

How does an urban space experience and remember sonic trauma?”¹ Andreas Huyssen has analyzed cities as palimpsests, places both “saturated with memory” and marked by “willful forgetting,” where **ruins** mark “absences” just as much as the *visible* presence of past violence is preserved by bullet and shrapnel marks on buildings.”² In the 1870s and 1880s, Paris was marked by the visible ruins of the Commune, including the gutted Tuileries palace, which remained at the center of the city for twelve years.”³ If the *visual* reminders of violence and trauma leave “absent presences” in a city, how might memories of *sounds* of conflict be similarly understood as leaving traces (sonic scars) in individual and collective memories? In my article, I detail sonic impacts on Parisians during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and analyze how this 19th-century sonic trauma was experienced, processed, and memorialized.

Scholars have examined popular song and Parisian concert life during this period, yet the *sonic* experience of serial traumatic events in this urban space remains understudied.⁴ In my article for the special issue I analyze **three** episodes from this year.⁵⁶ I begin with the Prussian bombardment of Paris in January 1871, when more than 12,000 shells were fired into the city over twenty-three days. French composer Vincent d’Indy described the whistling of shells as a sound which “made him feel sick...he could not help but shiver, and feel a cold sweat run through the body upon hearing this terrible crescendo.”⁷ d’Indy’s words remind us of Suzanne Cusick’s work on the use of sound *as* violence, and of J. Martin Daughtry’s analysis of *21st-century* belliphonic sounds as traumatics *causes* of hearing loss or PTSD. Much of our knowledge about somatic responses to shelling comes from catastrophic lessons gleaned from World War I’s shell-shocked soldiers; my case study deepens this avenue of trauma studies by generating *pre-20th century* insights on sonic traumas of both civilians and soldiers.

My second case study details the revolutionary sounds of the Commune's initial uprising on March 18, 1871,⁸ from the drum beats of the *rappel* and *générale* calling for the National Guard to assemble to bugle calls warning the citizenry to disperse to gunshots to noisy exclamations of particular neighborhoods. I analyze these as a sonic language of revolution, an inherited memory repeatedly re-inscribed into the aural history of Paris.⁹ My last example focuses on *la semaine sanglante*, the cataclysmic final confrontation between Communards and the Versaillais army. Innumerable memoirs, diaries, and journals recount the *sounds* of civil war.¹⁰ Augustine-Melvine Blanchecotte recalled May 23 as an endless night echoing with "the horrible combination of machine guns, cannon fire, the screams of shells, the racket of paving stones, yells from combatants, falling of bodies, the certainty of an explosion," while another account noted the sounds overpowered her, rendering her unable to sleep or function.¹¹ Through my analysis of Paris's "terrible year,"¹² we gain a sense of how sound rendered the familiar strange, a city shattered and remade by sound as much as bullets.¹³ These sounds lingered in the minds and ears of Parisians; Emile Zola commented that millions of Parisians were left with nightmares, terrors which could only heal once the *sounds* ceased.¹⁴

As clearly traumatic as these belliphonic sounds were to Parisians, I have been struck by three specific problems as I've worked to assess sonic trauma in a 19th-century context. First, this "collective trauma"¹⁵ was experienced in vastly different ways depending on political allegiance.¹⁶ Not only do such accounts presage questions of objectivity vs. subjectivity, truth-telling, and witness that we encounter in 20th century atrocities, they are an example of what Mark Micale theorizes as trauma's "spectrum of responses," or how many individuals experience events *nontraumatically*, i.e. "in ways..not deemed medically noteworthy **in their time**."

Second, in December 1871, France's Third Empire banned all representations of the Commune.¹⁷ Yet by the 1910s, hundreds of Commune accounts emerged, many shaped by both the passage of time and the specific qualities of traumatic memory.¹⁸ Nineteenth-century understandings of memory—let alone traumatic memory—were radically in flux at this moment; we might think of Théodule Ribot's *Diseases of Memory* (1883) (followed in the early twentieth century by Proust's work on involuntary memory and Maurice Halbwach's theories on collective memory). How do we analyze traumatic *memories* at this historical watershed for memory itself?

Finally, my work spends considerable time assessing how the traumatic events of the Commune were contextualized (or alluded to or ignored) in period medical discourses. In 1889, one of French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot's most provocative case studies concerns a former soldier traumatized after being struck by lightning.¹⁹ The male patient recounted the sound of the traumatic thunderclap “was **like a cannon shot**, accompanied by the clatter of a thousand plates falling to the ground,” causing the patient to “tremble and cry like a child.” Charcot casually admits that the man had already been exposed to “dramatic” and “terrifying” wartime episodes, including the sounds of cannon fire. Sixteen French medical dissertations on male hysteria appeared between 1875 and 1893, several researchers— notably Emile Duponchel in the 1880s and 1890s— searched for hysteria in the army, and Pierre Janet spent the last years of the century pondering the nature of “painful memories subconsciously fixed in the psyche.” Allan Young has analyzed how a new type of traumatic memory emerged at the end of the 19th century, namely, “the experience of fear, conceived as a memory, both individual and collective.” Mark Micale similarly explicitly places the beginnings of the trauma concept in psychological medicine in the 1870s. My work operates in this moment of possibility, the nexus of the trauma

concept, psychology, and memory, all emerging at precisely the moment Parisians processed the aftermath of the *année terrible*.²⁰ Yet while it is fascinating to parse Charcot, Duponchel, Janet and others for both evidence of trauma and early clues of the trauma concept, how do we remain vigilant about assessing trauma in a constructivist, temporally appropriate manner? (Here we might recall Allan Young, who has discussed PTSD as “glued together by the practices, technologies, and narratives with which it is diagnosed, studied, treated, and represented”).

These questions become particularly poignant as we consider how trauma misshapes time not just for the individual but also for the group. My contribution to the special issue concludes by highlighting two spaces in *contemporary* Paris— the *mur des Fédérés* and the basilica of *Sacre-Cœur*—which not only resound with remembered sounds from the period of the Commune but also continue to use sound as a weapon of commemoration. In such cases, how can our view of trauma ever be anything other than a blend of the past and the present?

[Add Slides and questions]

¹ As Andreas Huyssen has noted of urban memorials to national trauma, “cities remain the main battleground on which societies articulate their sense of time past and time present..once embodied in memorial sites within an urban fabric...remembrance of traumatic events seems less susceptible to the vagaries of memory. Huyssens grounds this analysis in a discussion of the memory park in Buenos Aires. See *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003): 101.

² Huyssen—who is particularly discussing Berlin—sees this as a shift from the persistent (and earlier) discourses of “reading the city as text,” from Hugo to Barthes and Baudrillard to many postmodern geographers, etc in the 1970s and 1980s. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2003): 50.

³ Jann Pasler comments “From 1871 to 1883, the most striking visual reminder of the country’s internal divisions was the gutted Palais de Tuileries at the very center of Paris. Suggesting the power of absence as well as presence in the cityscape, these ruins, untouched for twelve years, were fraught with uneasy and powerfully ambivalent symbolism. Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 20. Though her study focuses on the Third Republic—the French government which followed the Second Empire and the Commune—Jann also includes in her introduction, a “walk” through Paris as a means of discussing the symbolism of place, particularly in regard to music and power. For much more on ruins and their symbolism in post-Commune Paris, see Colette Wilson, *Paris and the Commune, 1871-1878: The Politics of Forgetting*, particularly the chapter on photographing the ruins of the Commune.

⁴ Ranging from 19th-century analyses to secondary monographs by Georges Coulonges and Robert Brécy to recent work by Kim White and Kathleen Hulley to work by Mordey and Tyre discuss opera performances, concerts by Padeloup and other organizations, and a special concert series held at the Tuileries palace during the Commune. See Mordey, “Moments musicaux: high culture in the Paris Commune,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22, 1-31, as well as Mordey, “Auber’s Horses: L’Année Terrible and Apocalyptic Narratives,” *19th Century Music*, 30, no. 3 (2007): 213-39 and “Dans Le Palais du Son, On Fait de la Farine: Performing at the Opéra during the 1870 siege of Paris” *Music & Letters* 93, no. 1 (2012): 1-29. Jess Tyre, “Music in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune,” *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 2 (2005): 173-202.

For work on the Commune and popular song, see Weckerlin, “L’Histoire en chansons, 1870-1871-1872,” *La Chronique Musicale*, 15 July 1873; Georges Coulonges, *La Commune en chantant* (Paris, 1970); Robert Brécy, *La Chanson de la Commune: chansons et poèmes inspirés par la Commune de 1871* (Paris, 1991). For a précis on Bordas and Amiati (and a linked art exhibit), see Kimberly White and Kathleen Hulley, “Singing the Nation: Amiati, Bordas, and the *chanson patriotique* of the Café-Concert,” AMS Rochester Program Booklet, 2017, p. 126. There is of course copious work on urban soundscapes of the 20th century; including a panel with that name at the 2017 AMS meeting in Rochester. At that same meeting, Juan Velásquez Ospina offered a critique of urban soundscape studies as still predominately concentrated on North America and Western Europe. See “Music, Noise, and Space: Music and Urbanization in Colombia, 1903-1950.” AMS Rochester abstracts book, p. 132. Martin Kaltenecker has noted a growing interest in what he calls the “phonosphères of war.” See Kaltenecker, Martin. “What Scenes! What Sounds! Some Remarks on Soundscapes in War Times.” *Music and War in Europe from French Revolution to WWI*, ed. Étienne Jardin, 3-28. Brepols: Turnhout, 2016. Has an excellent list of other works on war and sound in footnote 17 on p. 6.

⁵ Sarah Bernhardt notes “Evil days then came upon us. Paris began to get feverish and excited. The streets were black with groups of people, discussing and gesticulating....On July 19 war was seriously declared, and Paris then became the theatre of the most touching and burlesque scenes. Excitable and delicate as I was, I could not bear the sight of all these young men gone wild, who were yelling the “Marseillaise” and rushing along the streets in close file, shouting over and over again, ‘To Berlin! To Berlin!’ ” *Ma double vie*, p. 151-153. At the outbreak of war, Parisians sang “A Berlin” to the tune of “Les Lampions.” Hindencrone, *In the Courts of Memory, 1858-1875*, p. 251. This was only one of a number of incidents of public singing during this era; when Victor Hugo returned from exile on September 5, 1870, for example, a large crowd flooded Parisian streets singing the “Marseillaise” and reciting extracts from Hugo’s *Les Châtiments*. (Starr, *Commemorating Trauma*, 62). A huge and noisy crowd also invaded the Assembly National after the news of the loss at Sedan on September 4, 1870. Nathan Sheppard also has some excellent descriptions of this in *Shut Up in Paris*, London, 1871. Sheppard also notes that in November, Paris’s boulevards resounded with music of all kinds (144).

⁶ These sounds likely varied a great deal according to which section of Paris, a “politics of place.” Different parts of Paris very differently classed (Montmartre, Belleville, working class areas on the northern, eastern, and southern edges of the city). Robert Tombs writes of “Class war (conflicts?) written in the geography of the capital. *The War Against Paris, 1871*. (4)

⁷ d’Indy noted the continual nature of the bombardment—on the afternoon of January 5 he counted 38 detonations in a minute.

⁸ There were many other sonically significant uprisings throughout the year. In February 1871, for example, Parisians angry with the armistice terms gathered in the Place de la Bastille. That evening, the *rappel* (a drum signal which summoned the assembly of National Guard members from a particular *arrondissement*) was beaten illegally in the working class and leftist areas of Belleville, the Faubourg du Temple, and the Latin Quarter. Tombs, *War against Paris*, 27. Under normal order, the *rappel* was only beaten at the urging of the government. Part of the problem in the 1848 revolutions was beating of spontaneous *rappel*; see Jonathan M. House, *Controlling Paris: Armed Forces and Counter-Revolution, 1789-1848*. On March 18, the regular French army deployed at dawn to working class Parisian neighborhoods such as Montmartre, planning to seize cannons held by the National Guard.

⁹ While such sounds were not always specific to the French capital, in Paris they had a locally specific resonance via their connection to repeated waves of revolution and civil unrest that shook the city from 1789 through 1870. Some of these *did* have specifically Parisian meanings, such as the *générale*. Quoted in Lefebvre, p. 244 and also in Peter Starr, *Commemorating trauma*, p. 21.

Moreover, these sounds were as important as musical performances, proving Martin Kaltenecker’s point that in altered *phonosphères* of war “conventional separations between popular, functional, and art music dissolve, and the different spaces allowed to them may intertwine.” Kaltenecker, p. 10. He cites Edmond de Goncourt’s assertion that he had tried to attend a concert during the *année terrible*, but “music, at the moment, cannot make me forget...and I go out again to enjoy the sight of the streets.” Goncourt, Edmond de. *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, ed. by Robert Ricatte, 3 vols. Paris: Robert Laffont, 2004.

In reference to the sonic chaos of May 18, Georges Clemenceau described the scene as “perfect bedlam.” Moreover, within the noisy carnivalesque atmosphere of March 18, Gay Gullickson’s fascinating gendered analysis of the day’s crowds parses how the vocalizations of Montmartre’s female citizens dominated the soundscape and memories of the events. Gullickson is careful to note that reports from May 18 be inaccurate memory, but her reading is extremely illuminating nonetheless. See *Unruly Women of the Commune*, p. 35. She also does a stellar job of showing how the different accounts of the Commune were subject to revision and rewriting with time.

¹⁰ Lissigay, a prominent Communard, recalled this moment as an ominous cessation of noise: “the cannon were hushed, a silence unknown for three weeks.” The gradual acknowledgement by Communard leaders of this breaching of their defenses was marked by a resumption of noise: the *rappel* was beaten all night on May 21 in Batignolles while on the morning of May 22 the *tocsin* was rung throughout the city and the *générale* beaten. Alain Corbin notes that the *tocsin*—generally hurried, redoubled, and discontinuous strokes on a small bell—elicited physical and psychological effects in 19th century auditors, including “fear, panic, and horror.” *Memoirs of la semaine sanglante* note the nervous effect caused by the unending, horrifying drumbeats of the *tocsin* bell.”

¹¹ Like many, she drew particular attention to the new and horrifying sound of the *mitrailleuse* (an volley gun that could fire multiple rounds in rapid succession).

Lindencrone-Hegemann specifically mentions that music—usually a source of comfort—was unable to assuage her anxiety. On May 25, she noted that “when I open the door of the vestibule, I can hear the yelling and screaming of the rushing mob; it is dreadful, the spluttering of fusillades and the guns overpower all other noises.”

As the fires swept Paris during the Commune, they added to the sensory chaos, filling the city with ash and smoke, a foul miasma which privileged sound still more over the uncertainties of sight. Indeed, the soundscape of Paris’s fiery destruction was itself likened to a musical metaphor by actress Marie Colombier: “the fire roared like a basso continuo, interrupted from time to time by sharp crackling sounds.” Notably, not all Parisians were traumatized by the smoke-filled city’s chaotic sonic violence: some became accustomed to the sounds, while others found them mesmerizing. Louise Michel, ardent Communard and anarchist, wrote of the “beauty” of revolutionary sounds, noting “the red teeth of chattering machine guns showing on the horizon against the night sky...barbarian that I am, I love cannon, the smell of powder, machine-gun bullets in the air.”

¹² Victor Hugo’s wording: *l’année terrible*.

¹³ Thinking of the urban landscape, from the flâneur in the 19th century to later “city” theorists such as Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau or Roland Barthes—who described the city as a discourse we “speak” by wandering through it & looking at it—we might think of the dualistic *phonosphères* of Paris in the time of war. A city whose sonic discourse is both familiar—the recurrent barricades, the sounds of century-old revolutionary songs, the tapestry of bells, bugle calls, the rappel and the générale—mixed with the incommensurable new sounds of the mitrailleuse and the Krupp siege guns and the displaced and uncanny sounds occurring in “seemingly impossible” places, such as the bullets and cannons which ultimately silenced the last Communards in Père Lachaise.

In his writing on sonic warsapes, Kaltenecker notes a “pathological kind of hearing,” of constant listening straining to hear and interpret noises and sounds. He continues that “war can temporarily modify the structure of signals and common soundmarks” of a place, or create “sound displacements, where ordinary sounds arise in places where they wouldn’t in peacetime.”

¹⁴ Hegermann-Lindencrone—who fled Paris as soon as the Commune fell—found her recovery impeded by the memory of the sonic violence she had endured during *la semaine sanglante*. Even years later, as Colette Wilson has discussed, the noisy fireworks of the 1878 Exposition Universelle—which sounded like bombshells—were likely triggering for listeners who had experienced the sound of munitions in those exact Parisian places.

¹⁵ For collective trauma, see Arthur Neal and Jeffrey C. Alexander.

¹⁶ This makes it difficult to understand analyze responses within a traumatic lens.

¹⁷ The actual phrasing was any representation of the Commune which “upset public order.” This may remind us of other silences, from a Freudian repressive silence to what Maria Cizmiciu has, in a Soviet context, noted as politicized silence

¹⁸ So we see an initial government-imposed silence and a later abundance of witnessing—which presages many 20th century concerns about trauma, silence, and repression. Communard Louise Michel’s memoirs offer a particularly fascinating period exemplar of traumatic witness: she pieces together anecdotes non-chronologically “as they come to mind,” and flits from historical events to dreams to poetry to recurrent exclamations of grief at her mother’s death.

¹⁹ Charcot conceived what he deemed male “hysteria” as nervous crises prompted by a triggering traumatic event. Various diagnosed as “névrose traumatique, hystérie traumatique, hystéro-traumatique, or hystéro-neurasthénie traumatique,” Charcot diagnosed around ninety cases of male hysteria, almost exclusively working class men who suffered paralyzes, contractures, sensitivity or lack thereof to touch, melancholia, and alterations in vision after an accident. The account of “D...cy,” the soldier, is located in the 1889 work *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière*

²⁰ I’m not (necessarily) arguing causation—that the *l’année terrible* **created** discussions of traumatic memory on its own—but connective threads between these two issues are intriguing to research and analyze.