

Sound intertwines with trauma in many provocative ways: each can unpredictably connect the body and the mind, each can disrupt the experience of time, each can trigger intense memories and emotions, each can be difficult to characterize in a linear narrative. Moreover, when we look to the past—the nineteenth century, for example—sound and trauma present unique but related historiographic problems, such as how we study “ephemeral” sounds before the era of recordings or how we contextualize trauma before the formulation of current medical/social/therapeutic understandings.¹

In my contribution to the colloquy, I analyze possibilities around these questions, gauging how the production, (mis)understanding, and legislation of *sound* is critical in an attempt to study trauma in (nineteenth-century) history. In doing so, I interweave foundational theoretical frameworks of scholars in the history of listening, the “auditory turn,” and sound studies.² These writers center their work on issues of power and violence, querying how and what it means to *hear* or *listen* instead of looking or gazing in the era of 19th century colonialism, the antebellum period in the United States, or the sounds of US Civil War. Here, we might specifically note Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier’s “acoustically tuned explorations of the written archive,” how her readings of these archives “against the grain” offer possibilities of knowledge about Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants, and mestizos in 19th century Colombia.³ In his sensory histories of the nineteenth century, Mark M. Smith underscores the contested nature of sonic information through the mishearings between northerners and southerners in the US Civil War, while Jennifer Stoeber offers multiple 19th century case studies in her work on sound as “a critical modality through which subjects (re) produce, apprehend, and resist imposed racial identities and structures of racist violence.”⁴

In each of these works, sound strains against a tension with the visual or even the much-noted ocularcentrism of the 19th century.⁵ Ochoa asks whether at “an epochal moment when the gaze was privileged above all other senses in the West,” listening practices might nonetheless be hidden in “the nooks and crannies of history, dispersed across several fields and sites of knowledge and sound inscription.”⁶ Smith acknowledges the primacy of sight and visuality, yet argues that printed sources often retain “tantalizing traces” of the sonic.⁷ This might also remind us of the work of scholars who have queried how sound and listening might offer crucial knowledge of Black Atlantic cultural formations, including Tina M. Campt’s inspiration through Paul Gilroy to “listen to” images.⁸ These questions around listening, looking, hearing, images, power, violence, and marginalized groups each offer powerful intersections with the study of trauma in the 19th century. Ultimately, the sonic is essential in attempting to hear the traumas of the century, illusive as it may be.

My own case study considers how the production, (mis)understanding, and legislation of sound is critical to researching trauma in history. In the “terrible year” of 1870-71—spanning the Franco-Prussian War through the Commune—Parisians looked on with horror as their Ville Lumière descended into a nightmare of blood and fire. The city’s inhabitants not only watched, they listened. Through listening, they garnered crucial information but also failed to shut out belliphonic sounds that rendered them sleepless, sick and, in some cases, unable to function. In a flood of lectures and treatises, a generation of neurologists and psychiatrists assessed the impact of these wartime injuries on French minds and bodies. Scholars such as Charcot and Janet formulated early understandings of trauma, concepts emerging at precisely the moment Parisians processed the aftermath of siege, bombardment, civil war, and mass slaughter.

Weaving together contemporary medical discourse, diaries, journals, reportage, and iconography of *l'année terrible*, my work reveals a topography of Parisian sonic violence. Following Mark M. Smith and Jennifer Stoeve's understandings of sonic experiences as raced, gendered, and classed, this case study furthers their work by demonstrating sound's traumatic impacts on gendered and classed nineteenth-century Parisian bodies. In connecting sound, the events of 1870-71, and early conceptions of trauma, I also offer an important corrective to research on World War I by demonstrating how concerns about the traumatic effects of war had been resonating in Paris decades before. As I ultimately situate a specifically urban theorization of the aural experiences of war, I conclude with how the sonic trauma of *l'année terrible* might stretch far beyond 1870-71. Borrowing from Andreas Huyssen's analysis of a city as palimpsest—where visual reminders of violence and trauma leave 'absent presences' in the heart of an urban space—I query how sonic memories of conflict might similarly leave traces - sonic scars? - in both physical places and in individual and collective memories.

¹ Trauma has long been understood to impact people's memories and their ability to narrate events. While psychologists and neurologists have researched the ways memory responds to trauma, humanities scholars have explored individual and collective memory in connection to historiography and memorialization. If traumatic events are difficult to remember and narrate, then how do we experience time, tell history, and create memorials? Erin Brooks looks to the nineteenth century and considers how to investigate "ephemeral" sounds and their traumatic effects before the era of sound recording. Taking the sounds of the Paris Commune as a case study, Brooks considers how the production, (mis)understanding, and legislation of sound is critical to researching trauma in history.

² Ochoa Gautier notes on p. 17 that "this recent auditory turn in critical theory is giving rise today to the increased formalization of sound studies (Sterne 2012a). Questions about how such a turn is historically traced, what fields of sound studied are privileged in tracing such a genealogy, and who the pioneering figures are differ from one scholar to another." As historical work on audition intensifies, the question is raised as to whether the deaf ears of history were those of an epochal moment when the gaze was privileged above all other senses in the West (Jay 1993), or whether listening practices were always there, hidden by the fact that the traces left by audibility are enmeshed with different practices, a listening to be found in the nooks and crannies of history, dispersed across several fields and sites of knowledge and sound inscription.

Another work I've found helpful is the concept of the "imperial ear"'s categorization of colonized spaces (Hill 2013), though it's a little historically early for my work.

³ *Aurality: Listening & Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). Ochoa Gautier describes an archive full of listening practices, though absence of documents or inappropriate methodologies often obscure our knowledge of local expressive cultures. Speaking of the colonial and post-colonial archive. She is interested in "an acoustically tuned exploration of the written archive." "By reading the archive against the grain, it is possible to speculate how indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants, and mestizos also conceived of such vocalizations. Thus, rather than seeing the nineteenth century (or the colony) solely as the site of constitution of Western theories about the other, I prefer to understand it as a contested site of different acoustic practices, a layering of contrastive listenings and their cosmological underpinnings. The different practices through which such listenings have been historically inscribed, in bodies, on stone, on skin, and on paper, through rituals and through writing, are, to be sure, marked by highly unequal power in the constitution of the public sphere. But that does not mean that their significance disappeared or was completely erased. Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier has a Ph.d. in ethnomusicology from Indiana."

⁴ Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Jennifer Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

Stoever continues "Because racism seems to be a 'discourse of power that thinks with the eyes' in a culture driven by an 'overdetermined politics of looking,' sound has served as a repository of apprehension, oppression, and confrontation, rendered secondary—invisible—by visually driven epistemologies." Her 19th century case studies range from Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* and Harriet Jacob's 1861 *Incidents*; Performing the Sonic Color Line in the Antebellum North: The Swedish Nightingale and the Black Swan; Preserving 'Quare Sounds,' Conserving the Dark Past: the Jubilee Singers and Charles Chestnut Reconstruct the Sonic Color Line."

Stoever's main critical theoretical concepts are the sonic color line and "listening ear."

⁵ Jennifer Stoever also notes that race is often treated as a visual phenomenon and how we understand it sonically is the focus of her work as well as many others, including Nina Sun Eidsheim, Kira Thurman, etc.

⁶ Ochoa: As historical work on audition intensifies, the question is raised as to whether the deaf ears of history were those of an epochal moment when the gaze was privileged above all other senses in the West (Jay 1993), or whether listening practices were always there, hidden by the fact that the traces left by audibility are enmeshed with different practices, a listening to be found in the nooks and crannies of history, dispersed across several fields and sites of knowledge and sound inscription.

⁷ In fact, the difference between the sounds and sights of violence was one of the strongest markers of trauma for Parisians versus those outside the city. The rest of the world was privy to sights - rather than sounds - of catastrophic violence. As Howard Brown analyses in his study of visual representations of the Commune, graphic lithographs of corpses and executions - 'every gory aspect described in shocking detail' - fed an avid desire for macabre sights of a society coming undone. After May 1871, tourists bought photographs of Paris's smoldering ruins, and the photographed corpses of Communards were likewise readily available for purchase. Intriguingly, these images perpetuated an iconography of violence that lacks the sounds (and smells) of the first-hand accounts. Smith's work on the Civil War reminds us that images retain 'tantalizing traces' of the sonic, but it is essential to consider that the very technologies that preserved the visible violence of the year's events often occluded the sonic traumas endured by those within earshot.

⁸ Camp is also inspired by Ariella Azoulay's evocative proposal to "watch" rather than to simply "look at" images. Of Gilroy, Camp writes: In his foundational writings developing the conceptual framework of the Black Atlantic, Paul Gilroy defines sound and music, in particular, as a crucial modality of what he calls "a politics of transfiguration." His musical transliteration of a sonic politics of transfiguration invites us to attend to the "lower frequency" through which these transfigurations are made audible and accessible. Taking inspiration from Gilroy, it is through sound that I seek a deeper engagement with the forgotten histories and suppressed forms of diasporic memory that these images transmit. I theorize sound as an inherently embodied process that registers at multiple levels of the human sensorium. To invoke another counterintuition that serves as a second point of theoretical departure, while it may seem an inherent contradiction in terms, sound need not be heard to be perceived. Sound can be listened to, and, in equally powerful ways, sound can be felt, it both touches and moves people. In this way, sound must therefore be theorized and understood as a profoundly haptic form of sensory contact. My arguments in the chapters that follow extend the range and scope of our understanding of sound by returning to the fundamental definition of what constitutes sound and sonic perception, starting deliberately and specifically with the lowest sonic frequencies of all." She analyses "quiet photographs"—those of identification photography, paying attention to both the quiet and quotidian. Also quotes Fred Moten, 2003 *In the Break*.

See also: Kennetta Hammond Perry's work suggests to us the ways in which attending to an archive through the sensory—particularly sound—can open tell us unique things about state power and racialized violence."

Kennetta Perry, Director of Stephen Lawrence Research Centre and Reader in History at De Montfort University, Leicester. I enjoyed her talk, "Sights and Sounds of State Violence" about David Oluwale on Jan 27 2021. This talk seeks to explore what reading David Oluwale's archive through the sensory registers of sight and sound can tell us about how the power of the state is engineered, mobilized and sustained in such a manner that systematically suborns, sanctions and silences anti-Black violence, civil injury, distress, harm, and death. Perry is also building off the idea of "an archive of dispossession" which I believe is in reference to Karen Roybal's work *Archives of Dispossession: Recovering the Testimonios of Mexican American. Herederas, 1848-1960*.