic study, Yasmin Gunaratnam (2009: 8) examines the “sounds of dying among racialized others” as they are rendered problematic within the spaces of the multicultural English hospice. For the hospice and its white English staff, bodily “sounds of alterity” (Gunaratnam 2009:

10) like the “ululation” of the West African woman described in the quotation above “represent the ever-possible ‘failures’ of medical knowledge, care and technology, and the unruliness of others,” and as such must be managed and controlled—if not hushed—in order to ensure the reproducibility of white/English/medical authority. This control is achieved, Gunaratnam (2009: 10) argues, not coercively but through the “generation of institutional practices that are habitually oriented towards particular constructions of bounded identity and biomedicine.” The hospice, then, maintains authority through the maintenance and dissemination of what Jodi Melamed (2011: 24) calls “interpretive habit[s]” which represents or “ontologize[s]” (Gunaratnam 2009: 11) the noises of death as “racialized and gendered” and as connected to universal emotions, such that the particularity of grief and pain are “almost forgotten.” The result is a narrative (another kind of noise) like the one quoted above, which works to resolve and displace anxiety-producing sounds by rendering them as objects within a “professional situation.” The silencing of bodies is realized, for Eve, by *making them audible*.

Of course, by this logic, the sounds of alterity are never silenced altogether. Rather than *deontologized* they are *hauntologized*: they continue to trouble modern representation as what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007: 20) calls “exteriority,” or what for Derrida belongs to the “irreducible excess of a disjuncture” (2006: 32) in being as “revenant” (2006: 5), as that which returns. My goal here is to explore why this haunting must remain a haunting—neither a presence nor absence—so as to ensure the reproduction of capital’s social relations, particularly since the early 1970s with the rise of globalization. Because the reproduction of global capitalism, as Hardt and Negri (2001: 41) among others have suggested, is increasingly dependent on biopower, its critique must include an attention to the body and to the construction of the modern subject. For this reason I argue that sound, in its ability to physically and affectively mobilize the body (for examples see Goodman 2010), provides a material locus for studying the maintenance of the modern epistemes and the

modes of representation on which capitalism and other systems of power depend. In this chapter I discuss epistemes using Jacques Rancière's (2001: Thesis 7) notion of "the partition of the sensible" (*le partage du sensible*),¹ while employing Alain Badiou's idea of "the state of the situation" or its "metastructure"² (*BE*: 93–103) to explore the representations and transcendentals these epistemes make possible.

As seen in the passage above, noise, when "out of place," constitutes a site of rupture but also a site of management, as the revenant which must always be displaced. This management operates through the inclusion of noise within the "official" discourses or metastructure of English caretaking. Once-"out of place" sounds, then, become discursive apparatuses—like (neo)liberal multiculturalism and the race novel for Melamed (2011)—for policing the partition of the sensible and for naturalizing the disruptive processes of capital, resolving (ostensibly) its contradictions. These apparatuses are only produced, however, by representing or (haunt)ontologizing a set of sounds and bodies within a metastructure that conceals their multiplicity and renders them ghostly. In what follows, I turn to Marx (*C*, II), Roderick Ferguson (2004), and philosopher Michel Serres (2007) to theorize how certain sounds haunt, or rather *are produced as haunting*, the logics of capital.

III. Specters of Noise

"Haunting," Derrida writes (2006: 46), "belongs to the structure of every hegemony." My task here is to narrow this claim to show why this is the case for the relations of capital. As Ferguson (2004: 17) argues in reference to nonheteronormative racial formations, capital "can only reproduce itself

¹ Also translated as "the distribution of the sensible," Rancière's term refers to the law that delimits modes of perception, ie the conditions of possibility for knowing, "between what is visible and what is not, *of what can be heard from the inaudible*" (2001: Thesis 7).

² For Badiou metastructure, or the state of the situation, is the re-presentation of a presented multiple in that situation, which occurs when structure is *doubled*, ie, when it is counted-as-one once as presentation and then again by the state (*BE*: 94). This double count, for Badiou, secures the metastructure against the anxiety of the void. An example of metastructure is national citizenship, in which "a family of people is a presented multiple of the social situation" and "also a represented multiple [...] in the sense that *each* of its members is registered by the registry office" (*BE*: 174).

[ie, produce surplus populations for exploitation] by ultimately transgressing the boundaries of neighborhood, home, and region” which the state protects. I argue that sounds of alterity are also necessary for capital’s reproduction while threatening the metastructure and transcendentals through which this reproduction occurs. This conception of noise evinces what, for David Harvey (2001: 25), is “one of the central contradictions of capital”: the need to “build a fixed space,” a metastructure for investment, while at a later time needing to destroy this structure to make room for new investment and continued accumulation. Noises of alterity, as threats to the “control of the situation” (Gunaratnam 2009: 10) hold the potential to both destroy and to establish new spaces of investment, and therefore always constitute a problematic for surplus value creation.

Sound was of course problematic long before the rise of capitalism. According to Hillel Schwartz (2011: 655) Western legal systems have always had issues dealing with noise “precisely because it was so indeterminate.” But it’s with capital, in its need for surplus value, that noise becomes a site of *social contradiction*. Early-nineteenth-century accounts of industrial production for example, conceive the new soundscape of industry as aw(e)ful, even imprisoning. De Tocqueville (1982 [1835]: 306) writes: “the crunching wheels of machinery, the shriek of steam from boilers [...] those are the noises from which you can never escape.” Unsettling as these sounds are for the observer, they are the sensible traces of capitalist expansion during industrialism, part and parcel of the process of “creative destruction” (Harvey 2001: 30) that frees up additional markets for the realization of surplus value.

However, the sonic contradictions of capital are not limited to the space of the factory but extend, particularly in global capitalism, to (trans)national scales as well as to the body of the individual. Sound of course plays a key role in the circulation of commodities, within communication networks and global transportation systems. In Volume II of *Capital*, Marx (*C*, II: 219, 329) argues that communication and transport increase the productive power of labor, enabling

the reproduction and naturalization of capitalist social relations and creating the conditions of necessity for a world market. Sound not only reproduces but increasingly *enforces* a portion of these relations in providing coercive police tactics, like the use of infrasound technologies to quell riots (see Goodman 2010) and through the externalization and “industrialization of memory” (Stiegler 2008: 97–98) in recorded objects like MP3s.

But as much as sound functions to bind and to connect bodies within capitalist networks, it necessarily—on account of this connectivity—carries with it the possibility for interference. Like nonheteronormative racial formations for Ferguson (2004), noise poses a threat to the metastructure of the socioeconomic order from which it is produced. (“What is this sudden dangerous noise at the door that prevents me from finishing and leads me to other actions?” [Serres 2007: 8]) For Michel Serres (2007: 8) noise is a parasite, “an abusive guest,” “a break in the message”—the interruption within the system which gives rise to a new system. While the logic of capital incorporates literal and symbolic noise to generate new market networks and sources of surplus populations—through the development of telecommunications, creative destruction, and so on—these noises threaten to undo that which they support. This is because, according to Serres (2007: 79), systems like capitalism only exist to the extent that they fail, or rather, on account of what they exclude, which is registered and maintained as “noise.”³

While necessary for the expansion of capital, interruptive noises, like the “ululations” of the West African dying woman, always carry with them the potential for failure, for the demise of the state of the situation and the destruction of its transcendentals. As signifiers for both the success and failure of the realization of surplus value, noises of alterity are constantly displaced and rendered spectral—as neither absent (since they are necessary for surplus accumulation) nor present (since

³ This is in line with Marx’s (*C*, II: 190) idea that capitalism, specifically its modes of production, parasitizes aspects of external systems, placing them inside commodity production: capitalism “is conditioned by modes of production lying outside its own stages of development.”

they pose a threat to the metastructure that ensures this accumulation). This ghostly displacement is achieved through sets of discourses and institutional practices that reproduce interpretive habits or partitions of the sensible: modes of reading, listening, and surveillance that place transgressive sounds and subaltern bodies always-already within the state of the situation.

IV. Silence and Identity Politics

If, following the argument above, the growth of capital implies a contradiction between the need for noise in the form of the alter laborer, and the need to manage and silence this noise, then politics is placed under a specific set of conditions. For leftists, there has long been a temptation of a politics whose end goal is to “give a voice” to the silenced, to ensure their human rights and their ability to participate in a representational democracy. This becomes palpable in the shift to globalized capitalism, wherein increasing numbers of people are deskilled, flexibilized, and excluded from the wealth of the global north, leading to conflicts and violence around the world. Coupled with the political defeats of 1968, this would help explain the rise of identity politics in the latter decades of the twentieth century. A system of power that operates through the partitioning of the sensible between audible and inaudible terms produces a progressive politics that conceives resistance as an act of “audibility” or inclusion, of formally recognizing alterity. Wendy Brown (1995: 35), albeit for slightly different reasons, has shown however that identity politics is always reactionary insofar as it emerges in response to the crumbling of the modernist (universalist) project, and consequently remains couched in the representational terms of that which it seeks to overcome. I argue that identity politics is less reactionary than it is *obscurantist*, not denying the possibility of the event so much as ontologizing an authentic Body (based on social hierarchies) that silences the divided subject who, in Badiou’s philosophy, remains faithful to the trace of the event.

To bring this argument closer to the context of this chapter, I add, following Judith Butler

(2006: 194), that identity politics is self-defeating in that it is always constructed on the same “foundationalist reasoning” that maintains the partition of the sensible. This is a logic that “fixes, and constrains the very ‘subjects’ that it hopes to represent and liberate” (Butler 2006: 203). Thus, like English medical authority, identity politics attempts but will always fail to colonize alterity, to fully inscribe it within the bounds of a pre-given universal subject.

The temptation of identity politics is indeed the specter that runs through this chapter and through this thesis. Whether in the hospice, in noise complaints, or fiction, the “phantomalization” (Derrida 2006: 154) of sounds and bodies gives rise to the desire for a politics that seeks to recognize and to re-cast the excluded/inaudible within the terms of the state (of the situation). While often succeeding in securing rights, this politics repeats the violence of the sensible partition through which these sounds and bodies were originally excluded. In terms of resistance the question is therefore not one of exhumation, of how to make apparent that which is not, but of identifying and undermining the ontoepistemological conditions on which partitioned violence is based.

V. The Correlationist Assumption

For Butler, identity politics necessarily presumes a “metaphysics of substance” (2006: 28) that conceives ontology as a “grammatical formulation of subject [substantial identity] and predicate.” Plainly: there is always a “doer behind the deed” (Butler 2006: 35). Under these conditions experience can only be thought as a site of *unity* between “substance and attribute” (Butler 2006: 28), never as the disjuncture through which certain bodies and sounds are made inaudible. This bracketing is what makes the metaphysics of substance, and with it identity politics, a form of correlationism.

For Quentin Meillassoux, the correlationist denies the possibility of a detachment between subject and object, being and thought. Correlationism, he argues (2013: 5),

consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another. Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object “in itself,” in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object.

Tracing this assumption back to Kant, Meillassoux goes on to show how the correlationist designates to the realm of truth only those statements which are “universalizable” (2013: 16): “objectivity is no longer defined with reference to the object itself [...] but rather with reference to the possible universality of an objective statement.” What results is a colonization of time: all statements—of which we should include bodies and sounds—are only grasped if they are reproducible within the *correlationist present*, within the state of the situation. What is outside is literally rendered “*unthinkable*” (Meillassoux 2013: 15).⁴

While she places the moment of correlation more with Hegel than with Kant, Da Silva helps us think through the implications this assumption has on sounds and bodies of alterity. For Da Silva (2007: 68) the transparent “I” of the white, European subject is “achieved only by the version of universal reason [developed by Hegel] that unites the exterior and the interior.” In a Hegelian “scene of engulfment,” she argues (2007: 70), the once-threatening exteriority becomes colonized as “a moment of the trajectory of the transcendental (interior or temporal) subject.” Anxiety for the white subject is thus resolved in a process of correlation—the dialectical “actualization and recognition” (2007: 73) of *Geist*—that establishes a “profound intimacy between [self-consciousness] and exterior things.” What this process allows for is not only the construction of a universal interiority against which sounds and bodies of alterity are hauntologized, but also the proliferation of a set of discourses—like that of the English hospice or of noise-control regulations—that perform what Ferguson (2004: 21), drawing on Bakhtin, calls a process of “canonization” insofar as these

⁴ Which is why for Meillassoux (2013: 41, 48), Wittgenstein is an über-correlationist (at least the early Wittgenstein). After all, it was Wittgenstein (2007: 108) who in the *Tractatus* said: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”

discourses “suppress the heterogeneity of meaning” within a sonic situation. Individual aspects of noise are silenced, by this logic, according to a correlationist/Hegelian conception of truth as unitary and *audible*.

VI. Prolegomena to Any Future Interruption...

What does politics look like when it refuses to see truth as audible? What might it mean to do empirical research in a way that grasps the object on its own terms, beyond the limits of the transcendental? For the correlationist these questions are dismissed as nonsensical for they require “what modern philosophy has been telling us for the past two centuries is impossibility itself: *to get out of ourselves*, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not” (Meillassoux 2013: 27). To attempt this, says the “materialist” correlationist, one would need to adopt some erroneous form of idealism. But it is in fact the *correlationist*, Meillassoux (2013: 18) argues, who maintains a position of extreme idealism, “incapable of admitting that what science tells us about [...] occurrences of matter independent of humanity effectively occurred as described by science.” That correlationism is able to masquerade as a materialism demands a revision of materialism itself. While this is by far too large of a project for this paper, Butler⁵ and Badiou suggest a potential outline.

A revised materialism, instead of resolving the anxiety of exteriority in an interior essence, would theorize the (revolutionary) subject as emerging *from* anxiety, as that which, divided in itself, employs a strategy of “subversive repetition” (Butler 2006: 201) where the signifying practices of the metastructure are repeated to the point where they become “pastiche” (200) or “out-of-place” (Badiou *TS*: 142). As excess, these practices interrupt the repetition of which they are a part,

⁵ At the same time, it’s possible that Butler falls into the trap of correlationism herself. In circumscribing subversive gender possibilities “*within* the practices of repetitive signifying” (2006: 199), she runs the (poststructural) risk of reducing everything to discourse or language. The question to ask is whether or not it’s possible, in Butler’s philosophy, to grasp the object outside the vantage point of the subject. If she challenges a cultural dominant that posits a “prediscursive domain[s]” (2006: 10) then is prediscursivity possible? In other words can Butler think a “world without thought” (Meillassoux 2013: 28)?

exposing the “rift between the phantasmatic and the real whereby the real admits itself as phantasmatic” (Butler 2006: 200). The subject, then, is not an identity or stable “I” but that which both occupies the position of, and gives a name to, the remainder. In Badiou’s (*TS*: 141) words, the subject is both “the metonymy of the lack of being” and “that which gives being to the lack.” It is “that which cannot be inscribed on [...] the ground of repetition except destructively as the excess over that which keeps it in place” (Badiou *TS*: 141). According to this materialism, radical change occurs when a subject “forces” or places the impossible “in the position of possibility” (Badiou *TS*: 202).

However, the political task of the subject is not, in Butler’s (2006: 203) words, “to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility.”⁶ It is rather “to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designed as culturally unintelligible and impossible” (Butler 2006: 203). The challenge becomes one of “redescribing” these impossible possibilities—the spectralized—without stabilizing them within the limits of sensible. Rather than representing the spectral, which would naturalize the process through which the spectral is subordinated, a radical politics would playfully reappropriate the apparatuses of representation to spectralize the real itself, or more accurately to expose the real as phantasmal by drawing attention to the split between “our presence and what we are for representation” (Tiqqun 2011: 43). This is why for the French writing collective Tiqqun (2011: 43–44) the process of revolution is that of becoming “imperceptible,” which is not becoming invisible so much as it is forming an “inassimilable alterity” against the “universality of Empire.” The goal is thus to seize and subvert the apparatuses of non-identity through which Empire depends, in order to generate a division that unhinges the universality of the whole (Tiqqun 2011: 180). A philosophical project constituted on these grounds

⁶ This would either entail an identity politics based on the recognition of difference, or some sort of process ontology (à la Bergson and Deleuze) that commits the correlationist error of “hyposticizing some [...] vital term” (Meillassoux 2013: 37) whereby all objects are mediated through an assumed creative principle or life-force.

would, ironically, return to Hegel to place a “productive negativity” (see Žižek 2013: 374) at the core of being.

This negativity is precisely what is experienced by Eve, the nurse whose narrative of sonic disturbance began this chapter. Eve’s story, as I argued in the introduction, initially works to resolve her cultural anxiety by placing it within a professional situation, and by creating the conditions for the regulation of noise on the basis of racial othering. But this kind of control is never achieved: Eve never acts. Through her interviews with Gunaratnam, in “remembering and recounting” the traumatic experience of listening to death cries of that West African woman, Eve registers “a profound sense of failure” in being immobilized as a professional (Gunaratnam 2009: 13). She is made “superfluous,” unable to perform her role in the face of death—not only in the literal sense but in terms of racial and cultural alterity. The inassimilability of this experience constitutes a “disruption of a professional expertise that eschews emotional involvement” (Gunaratnam 2009: 13) and that creates a rupture within Eve’s professional situation—between the body and its institutionalized roles, thereby defamiliarizing the practices of care work. In other words, Eve is hauntologized, made excessive by that which has been produced as a haunting (the racialized other). And it is this process of spectralization through noise, of being cast in a position of (professional) nonidentity and failure, that Gunaratnam (2009: 13) argues “destabilizes habit, and creates possibilities for an unconditional hospitality.” Eve reminds us that “political re-education” (Badiou *TS*: 142) occurs in an act of subjective interruption. That’s not to say that ghosting can’t be made into a coherent political project, seeking to produce the conditions of rupture in pedagogy and beyond.

VII. Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to establish noise, generally, as a site of politics, and to develop a theoretical framework for the empirical studies of the following chapters. As I have shown, noise poses a problem for capital: it is a necessary component of the production and circulation of commodities as well as for the creation of new markets of investment, but it threatens the reproduction of capitalist relations. Drawing on an English nurse's narration of the sounds of the dying, I showed how this contradiction plays out on the scale of the individual, and how its resolution always involves a process of racialization and othering.

In the second half of the chapter I attempted to define some of the political and ontological underpinnings of modern attempts to resolve the problems of noise. Politically, I argued that identity politics obscures the possibility of the rupture. Through the desire to "give a voice" to underrepresented groups, this politics ironically silences the divided subject who bears the trace of the event. In this way, identity politics is the archetypal politics of democratic materialism.

The idea of "correlationism" developed here will return throughout the thesis. The binding of subject and objects, but especially bodies and languages, is a core tenet of democratic materialism and the dominant logic through which, I argue, noise is conceived and managed after 1970. In an attempt to avoid correlationism in my own empirical work, I ended this chapter by outlining a materialism that takes the *negative* as a serious political project and whose desire is always to produce failures, silences.

Chapter 3 Noise-Control Legislation in Seattle and the US

It is the express intent of the City Council to control the level of noise in a manner which promotes commerce; the use, value and enjoyment of property; sleep and repose; and the quality of the environment.

—Seattle Noise Ordinance (Sec. 25.08.010)

I. Introduction

Western legal systems have always struggled to deal with noise. According to Hillel Schwartz (2011: 655) this difficulty stems from noise's "indeterminacy," the inevitable failure of drawing fixed boundaries between permissible and impermissible sounds. This is because noise is, relative to other nuisances, a partially subjective measure—"a function of an observer's referents and attention" (Schwartz 2011: 655). Especially before the twentieth century, with its advances in acoustic measurement and recording technology (see Thompson 2004), sound was difficult to conceive as a fixed object amenable to regulation and governance. Even with these developments, geographers Vern Harnapp and Allen Noble (1987) argue that "excessive noise is a form of pollution which cannot be seen, photographed, or recorded except by professional methods." Other nuisances like "smoke, sewage, obstructions, stench" left "lingering signatures" (Schwartz 2011: 655). Noise was, and continues to be, more ephemeral. As Schwartz (2011: 655) argues: "Although the sources of loud, persistent, obnoxious sounds could be located easily enough, their residues could only be tracked through cracks in roofs or the dislocation of walls, as from the sledgehammers of an armorer in 1377." Nuisance laws were established, certainly, but their enforcement was always a tricky business.

While noise has always posed a problem for legal institutions, only recently was it thought to require consistent and comprehensive regulation, beyond specific nuisance laws and the allocation of quiet zones. In the US it was not until the 1960s, with an increase in public concern about the environment, that noise abatement truly became a desirable objective for both federal and local

action (Harnapp and Noble 1987: 222). Such action was made possible by several noise-control statutes, enacted during the 1970s at national, state, and municipal levels (see Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter for a list of policies ratified during this period).

In this chapter, I look at two of these documents: the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Noise Control Act of 1972 (NCA 72) and Seattle's Noise Ordinance of 1977 (SNO 77). By examining these policies in detail, and building off the theoretical points developed in the previous chapters, I show how they operate to manage the crises of a new global capitalism, particularly those related to the circulation of commodities. This reading relies on a conception of law drawn from the work of Marxist legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis. In China Mieville's (2006: 6) words, Pashukanis sees the legal form as "an expression of the relations of abstract commodity owners in commodity exchange." Using this framework, I understand NCA 72 and SNO 77 as state apparatuses whose function is, in part, to secure the "noisy sphere" (Marx *C*, I: 279) of circulation against the noises that threaten to hinder its continuation, including the noises of critique itself. For Marx (*C*, II: Ch. 7) the time of commodity circulation—which, along with production time, constitutes the turnover period of capital—has a direct effect on the production of surplus-value, the cornerstone of the capitalist process. In short: surplus-value increases with shorter turnover periods. Consequently, to the extent it bears on the time of turnover, unimpeded commodity circulation is essential for the reproduction of capital.

NCA 72 and SNO 77 secure circulation by providing the legal grounds for silencing or muting what would otherwise interrupt commodity exchange. In the name of "commerce," both documents establish borders between sounds that are and are not deemed permissible. Drawing boundaries is, of course, always a political act, one that implies certain strategies and technologies of governance. In order to trace these, I examine the geographies of both documents. In particular I ask: How do NCA 72 and SNO 77 prescribe and orient bodies in space? How does a restriction

placed on sound also limit the movements of the individual? In sum, the “sonic governance” of these policies is divided along two axes: one biopolitical and the other necropolitical.

In the first volume of *HS*, Foucault (140) defines biopower as the regulation of subjects through “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.” NCA 72 and SNO 77 develop these techniques by defining noise—and thus the body of its origin—as a potential threat to state-determined categories of welfare, health, and safety. In NCA these categories are abstracted from “the Nation’s population” (Sec. 1 (a)(1)), while in SNO they emerge out of the “community or neighborhood” (Sec. 25.08.280). Thus, through the figure of sound, these documents establish a link between certain individual actions and the interests of a larger group. In doing so, they *rationalize* the sensible, opening it up to governmental intervention. I will demonstrate how, on an ontological level, this rationalization occurs through the binding of the *body*—its everyday movements—to the *language* of the state: its population, health, economy, and so forth. Drawing on the works of Foucault, Nikolas Rose, and others, I conceive this language as a form of governmentality, an “ensemble” of relations that aligns the actions of the body with a rationality of governance. It is for this reason that NCA 72 and SNO 77 operate within a democratic materialism that, as I argued in the previous chapter, *correlates* language and bodies and in doing so places a finite limit on the latter.

However, this biopolitics can only be fully understood when seen as a moment within the logic of capital. The sonic limits established by NCA 72 and SNO 77 are ultimately directed to the sounds of alterity—to the “deviant” bodies they help nudge into the ranks of surplus labor. That is, through the correlation of language and bodies, the alter is *standardized*—acknowledged but only in the terms of the state. Exteriority is bound by an interior: difference is filtered through the existential and universalizing categories of health, welfare, safety, and so on, such that all subjects are always-already reproduced within the same world, ontologically speaking. This world is the “noisy

sphere” of circulation, insofar as NCA 72 and SNO 77 link the existential conditions of the individual, its “life” (Badiou *LW*: 35), to the realization of surplus value. Indeed, as I will show, the “population” or “community” presumed and reproduced by noise-control legislation is ultimately that of exploitable labor. Strategies of noise control are ultimately deployed biopolitically, to “ensure a healthy workforce” (Kelly 2004: 59) and to provide the political state with the means to influence civil society¹ in the interests of capital, ensuring the latter sphere remains compatible with the turnover of goods and that individuals continue to engage in the circulation of commodities. This is a world where noise is permitted only to the extent that it contributes to accumulation. Otherwise noise is silenced, along with the bodies that make it.

Not all subjects are secured within the world of exchange. The healthy workforce that NCA 72 and SNO 77 aim to protect is exploitable only insofar as there exists a surplus population to lower wages and increase the production of capital. But as this surplus population grows in size, as it does during economic recessions, it begins to pose a threat to the social relations of production (Spitzer 2008: 69). This is one of the fundamental contradictions of capital. In the words of sociologist Steven Spitzer (2008: 69–70):

a surplus-population is a necessary product of and condition for the accumulation of wealth on a capitalist basis, but it also creates a form of social expense which must be neutralized or controlled if production relation relations and conditions for increased accumulation are to remain unimpaired.

This is why, especially since the crisis years of the early 1970s, certain bodies—usually black and poor—have been marked as “dangerous,” and thus amenable to disciplinary action and to eradication from the labor relation altogether, either through incarceration, austerity, or death.

Providing a drain on the surplus population and allowing capital to operate unhindered, such a management process is always racialized. This is evident in the history of racially violent policing and

¹ Civil society is taken here in the Hegelian/Marxist sense as a modern system of social relations based on private interests and separate from the political state. As Majia Nadesan (2008: 10) defines it, civil society consists of “population, society, and everyday life.”

the 700% increase in US prison population since 1970 (Henrichson and Delany 2012: 68), which today is nearly 40% black even though blacks make up only 12% of the total US population (Hetey and Eberhardt 2014: 1949).

While not insidious or deliberately racist, NCA 72 and SNO 77 both justify and produce a set of technical apparatuses for the reduction of surplus populations. And it is from this space of exclusion—where *particular* bodies are made amenable to domination—that the state reaffirms its sovereignty and comprehensive noise control obtains its conditions of possibility. Indeed, I show how the biopolitics of NCA 72 and SNO 77—the very categories of population, health, welfare, and so forth—is predicated on a form of what Achille Mbembe (2003) and others have called “necropower,” which extracts certain bodies not only from government support but also from liberal rationality itself. Placing it within a Marxist framework, I use necropower here to refer to the violent process of domination by which members of the surplus population are literally or effectively eliminated—silenced.

Obviously, NCA 72 and SNO 77 do not establish this coercion on legal grounds. But that is precisely the point: they (1) authorize the production and (2) justify the use of repressive strategies that operate *beyond* the realm of legality. In soliciting research into noise technologies and in exempting military action from noise statutes, NCA 72 and SNO 77 bolster the development of sonic weaponry. Typically these weapons are first used by the US military in nations abroad; yet many “return home” in the form of crowd-control tactics for the repression and reduction of an “unruly” surplus populations. The control of sound by the state, then, is inextricable from the use of sound to control bodies.

These “technologies of destruction” (Mbembe 2003: 34) are always applied unevenly, enforcing social hierarchies. In coding sounds and bodies as “sonically impermissible” within the worlds of capital, NCA 72 and SNO 77 provide a legal rubric for marking, and rationalizing the

discipline of, bodies that threaten the spheres of labor and civil society, but whose positions as minorities, women, or workers are necessary for these spheres to function in the first place. This violent process of reduction—the creation of what Mbembe (2003: 40) calls “death-words”—is ultimately what enables capitalism to function and, in doing so, what imparts necessity and coherence to the state and to its constituent concepts of “commerce,” “health,” and “population.” The muting of alter bodies maintains social relations, literally in the case of noise-control legislation. It produces “dark geographies” (Paglen 2009) where the violence of the state and of capital meet in silence.

II. A Brief History of Noise Control in the US

Nineteenth-Century Efforts

NCA 72 and SNO 77 do not exist in a vacuum. It’s important to give a brief history of noise control in the US before looking at the texts themselves in order to demonstrate how and why these documents emerge when they do. By sketching the ways sound was previously handled in law, I develop a historical-materialist reading of noise control, tying legal and regulatory developments to existing modes of production and to the spatial relations they help enable.

Specific noise control legislation can be traced back to at least 1852 with the enactment of Boston’s Peace and Tranquility Ordinance (Harnapp and Noble 1987: 222). Following this, most other cities passed similar nuisance laws against “disturbing the peace” (Harnapp and Noble 1987: 222) or prohibiting “unreasonable” or “unusual” noise. Because of their subjective nature these ordinances were difficult to enforce (Falzone 1999: 780).

The growth of noise ordinance at this time occurred alongside the general shift from market capitalism, in which industrial growth was mostly restricted to national markets, to monopoly capitalism, wherein imperialism and international markets assumed new importance (Mandel 1980:

51). This shift was made possible by development of communication systems and the extension of transportation networks, such as railways, which reduced the costs of long-distance shipping and stimulated foreign capital investments. The need to control noise must be seen as emerging within this context, as a means of dealing with an increase in the complexity of capital's movements, and the sounds that came with it.

Indeed, in the US, legislation on noise has always been tied to the structures of capital. Throughout the nineteenth century, nuisance law was mainly structured on private property rights. Noise could be deemed punishable if it breached the security and enjoyment of one's property. As such, it was conceived in the particular and dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In Schwartz's (2011: 656) words: "courts handled noise cases as singular, with latitude for the oddities of each environment, each sort of sound, and each complainant." As individual occurrences, sounds were largely acted on after the fact, rarely seen as future problems in need of prevention (Schwartz 2011: 656).

This conception of sound began to shift as the concern for fixed property gave way to the idea of "privacy as a portable right," and a "feudal sense of place as a stronghold of personhood" was supplanted by a "bourgeois-modern sense of place as spaces in transit" (Schwartz 2011: 657). Noise came to be seen as a nuisance less in terms of land rights and more in relation to the functioning of the market as a whole: "courts began to listen anew to complaints of excessive noise that reflected [...] the shiftiness both of place and of time in a world where capital was indebted to markets that leaned towards speculative futures rather than reclining on static leases or steady rents" (Schwartz 2011: 657). Sound, particularly industrial sound, was placed increasingly within an economy and temporality of exchange relations. Abstracted from its material conditions, from the life of the individual, it began to signify and implicate larger processes of capital accumulation and industrialism.

For most nineteenth-century Americans, “the hum of industry” (Thompson 2004: 120) signified progress. Rattling trains, honking cars, and busy streets, generally speaking, were deemed necessary evils, associated with prosperity and with the development of Civilization. Indeed, as historian Emily Thompson (2004: 117) points out, until the 1920s New Yorkers tended to complain almost entirely about “traditional” sounds² rather than the urban and industrial that came to dominate the soundscape during nineteenth century. When complaints were filed against the latter, as they were in 1878 regarding noise from New York’s new elevated trains, they were easily dismissed as part of a necessary industrial process (Thompson 2004: 120).

Efficiency, Zoning, and Urban Noise

Rather than a direct reaction to the sounds of industry, systemic and preventative legislation became a possibility only when the state recognized noise as an obstacle to, rather than a necessary outcome of, capital accumulation. This occurred when noise was placed in a Taylorist “culture of efficiency” by means of new techniques of management (Thompson 2004: 123). By the late 1880s, certain kinds of noise began to be seen as “unnecessary”—detractions to work, education, and health. This culminated in a surge of zoning laws during the 1900s and 1910s that established quiet areas, particularly around hospitals and schools (for examples see Thompson 2004: 126). While these laws addressed the problem of noise, they did not usually require industrial or commercial parties to vacate the newly created residential districts. Neither did they address noise issues within residential neighborhoods. In most cases, complainants were forced “to appeal to general nuisance laws” (Thompson 2004: 127).

It was not until the 1920s that ambient noise pollution in cities was studied in a systematic manner. Among the initial attempts was E.E. Free’s 1924 study of urban noise in New York City

² These sounds included “horse-drawn vehicles, peddlers, musicians, animals, and bells” (Thompson 2004: 117).

(Harnapp and Noble 1987: 220). Free's findings influenced the establishment of the first Noise Abatement Commission in the US, formed in 1929 by the New York City Health Department (Thompson 2004: 157). The Commission was tasked with categorizing, measuring, and mapping city noises, as well as studying existing laws and suggesting new ones that would help control or remove these noises. In Thompson's (2004: 167) words, "The goal was to control the public soundscape of the city, to enforce and ensure the civic right of all to enjoy a noise-free environment." Ultimately the Commission failed in its mission: unable to deliver a public solution to the problem of urban noise, it disbanded after two years. While some blamed this failure on shifting municipal agendas in the early 1930s following the crash of the stock market, or on the general apathy of the public, Thompson (2004: 166–168) argues that the Commission's demise was part and parcel of a shift in focus from public- to private-based efforts in sound control. "By manipulating and controlling private space," she (2004: 168) writes, "acousticians offered a compelling alternative solution to the problem of noise."

This shift is important to keep in mind when looking at federal and municipal attempts to regulate sound in the 1970s. In many ways, NCA 72 and SNO 77 do more to control noise in private space rather than in public. Or, more accurately, these documents speak to the private spaces of the individual through a public strategy of governmental regulation. Either way, as I will show, these policies address noise very differently than previous attempts made by the state. This is due to the materials conditions of their emergence.

After the folding of the New York Commission, the concern for urban noise was not taken up, systematically at least, in other US cities until 1947–49 when The Greater Chicago Noise Reduction Council conducted an extensive assessment of noise (Harnapp and Noble 1987: 220). On the whole, however, local noise regulation remained based on ordinances and nuisance laws banning "excessive or unusual noises," which, as subjective, were difficult to enforce and rarely used to

challenge major noise sources like factories or other industrial operations (Findley and Plager 1974: 254). Developments in portable noise-measuring-equipment helped change this, as emissions could, with greater ease, be rendered into decibel units and thus evaluated against an objective limit (Shapiro 1991: 2–3). It was Chicago that in 1955 became the first city in the world to have a noise ordinance specifying maximum noise levels within zoning boundaries (Coelho 2007: 1528).

Towards a Comprehensive Federal Policy

Noise began to receive federal attention during the 1960s (see Table 3.1). This was largely a reaction to the shift from propeller aircraft to jet engines³ in the 1950s (Finegold et al. 2002: 51), as well as a growing recognition of noise as an environmental pollutant. While federal actions addressed these issues, they were, until 1970, conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, often as part of other federally funded programs (Houle 1974: 115). In 1968, Congress amended the Federal Aviation Act of 1958 to authorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to regulate aircraft noise (Falzone 1999: 782). And in 1969 the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) established the legal foundation for addressing noise pollution in environmental impact statements (Shapiro 1991: 3).

Yet the need for a *comprehensive* federal policy on noise was not recognized until the early 1970s (Houle 1974: 117).⁴ This was spurred on by voices at the local level. In Seattle, for instance, Mayor Wes Uhlman wrote to President Nixon in 1971 to “convey the concern of many Seattle and King County citizens regarding the need for effective noise pollution control legislation” (SF No. 5287-07 117/3). The year prior, in 1970, Congress had passed the Noise Pollution and Abatement

³ Commercial jets were introduced to the US in 1958 (Falzone 1999: 769).

⁴ Compared to air and water pollution, which received attention much earlier on, supporters of noise control had a tougher time proving noise pollution was worthy of federal attention. In many ways, this was because noise resists the normal strategies of environmentalist activism. As Sidney Shapiro points out (1991: 2), promoters of noise control (1) experienced difficulties in illustrating the relationship between noise and ill health; (2) lacked dramatic examples of noise-related catastrophes; (3) found it challenging to link noise pollution, which has many sources, to a single corporate target like the automobile industry; (4) compared to air and water, noise affects a small proportion of individuals in a given region.

Act of 1970 (an amendment to the Clean Air Act), establishing the Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) within the EPA (1970: Sec. 402). ONAC was tasked with completing a one-year investigation of “noise and its effects on the public health and welfare,” providing Congress and the President with recommendations for legislation. ONAC’s findings helped EPA convince Congress to pass the Noise Control Act of 1972 (NCA 72), which sought to “deal with major noise sources in commerce” whose control was said to require “national uniformity of treatment” (Sec. 2 (a)(3)). Although the UK and Japan both passed national noise-control acts prior to the US, in 1960 and 1968 respectively, NCA 72 was considered internationally to herald the start of a “comprehensive” program for the control of environmental noise (Finegold et al. 2002: 54).

Most abatement programs enacted under NCA, and later the Quiet Communities Act of 1978, ended after 1981 when the newly appointed Reagan administration pulled funding from ONAC (Falzone 1999: 785).⁵ Yet NCA 72 remains a landmark document from a period during the late 1960s and 1970s when noise was, for the first time, considered a threat on a national and even global scale. Until then, as I have discussed above, excessive sound was typically seen as a local problem, governed by laws established and maintained at the municipal level. Reframing the issue in global terms indicates a larger shift in how in bodies, citizens, and the nation-state were conceived and governed during this time. Such a shift meant changes for local law, causing a proliferation of similar noise ordinances at state and city levels throughout the 1970s (Coelho 2007: 1527).⁶ Seattle’s Noise Ordinance of 1977 (SNO 77) is an example of this.

The remainder of this chapter examines both NCA 72 and SNO 77 as documents that seek to manage the crises of capital. As mentioned above this management is theorized along two axes:

⁵ While most of EPA’s noise abatement activities were terminated (over one-thousand community noise abatement programs), the agency remains responsible for enforcing NCA.

⁶ In 1975, following the enactment of NCA, EPA released the document *Model Community Noise Control Ordinance* to assist states and municipalities with drafting local regulations. In addition, The Quiet Communities Act of 1978 allocated funds for the creation of local noise abatement program.

(1) *biopolitically* as an apparatus of liberal governance for securing the reproduction of capital, and (2) *necropolitically* as a technology for the reduction of surplus labor.

III. The Biopolitics of Noise Control

Dematerialization and the Language of the State

Instead of acting on a case-by-case basis, as noise ordinances had done in past, NCA 72 and SNO 77 legalize sound to the extent that it harms an abstracted group of individuals. While NCA 72 frames noise as a “growing danger to the health and welfare of the Nation’s population” (Sec. 1 (a)(1)), SNO 77 aims to “minimize the exposure of citizens to the physiological and psychological dangers of excessive noise” (Sec. 25.08.010). Thus, immediately, we see that the issue is not sound itself but its effects on a homogenous Body of “citizens” or the “population.” In securing this Body from excessive noise, both documents display the kind of biopolitics Foucault (2010: 317) recognized as “the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race ...”.

How exactly do NCA 72 and SNO 77 rationalize these problems? And how do these rationalities produce governable subjects? In what follows, I show how the biopolitics of noise control depends on a process of bodily dematerialization, and how this produces (neo)liberal “worlds” wherein capitalist exchange relations are naturalized and remain unquestioned.

Both NCA 72 and SNO 77 remove bodies and sounds from their material conditions to define them against universal and state-defined standards, including “public health,” “safety,” “welfare,” “property,” and “the environment” (NCA: Sec. 2; SNO: Sec. 25.08.010). It’s the alignment of the individual with these signifiers that makes him or her amenable to systems of biopower by placing the body—its desires, noises, health—in relation to an abstract concept of state

or global wellbeing.

NCA 72, for example, establishes the regulatory framework for circumscribing “persons” (Sec. 3 (2)) within those limits and types of noise that pose “an adequate margin of safety” (Sec. 5 (a)(2)) for the health and welfare of the population. It might be said that law, by definition, operates by placing restrictions on action. Rather than merely providing a legal foundation for federal noise control, NCA 72 translates its targets, through the threat of noise, into a set of bodies (“persons”) in need of either security or intervention. A body is given to just about anything: the document defines a “person” as “an individual, corporation, partnership, or association, and [...] includes any officer, employee, department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States, a State, or any political subdivision of a State.”

Through the proliferation of “persons,” NCA 72 is able to reduce the etiology of something as complex and overdetermined as noise pollution into a simple causal binary of Victim and Responsible Party, plaintiff and defendant (eg, see Sec. 12 (b)(2)). Individuals, corporations, even the state itself, are posed as subjects either in need of “laws designed to safeguard [their] health and welfare” or as a person “in violation” of a “noise control requirement” and subject to “civil action” and “compliance.” In establishing a rubric for evaluating conflict between bodies, NCA 72 not only produces its own justification, but it also provides a logic for reading across bodies and for correlating them to each other and to the language of law. The individual, the corporation, and the state can be thought in the same sentence, as occupying the same ontological position: the body that is always-already in danger or else impermissible.

This body is made possible, and given credence, by a techno-scientific imaginary that promises to measure, control, and securitize the field of noise. In particular, NCA 72 sets up a “means for effective coordination of Federal research and activities in noise control” (Sec. 2 [b]). NCA can thus be considered to provide the legalistic framework for a kind of governmentality, as it

calls for the development of an ensemble of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics” (Foucault 2001: 102) for researching the “effects, measurement, and control of noise” (NCA: Sec. 14 (b)) and ultimately for establishing and implementing regulations on the body. This ensemble targets the interior of the subject, mandating an “investigation of the psychological and physiological effects of noise on humans [...] and the determination of dose/response relationships suitable for use in decision-making” (NCA: Sec. 14 (b)(1)).

EPA’s ONAC carried out many of these investigations. In 1973, it published a report entitled “Public Health and Welfare Criteria for Noise,” a section of which is dedicated to noise exposure. In terms of the physiological response of humans to noise, the report (EPA 1973: 1-3 & 1-4) establishes a set of biological limits: concluding that “the human ear can discern without pain sounds ranging from a threshold of detection to sounds 10^{12} times as intense” and that “hair cells, vital to the hearing process, are nonregenerative.” As for psychological effects, the report states vaguely that “there is a deep and exceptionally intricate human emotional and psychological response to sound. These responses range from pleasure to fear and include all other aspects of human emotional reaction.” A year later, in 1974, EPA reinforced its health claims with a report establishing safe noise limits (“Information on Levels of Environmental Noise Requisite to Protect Public Health and Welfare with an Adequate Margin of Safety). The report establishes 70 dB as the threshold at which hearing loss occurs (EPA 1974: 3).

Solicited by NCA 72, all of these documents draw on “scientific knowledge” (Sec. 5 (a)(1)) to place a set of qualitative and quantitative limits on the body. Regardless of whether or not these limits are “true,” their effect is to produce a subject indexed to “public health” (Sec. 5 (a)(1)) and to state-established criteria of wellbeing. As a result, in the words of Nikolas Rose, NCA 72 and SNO 77 work to make the individual “thinkable and governable” (1999: 73), to transmute their “inner feelings [...] into measurements about which calculations could be made” (1999: 86). The body’s

experience of noise is given a language of expression: it can be quantified (in decibels), made legal or illegal, and is, as a result, amenable to state intervention.

This language acts on the body through a set of technologies for measuring and controlling noise. Many of these NCA helps develop insofar as it calls for research into “noise control technology” and “monitoring equipment” (Sec. 14 (b)), as well as their purchase (Sec. 14 (c), Sec. 15 (f)) and labeling (Sec. 8). In 1979, for instance, ONAC promulgated standards for the labeling of hearing protection devices. The goal of this regulation was to “provide information to potential users [of hearing protectors] on the noise reducing effectiveness of these products at the point of sale or at the point of distribution” (EPA 1979: 4). Through the circulation and regulation of this technology, the state (via EPA) gains a foothold in the national labor market, applying a set of biological risks, limits, and epistemes on the body of the worker.

This governmentality operates at scales other than the national. NCA 72 incorporates regional and local institutions through the establishment of various noise-control programs (under the Quiet Communities Program), some of which include “abatement plans for areas around major transportation facilities,” “a quality assurance program for equipment and monitoring procedures of State and local noise control programs,” “educational and training materials and programs, including national and regional workshops, and “regional technical assistance centers which use the capabilities of university and private organizations to assist State and local noise control programs” (Sec. 14 (c)). NCA also authorizes EPA to “develop and publish criteria with respect to noise” that “shall reflect the scientific knowledge most useful in indicating the kind and extent of all identifiable effects on the public health or welfare which may be expected from differing quantities and qualities of noise” (Sec. 5 (a)(1)). The EPA is also tasked with providing “information on techniques” for noise control, including “available data on technology, costs and alternative methods” (NCA: Sec. 5 (b)(2)). The 1978 amendment to NCA (the Quiet Communities Act) authorizes and allocates funds

to the EPA and other agencies to disseminate this information to the public “through the use of materials for school curricula, volunteer organizations, radio and television programs, publication, and other means” (NCA: Sec. 14 (a)).

SNO 77 demonstrates a similar logic. As municipal ordinance, however, it is more specific in the geographies, sounds, and bodies it subjects to regulation, which are contingent on the Seattle area and its particular sonic issues (eg, see Sec. 25.08.020). But regardless of scale, SNO’s stated purpose is the same: to “minimize the exposure of citizens to the physiological and psychological dangers of excessive noise and to protect, promote and preserve the public health, safety and welfare” (Sec. 25.08.010). The ordinance seeks to accomplish this by imposing a set of exterior sound limits (using dBA Leq measurements) for residential, commercial, and industrial zones (Sec. 25.08.410). It thus becomes unlawful for “persons to cause sound, or [...] to permit sound [...] to intrude on the real property of another person whenever such sound exceeds the exterior sound limits established” (Sec. 25.08.400).

“Persons” are defined in SNO similar to how they are in NCA 72, as “any individual, firm, association, partnership, corporation or any other entity, public or private” (Sec. 25.08.250). Always-already placed within a set of exterior sound limits these “persons” become indexed to and correlated with one another under a framework of regulation and governance. As such, SNO proliferates the bodily sites at which (sonic) behavior may be measured, monitored, and oriented. Like NCA, this proliferation is achieved and justified through the institution of programs, practices, and research agendas that work on the body, nudging it into systems of control and within certain boundaries of language (ie, law). In the subchapter on “Administration and Noise Management,” SNO requires the Director of the Department of Planning and Development to implement several actions, including training field inspectors, purchasing instruments for measurements, promulgating rules and procedures, assisting the public and other municipal departments in the measurement and

abatement of sound, and setting up a public education program on noise (Sec. 25.08.670).

The World of Commerce

Both NCA 72 and SNO 77 work to make the body governable according to a state-defined language—but to what end? In dematerializing the body, the policies resituate it within the world of commodity circulation. This is accomplished by framing sound *as a commercial problem*, both in terms of how it is defined and what it endangers. NCA 72 (Sec. 2), for instance, defines “major sources of noise” as “products of commerce,” and argues that “Federal action” and “Federal emission standards” are essential for the control of explicitly commercial noises (Sec. 2). SNO 77 similarly links the control of noise to the promotion of commerce (Sec. 25.08.010), and defines unlawful sounds (Sec. 25.08.400) and sound-limit levels (Sec. 25.08.410) in terms of property lines. In both documents noise is also deemed a threat to the economy: while NCA 72 mandates an investigation into the “economic impact of noise” on “human activities” (Sec. 14 (b)(4)), SNO 77 poses noise as a threat to the “sleep and repose” (Sec. 25.08.010) required by the worker to reproduce him or herself. In both cases, the body—its aural senses—are fused to capitalist production and circulation: through the medium of sound-as-risk the individual is responsabilized insofar as his or her actions become linked to the possibility of further commerce.

This process is evident in NCA’s mandate on labeling noise reduction technology (Sec. 8) and as promulgated in 1979 by ONAC’s standards for hearing protectors. Not only is ONAC’s system of labeling designed to “provide information to potential users [of hearing protectors] on the noise reducing effectiveness of these products,” but it does so within a particular commercial situation: “at the point of sale or at the point of distribution” (EPA 1979: 4). The result is that commerce becomes rationalized to the extent it is reinforced by expert knowledges on hearing loss. The label—as the bearer of scientific claims—is placed *on* the relation of exchange, affording it an

objective quality. The sale and distribution of hearing protectors, then, can only be licit or illicit under the logic of the label. It can never be questioned outright, as part of the capitalist process of exploitation, or of the structures of industry and commerce that produce the need for hearing protectors in the first place.

The example of labeling thus reveals a logical contradiction in the regulation of sound: the production and circulation of commodities is restricted in some way (eg, in the their labeling) but also promoted (eg, in the distribution of hearing protectors). It's through this antinomy that NCA 72 and SNO 77 resolve and naturalize the conflicts of capital. This is fully exposed only when reading the two documents side-by-side: whereas NCA 72 establishes a program to *control* noise emissions from “products distributed in commerce” (Sec. 2 (b)), the Seattle regulation emphasizes the need to “control the level of noise in a manner which *promotes* commerce” (Sec. 25.08.010; emphasis mine). This paradox—between requiring noise regulation to constrain as well as to promote commerce—is symptomatic of noise’s status as that which threatens the metastructure of capital relations while also being a necessary component of industrial production, circulation, the opening of new markets, and the creation of surplus labor.

This contradiction is something the noise-control policies try to cover up. Like Jodi Melamed’s (2011) official antiracisms explored in the last chapter, they work to displace—literally make inaudible—the tension between capital’s need for spatial fix and its need for spatial expansion through creative destruction. The noises of commerce must be regulated so as to enable the unimpeded investment and extraction of capital, but they must also be promoted to allow this process to expand to new markets. In NCA 72 and SNO 77, this tension is resolved by naturalizing the state of the situation as well as through its deferral via the correlation of the body with a biopolitical language that denies excess. What these documents produce is a prediscursive and exploitable subject for whom exteriority, including the threatening sounds of alterity, is always-

already assimilated and read against the state of that subject's situation. More concisely, it is pre-given that all objects exist as commercial objects amenable to control or stimulation for the sake of surplus value creation. The control of sound, then, becomes the command *to be* a subject-for-capital. It ensures the dependence of the sensible on commodity circulation, and as such, draws individuals into the wage relation, many of whom constitute the pool of reserve labor.

IV. The Necropolitics of Noise Control

Experiments and Exclusions

Yet as Judith Butler (2006: 199) argues, the injunction *to be* “produces necessary failures.” The assimilation of exteriority generates a ghostly supplement that remains irreconcilable to the universality of its signifiers—welfare, health, quality sleep, etc.—and refuses to be inscribed along the body's surface. From a Marxist position, the “population” of exploitable labor that NCA 72 and SNO 77 help secure and naturalize produces another problem for capital: the management of surplus populations—of racialized, gendered, and classed bodies that threaten to undermine the structures of hierarchy under which they are dominated.

NCA 72 and SNO 77 manage this surplus population and act as “technologies of destruction” (Mbembe 2003: 34) to the extent that they provide strategies for the repression of certain bodies. In authorizing federal studies into the “effects, measurement, and control of noise” (Sec. 14 (b)), for instance, NCA 72 provides the legal grounds and resources not just for the development of noise-control technologies but also for military experiments into the use of sound in warfare. NCA's solicitation for scientific research, then, works to transform sound into an object and tool for the state—for the command of surplus populations.

Furthermore, it is what NCA 72 *excludes* from its jurisdiction—its “beyond”—that helps to rationalize the use of these technologies for violence. The “beyond” of NCA 72 comprises those

bodies and sounds outside commerce. Legally, these are areas barred from federal action, as NCA is meant to apply only to “major noise sources in commerce” (Sec. 2 (a)(3)). At the same time, however, the document works to develop an apparatus for controlling, and ultimately destroying, what it cannot *de jure* govern. It does this by leaving open a space of exclusion. A “product,” as defined by NCA 72 (Sec. 3 (3)), “means any manufactured article of goods or component thereof” and is the zone over which the document claims jurisdiction. What’s left out of this category is military technology: “any aircraft,” “any military weapons or equipment which are designed for combat use,” “any rockets or equipment which are designed for research, experimental, or developmental work,” or “any other machinery or equipment designed for use in experimental work done by or for the Federal Government” (Sec. 3 (3)). The President is also granted the power to exempt “any single activity or facility” from compliance with NCA requirements “if he determines it to be in the paramount interest of the United States to do so” (Sec. 4 (b)(2)).

These absences constitute for NCA what Trevor Paglen (2009: 277) calls a “dark geography”: blank spots that indicate a repressive apparatus “underlying much of the American economy.” That is, while NCA applies strictly to the world of commerce, it produces a “black world” (Paglen 2009: 4) of military action and justified violence by which existing social relations—those of global capitalism—may be secured, if need be. Consequently, bodies and sounds that exist beyond NCA’s jurisdiction, beyond the commercial world it naturalizes, are subject to coercive silencing through military means.

This helps explain the contradiction between a document like NCA 72, which aims to protect the health of the public from the threat of loud noises, and research by the military and police on the use of ultrasonic and infrasonic sound as a “nonlethal” weapon for crowd control (Goodman 2010: 76). Long-Range Acoustic Devices (LRADS), for instance, have been used by police forces in the US since 2009, when they were fired in an attempt to disperse protestors at G20

summit in Pittsburgh. These “sound cannons” emit tones at decibels—as high as 162 dBA—that are above the average pain threshold for humans (130 dBA), potentially causing irreversible hearing loss. Similar tactics have been used in warfare and interrogation abroad, such as in 1989 in Panama City, when US troops bombarded former CIA employee Manuel Noriega with rock and pop music, in an attempt to prevent him from sleeping in the Vatican embassy where he was hiding. Other examples include the use of sonic weapons in the Waco siege of 1993 and in more recent years in the musical torture of al Qaeda suspects in Iraq and Guantanamo (Goodman 2010: 76).

Not only can such sonic weaponry exist alongside a federal need for noise control; it is noise control itself, particularly NCA 72, that *enables* this violence insofar as it exempts sounds used in military research and actions. While the public sphere is protected from noise under NCA 72, it is also a proving ground for military and police experiments. For sonic warfare, as Goodman (2010: 110) argues, is understood in the context of “basic population dynamics,” as “intervening into the affective ecology of crowds.”

In terms of a “beyond,” SNO 77 presents a varying and somewhat opposite case from that of NCA 72. This reflects the difference in their scales of jurisdiction but also their relation to capital, with NCA seeking ostensibly to control commerce while SNO aiming to promote it. What is beyond the latter’s authority are those sounds and bodies removed from property relations. Under SNO 77, for a noise to be unlawful it must “intrude into the real property of another person” (Sec. 25.08.400). Even the statute’s sound-level limits are based on and presuppose divisions in property type, between residential, commercial, and industrial zones. Thus, outside the property relation, SNO has no bearing. Indeed, under the ordinance those without property—homeless and renters—have no legal basis for complaint: the spaces they occupy, if unowned, exist outside SNO’s reach.

Nevertheless, SNO 77 is similar to NCA 72 in that it seeks to hold and to incorporate what it *de jure* cannot. By nudging individuals into the property relation, it functions *de facto* as a municipal

apparatus for capital accumulation. This is accomplished, once again, through the construction of blank spaces in the text. Unlike the military focus of NCA's exemptions, SNO's revolve around commerce and its promotion. Transportation networks—which Marx (*C*, II: 219, 329) saw as paramount for increasing the circulation time and turnover rate of capital—are exempt when they involve commercial traffic. Nonrecreational watercraft, for example, do not have to abide by normal sound-level limits when their operation is for commercial purposes, including “tugboats, fishing boats, ferries, and vessels engaged in intrastate, interstate, or international commerce” (SNO: Sec. 25.08.485). The sounds of aircraft in flight are also exempt at all times (Sec. 25.08.530), as is their testing and maintenance during daytime hours (Sec. 25.08.545). Finally, motor vehicles are exempt on highways (Sec. 25.08.480) as well as “auxiliary equipment [...] used for highway surface maintenance” (Sec. 25.08.530).

Transportation is not the only area of exception within SNO 77. Certain industrial sounds are excluded from the law, including those originating from “forest harvesting and silviculture activity and from commercial agriculture” (Sec. 25.08.530), all historically important labor sectors for the Pacific Northwest. The reproduction of labor itself is addressed by SNO's exemptions of noises having to do with safety: those from “protective devices, such as relief valves,” “fire alarms,” and “emergency equipment and emergency work necessary in the interests of law enforcement or of the health, safety or welfare of the community” (Sec. 25.08.530). When read against SNO's goal to promote commerce, the explicit exemption of these noises expresses a desire to maintain the health and reproduction of the laborer so that the activity of exchange may continue as normal. A similar rationality is behind SNO's daytime exemption of sounds from “chimes, or carillons not operating for more than 5 minutes in any one hour” (Sec. 25.08.540). Much has been written on how the development of clock time—often punctuated by the ringing of bells—has gone hand-in-hand in increasing the division of labor, the rationalization of the workday, and the maximization of

exploitation (Mumford 2010 [1934]; Thompson 1967; Aveni 2002).

Thus, rather than leaving open a space for military action as NCA 72 does, SNO 77 provides a technology for creating or reinforcing dark geographies within everyday life. This is still necropolitical in the sense that it signifies certain bodies as more expendable, ie, as subject to death. Either in the way it predicates legal protection on the basis of property or in rationalizing sounds it exempts, SNO nudges already-precarious individuals (homeless, working class) into a relation of increased domination, where the body may be silenced if need be to reduce the size of the surplus population. While obviously less dramatic than the death-worlds of military action, this logic reinforces an uneven geography and a more-than-biopolitical governance that ultimately depends, for its naturalization, on exposing certain forms of social existence to what it ostensibly prohibits and protects against: the risk of death.

That NCA 72 and SNO 77 speak beyond their jurisdictional limits is in part a function of their content matter. Noise, as I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, poses a thorny problem for law. Much of this is due to noise's transgressiveness—the difficulty in isolating and localizing any particular sound, especially within a legal binary of plaintiff and defendant. To attempt this, as NCA 72 and SNO 77 do, is always to produce an excess. As Badiou (2012: 66) has argued, “is always a decision about existence,” determining “not only what is permitted and forbidden, but in fact what exists under a clear name, which is normal, and what is unnameable and so does not really exist.” By this logic, NCA 72 and SNO 77 necessarily produce their own in-existent, a field of experience that is unnameable and abnormal. Thus, what cannot or refuses to be named in sound-control legislation—military action, aircraft, tugboats, and so on—are literally made inaudible and as such removed from critical engagement. On the grounds of NCA 72, for instance, the sounds of military warfare do not exist, or if they exist they are always-already uncontrollable. Such concealment works to rationalize the “uncontrollable” creative destruction of capital's movement, the war on terror at home and

abroad, and the regularity of racial violence and police brutality. Unnamed by legal apparatuses like NCA 72 and SNO 77, posed somewhere beyond existence and life, these events take on the ghostly traces of death, shrouded in a noisy veil that deflects all attempts at understanding which do not see death, excess, and violence as that which structures and permits the “normal” movements of capital. In this way, law does not function in its typical sense of placing defensive restrictions around life, of protecting against violence. On the contrary, it produces, while also masking, the ideological grounds for its own prohibition: for the *destruction* of certain forms of life.

Noise as Limit

It still remains to be shown why this destruction occurs along lines of race, gender, and class. “Unlawful noise” marks the *limit point*⁷ of the worlds of capitalism the state, via NCA 72 and SNO 77, aims to secure. It secures these worlds by establishing them *a priori* in need of protection. Yet, as a limit, noise is also something that must be constantly crossed, violated, evaluated, and measured so as to reaffirm the jurisdiction of the document and of the state. It is this notion of the *limit point* that allows noise to be theorized alongside race, gender, class, and other hierarchies on which the sovereignty of the state depends, as does the reproduction of capital. For documents like NCA 72 and SNO 77, noise is always-already a social hierarchy, imposing a limit on bodies and making coherent a “population” or “community.” In terms of their sounds, certain bodies are thus coded as illegal or illegitimate, posed as outside the “community” and thus amenable to acts of silencing. As Chandan Reddy (2011: 235) has argued with respect to race, in their alterity these bodies define the “other” of the nation-state, “the limit of sovereignty, and hence also outside the boundaries of the rational.” In this sense, insofar as they presuppose a bodily limit to what they mandate, NCA 72 and SNO 77 can be said to manufacture not only their own authority but also that of the national-state

⁷ The concept of the “limit point” comes from Chris Chen’s (2013) article in *Endnotes* on race as the limit of capitalism.

in general. Yet such an authority is based on and secured by ceaseless acts of “paranoid violence” (Reddy 2011: 232). In order for it to guarantee the sovereignty and rationality of the nation-state, the racialized, classed, and gendered “other” must be constantly reproduced as an “imaginary threat beyond all rationality” (Reddy 2011: 232). Posed in this way, the irrational body provides the state with “the opportunity to exceed its own rational conditions of possibility” (Reddy 2011: 236) and to affirm itself through acts of violence during which it “repeatedly crosses” (237) its own immanent limit.

V. Conclusion

Noise-control legislation provides a site for analyzing the relation between state and capital. In this chapter, I have shown how the regulation of sound is always a political act, emerging out of and in order to manage a particular set of socioeconomic conditions. This was demonstrated through an examination of two twentieth-century noise laws: NCA 72 and SNO 77. These documents, I argued, function to render sound, as well as the individuals that sound implicates, amenable to governmental intervention by the state. In the last instance, this intervention serves to secure the reproduction of capital—biopolitically in placing subjects always-already within a world of commerce and exploitation, and necropolitically in managing a “dangerous” surplus population.

This reading of noise control challenges a traditional, even Marxian, view of the state as a structure above or separate from civil society—from everyday life. As NCA 72 and SNO 77 demonstrate, the actions of the state are always directed towards and dependent on a particular regime of the sensible, in this case of sound. Such a regime enables the state, through legal measures, to know, to mark, and to act on the individual. But accordingly, any analysis of this governmental process is incomplete without an examination of the sensible itself, of how individuals are actually affected and shaped by noise.

A study of legal documents on noise control, then, can only do much to understand the relation of noise to the state and to the logic of capital. Scale is always a problem: rarely is noise control enforced by federal agencies alone. Not only are there many non-commercial noises outside NCA's jurisdiction, but after the Reagan administration ended funding for ONAC in 1981, EPA faces fiscal limitation in enforcing and updating the standards it is charged with upholding. For these reasons, the next chapter examines noise on a local level—not in how it is legally mandated but in how it is perceived and managed by individual subjects.

Table 3.1: Federal Policies on Noise Control, 1960–1979

Year	Agency	Policy	Description
1961	Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	A Guide to Airborne, Impact, and Structure Borne Noise-Control in Multi-family Dwellings	Manual providing classifications of noise from residential construction
1964	US Air Force, Army, Navy	Land Use Planning with Respect to Aircraft Noise (Joint AFM 86-5, TM 5-365, NAVDOCKS P-98)	Manual providing method of estimating noise exposure from aircraft engines
1968	US Congress	Aircraft Noise Abatement Act of 1968 (PL 90-411; 49 USC 44709 - 44715)	Amendment to FAA act of 1958 authorizing FAA to devise standards for measuring aircraft noise and regulations for its abatement
1969	US Congress	National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (PL 91-190, 83 Stat. 852)	Establishes US national policy for protection of the environment. Establishes legal grounds for assessing noise pollution in environmental impact statements.
	Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)	The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 (PL 91-17)	Imposes health standards with maximum noise exposure levels for underground coal mines
	Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	Federal Aviation Administration Noise Standards: Aircraft Type and Airworthiness Certification (14 CFR Part 36).	Technical standards for determining aircraft noise emissions
	Veterans Administration (VA)	Section VIII Appraisal of Residential Properties Near Airports.	Describes VA's noise policy
1970	US Congress	Noise Pollution and Abatement Act of 1970 (PL 91-604; 84 Stat. 2709; 42 USC 7641-7642)	Amendment to Clean Air Act establishing Office of Noise Abatement and Control (ONAC) within EPA
	US Congress	Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (PL 91-596 84 STAT. 1590)	Institutes and enforces protective standards for workplace safety and health; established Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
	Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	<i>Guide to the Soundproofing of Existing Homes Against Exterior Noise</i>	Manual with methods for soundproofing homes
1972	HUD	<i>Aircraft Noise Impacts, Planning Guidelines</i>	Manual for developing comprehensive aircraft noise abatement program through land-use planning
	National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety	<i>for Local Agencies.</i>	Provides recommendations for an OSHA occupational noise standard to reduce risk of developing permanent hearing loss
	Congress	Noise Control Act of 1972 (PL 92-574; 42 USC 4901-4918, 49 44709, 44715)	Requires all governmental agencies to "promote an environment for all Americans free from noise that jeopardizes their health or welfare."
1973	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Public Health and Welfare Criteria for Noise (EPA Report No. 550/9-73-002)	Describes effects of noise at varying levels and in different situations

Year	Agency	Policy	Description
	EPA	Product Noise Labeling (40 CFR 211)	Requires "noise rating" label for certain noise-producing products and "noise reduction rating" label for certain noise-reducing product; also established requirements for "hearing protective devices"
	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	Fundamentals and Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise (FHWA PB-222-703)	Training course
1974	EPA	Information on Levels of Environmental Noise Requisite to Protect Public Health and Welfare with an Adequate Margin of Safety (EPA "Levels Document," EPA Report No. 550/9-74-004)	Provides threshold exposure levels needed to protect health and welfare of US population
	EPA	Identification of Products as Major Sources of Noise (39 Fed. Reg. 22297)	Identifies and categorizes sources of noise
	FHWA	<i>Audible Landscape: A Manual for Highway Noise and Land Use</i>	Describes land-use control techniques for abatement of highway noise
	Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)	Occupational Noise Exposure (1910.95)	Sets occupational noise standard and required employers to offer hearing conservation program for 8-hour workers exposed to 85 dB+
1975	EPA	Model Community Noise Control Ordinance	Guide for assisting states, counties, and municipalities with drafting noise control ordinances
1976	FHWA	A Statement of National Highway Transportation Policy	Provides FHWA's policy on highway traffic noise
	FHWA	Federal-Aid Highway Program Manual 7-7-3	Provides FHWA's noise standards for highways and requirements for federal involvement in noise abatement projects
	FAA	Aviation Noise Abatement Policy	Outlines strategy for reducing aviation noise impacts on individuals living near airports
1977	National Research Council (NRC)	Guidelines for Preparing Environmental Impact Statements on Noise	Provides guidance EISs dealing with noise and vibration
	FAA	Airport Noise Control and Land Use Compatibility (ANCLUC) Planning under the Planning Grant Program (FAA Order 5900.4)	Provides guidance for ANCLUC
	FAA	Noise Control Plans (FAA Order 1050.11).	States FAA's policy and procedures for airport noise control plans
	FAA	<i>The Feasibility, Practicality and Cost of the Soundproofing of Schools, Hospitals, and Public Health Facilities Near Airports.</i>	Study on soundproofing schools, hospitals, and public health facilities to protect against aircraft noise
	MSHA	The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 (PL: 91-173, as amended by PL 95-164)	Extends noise exposure rules to all mines

Year	Agency	Policy	Description
	FAA	Insulation of Buildings Against Highway Noise (FHWA-TS-77-202).	Manual for assessing noise insulation requirements and for evaluating effectiveness of current and proposed buildings to insulate against highway noise
1978	Department of Defense (DoD)	<i>Planning in the Noise Environment</i> (Air Force Manual 19-10, Army Technical Manual TM-5-803-2, and Navy NAVFAC P- 970).	Manual for ensuring noise control on military installations
	US Congress	Quiet Communities Act of 1978 (PL 96-609).	Amended NCA 72 to authorize EPA to promote development of state and local noise control programs; required coordination between federal agencies
	Department of Commerce (DoC) National Bureau of Standards	<i>Design Guide for Reducing Transportation Noise In and Around Buildings</i>	Guideline for selecting noise criteria in and around buildings, predicting levels of noise from transportation systems, and assessing building design for noise control
	FHWA	Guide to Visual Quality in Noise Barrier Design, Implementation Package 77-12.	Considers aesthetics of noise barrier design
	FHWA	Background Report on Outdoor-Indoor Noise Reduction Calculation Procedures Employing the Exterior Wall Noise Rating (EWNr) Method (Report No. FHWA-TS-77-220).	Report on assessing outdoor-indoor noise reduction of structures using EWNr
1979	FHWA	Aviation Safety and Noise Abatement Act of 1979 (PL 96-193).	Authorizes FAA to impose regulations on and require funds for "air noise compatibility planning"
	HUD	Environmental Criteria and Standards, Noise Abatement and Control (24 CFR, Part 51, Subpart B).	Provides HUD's noise policy with noise standards and procedures for implementation
	HUD	<i>Noise Assessment Guidelines</i>	Guidelines for implementing HUD's noise policy

Chapter 4 Seattle Noise Complaints

City Sounds [of Seattle]¹

Thunders growl and roll and rumble;
Motors clank and wheeze and grumble.
But bongo drums and foreign chanties
Done by guys in ghandi panties
Make the noises that can floor us
("Please, Dear Lord, won't you restore us?")
Downtown buildings echo honks,
And swing-tunes from the honkie-tonks,
Teen-aged loud-mouths, crying babies,
Barking dogs that might have rabies,
Dopey ranters on religion,
Calls from sailing gull or pigeon,
Portable T.V.'s and worse,
Radios that add their curse...
But shave-head fools with white noise-paint
Wearing pants that surely ain't
Make the welkin echo rhythm.
Are we glad that we are with'em?
No! The decibels of sound
Deafen anyone who's bound
Up or down the street, or bus-wise.
Hhow long must we suffer-- us guys?
It isn't freedom of the speech;
It makes you want to run and screech.
We're getting huffier and huffer...
Must a lovely city suffer?

—Helen Maring, Seattle Resident, 1974

I. Introduction

The Noise Control Act of 1977 (NCA 77) and Seattle's noise ordinance of 1977 (SNO 77) do not impose a commercial rationality from a position above or outside the subjects they seek to govern. Rather than existing for-themselves these documents are discursive products of, while also serving to reinforce, a larger set of social relations. One way of mapping these relations is to change the scale of analysis—from legal documents to the individuals for which noise is a problem. I have shown how, in the spaces of the English hospice and of US noise-control acts, the management of sound presupposes a democratic-materialist ideology that correlates bodies and languages. In an

¹ Poem sent to Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman in 1974 (SF No. 5287-02 118/2).

attempt to substantiate and further develop this claim, the present chapter examines an archive of noise complaints submitted by residents of Seattle between 1893 and 2006. In analyzing these complaints I pay particular attention to how perceptions of sound may or may not have shifted within that time frame.

A question hinted at but ultimately left unanswered in the previous chapter was why NCA 72 and SNO 77 emerged when they did—during the 1970s. Citizen noise complaints offer one window into the material conditions of this emergence, into how individuals have historically responded to and were affected by the noises they encountered. While contextualizing the ways sound is conceived across time, space, and identity, this chapter asks the question: are there trends within the treatment of noise over time, before and after 1970? If so, do these trends suggest a coherent ontologic, similar to what was identified in English hospice practices or in US noise control?

I do indeed find such a pattern among the noise complaints, yet one that also complicates and nuances the discussion of sonic governance as developed in the previous chapters. On the whole, the ways Seattleites conceive and complain about noise change significantly around 1970. As I argue below, this shift can be understood as a movement towards the ideology of democratic materialism, which sees the world as a set of bodies and languages.

Before 1970, residents tended to hear and evaluate sound in terms of measurable concepts: noise was a threat, for instance, to health or it violated one's private property. At first this would seem to align with the biopolitics of NCA 72 and SNO 77 in referring the body to a state-determined language. However, before 1970, noise was largely conceived as something that remained *external* to the body, and in complaints from this time there is little correlation between the language residents use to understand and complain about sound and the interior of the subject. The

language of the state (concerning health, private property, etc.) is not inscribed on the body but rather posed as an *objective ideal*—something to be strived for.

This changes after 1970. In complaints from this period, noise is both described and bemoaned according to bodily, yet unmeasurable, signifiers, which constitute a distinctly liberal and democratic syntax of civility, human rights, and quality of life. This language is one of norms not ideals. Through the figure of sound, bodies are always-already located within its grammar: noise is forever penetrating the subject, becoming an irritant whenever it threatens to exceed the boundaries of the “community.” Such is the correlationism of democratic materialism: the body bound to linguistic limits. Ultimately, as I will show, after 1970 noise became an issue of *liberal multiculturalism*: sounds were evaluated on the basis of tolerance, reduced to a problem of “culture,” which in turn obscured their material conditions. Such multiculturalism secures the subject firmly within the relations of capital by culturalizing and disguising political conflict and thereby barring the critique of structure. However, similar to NCA 72 and SNO 77, the logic of noise complaints also removes certain bodies from the sphere of culture and capital altogether—demanding their silence.

II. Data Overview

During my research at the Seattle City Archives, I compiled a database of 410 noise complaints made by citizens from 1893 to 2006. Each entry was coded by type, location, threat posed, rationale used, description of noise, complainant gender, along with several other categories. In my analysis, to address the research question of how perceptions of noise may (or may not) have changed around 1970, I divided the complaints into those occurring before and after this date. In terms of numbers this split was surprisingly convenient, with 210 complaints registered on or after 1970, and 200 prior.

Before beginning a more detailed analysis of the complaints, I briefly outline my data in terms of the types of noise that saw increases and decreases after 1970 (Table 4.1), and in doing so

situate these shifts within the historical context of Seattle. Several major trends stand out. Most significant is the 16.7% decline in animal complaints. This is likely due to a variety of factors but most notable are the introduction of a Seattle dog-leash law in 1957 and the gradual disappearance of livestock animals from city limits. In his 2010 doctoral dissertation, historian Frederick Brown discusses the heated debate among Seattle citizens, from the 1930s to the 1950s, about whether dogs should be allowed to roam freely in the streets. During this time, Seattle had a system of “dog commons,” wherein licensed dogs were permitted to wander about off-leash. However, since the ratification of the leash law in 1957, “dogs’ and cats’ role in the city has become quite secure” (Brown 2010: 15). Livestock animals in Seattle, too, as Brown points out, were concealed and removed throughout the century. New marketing strategies that redefined the urban home led to a decline in backyard chickens. Large hog farms using urban food waste disappeared altogether in the 1960s, as did urban slaughterhouses and stockhouses (for cattle, pigs, and chickens) in the 1980s and 1990s due to cheaper rural labor (2010: 15–16). All of these phenomena would suggest a decline in animal-related noise complaints. Yet it might also be the case that these complaints were not deemed significant enough to be held in the mayoral and councilperson files I searched.

Macro-socioeconomic factors can also help clarify the slight decreases in the percentage of complaints about services and industry. Both can be explained, in part, by the decline in US manufacturing after the early 1970s, as well as by the neoliberal scale back of welfare and government services in the 1980s under the Reagan administration and, later, by Clinton’s right-to-work reforms. Seattle’s 6.4% fall in industry-related complaints might also be linked to the “Boeing Bust” of 1969–1971. Due to declining demand and rising costs (partially caused by potential noise and environmental impacts), Boeing, the major employer in the Seattle region, reduced its local workforce from 105,000 in 1969 to 38,000 in 1971 (Abbott 1992: 305).

What's more challenging to make sense of in the Seattle noise complaints from before and after 1970 are the drops in the percentages of "people" and "commercial" sounds (by 14.3% and 1.8% respectively), coupled with the dramatic rise in complaints having to do with transportation (+9.8%) and music & speaker systems (+15%). At first glance this would seem to defy the governmental logic I argued was implicit in the EPA and Seattle noise-control documents. Seattleites after 1970, it appears, were less concerned with the sounds—people-related and commercial—that provide bodily contact points for the inscription of state-defined values and the necessity of commodity circulation. This was not a soundscape in which the subject ("people") was linked to capital ("commercial").

But I think this is the wrong reading. Although the noises that annoyed Seattle residents after 1970 were less commercial and less anthropomorphic, their increased mechanization—as shown by rises in the categories of "transportation" and "music/loudspeaker"—suggests a partition of the sensible similar to what NCA 72 and SNO 77 enforce. For Marx (*C*, II 327) the development of transport and communication (of which speaker systems are a part) is essential in decreasing the time of circulation. Focusing on these technologies in their complaints, Seattleites acknowledged, as do the noise-control documents, that commodity circulation posed a problem in need of management. In this way, noise complaints after 1970 *do* correlate the subject with the logic of capital: sounds—and their bodies of origin—are situated within the sphere of circulation, which is made amenable to governance and securitization. It's not that "people" or "commerce" decrease in importance for noise complaints after 1970. They are simply mediated through technology and made increasingly subject to control.

At the same time, Seattle noise complaints suggest a logic of subjectivization more complex than that of NCA 72 and SNO 77. This is a biopolitics that does more than link body, population, and economy. Rather than (or in addition to) aligning the individual to a set of empirically

measurable norms—health, family, property, and so on—this is a biopolitics invested in the construction and proliferation of *immanent* limits, of inscribing social hierarchies *within* the subject, rather than on the surface. What the shifts in noise complaints reveal, then, is a concern for shoring up the boundaries of the body itself, its interior and exterior, which music and the sounds of transportation vehicles are always crossing. The subject is not indexed to any state-defined category of population or welfare, as with NCA 72 and SNO 77, but is instead conceived as *unfree*, its autonomy compromised by the infiltration of noise. On the whole, the desire of noise complaints after 1970 is that of a subject perfectly quarantined within the limits of a liberal language of tolerance and universal equality. This is the utopia of a self-sufficient “community,” “environment,” or “life”² that needs no outside to function. Ironically, what the complaints seek to achieve for the subject is also what many of them complain against: the autonomous machine, perfectly complete.

The notion of completion always implies a particular hierarchy of relations since it is achieved only through the exclusion and repression of racial, gender, and class difference. In what follows, I demonstrate how in Seattle noise complaints after 1970 the body is resignified and secured within a set of transcendentals or limits that are non-empirical and taken to be self-evident. This resignification occurs in three “movements”: (1) the corporealization of space, (2) the construction of limits, and (3) the connection of corporealized space (the body) to these limits (language). I address each of these movements individually, using three different objects of analysis: (1) descriptions of the sounds complained about, (2) the threats these sounds are said to pose, and (3) the rationales citizens provided for making complaints.

² All of these terms are increasing cited as threats in noise complaints after 1970 (see Table 4.3)

Table 4.1: Types of Noise in Seattle Complaints, 1893–2006

	1893–2006		<1970		≥1970		% Change
	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	
Animals	34	8.5%	33	17.2%	1	0.5%	-16.7%
Commercial	92	23.0%	46	24.0%	46	22.1%	-1.8%
Construction	19	4.8%	3	1.6%	16	7.7%	6.1%
Generic	6	1.5%	1	0.5%	5	2.4%	1.9%
Industrial	18	4.5%	15	7.8%	3	1.4%	-6.4%
Miscellaneous	16	4.0%	9	4.7%	7	3.4%	-1.3%
Music/Loudspeaker	50	12.5%	9	4.7%	41	19.7%	15.0%
People	37	9.3%	32	16.7%	5	2.4%	-14.3%
Services	16	4.0%	10	5.2%	6	2.9%	-2.3%
Transportation	112	28.0%	34	17.7%	78	37.5%	19.8%
Unknown*	10	n/a	8	n/a	2	n/a	n/a
Total	410		200		210		

*Some of the files listed in the archive’s database were not found in the records. When the type of sound was not evident in the file’s title I marked the complaint as “unknown” and did not factor it in to the total percentages.

N.B.: For reasons of comparability, the categories above taken from historian Emily Thompson’s (2002) archival study of noise complaints in New York City from 1926–1934. I did not end up including Thompson’s NYC data here, as it did not prove relevant to my arguments. For reference see Thompson 2002: 160.

Sources: Seattle Municipal Archives: Comptroller/Clerk Files: “Noise and Citizen-Complaints [index terms]” (1903–1973); General Files: “Noise” (1893); Subject Files: “Noise” (1970–2006).

III. Corporealization: Descriptions of Noise

Sonic Infiltration

For Foucault, resignification entails the obliteration of the body so as to allow for new cultural inscription (Butler 2006: 177–178). Changes in the descriptions of Seattle noise complaints (Table 4.2) suggest a similar process of destruction. As opposed to earlier decades, complaints after 1970 tend to frame noise as more visceral, bodily, and hazardous—threatening the boundaries of the self, community, and environment. There is a shift, for example, from describing noise as merely excessive (-2.3%), unnecessary (-3.6%), or as a nuisance (-15.9%), to seeing it as a serious physical hazard to the body, as something (+1.9%), assaulting (+1.4%), deafening (+1.4%), intrusive (+1.7%), stressful (+2.4), and dangerous (+4.3). This change is also reflected in the decreased use of “disturbing” as opposed to the rise of “disrupting.” While similar in meaning, the latter suggests the transgression of a boundary. It is through the threat of transgression that sound complaints produce space as corporeal, made up of bodies and organs in constant danger. For a disruption always implies that a boundary has been crossed: it defines *post-factum* the limits of a body under the threat of destruction.

Bodily destruction is a common theme in sound complaints after 1970. Writing to Mayor Wes Uhlman in 1974, Rick Pearson envisions the body of the Seattle resident as “savagely *attacked by unwanted noise*” (SF No. 5287-02 118/2). “It’s been proven over and over,” Pearson writes, “that excess noise stimulates a defense reaction in the body which is designed for emergencies. You can perhaps imagine what the sirens and trucks do to the body of a Seattite [sic] each day.” Not only this, but Pearson argues that “broken homes and delinquency can be partially traced back” to noise pollution. He goes on to describe the sounds of “clatter, zoom, putter” of cars and trucks that “blare their infernal machines past the delicate body of the man heading towards work.”

As this last quotation indicates, Pearson sees noise not only as a threat to the body in general but specifically to the body of the everyday (male) working citizen. The perceived threat of “unwanted noise” allows him to link the individual with the economic—to present the body as always-already “heading to work,” its natural state. What Pearson conceives and naturalizes, through noise, is a kind of *homo economicus*. “Imagine a man,” he writes,

on his way to work. He whistles and sings as he walks through his neighborhood to his job downtown. Suddenly a bus clatters by – he pretends to ignore the bus but his body reacts instinctively by increasing his heart rate, contracting his stomach and veins, sending adrenaline into his bloodstreams as though a tiger growled at him [...] the noise is unconsciously another blow to his cheerfulness & zest for work [...].

This passage poses a set of confluences: between the spheres of home and work, machine (“bus”) and nature (“tiger”), conscious and unconscious, as well as the body’s organs (“heart rate,” “stomach and veins,” “adrenaline”) and its external environment (“neighborhood,” “job downtown”). What makes these linkages possible is the assumed transgressiveness of sound. They are only legible, however, against a presupposition—also made possible by sound—that intersects the affective body with a natural orientation towards (ie, “zest for”) the economic. Heart rate is connected to the environment, for example, only within the context of a “man on his way to work.” Thus, noise as transgressive force not only connects the internal and external spheres (eg, the bodily and environmental) but is able to “economize” these spheres to the extent that the body becomes indelibly tied to its occupation.

Such an emphasis on sound’s penetration of the body marks a shift, not just in how sounds were described, but also in how the soundscape was perceived as a coherent object of knowledge. Lacking this transgressive concern, many of the descriptive words that decrease in usage after 1970 serve to demarcate a space of sound rather than to indicate the dangers such a space poses for the subject. Declining words like racket (-4.9%), boisterous (-4.2%), din (-2%), raucous (-2.1%), and commotion (-1.4%) outline a field of bothersome noise; they do not imply an infiltration of the

body. In general, complaints before 1970 maintain the possibility of a stable and objectively definable region of sound, a self-enclosed totality (“racket,” “din,” and so forth) unaltered by the presence of the observer.

After 1970 this conception of the soundscape appears to lose traction. Sound shifted from an object of knowledge to a body of knowledge, one that implicated the subject. Due in part to the rise in references to expert knowledge (+6.6%), bothersome noise was viewed increasingly as “inside” the body, as was the case in Pearson’s letter. Yet this body was not just that of the individual: it was also that of the “environment,” the “community,” and of “life” itself. Noise bled into other spheres, helping to define their bodily borders. Rarely was it posed as a self-enclosed soundscape.

Vibration and Pollution

Supporting this argument are the two largest increases in descriptive words in the period after 1970. These occur for “vibrating” and “pollution,” which rise 5.1% and 15.2%, respectively. Vibration has been theorized by several scholars in sonic studies as capable of “affectively mobiliz[ing]” (Goodman 2010: 8) the body in sync with its material environment, insofar as it “traverses mind and body, subject and object, the living and nonliving” (Goodman 2010: xiv). In his study of Jamaican dancehalls, Julian Henriques (2011: xv–xvi) suggests that the vibrations of sound systems place the body—its “every cell”—“inside sound.” This is what he calls “*sonic dominance*.” “On one hand,” Henriques (2011: xvi) writes, “this current immersion in auditory abundance can be experienced as a sonic invasion of our bodies and their personal space. On the other, it can also be heard as a sonic extension of the body [...]”

This is why Seattleites who describe sound as vibratory imply a porous and diffuse theory of the body: in these complaints bothersome noise is directly inscribed within the body, literally

becoming (an unwanted) part of the individual. This shift in focus—from sound as external medium to sound as bodily extension—is further supported by a 6.9% increase (from 68.6% to 75.5%) in the percentage of complaints made by individuals, as opposed to larger groups like petitions and neighborhood councils. More so after 1970, noise is a *subjective* problem. The increase in individual complaints also suggests the inculcation of subjects to police and report harmful instances of noise. This form of “responsibilization” has been considered by many scholars to be a fundamental technique of neoliberal governance (Foucault 1991 [1978]; Rose 1996, 1998; Dean 2009 [1999]; Lemke 2001). On an ontological level, moreover, the emphasis on the individual implies a securitization of being and the management of exteriority. For as Denise Ferreira Da Silva (2007: 50) argues, “When self-consciousness is fashioned as a juridical subject, the ‘individual’ emerges as the basic ontological unit, the rational will that embraces exterior regulation to protect its life and self-determination.” This is the “transparent” (Da Silva 2007: 33) and universal liberal subject, the individual for whom all exteriority—all *noise*—offers a site of governance and, as such, a means of self-preservation. “Vibration,” in this regard, while posing a threat to autonomy, creates the necessary conditions (eg, noise-control legislation) to define and safeguard it.

Though the usage of the term “vibrating” increased after 1970, an even larger shift occurred for “pollution.” The rise of this term can be placed within the context of the previous chapter, as part and parcel of the growth of the environmental movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s and the establishment of comprehensive noise-control acts like NCA 72 and SNO 77. Ontologically, the increase in the use of “pollution” indicates, at a scale greater than the individual, another kind of body in need of securitization: the environment. In framing noise as “pollution,” complainants imply that it has (noxious) effects beyond personal annoyance. Measuring the soundscape of such pollution, then, would require an analysis that moves beyond the sounds themselves—as well as beyond the human. If framing sound as vibratory poses the human body as in need of security, the

label “pollution” extends this protection to larger, non-human spaces, thereby transforming exteriority into an interior requiring management and regulation.

Yet, at the same time, “pollution” also establishes a (toxic) relationship between exteriority and the human body to the extent the two terms are seen as reciprocally destructive: the polluted environment becomes hazardous to the body and the polluting body becomes hazardous to the environment. It’s through this dialectic that the liberal body is extended outwards, to nature, which is reproduced as bodily and visceral. In this way, the use of “pollution” works to colonize and securitize zones of externality at a larger scale than that of the individual, rendering them subject to management and to neoliberal governance.

Corporealization of Capital

It also opens up these spheres for capital investment. In his letter to the mayor, Pearson argues that noise can be controlled in a cost-effective manner: “most loud noise from noisy machinery in the city could be improved dramatically at a cost of +5% or so – at the original point of production” (SF No. 5287-02 118/2). Writing in 1974, Pearson could not foresee the rapid growth of the environmental-consulting sector during the 1980s (Stephens 2008: 21) which would turn this 5% cost into a profit. It’s evident from the rise of this industry that “noise pollution” is part and parcel of commodity fetishism, becoming an apparatus for the commodification of nature (cf. Neil Smith 2008). The label of “pollution,” used in Pearson’s letter for instance, works to imbue the sonic environment with a set of definite social relations, in this case between the individual and his work. As a result, the environment becomes a commodity to be improved at a monetary cost. This fetishization is made possible, in part, because Pearson’s transgressive framing of sound expands the reach of the economic body and its organs to formerly noneconomic zones.

“Pollution,” then, like “vibrating” and many of the other sonic descriptors that increase after 1970 (see Table 4.2), enables a bodily and economic coding of the nonhuman, whether in terms of a universal liberal individual or in terms of capitalist social relations. It affirms a practice of reading that renders the body at risk, but also as a condition of knowledge, such that externality is always-already visceral, organic, and thus exposed to danger, in need of governmental intervention. It is in this way that the noise complaint indexes of a process of *corporealization*, whereby the world is made bodily.

What these complaints desire but can never attain is, in Judith Butler’s (2006: 185) words, a “coherence”: an “internal core or substance” that is the human body or environment free from the dangers of noise. Such a desire remains “an effect of a corporeal signification” (Butler 2006: 186), manufactured and “discursively maintained” through the complaint itself. I have shown how this discursive logic operates through the deconstruction and consequent expansion of the sonic body, which is rendered porous and endangered against the transgressiveness of noise. The question now becomes: what exactly is the body resignified to bear? What social relations are extended to the interior of the body, of the environment? How is the subject reconceived through noise? And if the subject is indeed rendered *homo economicus*, as Pearson’s letter suggests, how is this justified? To answer these questions, I turn now to the particular ways in which the complaints frame noise as threatening.

Table 4.2: Descriptions of Sound in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006

	1893-2006		<1970		≥1970		% Change
	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	
abusive	4	1.1%	0	0.0%	4	1.9%	1.9%
annoying	35	10.0%	14	9.8%	21	10.1%	0.4%
assaulting	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%	1.4%
awful	4	1.1%	2	1.4%	2	1.0%	-0.4%
banging	8	2.3%	4	2.8%	4	1.9%	-0.9%
blaring	4	1.1%	1	0.7%	3	1.4%	0.7%
boisterous	6	1.7%	6	4.2%	0	0.0%	-4.2%
cacophonous	2	0.6%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	1.0%
circling	3	0.9%	1	0.7%	2	1.0%	0.3%
commotion	2	0.6%	2	1.4%	0	0.0%	-1.4%
constant	9	2.6%	5	3.5%	4	1.9%	-1.6%
dangerous	9	2.6%	0	0.0%	9	4.3%	4.3%
deafening	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%	1.4%
din	8	2.3%	5	3.5%	3	1.4%	-2.0%
disrupting	7	2.0%	1	0.7%	6	2.9%	2.2%
distracting	2	0.6%	2	1.4%	0	0.0%	-1.4%
distressing	2	0.6%	1	0.7%	1	0.5%	-0.2%
disturbing	43	12.3%	22	15.4%	21	10.1%	-5.2%
excessive	10	2.9%	6	4.2%	4	1.9%	-2.3%
horrible	2	0.6%	2	1.4%	0	0.0%	-1.4%
howling	4	1.1%	2	1.4%	2	1.0%	-0.4%
intolerable	7	2.0%	1	0.7%	6	2.9%	2.2%
intrusive	3	0.9%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%	1.4%
irritating	12	3.4%	3	2.1%	9	4.3%	2.2%
menance	4	1.1%	2	1.4%	2	1.0%	-0.4%
nuisance	38	10.9%	29	20.3%	9	4.3%	-15.9%
objectionable	8	2.3%	6	4.2%	2	1.0%	-3.2%
obnoxious	2	0.6%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	1.0%
offensive	4	1.1%	2	1.4%	2	1.0%	-0.4%
penetrating	3	0.9%	1	0.7%	2	1.0%	0.3%
plagued	3	0.9%	1	0.7%	2	1.0%	0.3%
pollution	34	9.7%	1	0.7%	33	15.9%	15.2%
pounding	2	0.6%	1	0.7%	1	0.5%	-0.2%
racket	7	2.0%	7	4.9%	0	0.0%	-4.9%
raucous	3	0.9%	3	2.1%	0	0.0%	-2.1%
repetitive	6	1.7%	3	2.1%	3	1.4%	-0.6%
roaring	7	2.0%	4	2.8%	3	1.4%	-1.3%
screaming	7	2.0%	3	2.1%	4	1.9%	-0.2%
stressful	5	1.4%	0	0.0%	5	2.4%	2.4%
talking	2	0.6%	1	0.7%	1	0.5%	-0.2%
terrible	4	1.1%	3	2.1%	1	0.5%	-1.6%
thoughtless	3	0.9%	2	1.4%	1	0.5%	-0.9%
unbearable	9	2.6%	6	4.2%	3	1.4%	-2.7%
unnecessary	17	4.9%	10	7.0%	7	3.4%	-3.6%
vibrating	13	3.7%	1	0.7%	12	5.8%	5.1%
yelling	3	0.9%	3	2.1%	0	0.0%	-2.1%
Total Complaints*	347		140		207		

*Some of the complaints listed in the archive’s database were not found in the records. Unless I could identify a “description” in the file’s title, I did not include them in the count for total complaints.

Sources: Seattle Municipal Archives: Comptroller/Clerk Files: “Noise and Citizen-Complaints [index terms]” (1903–1973); General Files: “Noise” (1893); Subject Files: “Noise” (1970–2006).

IV. Limits: Noise as a Threat

Immaterial Spheres

One of the paradoxes of Seattle's noise complaints after 1970 is that while sounds are described in a more visceral and bodily manner (Table 4.2) they are considered to endanger very abstract concepts. Of the areas recognized for protection under SNO 77, only "safety" and "environment" increased (by 8.5% and 2.2%, respectively) from before and after 1970 as a percentage of cited threats (Table 4.3). Other areas identified by SNO 77—health, sleep, repose, property, commerce—all decreased, as did the demographic categories of children, family, and tenants. The difference between declining categories and those of "safety" and "environment" is that the latter are more difficult to measure empirically. What constitutes safety? How do you define the environment?

This holds true for the other threats that increased in percentage after 1970: quality of life (+11.1%), enjoyment (+5.9%), emotion (+3.9%), and community (+2.4%). Relative to the threats that decreased (which are abstractions as well), all of these categories are *immaterial*, problematic to observe, quantify, or make objective. In demanding protection, they work to dematerialize that which threatens them: the visceral or, in this case, the sonic body. To put it differently, these threats constitute the transcendentals of worlds—bound by community, enjoyment, etc.—wherein noise cannot appear as bodily, as vibratory or polluting, since this would endanger the coherence of the worlds themselves. Presupposing an immaterial sphere of community, life, or whatever means that the goal of security and governance must be to obscure the material conditions of that sphere—its noisy and bodily remainders so as to reproduce its illusion. Enjoyment, emotion, community, and quality of life become the abstract limits of a world in need of fortification.

These limits are the focus of noise complaints after 1970. For example, in a 1999 letter to the city council, a car-dealership owner named Paul Weir argues that "noise pollution [...] can adversely affect the lives of the people living nearby, lowering their *quality of life*, and raising their anxiety level"

(SF No. 4650-02 21/16; emphasis mine). General conceptions of “community” and “society” are also frequently cited as under attack. In a 1999 letter to councilman Mark Sidran, Abigail Ormsby writes: “Our society is lowering its standard. With the decline of intimacy so evident in recent years, has come the Rapid Advancement of thought-less carousers, yellers, engineer-gunner, ‘house’ partiers, etc.” (SF No. 5279-01 49/4). Bothersome noise, in Ormsby’s case, defines the limits of a normative world.

Capitalism under Threat

In many noise complaints after 1970, these limits are coupled with those of capital. The “community” or “society” under threat is often assumed to be one whose relations are based on surplus extraction. In linking a normative category to the logic of capital, noise complaints naturalize both spheres, making them appear as necessary conditions of existence. To demonstrate this, I use formal logic to examine a noise-complaint letter sent by Gerald K. Cinader in 1993 to then-mayor Norman Rice (SF No. 4667-02 38/10).

In the letter, Cinader, a member of the “Rail Noise Mitigation Committee,” argues that noise pollution from Burlington Northern railroad poses a menace to both the “community” and the “development” of Seattle’s Interbay region. Against the threat of noise, these two terms—“life” in the neighborhood and its ability to accumulate capital—become linked. Formally this is written using the biconditional: community/life \leftrightarrow development. Cinader writes:

The Burlington Northern **noise pollution** problem in Interbay is one of the main issues that we feel is keeping this neighborhood from reaching its **potential**. Our research shows that nearly 11,000 residents live on the downhill slopes of Queen Anne and Magnolia facing into Interbay. There’s no doubt that in spite of the neighborhood focus on top of Queen Anne and Magnolia, there’s also pressure for this valley to provide a sense of place and **community**. Toward this end the efforts of the Port at Fisherman’s Terminal and the City’s golf course plans are to be applauded. The **quality of life** of these 11,000 residents is directly **dependent on the way the valley is developed**. It affects everything from their property value and

tax base to crime and **pollution**. In keeping with the commitment to a better Interbay, we feel a resolution of the noise pollution problem is essential. [bolding is mine].

Noise pollution is linked (negatively) to community and life, which is linked (positively) to development. Let n = noise pollution from trains, p = potential of community or life, d = development (capitalist), and M represent a maximum degree. Cinader's letter clearly advances three statements:

- 1) $n \rightarrow \neg (p = M)$: if there is noise pollution then it's not the case that the community is at its full potential (sentence 1);
- 2) $(p = M) \rightarrow (d = M)$: maximal development is the necessary condition for community and life reaching their full potential (sentence 5); and
- 3) $n \rightarrow \neg (d = M)$: if there is noise pollution then development is not maximal (between sentences 5, 6, and 7 Cinader seems to suggest that the right development would resolve pollution).

Yet I argue that Cinader's narrative implies an additional, fourth statement. Like many of the other complaints, utopia for Cinader is a world free of noise pollution.³ Such a claim is the converse of the first:

- 4) $\neg n \rightarrow (p = M)$: if there is no noise pollution then the community and the life of the individual would reach their highest potential.

This is fantasy, of course. But it often seems, in Cinader's account as in others, that noise is the sole obstacle to "the good life."

However implicit this claim may be, because of it the "community" or "quality of life" of the individual is placed in a biconditional relationship with capitalist development. Given the statements above, not only is it the case that $(p = M) \rightarrow (d = M)$, but it also follows that $(d = M) \rightarrow (p = M)$, meaning that if development is at maximal so too is the community or the life of the individual. As a

³ Another example of this sonic utopia is found in Rick Pearson's 1974 letter, where he asks the mayor to "imagine a city *without* loud noise. The quiet would promote a new sense of harmony – would basically allow individuals in the city to go about their job building and rebuilding our city. The joy felt from more quiet, peaceful surroundings could spread to all facets of our day. We might become more sensitive to our atmosphere, to our dirty water, or to our depleted landscape" (SF No. 5287-02 118/2).

result, community and quality of life are biconditionals of capital: if one is true then the other must be as well. The proof: since $(d = M) \rightarrow \neg n$ (contrapositive of statement 3), then if development is maximal so is community/life (application of statement 4). The consequence of this is $(d = M) \rightarrow (p = M)$. Combining this new sentence with statement 2 we thus have the biconditional statement: $(p = M) \leftrightarrow (d = M)$.

In practice, what this biconditional accomplishes is the naturalization of each term by its counterpart. If community is assumed, for instance, capital must be as well. I will explore the implications of this logic in greater detail in section V below. For now, it's important to see how, within Cinader's letter, the identification of a single threat becomes linked to another, so that the world produced is structured on a series of *rational* limits justifying one another. In Cinader's world, to improve oneself or one's community is necessarily to reinforce the exploitative processes of capitalism, and vice versa.

Noise & Culturalization

But beyond logic how exactly does this coupling—which becomes increasingly prevalent after 1970—occur? To answer this question it's necessary to look at the ways in which individuals are made to *appear* in the textual soundscape of Seattle noise complaints. Not only is their existence fastened to general logic of capital, but the legitimacy of their bodies, and their bodies' sounds, are bound to a set of liberal multiculturalist limits that abstract from and reduce the contingencies of their positionality, which includes class, gender, and race relations. While these limits function to aid the movements of capital in producing deskilled, flexibilized and, replaceable pools of labor, their analysis must extend beyond the economic.

Supporting this argument is the connection, in terms of both history and effect, between post-1970 Seattle sound complaints and the “state-sanctioned antiracism” that Jodi Melamed (2011:

xxi) identifies as a technology of (neo)liberal multiculturalism. Official antiracisms, Melamed (2011: 27) argues, ward off the danger of more radical positions by incorporating and abstracting their content, for instance, through the aestheticization of black culture in race novels that “produced and circumscribed acceptable discourse about race” (71). Seattle noise complaints affect a similar process of aestheticization in reading sonic bodies against the dematerialized categories of life, community, enjoyment, and so on. Framed as such, noise complaints form a “strateg[y] of representation” (Melamed 2011: 154) that functions to erase the material relations of its content. This is evident in the 14% decrease, after 1970, in complaints that directly address race, gender, sexuality, age, and other hierarchical relations. In general, these topics become recoded as “cultural” problems, or as issues of tolerance.⁴

Earlier in the century this was not as much the case. In 1933, Arthemise Alexander complains about “a very undesirable class of people [that] is constantly brought to the neighborhood” of Capitol Hill (15th & Madison St), causing excessive noise. (CF No. 141860). The appeal to class reemerges throughout the next few decades: “I can't keep the class of tenants I would like to have as long as the dance hall is allowed to operate...” (1957: CF No. 232017); “[this is a] middle-class working district” (1968: CF No. 261904); “we do not feel that our neighborhood is a ghetto” (1968: CF No. 261241); “this is a continued infraction [...] and a nuisance depriving people living in a first-class zoned residential area [...]” (1969: CF No. 263825).

Gender conflict is also audible in noise complaints before 1970. In 1940, for example, a Seattle resident named A. Finlayson voices his disapproval of the Woman’s Century Club on Capitol Hill for holding loud dances. Noise is not the only issue: in his letter Finlayson implies that young women must always have “proper supervision” (CF No. 167214). Patriarchy is again mentioned in 1964, when Mrs. Frank J. Hoffman writes of her displeasure in failing to find any “man in authority”

⁴ Indeed, “intolerance” increases by 2.2% as a descriptor of noise (see Table 4.2).

during her visit to the police station. Sarcastically she asks, “do the women run the Police Department after 5 or 6 P.M.?” (CF No. 251249).

Politics, too, is problematized in earlier sound complaints, especially early on in the Cold War. In 1947, a group of citizens targets the Pacific Northwest Labor School for holding noisy dances (CF No. 194438), and in 1953, Seattle resident, R.P. Gallagher, protests against the “blatant and nonsensical” nuisance of sound trucks (which he calls “subversives”) broadcasting news about the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, two Jews accused of spying for the USSR (CF No. 220515).

While less overt, race and ethnicity remain evident in noise complaints prior to 1970, whether in protests against dances held at the German Club House in the years leading up to the second world war (1936: CF No. 150740; 1937: CF No. 157119) or following (1954: CF. No. 225800). There are also several complaints against black music, including a “jazz band” in 1947 (CF No. 194438) and a “soul town” venue in the Central District in 1968 (CF No. 261904).

These last two complaints stand out, however. In referencing culture, they signal a shift in how structural conflicts are framed. Rather than disappearing altogether, these issues are “culturalized” (Jameson 1998: 150; Brown 2008: 15; Žižek 2008: 660). To borrow Žižek’s words (2008: 660), political differences in later sound complaints are “naturalized and neutralized into cultural differences, different ‘ways of life,’ which are something given, something that cannot be overcome, but must be merely tolerated.” The “culturalization of politics” (Žižek 2008: 660) and the “promulgation of tolerance” (Brown 2008: 7) are key features of a liberal multiculturalist ideology, emerging in the late twentieth century in response to the “retreat and failure of direct political solutions (the welfare state, socialist projects, and so on)” (Žižek 2008: 660). “The cultivation of tolerance as a political end,” Brown (2008: 89) writes, “implicitly constitutes a rejection of politics as a domain in which conflict can be productively articulated and addressed.” Instead, politics becomes

an issue of *recognition*, of dressing up conflict in the guises of equality, culture, and community. This makes the fetishization of tolerance, according to Badiou (*LW*: 2), symptomatic of a democratic-materialist ideology keen on “recognizing the plurality of [cultural] languages” and presupposing “their juridical equality.”

Following this logic, noise complaints after 1970 tend to avoid speaking directly to political conflicts (gender, class, race, et al.) but instead render them “post-political” (Žižek 2000: 199; 2009: 349) through a cultural reading of sound. It is in this way that *noise* becomes an issue of tolerance, or rather, is defined as that which exceeds and threatens the system of tolerance itself. For as Badiou (*LW*: 2–3) argues,

democratic materialism does stipulate a global halting point for its multiform tolerance. A language that does not recognize the universal juridical and normative equality of languages does not deserve to benefit from this equality. [...] What it then requires is not tolerance, but a ‘right to intervention’: legal, international, and, if needs be, military.

Bodies (and their sounds) are punishable when they endanger the “community” of tolerant individuals, when their “culture” is deemed incompatible with the democratic system that serves to recognize and protect all languages equally. Noise is illegitimate, then, when it undermines liberal multiculturalism. This is why, after 1970, noise complaints are frequently couched in the language of tolerance, equality, and freedom of speech: sound becomes a problem to the extent it is registered as “unfair” or as preventing one from “enjoying” life as he or she sees fit.

This “cultivation of tolerance” is demonstrated by a 1999 complaint bemoaning a group of noisy upstairs neighbors. “It isn’t fair,” writes Beverly Fedor,

that thoughtless annoyances like [the sounds in the apartment upstairs] should turn me into a grumpy neighbor. I don’t want my neighbors to feel uncomfortable in their own homes around me; neither should I feel tense or uncomfortable or be forced to meet my neighbors. Aren’t people who live in the city presumed to be pre-endowed with common sense about what constitutes acceptable levels of noise in close, common living quarters? (SF No. 5279-01 49/3).

But such “common sense” tolerance is not objective. In respect to her noisy neighbors, part of what makes Fedor “uncomfortable” are the “loud groans and screams” of what she calls a “sado-masochistic sex play.” It offends her standards of decency: “I never made that much noise or motion during vaginal orgasms!” Fedor tries but is unable to remain neutral about the sex she hears: “never mind their sexual preferences if that’s what it is; but sexual preferences shouldn’t be that loud and I really have to object to the slamming and banging around.” The latter, she writes, “makes me as tense as a hen on a hot rock or the wife of a feckless Mennonite husband who is totally unskilled in the art of husbandry.”

What Fedor’s example shows is that the lines of tolerance and intolerance are never politically neutral. When sound is treated as an index of culture or of “sexual preference,” it can be used, intentionally or not, to define, ostracize, and make “deviant” groups governable. In many of the sound complaints after 1970, certain cultural forms of sound—like jazz or soul town—become coded as “intolerable,” as threats to the coherence of a (white) universal subject as well as to liberal notions of multiculturalism. Seen in this way, sound is a sensible mediator for linking certain social groups to “common sense” boundaries of tolerability and intolerability. This mediation, in turn, produces its own justification, naturalizing a mode of governance that serves to strengthen the white, male, heteronormative position. Noise complaints, then, provide a site at which liberal multiculturalism is both secured and naturalized.

Hippies, Hot-Rodders, and Racism

In Seattle, the “culturalization of politics” became most palpable after 1970. However, it can be seen emerging in the years leading up to 1970, particularly in complaints having to do with “the antics of young people” (1970: CF No. 267404). Until the 1950s, complaints involving the youth are relatively uncommon. The few that were filed are typically concerned with the shouts of paper-delivery boys.

But by mid-century, the noises of youth culture became a major source of grievance. In the late 50s and 60s, most of these complaints (CF Nos. 234754, 234806, 235396, 234806, 246129, 264322, 264548) have to do with “hot-rodders” and “hoodlums”: “the boys who tear-down and build hot-rods and drag-strip cars, which results in our little children being kept awake at night” (1958: CF No. 234806).

Later in the 60s and early 70s complaints (CF Nos. 258533, 261564, 264014, 263825, 264758) were increasingly linked to hippies and rock-and-roll music. For example, in response to a 1967 “hippy rally” in Volunteer Park, a Seattle resident named Donna Law demands that “we, as decent citizens” put a stop to the “spread of a worthless and decadent way of life” (CF No. 258533). She goes on to argue that “hippies – and our tolerance of them – are the answer to communist prayers.” Another Mrs. E.E. Harrington writes in 1970, in reference to a noisy street dance in the University District, that “the hippies do not work and their whole purpose in life seems to create disorder” (CF No. 267404). On the same event, James E. McComb states that he, and other property owners, “have good reasons to fear some of these kids” (CF No. 267404).

While many complaints, like those above, criticize the hot-rodders and hippies on the basis of their lifestyle, most take issue primarily with the noises made by these groups. The sounds of drag-racing and rock-and-roll are central in the culturalization, and thus the representation, of the youth in ways that diminish the potentials of their political dissent. The sounds of hot-rodders and hippies—their cars, festivals, music, on so on—provide a sensible medium through which they can be known, recorded, complained about, and governed. Indeed, many of the complaints of the late 1960s and early 1970s classify annoying sounds as “rock-and-roll” or as “hippy.” For one accuser, “the noise nuisance in our neighborhood [is] caused by the highly-amplified rock-type bands” (1969: CF No. 263825). Another laments having to listen “to a ‘hippy’ band practice next door” (1969: CF No. 264014). Through the medium of sound, these complainants are able to delegitimize certain

bodies without attacking them directly. They are able to remain tolerant of hippies and hot-rodders as “cultures” or “ways of life,” while discrediting the movements and sounds of these groups. What this amounts to is stripping counterculture of its entire radical potential, situating it as one of many sterilized languages of an official multiculturalism.

After rock-and-roll’s peak, musical genre continued as a site through which complainants could address, but dematerialize and obscure, social conflicts concerning race, gender, class, and sexuality. For example, in her 1999 letter to Mark Sidran, Abigail Ormsby sees “hip-hop clubs” as a public nuisance, while being careful not to come across as racist (SF No. 5279-01 49/4).⁵ She writes: “I also agree with your [Sidran’s] stance on hip-hop clubs—How does one avoid sound, or heaven forbid, appearing “RACIST” on this issue?” Nevertheless, it’s clear for Ormsby that the sound of hip-hop clubs is fixed to a specific, racially defined, social group: “There is a ‘certain crowd’ that these “JOINTS” attracts, isn’t there?” Even with the explicit intent of not doing so, Ormsby ties music to race, making the latter a “cultural,” and therefore governable, category.

As Da Silva (2007: xxxiv–xxxv) argues, “the equation of the racial and the cultural undermines cultural politics projects” since it “reinforces the effects of signification of the racial: exterior determination.” “No matter how fluid, hybrid, or unbounded,” (Da Silva 2007: xxxv) the cultural, like the racial, cannot think collectivity in its own terms and thus “cannot communicate interiority.” For this reason, Ormsby’s alleged post-racial stance on hip-hop clubs, in Da Silva’s (2007: xxxv) words, “(re)produces the racial’s effect of signification which is to write all that is particular to post-Enlightenment Europe as a signifier of the subject, the transparent ‘I.’” While trying to be “tolerant,” Ormsby reinforces the structures of racism by universalizing hip-hop and by reducing the music of the Other so that it is comprehensible and manageable from her own subject position.

⁵ In another letter to City Council, Ormsby makes reference to “Rap-Crap” (SF No. 5279-01 49/4).

Ormsby also ties music to class. She goes on in her letter to argue that unlike hip-hop clubs, “[t]he RAINIER CLUB, by contrast, does not [attract a ‘certain crowd’]! Geeeee, wonder why Or, the classier and more sophisticated the clientele . . . (YOU FILL IN THE BLANK) One can enjoy oneself SEDATELY!” The imperative to fill in the blank, along with the ellipses that litter this passage, indicates a class hierarchy that for Ormsby goes without saying, literally. This is an example of how silence can reproduce a politically motivated commonsense. In the context of Ormsby’s letter, silence precludes any investigation into the social structures of why a “sophisticated” clientele would be or could be considered more “sedate” than a hip-hop crowd. By appealing to commonsense, then, Ormsby reinforces racial and class inequalities while appearing to present an objective narrative that avoids these issues altogether. After all, why worry about race and class when “one can enjoy oneself SEDATELY!”

Another example of a noise complaint that seeks to avoid, or make cultural, a set of political issues is the 1981 protest of the Pike Place Market Preservation and Develop Authority (PPMPDA) against the use of bull horns and PA systems in the market by the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) (SF No. 1628-01 147/3). The letter emphasizes that the problem is in no way related to the radical ideas or political nature of RCP but is rather an issue of loud noises and their potential disturbance to vendors and business. Like many complaints after 1970 and especially in the 1990s and 2000s, PPMPDA is explicit about upholding the right to freedom of speech. Noise control, they argue, will in no way impinge upon this right. The RCP is welcome to hold a rally in Pike Place Market, but they make loud noise or disturb the flow of commerce. Freedom of speech, in this case, is perfectly compatible with the silencing of radical groups. Indeed, as Žižek (2009: 22) argues, “freedom of speech functions when all parties follow the same unwritten rules of civility” that tell us “which features of a specific ethnic or religious ‘way of life’ are acceptable and which are not acceptable.” For PPMPDA and for commerce, the sonic features of RCP are “not acceptable,” they

violate the liberal rationalities of civility and freedom that enable the movement of capital to appear as natural.

Thus, similar to the hippies and hot-rodders discussed about, while RCP is tolerated as a cultural group, their actions are subject to governance. PPMPDA's appeal to free speech, then, splits the body of RCP in two. On one hand, free speech culturalizes the political group, which is deemed an acceptable form of being. On the other hand, free speech imposes a limit on the group's actions such that the use of bullhorns and PA systems falls outside what is considered tolerable. PPMPDA's complaint is thus structured on a "partition of the sensible" (Rancière 2001: Thesis 7), on the delimiting of a space of "depoliticization" (Brown 2008: 1–24) wherein radical politics is only permitted to exist as a "way of life" (153) and never as a practice that would threaten the flows of capital.

Table 4.3: Threats Cited in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006

	1893–2006		<1970		≥1970		% Change
	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	
children	21	6.1%	11	7.9%	10	4.8%	-3.0%
comfort	8	2.3%	6	4.3%	2	1.0%	-3.3%
commerce	18	5.2%	10	7.1%	8	3.9%	-3.3%
communication	10	2.9%	4	2.9%	6	2.9%	0.0%
community	5	1.4%	0	0.0%	5	2.4%	2.4%
emotion	12	3.5%	3	2.1%	9	4.3%	2.2%
enjoyment	16	4.6%	2	1.4%	12	5.8%	4.4%
environment	7	2.0%	1	0.7%	6	2.9%	2.2%
family	7	2.0%	3	2.1%	4	1.9%	-0.2%
health	46	13.3%	22	15.7%	24	11.6%	-4.1%
peace	40	11.5%	20	14.3%	20	9.7%	-4.6%
property (value)	25	7.2%	11	7.9%	14	6.8%	-1.1%
quality of life	23	6.6%	0	0.0%	23	11.1%	11.1%
quiet	29	8.4%	13	9.3%	16	7.7%	-1.6%
repose	14	4.0%	13	9.3%	1	0.5%	-8.8%
safety	20	5.8%	1	0.7%	19	9.2%	8.5%
sleep	84	24.2%	43	30.7%	41	19.8%	-10.9%
tenants	18	5.2%	13	9.3%	5	2.4%	-6.9%
work	29	8.4%	19	13.6%	10	4.8%	-8.7%
Total Complaints*	347		140		207		

*Some of the complaints listed in the archive’s database were not found in the records. Unless I could identify a “threat” in the file’s title, I did not include them in the count for total complaints.

Sources: Seattle Municipal Archives: Comptroller/Clerk Files: “Noise and Citizen-Complaints [index terms]” (1903–1973); General Files: “Noise” (1893); Subject Files: “Noise” (1970–2006).

V. Rationales: How Noise Complaints Are Justified

Civil & Uncivil Bodies

Up to this point, I have shown how sound complaints after 1970 produce (a) the body as visceral, precarious, and in need of protection, along with (b) a depoliticized space of tolerance, culture, and capital. But how do (a) and (b) intersect? At what point does the vulnerable body come into contact with (neo)liberal multiculturalism?

To answer this, I turn to the ways in which noise complaints are rationalized as worthy of government attention (Table 4.4). These rationales assume a subject for whom authority and truth are based on a notion of finitude. The only “true” body in these complaints is an enclosed body. And to exist, permissibly at least, is to be read through and bound by a set of (neo)liberal transcendentals. In the formal sense, these complaints situate the (a) precarious body within the (b) space of tolerance by linking exteriority with interiority, subject with object. Locating rationales in the documents provides one way of tracing this correlationist process: they show how the sonic body (ie, that which is described) becomes written in the finite language of cultural limits (ie, that which is threatened). For a finite body is a governable body, knowable by the state and exploitable by capital. The cultural limits of sound complaints, then, help fasten the subject within the logic of surplus-value creation. But they also cast certain bodies out. Culture, as limit, always implies an outside: in rationalizing their complaints, many of the documents examined below place already-subjugated gender, race, and class positions in a space of silence.

Similar to the trend in noise threats, the decades following 1970 see a general decline in the percentage of rationales based on measurable categories. Complaints made on the grounds of zoning issues (-5.5%), length of residence (-0.5%), house ownership (-5.9%), and taxpayer status (-1.2%) all decreased in this period. Taking their place were less-empirical appeals to bourgeois values like

fairness (+5.8%), civility (+1.9%), morality (+1.8%), legality in general (+1.1%), aesthetics (+1.4%) and citizen rights (+5.3%).

For example, in another letter addressed to the city council in 1999, Mrs. Ormsby writes that in spite of “public noise-makers,” there “exists hope that civility will return & prevail” (SF No. 5279-01 49/4). In 2002, the Downtown Seattle Residents Council (DSRC) relies on a similar rationale when writing to Mayor Nickels in protest of the noises from cars, motorcycles, and stereos. In their letter, they argue that increased enforcement of noise ordinance “will bring a greater civility to our communities [...]. The result will be a more livable city” (SF No. 4667-02, 116/09).

These appeals to civility, fairness, and rights, like those to tolerance and freedom of speech, depoliticize space in a way that enables unhindered commodity circulation. As Žižek argues (2009: 20), “the rules of civility do not constrain our freedom, but provide the only space within which our freedom can thrive; the legal order enforced by state apparatuses is the base for our free-market exchanges.” The rationales that increase in complaints after 1970, then, are part and parcel of the production of the neoliberal subject, for whom free competition is a state that must be secured and reproduced through acts of civility and fairness, as opposed to being a natural principle as it is for traditional liberalism.⁶

Yet civility, fairness, and rights—multiculturalism itself—are only possible against a limit specifying which “ways of life” are acceptable and which are not. As a result, these rationales necessarily imply and produce an outside—one that becomes subject to legal action. In Žižek’s (2009: 22) words, “[i]f all sides do not share or respect the same civility, then multiculturalism turns into legally regulated mutual ignorance or hatred.” Under the assumption of civility, that is, bodies (and their sounds) can be coded as impermissible and as demanding discipline.

⁶ For more on the difference between neoliberalism and liberalism, in this respect, see Foucault 2008: 131 and Lemke 2002: 58.

This is always a racialized, gendered, and classed process. For example, I showed above how Ormsby's morals and normative beliefs (eg, her appeal to "civility") depend on the silencing of a "certain crowd" that attends hip-hop clubs (SF No. 5279-01 49/4). The racialization implicit in Ormsby's account demonstrates how rational institutions, like civility, are always based on and limited by a policing of social positions, in this case race. As Chandan Reddy (2011: 236) has argued,

Race is the threat that all national institutions of the West have historically specific and structured limits, their conditions of possibility that are constitutive to their development, growth, and persistence. Yet for this reason, race figures metalectically as the outside to those very limits upon which modern rational formations depend.

With Seattle sound complaints, not only is race a structural limit but so too is class, gender, and sexuality. In Pike Place Market in 1981, for instance, liberal notions of free speech produce a space in which the voices of political groups like RCP are excluded and posed as threatening to the everyday flow of commercial activity (SF No. 1628-01 147/3). And it's through this process of exclusion that free speech is able to produce itself as a self-evident rationale. In other words, freedom of speech is made possible within Pike Place Market, along with rational definitions of tolerance and commerce, *on account of* the recognition and silencing of groups that fall outside of "civility."

The control that these documents solicit and justify is not always legal or rational. Posed as "uncivil," bodies become subject to irrational acts of violence. Since rational formations like civility are always constricted and threatened by the racial, gender, class limit of what makes them possible, their legitimacy and coherence depends on the constant targeting of an "imaginary threat beyond all rationality" (Reddy 2011: 232), on asserting control over the excluded bodies to which they are existentially bound. As Reddy (2011: 236) argues, "Racial violence—callous, cruel, and extreme but always exceptional—is the supplement that gives the appearance of a rational military power that has achieved a perfect mimesis of an omnipotence."

Sound complaints, particularly after 1970, provide examples of a supplemental violence that is racial but also classed, gendered, and age-based. Rarely is this violence explicit,⁷ yet it is often implied within appeals to the liberal values of civility, fairness, and citizen rights, as well as to abstract categories like legality, aesthetics, and morality. Against these categories, certain bodies are categorized as deviant but also as excessive and extraneous. More than amenable to a system of governance, they are framed as blights in need of silencing. For example, against the “decency” Donna Law considers typical of US and Seattle citizens, the hippy, she says, is a cancer that “destroys a persons [sic] body unless it is rooted out completely” (1967: CF No. 258533). Three other complaints make reference to the noises of hippies and neighbors as a plague (1968: CF No. 261564; 1972: SF NO. 5287-07 117/15; 1991: SF No. 4663-02 88/1). In a similar vein, Ormsby bemoans “rap-crap”—along with the racialized “crowds” it attracts—to the extent she frames them as threats to “civility” (SF No. 5279-01 49/4).

In to the poem that began this chapter, Helen Maring provides an example of how noise complaints, in the way they are rationalized, exclude certain bodies from civil society. Her soundscape of Seattle is filled with “dangerous” individuals. Some of them are racialized: “bongo drums and foreign chanties / Done by guys in ghandi panties.” Some are age-related: “teen-aged loudmouths.” Others are classed or culturalized: “shave-head fools with white nose-paint / Wearing pants that surely ain’t / Make the welkin echo rhythm.” Even religiosity is mentioned: “Dopey ranters on religion.” Finally, there are nonhuman bodies: “Barking dogs that might have rabies [...] Calls from sailing gull or pigeon.”

A noisy scene, certainly, but it’s not until the last line of the poem that these bodies are fully transfixed as hostile. Throughout the poem we are barraged with noises, getting “huffier and huffier,” until Maring poses the question: “Must a lovely city suffer?” This is her rationale: the

⁷ With the notable exception of Donna Law: “I am quite sure it will be painless for [the communists] to shoot these ‘hippies’ who say they love but are obviously nothing but weak fools” (1967: CF No. 258533).

aesthetics of Seattle. Against such “loveliness,” the ghandi-panties singers, the shave-head fools, the rabid dogs all become a threat.

If a poem like Maring’s formulates the logics of violence it does so indirectly, through the mediation of aesthetics, similar to how other noise complaints use civility, rights, culture, and freedom. The kind of governance and violence these texts imply, therefore, is predicated on a dematerialization of the sensible, in which social relations and empirical categories become abstracted and flexibilized (what exactly *does* civility mean anyway?). This explains why complaints after 1970 tend to take on a moral or ethical character.⁸ Rather than justifying a grievance according to measurable concepts, such as the economy or zoning laws, complaints like Maring’s refer to self-evident principles, to an ethical plane in which particular subjects are always-already in the wrong, should never have been making noise in the first place.

Expert Knowledge & Ethics

Not all rationales that increased after 1970 were abstract, however (see Table 4.4). What needs to be explained, is the 6.6% increase in the use of expert knowledge, which would seem to counter the shift towards abstract, ethical justifications for noise complaints. Against this, I suggest a play between ethical values like civility and scientific reason. As Da Silva argues (2007: 94–99), *homo scientificus* is crucial in placing the “human body and the social” within a universality that secures exteriority as “ontoepistemologically irrelevant.” “The mind,” Da Silva writes (2007: 98), is transformed “into an object of scientific reason,” which works—through an apparatus like NCA or SNO—to resolve the threat of exteriority and maintained the self-determined subject. Scientific reason, for Da Silva, rewrites the body as a transparent I, placing the dominant subject within a universality that binds a once-threatening exteriority to, and thus securing, its interiority. Seen in this

⁸ “Morality” increases 1.8% as a rationale.

way, expert knowledge might be understood as providing the conditions through which the “interior” values of civility, rights, and so on are fortified and made possible. And in seeking to grasp and resolve exteriority (eg, empirics) expert knowledge justifies and bolsters the development of management technologies like that of noise control.

An example is found in the DSRC’s 2002 letter to Mayor Nickels (4667-02: 116/09). In this complaint, the DSRC cites scientific research in support of the “revisions and ensuing enforcement” of a noise ordinance that will “bring great civility in our communities.” The DSRC argues:

Regular exposure to loud noise is a leading cause of hearing loss. Over 20 million people in the U.S. are exposed to environmental noise that can damage hearing. 28 million already suffer hearing loss. The Journal of the American Medical Association recently reported hearing loss-enough to affect speech perception, learning, self-image, and social skills-in almost 16 percent of children ages 6 to 19.

Not only do these statistics allow the DSRC to justify an increase in noise control, but they also provide a bridge that links governance to presupposed liberal values like “civility” or the desire for a “more livable city,” that leave unchallenged the structural issues that lead to exposure in the first place.

This linking has implications for social reproduction. According to the DSRC, studies on hearing loss demand the creation of a new subject, through both governance and education:

There will be a learning curve, as individuals and businesses become aware of the new rules. Behavior won’t change overnight but gradually we will see people choosing quieter ways of doing their work and/or entertaining themselves. Education will be an important component, both as to the effects of noise on our health and the allowable levels in the new ordinance.

In noise statistics, the exteriority of governance and the interiority of behavior are aligned, each self-evident. Scientific rationality thus prescribes a form of regulation (sound control) along with an ethical life and education (quiet civility). Both of these forms—exterior and interior—are justified and universalized to the extent that their conditions of possibility are concealed, having been situated in their counterpart. For example, through the use of statistics, the “livability” of Seattle is

made to appear as a natural corollary of a specific set of regulations. Vice versa, these regulations are produced as necessary outcomes of the desire for “livability.” “Livability,” then, is both product and cause: it is both true that “[l]iving together in a safe and healthy environment is everyone’s first priority” and that “the result will be a more livable city.”

In logical terms, expert knowledge allows the DSRC to set up a biconditional between governance and life, or exteriority (E) and interiority (I), $E \leftrightarrow I$, such that the existence of one term always implies the other. Some philosophers (see Stich 2011: 199) have seen the biconditional as that which, when discovered a posteriori through science, naturalizes the content of its propositions (eg, “x is water iff x is H₂O”). Similarly, in noise complaints like DSRC’s, scientific rationality produces (“discovers”) a biconditional relation that works to naturalize, and thus neutralize and universalize, its terms of exteriority (eg, “new ordinance”) and interiority (eg, civility and proper behavior). In this case, liberal values and governmental strategies are produced through a logical proof whose axioms are drawn from science.

The empirics of expert knowledges provide one technology for grounding the abstract rationales and values that increase in sound complaints after 1970. They do this by placing the latter in relation to a set of laws and regulations. Such a process echoes the logics of bodily inscription seen in NCA 72 and SNO 77, to the extent that a body’s interior (its ethics, values, education, and so on) are secured and signified “through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility” (Butler 2006: 184).⁹ Sound complaints reproduce the interior-effects of civility, for example, “through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure” (Butler 2006: 184). When “civility” is absent in the soundscape, the body is posed as always-already in need of protection—enclosed within the exteriority of regulation. As in the DSRC example, this enclosure is often made possible through an expert

⁹ What is different for the noise complaints is that externalities (limits) are inscribed *within* the body as well (as moral-ethical principles), whereas for NCA 72 and SNO 77 they were written *on* the body (as legal statutes).

knowledge that produces a bioconditional between (an absent) interiority and (a suggested) exteriority. The result of this coupling is an enclosed and securitized universal body, for whom racial, gendered, and classed exteriorities are purged of risk and sublimated, through language, into manageable categories of “culture” and “ways of life.”

Table 4.4: Rationales Cited in Seattle Noise Complaints, 1893–2006

	1893-2006		<1970		≥1970		% Change
	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	Total	Total %	
aesthetics	7	2.0%	2	1.4%	5	2.4%	1.0%
america	4	1.1%	2	1.4%	2	1.0%	-0.4%
civility	4	1.1%	0	0.0%	4	1.9%	1.9%
community	23	6.6%	8	5.6%	15	7.2%	1.7%
economy	3	0.9%	2	1.4%	1	0.5%	-0.9%
elderly	12	3.4%	2	1.4%	10	4.8%	3.4%
expert knowledge	26	7.4%	5	3.5%	21	10.1%	6.6%
fairness	12	3.4%	0	0.0%	12	5.8%	5.8%
legality	34	9.7%	13	9.1%	21	10.1%	1.1%
length of residence	21	6.0%	9	6.3%	12	5.8%	-0.5%
morals	11	3.1%	3	2.1%	8	3.9%	1.8%
owner	27	7.7%	16	11.2%	11	5.3%	-5.9%
profession	5	1.4%	2	1.4%	3	1.4%	0.1%
property	24	6.9%	8	5.6%	16	7.7%	2.1%
rights	11	3.1%	0	0.0%	11	5.3%	5.3%
taxpayer	17	4.9%	8	5.6%	9	4.3%	-1.2%
zoning	45	12.9%	23	16.1%	22	10.6%	-5.5%
Total Complaints*	350		143		207		

*Some of the complaints listed in the archive’s database were not found in the records. Unless I could identify a “threat” in the file’s title, I did not include them in the count for total complaints.

Sources: Seattle Municipal Archives: Comptroller/Clerk Files: “Noise and Citizen-Complaints [index terms]” (1903–1973); General Files: “Noise” (1893); Subject Files: “Noise” (1970–2006).

VI. Conclusion

The enclosed body is a major axiom of democratic materialism. In the “contemporary world,” Badiou (2006) argues, “the individual recognizes the objective existence of bodies alone, and, first of all, of his or her own body.” This is evident today, according to Badiou (*LW*: 1–2), among

the most inventive artists—choreographers, painters, video makers—[who] track the manifestness of bodies, of their desiring and machinic life, their intimacy and their nudity, their embraces and their ordeals. They all adjust the fettered, quartered and soiled body to the fantasy and the dream.

This is the postmodern desire to know the body, to fix all hope, production, and “the power of life” to the body-qua-machine. What these artists seek, in Badiou’s (*LW*: 2) words, is to “impose upon the visible” a specific relation: “the dissection of bodies bombarded by the tumult of the universe.” The result, then, is the world to the limits of the body, so that to know the body—its affects, enjoyments, desires—is to know the world.

This reductionism, as I hope to have shown, is the method by which Seattle residents tend to complain about sound after 1970, where bodies are made knowable and manageable—and therefore finite—within the worlds of multiculturalism and capital. The governance these complaints imply imposes a political binary “upon the visible”: bodies are either reaffirmed within the limits of liberal multiculturalism, civility, and so forth, or else they are located outside these bounds, in a sphere of discipline and silence.

My analysis in this chapter has its own limits. In a geographic lens, my conclusions are contingent on the Seattle region and its socioeconomic relations. It remains to be seen whether these findings are applicable for other locations and scales. In the next chapter, I test the scope of my claims in examining the scientific practices and technologies that allow for the concept of the “soundscape,” as it was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s by R. Murray Schafer and his colleagues at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. How much of the “soundscape” can be explained by the shifts in ontology and governance identified here?

Chapter 5 Schafer, Soundscapes, and Aural Governance

Behold the new orchestra: the sonic universe!
—R. Murray Schafer (1969: 2)

Space is only noise if you can see, so grab a calculator and fix yourself.
—Nicholas Jaar (2011)

I. Introduction

The history of sound complaints in Seattle reveals a shift, sometime around 1970, in how individuals conceive and talk about sound. While this shift is in no way uniform across the city, it suggests the emergence of a coherent ontology and mode of governance. The following chapter tests and expands on this claim from a different set of artifacts: the technologies and practices that conditioned the birth of the World Soundscape Project (WSP) and gave rise to the concept of the “soundscape.”

Established in the late 1960s¹ by R. Murray Schafer at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, the WSP laid the foundations for what is now known as acoustic ecology or soundscape studies. Over the past decade several geographers have turned to this discipline in an attempt to grasp the relations between fauna, space, and sound (Matless 2005; Cameron & Rogalsky 2006; Prior 2013), as well as the bodily aspects of aural phenomena (Kannisgeiser 2011; Duffy & Waitt 2011). What’s missing from the literature, as suggested in Chapter 1, is an exploration of how the theoretical framing and technological monitoring of “soundscapes” have functioned biopolitically to maintain hierarchies of power.

Such an exploration, which I attempt here, is valuable because it connects the often-insular field of sonic geography to wider discussions occurring in the discipline, concerning biopolitics,

¹ Officially established in September 1972 (Shand 1974: 5).

governance, and subject formation under the current logic of capitalism. The (bio)politicization of “soundscapes” is also useful in tracing an *ontological* shift in spatial representation which underpins the emergence of new technologies and strategies of governance around the time of WSP’s founding.

The goal of this chapter is thus to theorize the WSP as a set of contradictory practices, located at a position of liminality between two governmental (onto)logics that I identify in Schafer’s writings (1969, 1994 [1977]). The first I call *modernist-idealist governance* insofar as it is structured on Western modernism’s penchant for totality and its desire to attach sonic bodies to an archetypal yet unreachable interpretation of the world. The second form of governance is familiar to this thesis as that of *democratic materialism*, which is postmodern to the extent it relies, not on metanarrative, but on a conception of sound as simulacra, as representation without origin.

In delineating these two modes of governance, I demonstrate how the shift from one to the other is rooted in social, economic, and technological factors, particular to the WSP and global capitalism, that shape the perception of noise. Such a material grounding affords comparisons between the governing logics of the “soundscape” and those of Seattle noise complaints, US noise-control legislation, and the English hospice. By defining the ontologies these worlds share, that is, we are able to make cross-scale claims about governance and subjectivization, while maintaining a framework that accounts for local contexts and for particularities in the way dominance is structured in a given situation.

II. Modernist-Idealist Governance

Soundscape as Metastructure

Although first used in the 1950s, the term “soundscape” was popularized by R. Murray Schafer in his 1969 book *The New Soundscape*. For Schafer (1994: 7), the soundscape is simply “any acoustic field

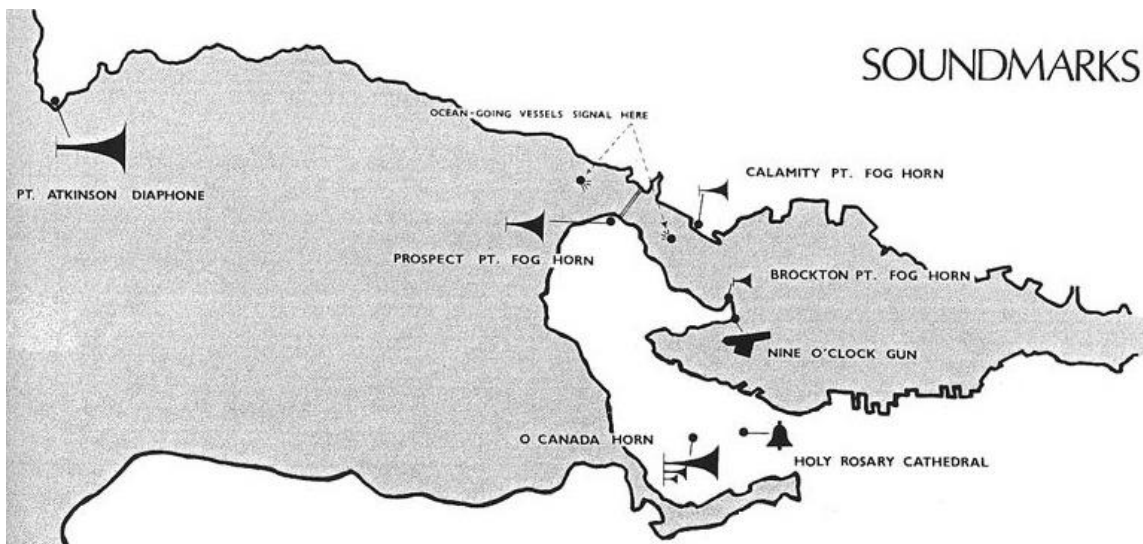
of study,” whether that be a “a radio program [...] or an acoustic environment.” As a musician, however, Schafer brings an aesthetic ear to an otherwise-scientific concept. Inspired by John Cage, he treats “the world as a macroscopic musical composition” (1994: 5) with each soundscape containing a unique “tuning” (1994: 6) or “vocabulary of sounds” (1969: 3) that distinguishes it from others. Consisting of “*keynote sounds, signals and soundmarks*” (1994: 9), this vocabulary constitutes the transcendental organization (Badiou 2013a: 100) of the worlds Schafer and the WSP demarcate and seek to analyze.

The Badiouian concept of metastructure provides an accurate description of Schafer’s soundscape insofar as the latter “secures and completes” (Badiou *BE*: 522) a sonic situation by reducing it to a set of essential, measurable, mappable—and ultimately reproducible—elements. This reductionism, I argue, is part and parcel of a modernist form of governance that seeks to fix the subject within an essentialized, and ultimately ideal, sonic environment. For example, in their 1973 study of the Vancouver soundscape, the WSP represent the city according to a set of geographically-specific sound events: “the O Canada horn at 12 noon, the Nine O’clock Gun in Stanley Park, the bells of Holy Rosary Cathedral, to name a few” (Schafer 2004). All of these were recorded and mapped by the WSP, as shown in Figure 5.1. In identifying them as soundmarks, moreover, the WSP is able to render these events as “properties of uniqueness, symbolic power, or other qualities that make them especially conspicuous or respectfully regarded” (Schafer 2004), in other words, what gives Vancouver its (sonic) sense of place.

Such a sense of place, however, is produced just as it is discovered by the technology of the soundscape. In the recordings and sound maps of Vancouver created by the WSP (in 1973 and 1996), this “placeness” appears unquestionable, as always-already in existence. At least sonically, then, certain locations and events are secured as necessary components of the city. This is achieved through the proliferation of the “soundscape,” by which a particular metastructure of

“Vancouver”—what is audible within it—is redoubled and naturalized. Indeed, as a technology of re-presentation, the soundscape counts the situation *twice*: once as a structure *to be* recorded and again as a metastructure that *has been* recorded. It is this “count-of-the-count” that in Badiou’s (*BE*: 515) ontology makes a term appear as “normal.” “Normality,” Badiou (*BE*: 99) writes, “consists in the re-securing of the originary one by the state of the situation in which the one is presented.” This is why the soundscape, when applied to Vancouver, functions as a *state* apparatus and serves to police the regime of the sensible: what is not re-secured within the soundscape—those sounds and bodies that are barely audible to begin with—are literally silenced on the level of representation. In fact, they are silenced twice over—their silence itself becoming mute.

Figure 5.1. Soundmarks of Vancouver, BC, 1973



Source: Soundmarks [Online image]. (1973). Retrieved 25 May 2015 from <http://www.vancouver-soundwalk.com/>. Originally published in R. M. Schafer (ed.). *The Vancouver Soundscape*, p. 36.

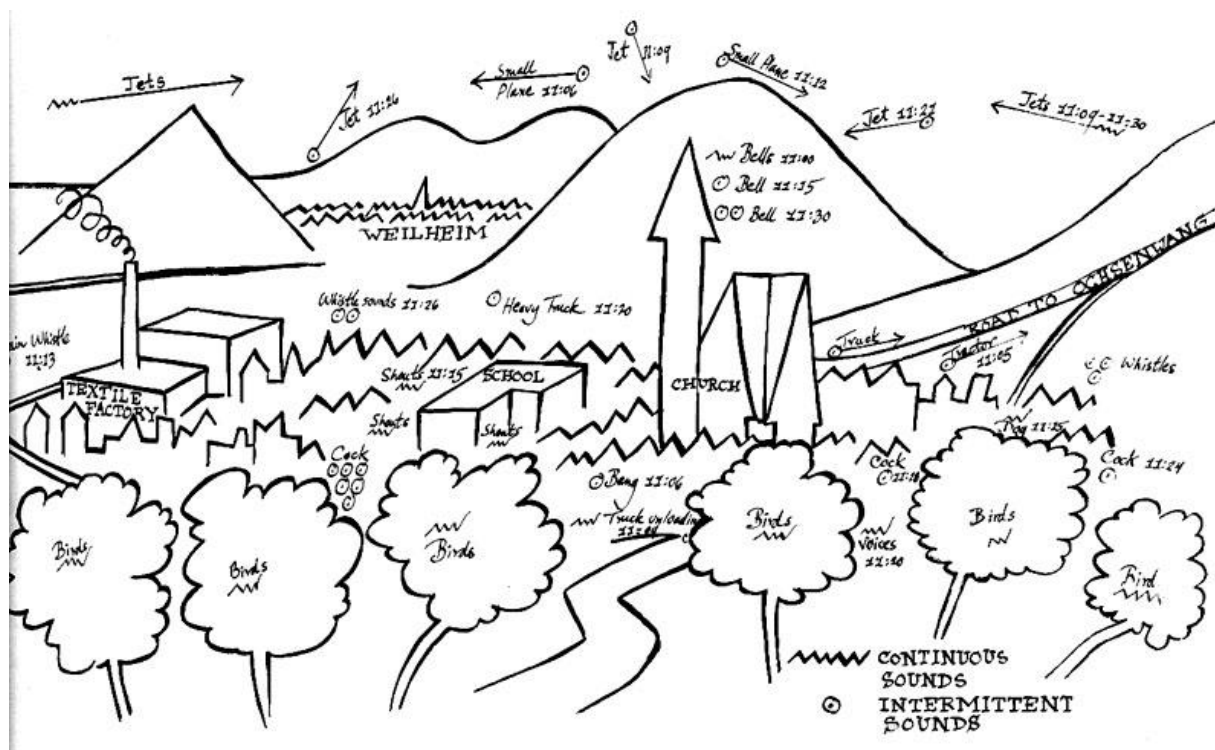
The Orchestration of the World

Schafer thought that soundscape analysis could be applied to any location. Indeed, in 1975 the WSP took a “field trip” to Europe to measure the sounds of several small villages. Figure 5.2 below provides WSP’s sonic depiction of a German town named Bissingen, as it was published in the Schafer-edited *The Music of the Environment Series* (WSP 1977). This drawing demonstrates the reductionism of the soundscape in how it divides space into a taxonomy of soundmarks. Within the context of this diagram, the sonic essence of Bissingen consists mainly of chirping birds, church bells, factory whistles, and, as a constant reminder of the global economy, the roaring of jets overhead. These jets are important because they remind us that the compositional view of the soundscape is not limited to the city or village, but for Schafer (1994), can be applied to larger scales and across history to circumscribe the abstract spaces of “the Natural Soundscape,” “the Rural Soundscape,” “the Industrial Revolution.” Each has a foundational “tuning” awaiting discovery, mapping, and analysis; each is an orchestra in need of a conductor.

The apparatus of the soundscape opens a new space of scientific inquiry and in doing so lays “the foundations for a new interdiscipline—acoustic design” (Schafer 1994: 4). The task of the “acoustic designer,” Schafer argues (1994: 237–241), is to shape, preserve, and repair the sonic environment in ways that achieve balance and create “new harmony and equipoise.” What’s assumed is that though careful study, the designer may uncover the *master plan* of a particular soundscape—“the secret of [its] tuning” (Schafer 1994: 6—and thereby learn “how the soundscape may be altered, sped up, slowed down, thinned or thickened, weighted in favor of or against effects” (Schafer 1994: 238). As they are “employed in adjudicating and improving” (Schafer 1994: 238) the environment, the principles of acoustic design acquire a moral—nearly-religious—dimension. Without proper

planning, Schafer says, the sonic terrain of modernity is disordered and bewildering, having a deleterious effect on the fabric of society. In Schafer's (1994: 237) words: "When the rhythms of the soundscape become confused or erratic, society sinks to a slovenly and imperiled condition."

Figure 5.2. WSP Sound Analysis of Bissingen, Germany, 1975



Source: originally published in Schafer, R. M. (ed.). (1977). *Five Village Soundscapes: The Music of the Environment Series*, No. 4. Vancouver: A.R.C. Publications. Retrieved from <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/FVS/fvs.html>

The One Best Sound

Based on a foundational tuning, the soundscape equips the acoustic designer with a blueprint for coding a sound as “good” and “bad,” according to its effects on the essentialized whole. If, in Vancouver, the sound of traffic masks the bells of Holy Rosary Cathedral, then the former can be defined as a nuisance, literally as not belonging, since it impinges on the designer’s view of a healthy and authentic soundscape. The soundscape, therefore, not only manufactures a new scientific subjectivity but also produces a specific ontology and conception of space that maintains a visible

connection between appearance (sounds as they exist in the world) and a constructed essence (an abstract soundscape). This connection is achieved and policed through the mediation of the soundscape: its maps, technologies, discourses, and so on.

This ontology supports a *modernist-idealist* mode of governance that seeks to define sounds, bodies, and spaces against an institutionally maintained set of norms and essences. Similar to how literary scholars (Jameson 2007: 157; Esty 2007: 87) have framed the modernist novel as that which seeks to address the ontological contractions of modernity as revealed within colonialism, the soundscape can be read as an attempt to defer the “noisy” contradictions of global capital. What Schafer (1994: 3) proposes, in other words, is a way of modeling and totalizing, and thus making amenable to repair, a world soundscape that “has reached an apex of vulgarity in our time.” Thus, like Fredric Jameson’s (2007: 157) argument that modernist literature presents a metanarrative that “seeks to solve” a “new and historically original problem,” the idea of soundscapes works as a quasi-religious artifact to make sense of—indeed to *re-enchant*—a raucous and chaotic modern world that has lost its meaning.² It turns a “confused” and “slovenly” (Schafer 1994: 237) world into one “tuned by a divine hand” (1994: 6).

It’s for this reason that historian Emily Thompson (2004: 321) defines modernism as a search for “the one best sound, the modern sound [...] a means to deal with change.”³ The “one best sound”—the meta-sound—is precisely what Schafer’s soundscape seeks to unearth in rendering environmental noises within a coherent, essentialized composition. In formal terms, the soundscape presents an attempt to define, and ultimately to reduce and fix, the transcendentals of its world.

Such an essentialist and totalizing coding of sound is made possible only by the rise of environmentalism in the 1960. With the assumption of an intelligible and endangered natural world,

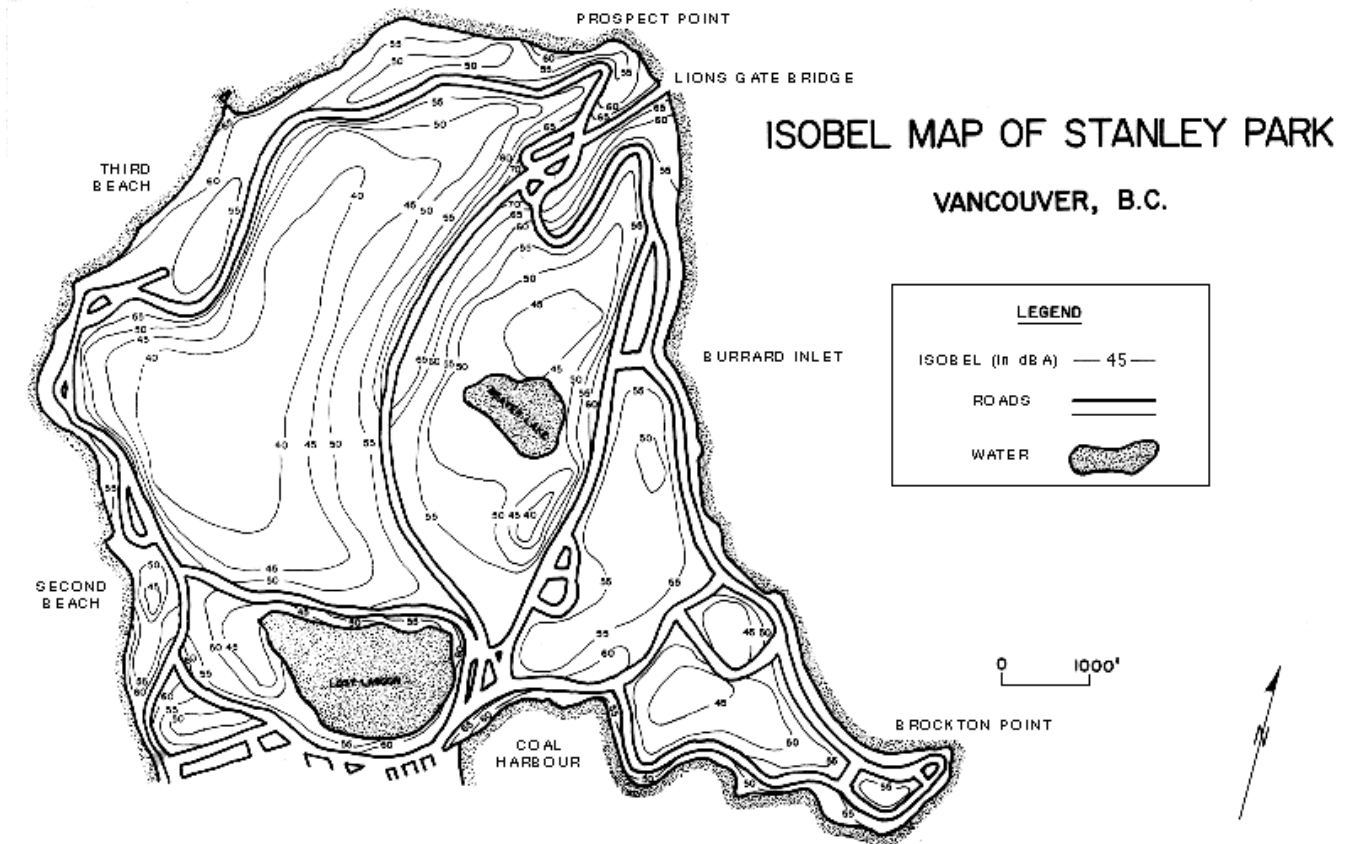
² See Weber 2004 on the disenchantment of the world.

³ This is true of modernist architecture—the “absorbent and fan-shaped auditoriums of the 1920s and early 1930s”—insofar as it sought to give listeners “an objective, detached mode of listening” so as to achieve the “one best sound” (Thompson 2004: 320–321).

sound always carries with it the potential for noise pollution and as a result becomes heard as either natural or unnatural. Yet to think and to locate noise on either side of this binary requires a host of acoustic technologies and methods that reliably capture, measure, and represent sonic phenomena. Beyond advances in field recording technologies, these include what Schafer calls “Sound Notation Systems” (1994: 264) or “Aerial Sonography” (1994: 131)—ways of mapping noise that can be “read and comprehended immediately by professionals in many fields, particularly those on whom soundscape studies impinge most closely [...]” (1994: 131).

The WSP developed several sonographic techniques, including the isobel map and the events map. The former provides a way of depicting sound intensity (in decibel levels) over space, much like a topographic map. In Schafer’s (1994: 131) words, the isobel map “derives from the contour maps of geographers and meteorologists, and consists of hundreds or thousands of readings on a sound level meter averaged out to produce bars of equal intensity, projected as if the observer were above the field of study.” This type of cartography first appeared in 1974 in a WSP study of the Vancouver soundscape and was used to depict noise-level differentials in Stanley Park (reproduced below as Figure 5.3). Event maps, on the other hand, measure the “distribution and recurrence of sounds” (Schafer 1994: 131) in one or more locations over a given period of time.

Figure 5.3. Isobel Map of Stanley Park, Vancouver, BC, 1973



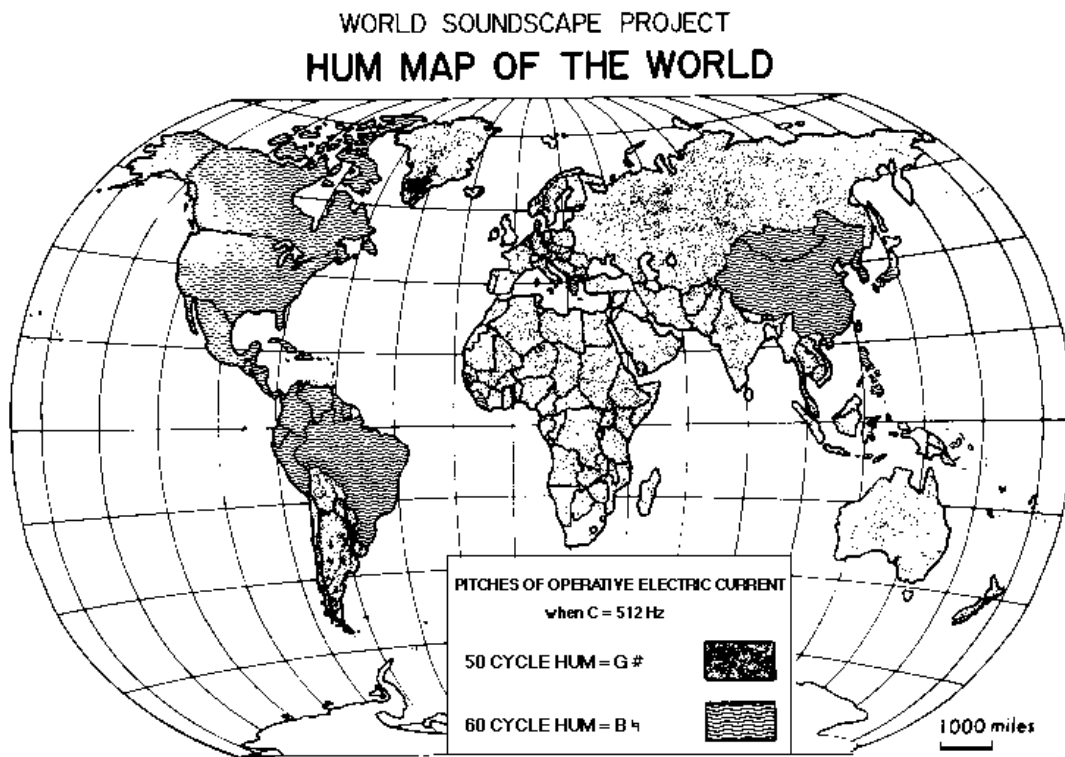
Source: originally published in World Soundscape Project. (1974). *The Vancouver Soundscape. Music of the Environment Series*, No. 2. Retrieved from Traux, B. (ed.). (1999). *Isobel. Handbook for Acoustic Ecology [online]*. Cambridge Street Publishing. <http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/handbook/Isobel.html>

Sonography enabled the WSP to abstract from, categorize, and represent a field of phenomena that—compared to something like air or water pollution—does not leave a tangible residue in the environment. And it was through such representation that Schafer and his colleagues could presume the modernist ontology that divided sounds and bodies into binary categories—not only on environmental-ethical grounds but also according to empirical measurements. Thus, echoing the colonial roots of Western cartography, sonic maps were very much a part of the scientific apparatus that enabled WSP to universalize its claims across time and space, making sonic judgments

on a global scale. In this way, the soundscape might be seen as part of a Cold-War geopolitics that carves up the globe into dueling ideologies and divided blocs, or read alongside a Wallersteinian world-systems analysis (first conceived in the 1970s) that operates through the lens of core and periphery.

The WSP was, indeed, invested in dividing up the globe, albeit along sonic lines. An example is WSP's "Hum Map of the World" (Figure 5.4) which labels every country with one of two pitches: G# or B \flat . These pitches correspond to national standards of electrical current, either in the 100–120 volt range with a frequency of 50 Hz, or in the 200 volt range with a frequency of 60 Hz. According to Schafer (1994: 98), these frequencies mark "international tonal centers," the "central sound against which all other vibrations may be measured" for that country. As low-frequency drones, they can be heard when electrical equipment is grounded improperly—"from light and amplifiers to generators" (Schafer 1994: 99). Schafer (1994: 99) argues that these notes mark "the tone of prime unity" not only for an electrical soundscape but also for bodies within that soundscape. An individual is most likely "to retain and to recall spontaneously" (Schafer 1994: 99) the pitch (either a G# or B \flat) that constitutes the electrical-current standard of his or her environment. This is most evident "[d]uring meditation exercises, after the whole body has been relaxed and students are asked to sing the note of 'prime unity'" (Schafer 1994: 99). Regardless of whether Schafer's arguments are empirically accurate, the WSP's concern with "prime unity," and in bifurcating the globe, align it with a modernist ontology that views the world in terms of being and non-being, essence and excess.

Figure 5.3. Hum Map of the World, World Soundscape Project



Source: Traux, B. (ed.). (1999). Alternating Current (AC). *Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* [online]. Cambridge Street Publishing. http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/handbook/Alternating_Current.html

Orchestrate and Destroy

In tying bodies and sounds to an essentialized representation, Schafer's soundscape functions in conjuncture with technologies of governance that, in Jodi Melamed's words (2011: xi), seek to "represent and destroy." For Melamed (2011: iv-xvii) state-recognized or "official" logics of subject formation, in her case post-war liberal renderings of race, work to determine "the limits of social possibility" insofar as they are always mediated through a discursive framework that "disconnects race from material conditions." She explores the cultural technology of the race novel, for instance, as reinforcing racial-liberal representations of difference through its dissemination of "interpretive

habits and reading practices” that allow these representations to masquerade as “the whole truth” (2011: 23–24)

Like race novels, the concept of the soundscape works to mediate (sonic) difference through a single meta-tune or set of dematerialized features. Ultimately, by reducing something like the industrial revolution to its so-called foundational sounds, Schafer’s program is deeply essentialist and, in the last instance, exclusive. In line with Melamed’s argument, this reductionism does not occur through repression (*per se*) but through the positive production of sonic spaces: through technological representation. These are spaces in which sounds can be coded as “good” and “bad,” “advantageous” and “slovenly.”

Operating through the binary coding of bodies and spaces, modernist governance can be traced back, at least, to the 1920s with the Chicago School sociologists. Ernest Burgess’s 1925 concentric-zone model of Chicago, for instance, naturalizes a predominantly white process of suburbanization, while the black urban population—depicted in the model as the “black belt”—is rendered a blight, an anomaly, a glitch in an otherwise normal form of migration (see Park and Burgess 2012 [1925]: 51). As Roderick Ferguson (2004: 20) suggests, these early sociological studies conceived blacks in terms of how their “sexual, familiar, and gender relations deviated from a bourgeois nuclear family model historically embodied by whites.” In other words, just as soundscapes code bodily sounds against a foundational “tune,” canonical sociology of the early twentieth century produced a set of discourses and representational apparatuses that marked black bodies and in doing so “disenfranchise[d] them politically and economically” (Ferguson 2004: 21). Soundscapes, as Schafer conceives them, enact a similar marking of bodies, in terms of how well the sounds they produce match the decided essence of the whole.

Geographers have critiqued the WSP on similar grounds, although they have not framed the soundscape as a modernist invention. Susan Smith (1994: 233–234) argues that the WSP fails to

listen to sound *in context*: it does not recognize that “sound itself has meaning and position, and that music has the power to evoke a sense of space different from that evoked by sight.” For Smith, what Schafer’s soundscape lacks is an ethnographer’s attention to detail and difference—to the social and political aspects of noise that shape and are shaped by the production of space. In a similar vein, David Matless (2005: 748) asserts that Schafer and the WSP make value judgments—“normatively classify[ing] sounds as good and bad, in place or out of place, musical or noisy”—that trivialize particular spaces. Schafer’s distinctions, Matless (2005: 748) claims, work to “idealize a particular rural soundscape and criticize the racket of the city.” Through such a sonic division in space, which is an ontological one, Schafer frames change, technology, and the new as deeply problematic.

Yet Schafer’s is not entirely a Romantic outlook. He does not *only* idealize the rural as Matless suggests, neither does he call for a complete return to nature. In turning to modern acoustics and in producing the concept and practice of the soundscape as an attempt to *solve* the problem of the new, Schafer’s ideology is far more modernist. While he certainly opens up a space of critique (of progress, for instance), Schafer’s bifurcation of sounds, like the race novel, functions to make sense of, secure, and de-radicalize sounds and bodies that exist beyond a normative threshold. In this way, the WSP lays the foundations for a *reactive subject*. While the soundscape is certainly “productive” as an acoustic concept, what it produces is “an extinguished present” (Badiou *LW*: 55) emptied of all ruptural potential. What the soundscape is, then, is an apparatus for re-grounding the subject, which it does “under the cloak of modernity” (Badiou *LW*: 55).

III. Democratic-Materialist Governance

But there is also an un-grounding. Despite its modernist concern with foundations, Schafer’s soundscape heralds a diffusive form of biopolitical governance that works not only to obscure but also to de-ontologize aural origins. While the aim of the WSP is to record soundscapes in the hopes

of isolating its “keynote sounds, signals, and soundmarks,” the recording process itself, through repetition, produces a new sonic representation: the soundscape abstracted from its material origins. As a sound recording, data file, or map, the soundscape exists as an artifact in its own right, separate from the objects (the count-as-one) it seeks to capture. While its goal may be reductionist, the act of actually “doing” a soundscape—recording noise, taking measurements, drawing boundaries, and so on—proliferates a body of sonic simulacra that are in excess of their referents.

Logically, this excess implies the failure of the WSP, or of any modernist project that would re-ground a field of experience, to produce reliable or all-inclusive representations of the world. At the same time, as reification the soundscape obscures its own origins or means of production—brandishing itself *as* the real. To put it in more Hegelian terms, the soundscape as severed from its situation acquires an autonomy such that it becomes *mistaken for that situation*, barring the appearance of sounds and bodies outside representation. This logic is at the core, I argue, of a democratic-materialist form of governance.

Schizophonia

Schafer himself is aware of this process. Indeed, in the same 1969 book in which he popularizes the idea of the soundscape, Schafer (1969: 46) also coins the term “schizophonia” to describe sounds that are severed from their origins. In *The Tuning of the World*, he defines this term as

the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction. Original sounds are tied to the mechanisms which produce them. Electroacoustically reproduced sounds are copies and they may be restated at other times or places. (Schafer 1994: 273)

The conception of sound as simulacrum places Schafer’s soundscape within a theory of postmodernism. After all, as Jameson (1992: 6) famously argues, *schizophrenia* is one of the “constitutive features of the postmodern.” Drawing on Lacan, he defines schizophrenia syntactically as a “breakdown in the signifying chain” that prevents the individual from perceiving time and

identity as linear or continuous (Jameson 1992: 34–35). Instead, the schizophrenic is stuck in a “perpetual present”—“reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.”

Jameson shows how, as a trope, schizophrenia figures heavily in the cultural productions of postmodernity. With his notion of origin-less sounds, Schafer suggests that this experience extends to scientific and acoustic realms as well. By his definition, schizophrenic sounds are sensible indexes of a breakdown in syntax insofar as they are severed from their pasts and from any teleology that fixes them in time or space. As pure representations, schizophrenic sounds reside in a “perpetual present,” as virtual, empty signifiers capable of reproduction and restatement within multiple semiotic chains.

Schizoponia, like Jameson’s schizophrenia, thus goes hand-in-hand with the practice of pastiche and the kind of music sampling that achieved popularity in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The proliferation of these sounds would seem to complicate soundscape studies, as it becomes difficult to distinguish so-called authentic from inauthentic noise sources. Do schizophrenic sounds belong to the soundscape? At one point does one become “natural” within an environment?

And yet it is no coincidence that the concepts of “soundscape” and “schizoponia” were developed simultaneously by Schafer in 1969. These two terms are logically inseparable—one implies the other. The foundational “tune” that Schafer and the WSP seek to trace through the soundscape is only conceivable through the proliferation of schizophrenic recordings that produce electroacoustic spaces separated from their “original sounds.” When *realized*, the soundscape *is* schizophrenic. The reverse is also true: schizophrenic sounds present an abstracted and dematerialized representation of their worlds. Thus, to think schizophrenically is to think in terms of the virtual soundscape. What this means is that Schafer’s modernist desire to read for essence always produces its own postmodernist failure. Applying a metastructure (the soundscape) to a given

multiplicity presumes an obfuscation of that multiplicity, of the parts that do not appear under the transcendentals defined. In this way, the performance of doing a soundscape, technologically but also logically, reproduces the experience of schizophonia and thus naturalizes a regime of the sensible that excludes “non-essential” sounds and bodies.

The relationship between soundscape and schizophonia is never made explicit in Schafer’s work. Understanding the necessity of this pairing, though, offers clues to a shift in modes of governance. In itself, the soundscape figures a modernist-idealist (and still very relevant) form of governance in which bodies are constituted through their connection to and inclusion within a system of ideals (metanarratives, whiteness, urban growth, and so on), ie, through institutional and discursive restraints placed on space and difference. Such a process is *reactionary* to the extent that it negates the actual (post-evental) present by offering an alternative materiality. Yet in its relation to schizophonia, the soundscape also signifies a democratic-materialist mode of governance that works through the proliferation of a dematerialized Body (of spaces, identities, and differences) that *obscure* the multiplicities from which it is produced. Rather than referring to an essence that is external to experience, this form of governance produces an immanent representation or *a priori* language. This is made possible by schizophrenic apparatuses like the soundscape which naturalize *what is* and bar *what is not* from ever appearing. And without the appearance of an in-existent, there can be no real change (Badiou *LW*: 585). The dream of democratic materialism, then, is a world where “nothing happens, but for the death that we do our best to put out of sight” (Badiou *LW*: 420). This is a world, a schizophrenic one, where noise is just another form of silence.

Presentation and Representation

Before exploring the spatial and political consequences of a shift from modernist-idealist to democratic-materialist governance, I first need to examine the ontologies that define these strategies.

As the general argument of this thesis, radical politics must take ontology seriously, since it is through the ontological lens that certain practices can be revealed as reactionary or obscurantist in relation to the event. Such analysis is necessary for the organization of our own strategies and for accounting for the political failures of the past.

While there are certainly other ways of schematizing, Badiou's use of set theory helps make sense of the ontological shift in question. In *Being and Event*, Badiou draws a distinction between presentation and representation. Presentation is "multiple-being" (BE: 519), the structure of what a situation "counts as one" (BE: 102) before it is counted again by the state of the situation, after which it becomes representation (BE: 521). Representation is thus proper to the state of the situation (BE: 521) and is a "count-of-the-count" or "metastructure" (BE: 519). Presentation, meanwhile, is the set of elements from which the metastructure is composed (BE: 24). Simply put, representation is the result of a counting operation applied to presentation.

For Badiou (BE: 99), there is a difference in how presentation and representation relate to their worlds. While a presented term *belongs* to the situation, a represented term is *included* in the situation. In set theory the relation of belonging is written $\beta \in \alpha$, meaning that " β belongs to α " or " β is an element in α ." What this relation indicates is that, in Badiou's (BE: 81) words, "a multiple is counted as element in the presentation of another multiple." β can thus be said to belong to a situation if it is counted as a term in that situation's set of elements. Inclusion is a much stricter relation. Written $\beta \subset \alpha$, meaning " β is included in α ," inclusion indicates that a multiple is a "submultiple" (BE: 81) or subset of another multiple. Thus, β is included in the situation α if "every multiple that belongs to β also belongs to α " (BE: 82).

As an example, let's say β consists of the submultiples y , x , and z (all of which belong to β). If β is said merely to *belong* to the situation α , then y , x , and z need not also belong to α . However, if β is *included* in α , then y , x , z must all belong to α . In this case β is both presented (it belongs) in a

situation and also re-presented (it is included) in the state of that situation. It is counted twice: once as an element and again as a submultiple.

A real world example makes this clear. Every four years the US Census collects information on household income. The individual households surveyed thus *belong* as elements in the final census report. Yet, at least in terms of this statistic alone, the submultiples of each household—the family members themselves, the mother’s occupation, the daughter’s eye color, the son’s favorite flavor of ice cream, and so on—all of these elements do not belong to the census report on average family income. If they did, then we could say for a given family-set that it is *included* in the world of census statistics. Instead, families are merely acknowledged as elements (that belong) without being fully re-presented as multiples by the state.

The reason why I am taking the time to explain this rather abstract difference between presentation and representation, belonging and inclusion, is that I believe it helps make sense of the movement from modernist-idealism to democratic-materialism that Schafer’s soundscape traces. The fundamental distinction I want to make is between a modernist-idealist governance that depends on a degree of separation between presentation and representation, and a democratic-materialist governance that operates through a “pure representation” that seeks (unsuccessfully) to obscure and erase presentation altogether.

In their modernist logic, Schafer’s soundscapes perform a count-as-one on noises and bodies only to the extent that this representation indexes an essential and originary multiple. Such a multiple resists the count of the soundscape—as a normative ideal it exists beyond all attempts to map and measure it. And yet the soundscape, as representation, depends on this failure. It requires an uncountable outside or origin to experience (presentation) so as to orient bodies and sounds to something that *is not* (to a harmony, balance, naturalness, etc.). In simpler terms, the modernist

soundscape is a representation that maintains discernible links to a presentation of materiality, original multiplicity, assumed essences, and so on.

In formal terms, as a technology of modernist-idealist governance, the soundscape can never fully *include* the objects of its analysis. As elements, environmental sounds belong to the set of the soundscape—they are presented but not re-presented. This is because the soundscape must pose absences, blind spots, within the sonic terms it gathers. Never can the submultiples of a sound be defined or completely secured. Such an act of inclusion would close off the possibility of that sound having parts that are essential but unnamable. In other words, a sonic body cannot be normatively coded unless it is conceived as incomplete, that is, as *potentially* having a submultiple that would (or would not) connect it to a larger essence or theme. Modernist governance holds open this possibility—and so does not include all noises within the soundscape—in order to orient bodies and sounds to transcendental rationalities that they do not actually possess. In this case, the state of the situation thus governs by and is structured on multiples that Badiou (*BE*: 100) calls “singular”: presented but not represented.

Schizophrenia implies a different logic altogether. Severed from their material origins, sounds appear not as “singular” but as “excrement” (Badiou 100) insofar as they are represented but not presented in the situation. As schizophrenic, the soundscape is complete in the sense that it makes no reference, in itself, to essential or originary terms (ie, unrepresented multiplicity) but includes all of its elements. In simpler terms, the soundscape as artifact points to nothing beyond itself. It is an empty signifier, a pure present that according to Schafer invisibilizes the process of its production. Seen this way, pace its role in modernist governance, the soundscape includes all of the sounds it acknowledges, providing a representation of a world that claims to *be* that world without remainder. This is part and parcel of a democratic-materialist governance that conflates the situation with the situation’s state. Unlike the modernist soundscape—which seeks to change its world, although in a

normative way—the postmodernist soundscape produces worlds wherein nothing ever happens. These are the famous postmodern worlds of pure simulacra wherein the real has disappeared behind its representation. Could it be that the philosophers who pursued this idea, Baudrillard and others, were listening to too many recorded sounds?

IV. The Politics of the Soundscape

To sum up, while the so-called modernist-idealist soundscape operates by connecting itself as representation to a posited but uncounted presentation, the democratic-materialist soundscape of schizophrenic noise seeks to do away with presentation altogether by posing itself as the real. While abstract, this (onto)logic has major political implications, and helps us better understand the shift in governance discussed above.

Both forms of governance depend on the proliferation of representations, like soundscapes, that act on the sensible body—ie, on the subject who listens and is listened to. For modernist-idealist governance this is an *extrinsic* process: the body is read against a set of normative conditions (essences, origins, etc.) that are external to the soundscape in which that body is placed. Conversely, the schizophrenic soundscape is *intrinsic* to the extent that it inscribes and evaluates the body entirely within the sonic world that it itself produces and naturalizes. In this sense, the schizophrenic soundscape can be said to be an autonomous technology of governance: it creates its own conditions and spaces of control, and requires no “outside” multiplicity against which to organize the sonic bodies it records.

These bodies are not governed towards any particular ideal or aim but rather, aligning with liberal notions of tolerance and multiculturalism, towards an acceptance of *what is*. In other words, in obscuring their material origins, schizophrenic sounds reproduce a subject whose positionality, conditions of existence, and relations to exploitation are obscured. This is a subject for whom the

world appears only in its representation, as a set of bodies and languages universally audible. Thus, contrary to a modernist-idealist governance that relies on a unrepresented field of reference, the schizophrenic subject is bound to and governed only by what appears. And what appears (representation) is conflated with the range of what exists or what can exist (presentation). The result is that all worlds—and their constituent relations of exploitation and inequality—are naturalized as *what must always be*. Under this logic, the temptation of progressive politics becomes one of reform, of spreading racial, class, and gender tolerance, and of limiting the damage from conflicts that are increasingly considered the harsher realities of life.

But how exactly does the soundscape produce such a world? My argument is that as a recorded artifact the soundscape constitutes one of many technologies of surveillance whose function, intentionally or not, is to securitize and deradicalize the sensible. In providing a count-of-the-count, the soundscape offers “a clause of closure and security” (Badiou *BE*: 98) to the situation, affirming its state. Such a state, as we have seen, places restrictions on the presented multiple thereby ensuring that all its parts are accounted for. This is true of course for the modernist notion of the soundscape as well. The difference is that as a recording or simulacrum, the schizophrenic soundscape masks its own process of production. It does not acknowledge the presented multiplicity of sound and bodies on which it performs the count, and in so doing obscures the exclusions that allow for its emergence. In this way, the soundscape inculcates a practice of reading that discredits, or fails to register, the historical and material conditions of appearance. And in producing a real that is complete and fully securitized, the soundscape constructs a flattened space/time as well as removing an ontological depth from bodies, all of which are bound to and restricted by the monotony of *what is*.

V. Conclusion

The danger in writing this chapter is that I run the risk of misrepresenting Schafer's soundscape as some kind of maniacal device for population control. It is not. Rather, in two different systems of governance, it provides a (not unambiguous) technology for organizing bodies. Yet I would be remiss not to point out that as a concept and practice the soundscape does have potential for a radical politics. I conclude this chapter by looking at the ways in which the schizophrenic soundscape opens new possibilities for looking at space, and for reframing it beyond the academy as a relational construction.

In some sense, schizophrenic is a great equalizer, reproducing all noises, subjects—space itself—on a singular plane, in the pure present of the recording. It translates these elements into the same language, so that they can be read together and seen as the social constructions they are. What this upends is a conception of space and bodies rooted in a metaphysics of substance.⁴ Important for the modernist-idealist form of governance outlined above, a metaphysics of substance treats space and the body as substances to which belong a set of properties or essences. This is certainly Schafer's goal in conceiving the soundscape: a container for essential sounds.

But as we have seen, the schizophrenic iteration of the soundscape does away with all extrinsic relation. Within its count-as-one, spaces and bodies are not so much substances as they are self-identical elements. And as elements belonging to the same set they achieve a kind of readability or ontological equivalence, as different kinds of sound. Rather than a metaphysics of substance this looks more like a metaphysics of noise. Bodies become translated into noise, as is space itself.

Musician Nicolas Jaar captures this flattening effect in this 2011 album *Space is Only Noise*. In the title track he sings,

Space is only noise if you can see
See I want to write a story about two long lines

⁴ For a critique of the metaphysics of substance see Butler 2006: pp. 14, 28–38.

Two pretty lines that fall in love
Two little spaces they're filled with echoes
Did the lines ever intersect one another, at a moment in time?
Moment time

Have you always crossed like this?
Have you always crossed like this?
[...]

You used to check the weather
Now you stopped that,
You used to look at time
Now you stopped that,
You used to wear red
Now you wear white,
What happens all the time
It happens all the time,
Replace the word "space" with a drink and forget it
Space is only noise if you can see,

Grab a calculator and fix yourself,
Grab a calculator and fix yourself,
Read the news baby, read the news,
Watch your clock baby, watch your clock,
Watch the weather baby, on TV,
It's all together you can see.
[...]

Within the world of Jaar's song, which is a build up of echoes and repetitive synthesizers, it's difficult to put it "all together." But against the haze and confusion of the soundscape, Jaar pleads for his addressee to recognize that in in such a world "space is only noise." Amid the echoes and schizophonic repetitions of the everyday, space can no longer be thought of as anything but a construction, the noisy output of material processes. Failing to grasp this is to remain trapped in the "little spaces [...] filled with echoes." That is, if space is not seen as noise then it is treated as an autonomous substance, containing and determining the individual in every instance.

With the proliferation of schizophonic sounds, echoes, and reverberations the spatial container becomes redundant and repetitive. Recordings on the radio, youtube, and Jaar's song itself, make it possible to experience the same events over and over, so that "what happens all the time / it

happens all the time.” Such monotony produces spaces in which (it appears that) nothing new ever happens. Facing the eternal return of the Same, the song’s addressee loses motivation to leave their space—to check the weather, the time, or the news. Failing to see that schizophonic spaces are only noise, they adopt a certain nihilism or relativism, whereby change becomes tantamount to the shifts in fashion trends (“you used to wear red / now you wear white) and there is little point in paying attention to one’s surroundings. For if everything is recorded and available when- and wherever in private space, then why should an individual ever leave his or her sphere of desires?

Jaar is attempting is to break out of this sphere. His is a “story about two long lines” that intersect at a particular “moment in time.” The coincidence is that of the song—this moment in time—which deconstructs the idea that space is, or was ever, spherical and private. Space, Jaar suggests, is not (always) a container. It is not (always) a collection of echoes, of *what happens*. Taken as container or collection, the notion of space is a noisy abstraction that induces relativism and obscures material conditions, including the physical (the weather), temporal (clock time), mathematical (calculations), and social (the news).

In posing space as an existential limit (to *what happens*), we are unable to see beyond our own “spaces” of finitude, and thus cannot conceive the structures that work “all together” to produce the regime of the sensible. Jaar’s suggestion: “Replace the word ‘space’ with a drink and forget it.” Similar to Marx (*C*, I, 279), Jaar advises us to bid farewell to the “noisy sphere” in order to understand that sphere’s conditions of possibility. The recognition of space *qua* noise, then, for both Marx and Jaar, enables its defetishization. What was once seen as a melody—commodity circulation, space itself—is revealed as a material relation, made possible only within a structure of domination.

Conclusion The Scrambling Device

In many ways this thesis relies on a false construct. “Noise,” when used as a critique of capital, begins to disintegrate as an intelligible category. For, as Marx (*C*, I: 279) argued, the “noisy sphere,” if it exists at all, is merely the “surface” of a deeper “abode of production.” This is what I’ve attempted to show in my thesis: that noise cannot be thought as an entity for-itself, as a phenomenon removed from its context. Indeed, this is the thought—the thought of the body alone, of the “materials themselves” (Brenner et al. 2011)—that democratic materialism imposes.

That noise can be thought, unproblematically, in the abstract is evidence of the obfuscation of capital. To better understand this process, I have examined an array of sonic artifacts, seeking to trace their implications for both governance and ontology. Within an ethnography of English hospice life, US noise-control policies, noise complaints made by Seattle residents, and the apparatus of the soundscape, I have identified a general shift in governance and in ontological assumptions around 1970. While certainly not homogeneous, this shift has been theorized as a movement towards the ideology Badiou defines as democratic materialism, according to which there are only bodies and languages, with governance occurring through their correlation. Noise, in its conception and dissemination, plays a significant role in the policing of bodies, both inside and outside a normative regime of the sensible, whether that be one of multiculturalism, civility, or universal equality.¹ It is for this reason that noise can provide a material index for bodies that have been silenced and made in-existent by the state in the service of capital. As the site “where everything takes place on the surface,” noise necessary implies a hidden depth, one that can be rendered through empirical analysis.

¹ We have also seen how noise *reveals* these structures. Marx’s own biography provides an additional example. In 1835, while a student at the University of Bonn, Marx was thrown in jail for “disturbing the peace of the night with drunken noise” (McLellan 1995: 14). Noise, in this case, exposes not only the margin of legal behavior but also normative conceptions of peace.

But what's the political value of revealing these depths, of tracing something like democratic materialism in the sounds of the everyday? This is an issue on which the thesis has remained largely silent. Having mapped the logics of governance and the ontologies of domination in a given situation, *what are we to do?* What tactics, what strategies emerge from this analysis? In what ways can we resist, sonically or otherwise, the processes that deny and obfuscate the ruptural present, its possibilities and consequences?

A sufficient answer to these questions would require an analysis beyond the scope of this thesis. I conclude, however, with a sketch of one possible tactic that draws on the works of William S. Burroughs. If the democratic-materialist ideology operates through the fastening of bodies and languages, then a practice of resistance would reverse this process, unbinding the two poles. While Burroughs, as a writer, maintains the body within the matrix of language, he offers a strategy of *re-tuning the body*, of freeing it from a language that signifies in the interests of capital.

Burroughs's recoding of bodies is demonstrated in his lifelong fixation with the viral: from the "junk virus" (Burroughs 2001: 211) and "viral venereal disease" (2001: 36) of 1959's *Naked Lunch* to the "obsession with sex and death" (1981: 25) that is triggered by "Virus B-23" (1981: 20) in 1981's *Cities of the Red Night*. Central to the Burroughs' virology, is the idea of language as virus, capable of infection: "The word is now a virus," he writes in *The Ticket that Exploded* (1967: 49).

While Burroughs is concerned primarily with the virology of the written word in his novels, in 1968 he started to experiment with a sonic cut-up technique. By splicing audio recordings with sexual and bodily sounds² he sought to produce "a front line weapon to produce and escalate riots" (ER: 20-23). Discussing this project in his strange non-fiction work, *The Electronic Revolution* (ER) (2005 [1970]), he claims that sound—particularly recorded sound—has the potential to orient, control, and mobilize the body. "Riot sound effects," for example, "can produce an actual riot in a

² Burroughs (ER: 13) includes: "stammering coughs sneezes hiccoughs snarls pain screams fear whimperings apoplectic sputterings slobbering drooling idiot noises sex and animal sound effects."

riot situation. RECORDED POLICE WHISTLES WILL DRAW COPS. RECORDED GUNSHOTS, AND THEIR GUNS ARE OUT” (ER: 13).

Noise possesses this power because, for Burroughs, it is itself a kind of virus (ER: 10) which when cut-up and played back can have disruptive, violent effects on hierarchies of power. “Anyone with recorder” (ER: 12) is able to disrupt “political rallies” (13) and to “SCRAMBLE AND NULLIFY ASSOCIATIONAL LINES PUT DOWN BY MASS MEDIA (13). With this method, “[m]illions of people,” Burroughs (ER: 12) envisions, “could nullify the control system which those who are behind Watergate and Nixon are attempting to impose.”

The same technique is described in several of Burroughs’s novels, including *The Soft Machine* (1992 [1961]) and *The Ticket that Exploded* (1967 [1962]). For example, in the “Mayan Caper” (1992: 91–92) chapter of the former, the protagonist uses a mixed “sound and image track” to undermine the control system maintained by Mayan priests:

I now correlated the recordings of burning brush with the image track of this operation, and shuffled the time so that the order to burn came late and a year’s crop was lost — Famine weakening control lines, I cut radio static into the control music and festival recordings together with sound and image track rebellion.

“Cut word lines — Cut music lines — Smash the control images — Smash the control machine — Burn the books — Kill the priests — Kill! Kill! Kill! — ”

Whether Burroughs’ audio techniques did or could create actual riots or whether they are simply fictional devices echoing his experiments in literary form—this is not what’s important. Rather, the idea of a word-virus provides an example of how Burroughs’s conception of (scrambled) noise works reconfigure bodies and language, creating a “soft machine.” For Burroughs, juxtapositions of sound and text are able to infect and mobilize the body, bringing death, sexual frenzy, and rioting—externality—to the surface of desire.

If the Burroughs novel is a kind of “scrambling device,” then it produces “the human body and nervous system as unscrambling devices” (ER: 16). The reader, when confronted with a re-

arranged “sequence” of text or sound, deciphers this content “compulsively and against [their] will” (ER: 24). Within this dialectic of scrambling and unscrambling, Burroughs’s cut/up technique reimagines the coupling of language and body. By framing the former as a “biological weapon” (ER: 21) for changing consciousness, Burroughs proposes a language—“a number of weapons and tactics in a war game” (35)—that unbinds the body from its “permanent condition” (34), from its fixed signifiers. Grammatically, the act of splicing and scrambling destabilizes the “IS of identity,” the “definite THE,” and replaces the “whole concept of OR” with “juxtaposition, by AND” (ER: 33–34).

In reproducing space as a set of juxtapositions rather than as a fixed site of predicate logic, Burroughs re-routes the body—its parts, sounds, affects and fluids—to other materialities. As he writes in *The Ticket Exploded* (1967: 50),

The first step is to record the sounds of your body and start splicing them in yourself. Splice in your body sounds with the body sounds of your best friend and see how familiar he gets. Splice your body sounds in with air hammers. [...] Splice your body sounds in with anybody or anything. Start a tapeworm club and exchange body sound tapes. Feel right into your nabor’s intestines and help him digest his food.

Burroughs’s thoughts on sonic scrambling must be read in the context of his capacity as a writer, primarily of fiction. What’s important is the way in which he undermines and rewrites the connection between body and language, and as a result challenges a democratic-materialist ideology that places bodies, in the last instance, under the language of capital. Beyond the realm of fiction, how might we adopt such a practice—in our writing and in our relationships? How might we use noise to interrupt the social reproduction of capital, its endless melody? How might we, in Badiou’s (TS: 142) words, “jam up the mechanism of repetition”?

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