

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*, this article reveals a topography of Parisian sonic violence. As Mark M. Smith and Jennifer Stoeber have analyzed, experience of sound is 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.