

Colloquy

Music, Sound, and Trauma

MARIA CIZMIC and JILLIAN C. ROGERS

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Introduction

MARIA CIZMIC and JILLIAN C. ROGERS

Music and sound frequently play significant roles in experiences and representations of trauma, and in the last decade music scholars have

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participated in a series of critical interventions in trauma studies. From their unique disciplinary perspective, they have asked crucial questions. How do sound and music contribute to and heal the physical, mental, and emotional effects that occur in post-traumatic contexts? How does music figure in expressions of personal and cultural trauma? The resulting work on music and trauma is a vibrant subfield that addresses a wide range of musics and employs various methodologies. The essays here—which are purposefully eclectic in their engagement of different cultural contexts, musical genres, methodologies, and modes of writing—contribute to this growing subfield. The authors utilize psychological and therapeutic frameworks in some instances, consider socio-cultural contexts and implications in others, and focus on individual and collective healing. They understand trauma as individual, collective, and cultural, recognizing that it can range from an exceptional event to a part of everyday life and social structures.¹ The heterogeneity of this colloquy thus reflects both the broad range of concerns that exists under the umbrella of “trauma studies” and the wealth of musical and sonic experiences that intersect with trauma.

The contemporary concept of trauma developed in Europe during the late-nineteenth century. Industrial labor and railroad travel caused accidents, and doctors found that survivors suffered mental as well as physical injuries. Early ideas about trauma as psychological damage involved the work of medical practitioners, insurance companies, corporations, legal institutions, financial systems, and the state.² At this time, Europe’s leading neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot, studied and treated people with hysteria, a diagnosis that was long unfairly associated with women.³ The next generation of neurologists—Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, and Joseph Breuer—laid important groundwork for current understandings of psychological trauma.⁴ Research into trauma surged after the First and Second World Wars. In the US during the 1970s, psychiatrists working with Vietnam War veterans and feminist psychiatrists who drew attention to sexual violence developed the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which entered the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980.⁵

Trauma thus became a recognized, dominant, and multidisciplinary paradigm of our time, and for the last three decades, those working in trauma studies have sought to understand the psychological effects of violence on individuals and how catastrophic events can shape collective identities. As a medical concept, trauma has implications for individuals and societies,

1. Brown, “Not Outside the Range.”

2. Harrington, “Railway Accident”; Caplan, “Trains and Trauma.”

3. Micale and Lerner, “Trauma, Psychiatry”; Micale, *Hysterical Men*; Goetz, Bonduelle, and Gelfand, *Charcot*.

4. Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*; Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; van der Hart and Friedman, “A Reader’s Guide”; van der Kolk and van der Hart, “Pierre Janet.”

5. For historical overviews, see Luckhurst, *Trauma Question*, chapter 1; Bond and Craps, *Trauma*, chapter 1; and Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, chapter 1.

extending to healthcare, labor, education, and social justice. As a cultural concept, trauma studies examines how media outlets represent events and how artists express suffering. Within the humanities, scholars have considered issues including the ethics of bearing witness and the problematics of vicarious trauma.⁶ As a result, definitions of trauma have changed over time and been shaped by various disciplines. And yet, several core ideas have anchored research and debate across the fields of mental health, the social sciences, and the humanities. Traumatizing events are those that fundamentally uproot a person's sense of safety—whether through a single event, an ongoing set of experiences, or a proximity to violence. Mainstream conceptions of PTSD understand that trauma affects an individual's memory and sense of time, leading to a range of symptoms. Some manifestations are intrusive, like the unbidden return of memories in flashbacks and nightmares; others are numbing, as with repression and dissociation. Because traumatic events injure people physically, emotionally, and socially, psychiatrist Judith Herman describes recovery as a process of rebuilding a sense of embodied safety, creating social connections, and narrating a life story that accounts for the trauma.⁷ She begins her landmark work, *Trauma and Recovery*, by writing that “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.”⁸ Humanists also wrestle with this foundational paradox, asking: what are the imperatives and limits to representing trauma and pain? As Elaine Scarry's work demonstrates, people may find it difficult to communicate physical pain at the same time that many circumstances—medical, personal, social, political—prompt us to do just that.⁹ Her work resonates with the emphasis on language in therapy, literature, history, and film, in that many personal and social barriers to expressing trauma exist, and yet expressive language can help people process trauma.

The founding of trauma studies in the humanities—anchored by the so-called Yale School in the 1990s—arose out of key works by literature scholars Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and psychiatrist Dori Laub, among others.¹⁰ Deeply connected to Holocaust studies, their theories developed from the intersection of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. Both Caruth and Felman focus on post-WWII European philosophy, literature, and film that addresses the Holocaust through self-consciously disrupted aesthetic conventions that register trauma's psychological, personal, and social disturbances. Their project has an

6. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*; Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*.

7. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. See also van der Kolk, *Body Keeps the Score*, “Trauma Spectrum,” and “Compulsion to Repeat”; van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, *Traumatic Stress*; and Brown, “Not Outside” and *Cultural Competence*.

8. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

9. Scarry, *Body in Pain*.

10. Hartman, *Longest Shadow*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience, Literature in the Ashes, Trauma*, and *Listening to Trauma*; Felman and Laub, *Testimony*.

Adornian homology at its core, advancing that aesthetic forms can mimic post-traumatic psychological and social experiences, most notably through fragments, repetitions, and gaps.¹¹ More broadly, the Yale School has faced many criticisms, including for problematically presenting their views on trauma in a universalizing manner.¹² Through these unfolding debates, the Yale School and their critics, including historians Dominick LaCapra and Ruth Leys,¹³ address themes that have persisted in trauma studies: trauma as an epistemological crisis; trauma as a way to think about how we relate ethically to each other; and trauma as a representational challenge to aesthetic form, mediation, and reception.

Since the 2000s, trauma studies has become increasingly interdisciplinary, leading both to broader applications and to further debates about the nature of trauma. The contributions of sociologists—including Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, and Kai Erikson, among others—raised important questions about whether trauma studies had focused on individuals at the expense of social dynamics.¹⁴ Alexander characterized cultural trauma as a social construction, created by communities when violent events challenge their collective identity. In his work on slavery as cultural trauma, Eyerman demonstrated that the meanings people ascribed to slavery changed over the course of American history, revealing that cultural traumas are often subject to debate.¹⁵ In this sense, cultural trauma emerged as a discursive concept and subject in flux—an understanding of trauma quite different from those based in earlier psychodynamic models. Consequently, resulting work on intergenerational trauma highlighted the connections between individual and cultural trauma, and thus between subject and society.¹⁶ Recent postcolonial interventions have further extended understandings of cultural trauma.¹⁷ Stef Craps argues that an ethical practice of trauma studies requires scholars to examine suffering caused by

11. Luckhurst's *Trauma Question* is an excellent exploration of this conception of trauma; he directly engages Caruth and Felman in pages 1–15.

12. Caruth and her interlocutors share a frame of reference grounded in the post-WWII global north; consequently, it seems reasonable to understand their theories as culturally and historically specific rather than universal. Additionally, Caruth's argument that the literary representation of fragmentary memories is a central way to access historical truth about trauma has been much debated. See Bond and Craps, *Trauma*, 73–83.

13. LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust and Writing History*; Leys, "Traumatic Cures," "Death Masks," and *Trauma*.

14. Alexander, *Trauma*; Alexander, et al., *Cultural Trauma*; Eyerman, Alexander, and Butler Breese, *Narrating Trauma*; Eyerman, *Memory, Trauma*; Erikson, *New Species of Trouble* and "Notes on Trauma."

15. Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, chapter 1.

16. Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*; Rosner, *Survivor Café*; Abraham and Torok, "Secrets and Posterity."

17. Ward, *Postcolonial Traumas*; Andermahr, *Decolonizing Trauma Studies*; Rajiva, *Postcolonial Parabola*; Ifowodo, *History, Trauma*; Eyerman and Sciortino, *Cultural Trauma of Decolonization*; Buelens, Durrant, and Eaglestone, *Future of Trauma*.

colonialisms.¹⁸ This argument seeks to correct the Eurocentrism of trauma studies and instead center cultural positionality, for if trauma is at least in part socially constructed, then scholars must remain sensitive to the culturally specific ways that people understand and represent traumatic experiences.

While advocating for an inclusive understanding of trauma that emerges from this interdisciplinary conversation, we also recognize that pitfalls arise when people use the word “trauma” without specificity. It is crucial to avoid false equivalencies between different traumatic experiences; blurred distinctions between victims, bystanders, witnesses, and perpetrators; and rigid notions about what trauma “should” look like. What people experience as trauma is not always predictable—the same events might leave one person with PTSD and another largely unscathed.¹⁹ In response, Herman proposes the term *complex trauma*—the idea that a person’s life experiences, mental health, and past traumas are interconnected.²⁰ Additionally, psychiatrist Laura Brown argues that people’s outward expressions of internal disequilibrium are profoundly shaped by culture.²¹ In blending clinical ideas with approaches from history, sociology, and literary studies, trauma studies in the humanities is not an endeavor to “diagnose” texts, people, and cultures; its purpose is to wrestle with epistemological and ethical questions.

As a set of frameworks and debates, trauma studies has prompted considerations of how music and sound become woven into different traumatizing and post-traumatic experiences. Suzanne Cusick’s influential work on music and torture illuminates how music and sound can cause physical pain and psychological trauma.²² Other music scholars have explored bearing witness to trauma through musical form, embodied performance, and film music.²³ Unlike the Yale School scholars who have focused almost solely on the disruptive aspects of trauma, music scholars supplied a counterweight to that bias by considering music’s role in reparative responses.²⁴ In the resulting wave of music studies, conversations typically centered on wars, state violence, gendered violence, the Holocaust, and commemorative practices.²⁵ Although there is more work to be done, this scholarship

18. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*.

19. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*, 52.

20. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 176–78.

21. Brown, *Cultural Competence*, 7.

22. Cusick, “‘You are in a place’” and “Towards an Acoustemology.” See also Daughtry, *Listening to War*; Greitzer, “Queer Responses”; and Johnson, “Touch of the Violin.”

23. Cizmic, *Performing Pain*; Sprigge, *Socialist Laments*; Wlodarski, *Musical Witness and George Rochberg*; Maus, “Sexuality, Trauma”; Heel, “Trauma and Recovery”; Baumgartner and Boczkowska, *Music, Collective Memory*; Fauser and Figueroa, *Performing Commemoration*.

24. Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*; Rogers, *Resonant Recoveries*. For another example of reparative responses in music studies, see Cheng, *Just Vibrations*.

25. Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust*; Chang, “Exilic Suffering”; Barney and MacKinlay, “Singing Trauma”; Hung, “Sounds of Asian”; Cumming, “Horrors of Identification”;

included contributions by cultural historians, musicologists, ethnomusicologists, music theorists, music educators, and music therapists, and has thus been pluralistic in terms of methodologies, musical genres, and sonic geographies.²⁶

In recent years, waves of racialized and gender-based violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and wars have continued to affect people's lives and dominate media. It is in this context that this colloquy's authors explore how music, sound, and trauma intertwine. This colloquy demonstrates how studying sound and music enriches understandings of post-traumatic responses beyond those conveyed in conventional language. And yet, we express our ideas about music, sound, and trauma in words. Our authors employ different modalities of writing because the demands of representing trauma in language are relevant to scholarly writing.²⁷ Importantly, each offering reflects on the writing process itself—how do we as music scholars position ourselves in relationship to the stories about sound, music, and trauma we choose to tell?

Erin Brooks excavates the role of sound in trauma's development as a modern concept in nineteenth-century France. Brooks finds sonic traces in archival sources and examines how testimonies of traumatizing sound-events during the Franco-Prussian war require consideration of the authors' social, cultural, and geographical positionalities. Brooks draws on postcolonial work on trauma to emphasize positionality, which she describes as encompassing how people hear sound from their physical locations and their cultural, ethnic, and political positions.

Composer-scholar Jenny Olivia Johnson purposefully deviates from academic modes of writing to reflect on trauma's effects on her life, ethnographic scholarship, and musical compositions. Johnson's essay is a musico-poetic composition that uses aporias and fragments to perform the essay's subject. By interweaving personal, musical, scholarly, and mediated encounters with trauma, Johnson provides a complex picture of trauma that includes loss and grief. Throughout, she reflects on the issue of positionality by contemplating her personal experiences of grief and trauma²⁸ and asks questions about the ethics of addressing trauma in music composition and scholarship.

Imani Danielle Mosley and Eric Hung consider the ethical stakes of representing cultural traumas resulting from racism. Mosley discusses hip-hop artist Lil Baby's performance at the 2021 Grammy Awards, which represented police violence as both personal and collective Black trauma. Reviewing Twitter feeds posted during the Grammys, Mosley found that many viewers,

Kerman, "Terror and Self-Pity"; Mangaoang, "Dancing to Distraction"; Calico, *Arnold Schoenberg's A Survivor*; Anderton, *Rubble Music*.

26. Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*; Daughtry, *Listening to War*; Bradley and Hess, *Trauma and Resilience*.

27. LaCapra, *Writing History*; Rajiva, *Postcolonial Parabola*.

28. Intersections between grief and trauma have long been studied; see Wolfelt, *Reframing PTSD*; and Volkan, "On Not Letting Go."

particularly Black women, experienced this performance as a site of retraumatization. When are performances of trauma culturally beneficial? When do they potentially retraumatize audiences? Hung reflects on related issues from his position as a public musicologist who self-consciously writes about Asian American cultural trauma. He discusses the difficulties and socio-political importance of wrestling with traumas that Asian Americans have faced, prompting consideration of how we tell stories about music and trauma. What are our responsibilities to those we write about and for whom we write?

Our moderated interview with Molly C. Doran, Sarah Gerk, and Mary Ellen Ryan offers another piece that departs from typical scholarly prose. Doran, Gerk, and Ryan all research music and trauma preceding 1870—nineteenth-century opera, Irish famine and emigration, and the Sack of Rome, respectively. As music and sound scholars who work on historical periods before the development of trauma as a modern concept, they must contemplate how to engage with modern trauma studies sensitively. In their conversation, Doran, Gerk, and Ryan discuss the various challenges and benefits of doing historical research on music and trauma. The format reveals some of the process of developing this colloquy: since so much of trauma studies examines modes of knowledge and expression, the interview's form permits the integration of multiple viewpoints and highlights how scholarship arises from such collective engagements.

To close our colloquy, Fred Everett Maus writes about how trauma and recovery can be mapped onto music. Maus anchors their contribution in the work of Melanie Klein—an influential psychoanalyst who combined deep indebtedness to Freud with pervasive, provocative revision—and integrates insights from their training in the Bonny method of music therapy. Through consideration of personal experiences of trauma, therapy, and music, Maus illustrates ways of perceiving music as metaphors for responses to traumatic experiences, offering a theory of musical meaning.

Each contributor to this colloquy has found the various questions, ideas, and methodologies of trauma studies useful because they have also been personally relevant. Each author addresses their investment in music and trauma, albeit in various ways. The stakes of openly recognizing our relationships to trauma in scholarship responds to the fact that “traumatized” as an identity has long been stigmatized. Instead of understanding trauma as something of which to be ashamed—a neoliberal understanding that burdens the individual—music research can work towards destigmatization by examining the socio-cultural forces that shape trauma. Indeed, this colloquy arises out of an awareness that naming musical representations and experiences of trauma for what they are illuminates the ubiquity of trauma in our world, tells us about the range of musical and acoustical responses to trauma, and potentially has therapeutic value for those who, as a community, value music.²⁹

29. The co-conveners extend a heartfelt thank you to the reviewers, *JAMS* editors, and *JAMS* editorial board members for the care with which they provided insightful and helpful feedback.

“When the Echoes of the Last Shots Have Ceased”: Hearing Nineteenth-Century Trauma

ERIN BROOKS

“The cannon’s vibration still lingered in the ears, the shaking of the spirits did not ebb away and the despondency of the dead city persisted.”—Augustine-Malvine Blanchecotte³⁰

In the midst of a project on France’s *l’année terrible*, I pondered traces of historical sounds in thousands of photographs, memoirs, newspaper chronicles, and medical writings.³¹ Straining to hear across a gap of roughly 150 years, I also considered the “silence” of the “archivally unknown”—individuals and sounds missing from these documents—and my own positionality as a white American woman living in the twenty-first century, who has her own various relationships to trauma.³² In attempting to understand how sound could be linked with trauma at this historical moment, a rich web of connections emerged around the cultural contingency and subjectivity of sound and trauma, both in the late-nineteenth century and today. I’ll begin with a few general comments on entanglements between trauma and sound, the necessity of disciplinary redress in connecting these phenomena, and analogous methodological conundrums of studying past traumas and historical sounds.

My main case study analyzes the role of sound during France’s *l’année terrible*, exploring how sonic wartime trauma was experienced, understood, and contextualized in disparate ways impacted by political affiliation, class, geography, and gender. Early scholarship on trauma by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and psychologist Pierre Janet emerged in this moment—including occasional links between trauma, war, and sound—but their work also resists discussing (or even acknowledging) many kinds of trauma. In the historical aftermath of the war, I query how connections between trauma and sound in one context can coexist in complex ways with other kinds of traumatic listening, as in the juxtaposition of metropolitan sonic trauma with colonial listening. Ultimately, I argue that positionality—both listening positionalities and positionalities in traumatic experiences—is pivotal to understanding sound’s connections to trauma in the nineteenth century and today.

30. Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d’une femme*, vii.

31. *L’année terrible* was Victor Hugo’s term for France’s “terrible year” of 1870–71, encompassing the Franco-Prussian War, the siege of Paris, and the Paris Commune.

32. “Archivally unknown” comes from Laite, “The Emmet’s Inch,” 979. Laite’s work is cited in a longer examination of archival violence, distortion, and historical erasure—and potential methods of redress—by Miles in *All That She Carried*, 17–19, 27–29. Among many works on positionality and music scholarship, see Bissett Perea and Solis, “Asking the Indigeneity Question.”

At the turn of the twentieth century, Janet observed the rich sensory context—images, odors, bodily sensations, and *sounds*—of traumatic memories.³³ In relation to the Iraq War, J. Martin Daughtry explained that sounds are both tactically salient and a “profound source of trauma.”³⁴ Sound and trauma not only coexist in such varied contexts, their commonalities also intertwine in particularly consequential ways. Invoking knowledge “stored in our bodies as wordless stories,” Resmaa Menakem reminds us that trauma is something that “always happens *in the body*.”³⁵ Trauma also disrupts temporalities, both through past experiences revisited in the present, as well as via memory and what Marianne Hirsch has called postmemory, or “intergenerational acts of transfer.”³⁶ As wordless, sensory, embodied knowledge, or as a disruptive force straining against certain epistemologies, trauma seems profoundly akin to sound.

Many authors have explained how trauma uniquely straddles individual, collective, and intergenerational experiences, shaped by and shaping positionality.³⁷ Dylan Robinson’s work reminds us that “race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and cultural background intersect and influence the way we are able to hear sound, music, and the world around us”; Robinson calls for a “critical listening positionality,” an attempt to understand the “moment of contact between listening body and listened-to sound.”³⁸ Bringing together trauma theory and sound studies foregrounds how our positionalities frame how sounds can be traumatic, triggering, didactic, healing, or cherished. Yet connecting sound with trauma necessitates disciplinary interventions. Although trauma theory’s emergence in the humanities aims for “cross-cultural ethical engagement,” Stef Craps details four failures among foundational texts:

[T]hey marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favor or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas.³⁹

33. Janet, “Histoire d’une idée fixe,” 126.

34. Daughtry, *Listening to War*, 5.

35. Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands*, 5, 7 (emphasis original).

36. Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*.

37. On collective trauma, see Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*; and Erikson, “Notes on Trauma.”

38. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 10–11. Other important work on listening, positionality, and race includes Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*; and Stoeve, *Sonic Color Line*.

39. Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, 2. On culturally informed healing modalities, see Comas-Díaz, “Racial Trauma.”

Postcolonial scholars defend the potential of a decolonized trauma theory, but much remains to be done. Sound studies shares such failures; surveying the discipline, Gustavus Stadler called for contending with “the underlying whiteness of the field” and for interrogation of vague yet ubiquitous terms such as “the listener,” “the body,” or “the ear.”⁴⁰ Thus, connecting sound and trauma—while vitally important—demands caution and redress.

As a powerfully interdisciplinary subject of cultural, psychiatric, and medical study, conceptions of trauma have often been shaped by catastrophic events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and 9/11.⁴¹ Analyzing trauma in earlier eras requires constructivist, temporally appropriate methodologies, underscoring Allan Young’s dictum that trauma is *not* a timeless, universal phenomenon.⁴² The late-nineteenth century is a particularly consequential era for such study. Mark Micale places the beginnings of the trauma concept in psychological medicine of the 1870s, noting that political events, social phenomena, and medicalized discourse helped forge a “proto-science of mental trauma” during this period.⁴³ Young adds that a new “traumatic” memory coalesced by the century’s end, connected to emerging theories about repression and dissociation.⁴⁴

Connecting historical understandings of trauma with contemporary modes of hearing or listening engenders thorny methodological challenges. Maria Cizmic, Daughtry, Joshua Pilzer, Jillian C. Rogers, and others have published foundational work connecting trauma with sound/music in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, but studying a more distant past, particularly prior to sound recordings or in circumstances marked by archival violence, is immensely difficult.⁴⁵ As Glenda Goodman argues in her essay on colonialist archives in eighteenth-century America, “in the face of scarce or inscrutable sources, what is needed is methodological inventiveness, not resignation.”⁴⁶ And scholars have risen to the challenge, locating sonic residue remains in nineteenth-century sources. Ana María Ochoa Gautier’s work on auralities details methodologies for an “acoustically tuned exploration of the written archive” and historical sounds inscribed beyond the written text.⁴⁷ Tina M. Campt’s work on identification photography

40. Stadler, “On Whiteness.”

41. Many authors note that conceptions of trauma should not focus solely on a singular event.

42. Young, *Harmony of Illusions*, 5; Micale and Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts*, 6–7.

43. Micale, “Jean-Martin Charcot,” 138.

44. Young, *Harmony of Illusions*, 3.

45. Cizmic, *Performing Pain*; Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*; Wlodarski, *Musical Witness*; Daughtry, *Listening to War*; and Rogers, *Resonant Recoveries*. On archival violence, see Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.

46. Goodman, “Joseph Johnson’s Lost Gamuts,” 486.

47. Ochoa Gautier, *Auralities*, 3, 7.

uses sound to disrupt the colonial archive; she notes that choosing to “‘listen to’ rather than simply ‘look at images’ is a conscious decision to challenge the equation of vision with knowledge.”⁴⁸ Gleaning understandings of nineteenth-century sound and trauma necessitates listening against the grain—a sonically, somatically, and psychologically attuned listening to historical testimonies, wherever they are found.

Through listening to images, reading for sound, or reconstructing aural traces, the archive of France’s *l’année terrible* discloses an overwhelming sonic density. From the declaration of war on July 19, 1870—when singing citizens flooded the streets—to shots and screams in late May 1871, Paris was riven by what Daughtry has termed *belliphonic* sounds (sounds produced by armed combat).⁴⁹ Some sounds recalled a familiar vocabulary: revolutionary songs from 1789, 1830, and 1848, the *rappel* and *générale*, bells, bugle calls, and the clanging of stone barricades. Other sounds transformed Paris, such as the uncanny quiet during the winter siege, shelling which shattered the typical tranquility of Père Lachaise Cemetery, or wholly new noises such as the *mitrailleuse* (a volley gun that fired multiple rounds in rapid succession). Martin Kaltenecker and Mark M. Smith have explained how such unfamiliar sounds can intensify psychological distress in wartime.⁵⁰ Below, I share just a few anecdotes detailing the year’s sonic impact, moving from the January 1871 bombardment to “the bloody week” (*la semaine sanglante*) of late May 1871.⁵¹ These examples demonstrate differential experiences based on geography, gender, class, and politics during bombardment and street combat; each also attracted contemporary psychological commentary.

Belliphonic noise sickened some Parisians during the January bombardment. Stationed on city fortifications, composer Vincent d’Indy listened to shelling, a horrible whistling which provoked shivers and cold sweat “upon hearing this terrible crescendo.”⁵² Due to contingencies of gun placement, certain neighborhoods were disproportionately impacted, including the Montrouge commune and the 5th and 14th *arrondissements* (the Barrière d’Enfer, the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, the Observatoire, and the Panthéon).⁵³ Psychiatrist Henri Legrand du Saulle observed that some affected residents suffered from insomnia, tremors, inability to straighten the body, hypervigilance, and “*mélancolie avec stupeur*.”⁵⁴

48. Camp, *Listening to Images*, 6. On sound vs. ocularcentrism, see Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*; Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*, 13–21; Sterne, *Audible Past*, 3–18; and Stoever, *Sonic Color*, 3–4.

49. Daughtry, *Listening to War*, 3.

50. Kaltenecker, “‘What Scenes!’” 9; Smith, *Smell of Battle*, 95–97.

51. For more see Brooks, “Sonic Scars.”

52. D’Indy, *Histoire du 105^e Bataillon*, 100–1.

53. Legrand du Saulle, *Le délire*, 498.

54. Legrand du Saulle, 498–501.

During the *semaine sanglante*, the Versaillais army pushed eastward, brutally retaking Paris street by street. Hiding in her house near the Jardin du Luxembourg, Augustine-Melvine Blanchecotte listened during the night of May 23 to the awful din of machine guns, explosions, cannon fire, screaming shells, the racket of paving stones, shrieks from combatants, and thuds of falling bodies.⁵⁵ On May 25 in the Faubourg St. Honoré, Lillie de Hegermann-Lindenchrone opened her door to “the yelling and screaming of the rushing mob; it is dreadful, the spluttering of the fusillades and the guns overpower all other noises.”⁵⁶ She lamented that music failed to assuage her profound anxiety, and incessant noise rendered her unable to sleep, function, or change her clothes. Fires swept Paris, blurring vision and intensifying noise’s psychological impact—Edwin Child wrote that it seemed “all day we could hear that terrible din that never ceased for an instant not knowing at what moment our own turn might arrive.”⁵⁷

After the May 28 massacre in Père Lachaise, thousands of Communards were executed and buried en masse at La Roquette, the École Militaire, the Parc Monceaux, the Lebau Barracks, the Luxembourg Gardens, and the Jardin des Plantes. Carts bearing corpses rattled across the city for weeks; other casualties were buried at night. Blanchecotte wrote in her diary on June 13 that “[the] sound of shells, which I thought incomparable, was only innocent music beside these most recent noises. . . . The dreadful task imagines it is silent, as it imagines itself to be without witnesses.”⁵⁸ These sounds lingered in Parisians’ minds; in June, Émile Zola noted that the nightmares of millions could only begin to heal once the sounds quieted.⁵⁹

This flood of personal accounts demonstrates a spectrum of reactions to *l’année terrible*—including traumatic responses to sound—but period medical discourse also pondered the year’s impact. Publications tallied increases in hospitalizations or particular diagnoses, such as French psychiatrist Bénédict-Augustin Morel’s June 1871 report of a striking increase in a distinct type of intense anxiety (*panophobie gémissante*).⁶⁰ Writers repeatedly queried potential connections between political events and madness, drawing on both early nineteenth-century conceptions of *folie* (madness) by Étienne-Jean Georget and Esquirol, and pejorative theories about predisposition and degeneracy.⁶¹

55. Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d’une femme*, 277.

56. Hegermann-Lindenchrone, *In the Courts*, 326, 334.

57. Diary held in King’s College, London; cited in Richardson, *Paris under Siege*, 186.

58. Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d’une femme*, 348–49.

59. Zola, “Lettres de Paris.”

60. Laurent, *Revue médicale*, September 28, 1872, quoted in Glazer, “De la Commune,” 64–65. Morel, *Du délire panophobique*, 5–6.

61. Copious literature connecting crowd psychology, class, revolution, degeneracy theory, and transmission of trauma through heredity appeared in the wake of *l’année terrible* (including well-known works by Hippolyte Taine and Gustave Le Bon). See Glazer, “De la Commune”; and Brooks, “Sonic Scars.”

Other research in *l'année terrible's* aftermath, however, revolutionized early medicalized discourse on trauma. Charcot—who experienced the war first-hand—newly focused on “hysteria” in working-class men. Connecting intense fright, unconscious mental processes, and physical symptoms, Charcot observed that events could create a loss of sensation seemingly unrelated to any physical wound, noting potential delays between an event and onset of symptoms. Janet, who studied under Charcot, published a series of works in the 1890s on involuntary actions and obsessions or fixations (*idées fixes*). Janet believed in “painful memories . . . subconsciously fixed in the psyche,” inaccessible due to dissociation—and that traumatic memories were often experienced through sensory remnants of an original event, such as sounds, smells, or images.⁶²

Only a few of their cases reference wartime trauma, such as Charcot's narrative of “D...cy” in *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière* (1889)—provocatively focused on belliphonic sounds and a subsequent traumatic lightning strike—or Janet's example of a French soldier's 1870 case of frostbite and later impacts in *Névroses et idées fixes* (1898).⁶³ Their work offers tantalizing evidence, but also frustrating limitations due to contemporary cultural frameworks. They do not, for example, attend to wartime trauma among civilians, and they fail to ask more precise questions about connections between physiological reactions and psychological phenomena. More subtle links, however, may also connect *l'année terrible* with early trauma theory. Micale notes the six-year “lag” between 1870–71 and Charcot's first publication on traumatic male hysteria as “the same as the duration between the American involvement in the Vietnam War and the formulation of the diagnostic category of post-traumatic stress disorder.”⁶⁴

Whether detailed in memoirs or medical discourse, Parisians clearly experienced the sounds of *l'année terrible* in radically different ways depending on political affiliation, social class, geography, gender, and race. Anti-Communards heard the *tocsin* on May 21 as the sound of deliverance, while the belliphonic chaos of *la semaine sanglante* struck Commune Louise Michel as “beautiful” revolutionary sounds.⁶⁵ Geographies of sonic violence reveal not just intersections of politics and class in nineteenth-century *arrondissements*, but also contingencies of gun placement and proximity to particular battles.⁶⁶ Gender structured both experience and interpretation; analyzing the initial hours of the Commune,

62. Micale, *Traumatic Pasts*, 14; Janet, *L'Automatisme Psychologique*; van der Kolk and van der Hart, “Intrusive Past.”

63. Charcot, *Leçons du mardi*, 437–40; Janet, *Névroses et idées fixes*, 300–2.

64. Micale, “Jean-Martin Charcot,” 122. The question of “latency” has been important in several waves of trauma theory; see Caruth's reinterpretation of Freud's concepts in *Unclaimed Experience*.

65. Goncourt, *Paris under Siege*, 294. On nineteenth-century hearings of the *tocsin*, see Brooks, “Sonic Scars,” 104–5; and Michel, *Red Virgin*, 66.

66. On class, politics, Parisian neighborhoods, and paths of the Versaillais army during *la semaine sanglante*, see Tombs, *War Against Paris*, 147.

Gay Gullickson details how contemporary bourgeois male commentators framed voices of working-class female revolutionaries as abject noise.⁶⁷ Ultimately, analyzing *l'année terrible* reiterates both the interconnected nature of sound and trauma and the crucial positionalities of “listening body and listened-to sound” in sonic histories.⁶⁸

Scattered among a network of detention camps, forts, and prisons, more than 4,500 Communards were eventually deported to the New Caledonia penal colony in the South Pacific. *Déporté* memoirs, letters, and newspapers detail their experiences in rich sensory detail, such as Achille Ballière’s narrative of the nightmarish ocean voyage (including abuse that triggered memories of shells and gunshots).⁶⁹ *Déportés* and penal officials deployed culturally constructed diagnoses such as “mental alienation,” *idée fixe*, or “fatal nostalgia” to understand and discipline chronic and complex trauma.⁷⁰

As Alice Bullard explains, Communard *déportés* were considered “savage destroyers of civilization” by the metropolitan government, yet they were still expected to colonize New Caledonia for the French state.⁷¹ While these *déportés* vehemently protested the carceral regime—and in rare instances the colonizing mission itself—their interactions with the landscape, the Indigenous Kanak, and Kabyle *déportés* (fellow inmates imprisoned after the 1871 Mokrani uprising in Algeria) were nonetheless marked by colonial modes of perception.⁷² *Déportés* were therefore prisoners and colonizers, traumatized by belliphonic sound yet hearing through colonial ears. Understanding *l'année terrible* and its impacts demands a nuanced attention to these entangled histories.

Writing about French Guiana’s penal colony, Patrick Chamoiseau rejected colonial histories of documents, statues, and monuments. Rather, he advocated an anti-authoritative, affective “memory trace”: attending to oral memory, landscape, corporeal knowledge, murmurs, sighs, and silences.⁷³ As this essay contends, the imperative to listen differently—and for difference—when dealing with the traumatic past is clear. Hearing occluded histories, whether joyous or traumatic, necessitates precisely this kind of listening to memory: a centering of resonances, echoes, and testimonies through bodies and across time.

67. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, 35–37.

68. Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 11.

69. Ballière, *La déportation de 1871*, 157. For a bibliography of *déporté* writings, see Bullard, *Exile to Paradise*.

70. Bullard.

71. Bullard, 72.

72. On limitations of Commune “universalism,” and encounters between Communard and Kabyle *déportés*, see Plaetzer, “Decolonizing the ‘Universal Republic.’” Amongst copious scholarship on affect and (anti)colonial modes of perception, see Fanon, *Dying Colonialism*, chapter 2.

73. Chamoiseau, *French Guiana*, 5–9.

Quietly, With Ghosts

JENNY OLIVIA JOHNSON

August 2021

[redacted]

*

April 2021

[redacted]

*

February 2021

[redacted]

*

September 2020

[redacted]

*

October 2021

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. . . . this is the meaning of the word **unspeakable**.⁷⁴

Atrocities, however, refuse to be **buried**. . . .

Folk wisdom is filled with **ghosts** who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told.⁷⁵

*

July 2020

I begin writing this essay by conducting an interview with ——. This will be the second of five conversations that will take place between us, all approximately three hours in length.

74. The original version of this essay featured a series of words marked in red ink. In this version, those words appear in bold typeface.

75. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

These conversations with — were largely about their personal and musical experiences with — —, who is alleged to have —, —, —, —, and — — — —. This person also created “— — —,” which is regarded by many as a paragon of artistic greatness.

In each conversation with — the story will both repeat itself and change, like music; it will incite (in me) flavors of rage both righteous and poisonous. It will make me hear a lot of things differently.

July 2020

[redacted]

*

October 2021

Atrocities, however, refuse to be **buried**. . . .

Folk wisdom is filled with **ghosts** who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told.⁷⁶

Like scratched LPs, these earworm fragments have spun repeatedly under the needle of my inner turntable ever since the night I first read Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* in one sitting, sometime in the fall of 2002, several months after one of my closest friends had died by suicide.

It is now nineteen years since my first encounter with Herman and with trauma studies. It is a time that I find myself in the grip of both another personal trauma (the sudden loss of my father in June 2021) as well as incalculable global, collective ones. It is also a time I find myself unable to write this essay.

I can't write this essay. I can't.

Let me explain what I mean.

[Although I am tempted not to; I am tempted to leave the rest of it blank.]

[If this were a commission for a piece of music, it would probably contain large gaps of silence, or at least some semiotics of silence (but sidestepping Cage⁷⁷ —

that is definitely not the brand of silence or void I would intend to reference here)⁷⁸.]

*

76. Herman, 1.

77. Cage, *Silence*.

78. See Wollen, "Girls Own the Void," profiled by Power in "Towards a Feminism of the Void."

August 2021

[redacted]

*

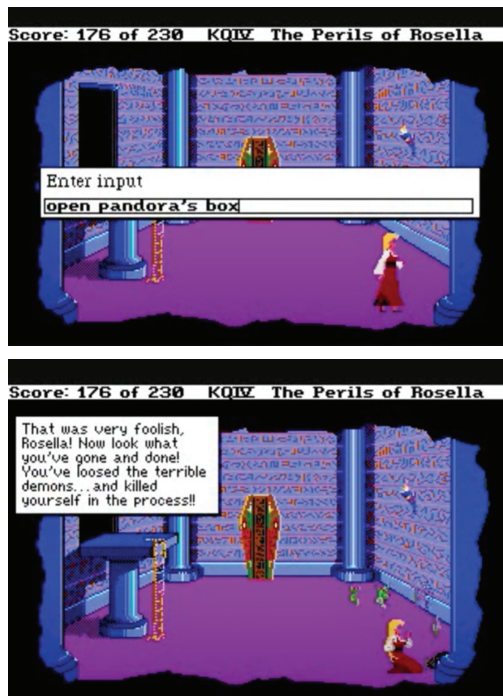
February 2022

I really do understand, —.

It's just that—well, I have spent years trying to write about trauma through sound.

I felt very strongly for a long time that telling our **ghost** stories, and describing their abilities to manifest so mysteriously and profoundly through musical vibrations, could help others—

(—if only my attempts to do so didn't again and again and again lead to a re-closing of the door, a re-lidding of the box—).⁷⁹



Figures 1a & 1b Screenshots from the RPG PC game *King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella*. Sierra Games, 1989.

79. *King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella*. (You can't hear it through these images, but the accompanying 16-bit music is absolutely terrifying.)

My first conclusion is that unspeakability is sometimes an endemic feature of trauma that deserves to be respected, and left at peace in its grave.



Figure 2 Screenshot from the RPG PC game *King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella*. Sierra Games, 1988.

My second conclusion is a paraphrase of Danielle Brown's recent work—"if you're not telling your own stories, someone else is telling them for you"⁸⁰—and a reckoning with why I wanted to, or ever thought I could, speak for someone else.

*

December 2007
[redacted]

*

January 2012
[redacted]

*

October 2021
For a long time, my work on trauma was ethnographic; I interviewed survivors of childhood sexual abuse and under conditions of anonymity would share certain details about the roles that music and sound played in their remembering and negotiation of these events many years later.

80. Brown, "My People."

Many of these stories were heartbreaking, harrowing shards of glass—stories that couldn't cohere, that had splintered; memories that felt at once massively present in a somatic sense and incredibly elusive in a narrative one. My interlocutors would describe their traumas in languages of the senses and the body—as shapes, colors, echoes—and in many cases it was relevant music and sounds that comprised the **skeleton** keys that could unlock these secretive traces and forces.



Figures 3a, 3b, 3c, & 3d Screenshots from *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, dir.). Studio Canal, Universal Pictures, and Bac Films, 2001.

(In David Lynch's Mulholland Drive, two women who meet under traumatic circumstances find a mysterious blue box that is locked.)

(They are later compelled to attend an intensely emotional musical performance, after which one of them suddenly finds a blue key.)

My suspicion (strongly, at the time) was that for many childhood trauma survivors, these uncertainties about the truths of their own lives—and the long **burial** of their traumatic experiences by people they were afraid to tell, or by their own (societally encouraged) impulses to “banish them from consciousness”⁸¹—were in fact the real traumas.

I therefore began my research with the ardent belief that the stories of trauma survivors deserved to be heard, even (and especially) when these stories were, in a normative sense, “untellable.”

I focused in particular on the phenomenon of synesthesia (the ability to experience music visually and somatically, as colors, smells, or tactile sensations). I was interested in thinking about whether musical synesthesia could in certain cases be understood as involuntary modalities for remembering and processing a trauma that is triggered by sound, in ways that “shatter” the intensity of the original experience into glittering fragments that might be experienceable as beautiful or intriguing, if not also mysterious, unsettling, or confounding.⁸²

*

August 2021

[redacted]

*

October 2021

It is easy for me to say now (and I do, with utmost sincerity) that I embarked upon this work with the best of intentions. I genuinely wanted to help others by bringing the mysteries of trauma to light, while also emphasizing their inherent complexity and ambivalence.

81. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

82. Johnson, “Luminous Noise.”

And yet: not an insignificant number of the survivors I worked with on these projects later asked me to omit their testimonies, or to not go forward with publishing work involving their experiences.

Each person's reasons for doing so were unique, but all of them said some variation of the following:

"This is my story, and if it gets told, I should be the one to tell it."

*

February 2023

The best parts of my intellectual life are . . . in areas outside my expertise. I suppose because within my area of expertise the regulations they have placed upon me make it impossible to know or understand anything. The science of xenology insists on more mysteries.

—Orson Scott Card, *Speaker for the Dead*⁸³

*

February 2022

Twenty years ago today I received the call from your mom that you had **died**. (Her voice from that call still rings in my ears, almost every day: "Sera has **died**.")

I was in grad school for composition, and I wrote a piece for you: "Lucy Songs (for Sera Bilezikian)." I tried to fill it with things you loved, and things I loved about you: punk rock (The Clash, L.E.S. Stitches, Avail), *The Waste Land*, a memory of us dancing half-naked in muddy rain, you playing Debussy, your wonderfully strange laughter.

Of course, all these points of inspiration became filtered through my particular grief. ("Is this really punk rock?" a fellow composer once asked me.) I tried to be punk rock, but it turned into a kind of wacky, microtonal musical theater. The things about my own musical tastes that you always made fun of me for, ha.

For me, "Lucy Songs" is a red-pink piece, because your name is a beautiful hot pink edged with glossy black nailpolish. The only other name (in my synesthesia) with those same colors is "Lucy," so I chose it for you.

83. Card, *Speaker for the Dead*, 5.

Example 1 Score excerpt from the author's *Lucy Songs (for Sera Bilezikian)*. © Jenny Olivia Juice Music (ASCAP), 2004. Used by permission of the author.

62 **H** $\text{♩} = 80$

Fl. *pp*

Ob.

Cl.

A. Sax

Bn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

B. Tbn.

DX-7/
Piano *mp*

Perc. 1

Perc. 2 *mp*

Perc. 3 *mp*

Perc. 4 *mp* *l.v. sempre*
triangle

M-S. *f*
Aq - ua Net... Mud - dy rain...

H $\text{♩} = 80$

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

Cb. *p*

(continued)

Example 1 continued

63

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

pp

A. Sax

Bn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

B. Tbn.

DX-7/
Piano

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

M-S.

Nak - ed lawn... Bell - y rings...

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

Cb.

(continued)

Example 1 continued

64

Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
A. Sax
Bn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
B. Tbn.
DX-7/
Piano
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
M-S.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Vc.
Cb.

Dir - ty sex...
Deb - u - ssy...

Example 2 Score excerpt from the author's *Lucy Songs (for Sera Bilezikian)*. © Jenny Olivia Juice Music (ASCAP), 2004. Used by permission of the author.

32 *whispering* **B**

Fl. Ob. *Shan tih*

Cl. B. Cl. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Bn. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Hn. *whispering* *Shan tih*

C Tpt. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Tbn. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Perc. 1 *glock.*

Perc. 2 *crystal glass* *l.v.* *pp*

Perc. 3, 4

Pno. *amplified with slight reverb* *gva* *con ped. mf*

M-S. *eyes still closed; laughing "inwardly"* *f* *with added delay reverb to microphone:* *Ha!*

B

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Vc. *whispering* *Shan tih*

Cb. *whispering* *Shan tih*

(continued)

Example 2 continued

34

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

B. Cl.

Bn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

M-S.

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Va.

Vc.

Cb.

gva

do not release pedal until sound completely fades

Ha! Ha ha! Ha ha! Ha!

*I know I treasure things too much,
Instead of pushing them aside.*⁸⁴

(In 2020 I created DIVE (Lucy's Last Dance), a full-scale replication of the dive bar we used to go to together in NYC. The picture of us to the left of the Pabst sign is the one you made for me.)



Figure 4 Interior photograph of the author's *DIVE (Lucy's Last Dance)*. Exhibited at the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, February 2020–February 2021.

I knew you suffered from what we might call “depression.” I knew you struggled. I knew your struggle was indelibly intertwined with your punk politics, your disavowal of patriarchy and normativity, your strident disbelief in the status quo, and your adherence to disruptive, glittery noise. You moved to Richmond and we didn’t speak much after that, but I knew you were living a version of your truth that felt closer to anything you were able to reach when we were going to school together in New York.

Going “into the **death**”—investing in (rather than divesting) exceptional groups and individuals, upsetting the delicate balance of death/life—may be a tactic of counter-resilience. . . . I call this tactic “melancholy.”

[M]elancholia can also manifest as the failure to **die** in the right way, at the right time, or at the right pace.

[I]f you don’t **die** in precisely the way hegemony has bet you will, then it won’t make the returns it anticipates and counts on.⁸⁵

Six years later I received your mom’s call. But I actually wasn’t able to access my grief about you until a year and a half later, in 2003, when someone jumped from the top floor of the library of the school where I had just started my PhD.

84. Avail, “Song.”

85. James, *Resilience*, 19–20.

I was there in the library. I remember the sound—the awful, awful sound. I started laughing uncontrollably (I don’t know why; I think you would have too?)—

At the premiere of “Lucy Songs,” a mutual friend told me that she felt you were there.

“Sera was there in the room with us,” is what she said.⁸⁶

*

October 2021

Herman’s decision to call upon the **supernatural** as a metaphor for trauma has always made intuitive sense to me. **Ghosts** and traumatic experiences are both imbued with mystery. We can’t truly know what they are, at least in any complete sense; countless studies, from the nineteenth century to the present day, emphasize trauma’s overwhelming and inchoate forms.⁸⁷

Similar feelings often accompany **ghost** stories. A sensed presence from another realm, a sound with no discernible origin, an unbidden memory with no origin—**ghosts** and trauma both defy logical understanding.

At the same time, legions of studies of trauma—including the DSM-V⁸⁸—rely upon seemingly stable definitions of trauma, or at least its aftereffects. Surely Herman herself subscribes to the notion that trauma is knowable and quantifiable, even as she deftly acknowledges its strangeness.

March 2022

This strangeness that Herman invites me to contemplate through her invocation of **ghosts** inspires me to turn to other dossiers on **haunting** and sound. Louis Chude-Sokei’s descriptions of the “**ghostly** sound world[s]” afforded by the “fragility of overused tape” in dub music and Rastafarian practices.⁸⁹ Njelle Hamilton’s poetic musings on mix-tapes and their ways of “keeping even **ghosts** of voices present in the mix.”⁹⁰ Robin James’s injunction to “think with and through musical works” to consider how to “recycle **death** and damage into life.”⁹¹ Imani Danielle Mosley’s examination of the “practiced silences” of Black women in the time of slavery, which reinforced a “**death-in-life**, a reminder of the *state of injury* in which Black

86. Karen Feder and Alarm Will Sound’s performance of “Lucy Songs (for Sera Bilezikian)” (2004) is on SoundCloud. The section discussed here begins at timestamp 12:54.

87. See Freud, “Aetiology of Hysteria”; and Ferenczi, “Confusion of the Tongues.”

88. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

89. Chude-Sokei, *Sound of Culture*, 170.

90. Hamilton, *Phonographic Memories*, 165.

91. James, *Resilience*, 22, 24.

women lived,” and also in some cases provided protection from further trauma.⁹²

These insights send me away from the prescribed journey of talk therapy—to speak the truth, to let it be known, at all costs—and into a realm much more complex, a realm in which I listen much more than I speak.

*

February 2022

— — writes to me to tell me that I should go ahead and publish [redacted], because they are certain they will **die** soon.

*

March 2022

I am asked to write a piece in memory of Magdalen Christian, beloved Program Coordinator of the Wellesley Music Department, who passed away very suddenly in October of 2021.⁹³

The piece I compose is titled “For Magdalen (to be played by Eliko).”

I didn’t think to connect it to “—— ———,” until now.

*

October 2021

Herman’s invocation of **ghosts** at the beginning of *Trauma and Recovery* refers to spirit presences that haunt the realm of the living because something vital on Earth remains undone. She equates these **ghosts** with traumatic experiences that have been “banished,” either from consciousness or polite society, and which desperately want recognition, even revenge.

Her analogy is certainly reflected in countless North American pop-culture representations of **ghosts** and **spirits**, whose stories center on unresolved issues that must be addressed. *The Sixth Sense* features a ghost child who tells the protagonist—a living child—that her mother poisoned her to death, and impels him to contribute to her comeuppance. *Poltergeist* tells the story of a **cemetery** that was built over with tract housing in 1980s suburban California; the angry **dead** reclaim this land by **haunting** the

92. Mosley, “Say Her Name,” 147.

93. Fuck cancer.

house of one of the real estate developers and kidnapping his young daughter into an unknowable realm between life and **death**. *Ghost* is about a successful banker who is brutally murdered in front of his wife, by a hitman hired by his deceptive best friend; he remains a **ghost** on Earth to figure out a way to communicate this information to her, using (uncomfortably) the body of a Black female medium to speak for him.

Yet many other kinds of **ghost** stories—especially ones from outside Western / US culture—feature situations that are not (nor should be) resolvable. Yuki Urushibara's Japanese manga series *Mushi-Shi* follows the story of a placid young wanderer who is able to communicate with **spirits**, a gift he uses to help a variety of living people in need of **supernatural** assistance. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 2010 film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall his Past Lives* immerses viewers within a remote and rural corner of Thailand, in which **ghosts** sit at dinner tables with the living and are regarded with calm (if unnerved) reverence. Akwaeke Emezi's 2018 novel *Freshwater* describes the experience of a Nigerian child who is an *ogbanje*, in Igbo ontology; their body is shared with a number of **spirits**, and they are described as having been born "with one foot on the other side." When the child grows up, they must reckon with their liminal identity, and come to a place of inner peace and understanding with their body's co-inhabitants.

In these stories, **ghosts** aren't here with us to make us do particular things for them, nor help them restore an equilibrium to situations that were disrupted by their having **died** and been **buried**. They are simply presences with whom we have no choice but to share space.

What if trauma could also be regarded this way? As something that deserves respectful quiet just as much as it may deserve recognition and telling? As a presence that requires us to sit wordlessly with its complexity, even as we work to assimilate its painful aftermaths into our own life stories?

What if, like the torn black ribbons pinned to the clothes of the **grieving** in Judaism,⁹⁴ there was a widespread tradition of indicating to others that one is currently sitting with a trauma, a **ghost**?

And what if that person, so recognized, could automatically receive public respect, recognition, and grace in the forms of time, privacy, and access to care that aligns with their cultures and values?

*

March 2022

(I know you suffered from what we might call "depression." I know you struggled. I know your struggle was indelibly intertwined with your fears of and

94. Klug, "Jewish Funeral Customs."

anger about what the world seemed to be becoming, and that this was largely a decision.)

(I am sitting with that.)

*

October 2021

Most studies of losing a parent indicate that at some point I will be “better.”

So far, the much more truthful pearl of wisdom I have received is from my uncle, who, once we knew my dad was going to **die**, told me the following:

“You won’t be better, you won’t be worse, you’ll just be different.”

*

March 2022

I realize, composing the piece for Magdalen,⁹⁵ that it wasn’t silence I was asking for. It was quiet.⁹⁶

*

May 2022

(I don’t know when or if I’ll ever be able to write music for you. I hope you understand if I don’t. But maybe one day I will)

(Meanwhile, I am sitting quietly with you)

(I am listening)⁹⁷

95. Akahori’s performance of “For Magdalen” (2022) is on YouTube, at timestamp 55:12.

96. See Pilzer, “Yi Suyong.”

97. Many thanks to Jillian C. Rogers, Maria Cizmic, Magdalen Christian (1959–2021), Eliko Akahori, Sera Bilezikian (1978–2002), Karen Feder, Alarm Will Sound, — —, my mother, Cyndy Johnson, and my father, William Courtland Johnson (1952–2021).

Example 3 Score from the author's *For Magdalen*. Used by permission of the author.

♩ = 86 (approx; freely)
ritualistically, as though praying

pp

use pedal springly, if at all

8

14

♩ = 90 (approx; freely)

(sparkling like a diamond)

20

26

(continued)

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece titled 'For Magdalen'. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It is divided into five systems of music. The first system begins with a tempo and mood instruction: '♩ = 86 (approx; freely)' and 'ritualistically, as though praying', followed by a dynamic marking of 'pp'. A performance instruction 'use pedal springly, if at all' is placed below the first staff. The second system starts at measure 8. The third system starts at measure 14 and includes a tempo change to '♩ = 90 (approx; freely)'. The fourth system starts at measure 20 and includes the instruction '(sparkling like a diamond)'. The fifth system starts at measure 26 and ends with the word '(continued)'. The notation includes various note values, rests, and phrasing slurs.

Example 3 continued

watery, as though swimming
(in this section, try to make every single iteration of these two chords
somewhat unique, while always quiet and placid)

32

(barely audible; a whisper)

38

as though falling asleep; put yourself in a trance...
rit.-----

44

(we want the f# but we can't have it)

50

hold until sound
completely fades

56

♩ = 50 (approx; freely)

ppp *pp*

“Can I Enjoy One Award Show Without Having to Think About Black Death?”: Music, Politics, and the Trauma of Performed Reenactment

IMANI DANIELLE MOSLEY

“This is what Black death-as-spectacle is, we consume and commodify Black death, we can’t understand it without visualizing it & when it’s visualized it becomes a site of desire.”—Mosley⁹⁸

I tweeted the above immediately after watching Lil Baby’s performance of “The Bigger Picture” at the 2021 Grammy Awards. That night, the Grammys broadcast centered itself around performance in a way that was unusual; the COVID-19 pandemic had reshaped events like award shows, and producers were looking for innovative ways to keep the show going. The approach taken by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) was to feature boutique performances by artists rather than padding the event with banter from hosts. Showing artists on stages watching, listening, and reacting to one another perform gave the feeling of an event in which musicians were there to celebrate other musicians rather than a made-for-television pageant. The focus on live performance also gave artists more freedom with how they presented their work: Taylor Swift’s reconstructed cabin in the woods, Billie Eilish’s fog-submerged car, Megan Thee Stallion’s Harlem Renaissance-era nightclub. It was these conditions that made a performance such as Lil Baby’s possible.

Throughout the night, television audiences were told to stay around for a powerful performance. Positioned as the last event of the night, Lil Baby performed his 2020 hit song “The Bigger Picture” outside the Staples Center on the streets of Los Angeles. The song was his response to the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as well as the renewed Black Lives Matter protests that occupied that summer. In addition to becoming an anthem for the movement that surged throughout the summer of 2020, the song was also a huge commercial hit, debuting at no. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 and leading to its Grammy nomination. Lil Baby’s Grammys performance was an outgrowth of the song’s popularity and its message; music critics Mankaprr Coneth and Brittany Spanos wrote, “Just like with the song, this performance had to reflect the real.”⁹⁹ In what follows, I chronicle the performance as it moved through real time.¹⁰⁰ Doing so outlines how the discrete parts of the performance contributed to an already-existing narrative and discussion around the sonic and visual representation of Black male death as a gendered death-spectacle, and how that death-spectacle has come to represent rap in the 2010s.¹⁰¹

98. Mosley, “This is what Black death-as-spectacle is.”

99. Coneth and Spanos, “Watch Lil Baby.”

100. The performance is on Lil Baby’s official YouTube page.

101. Mosley, “Say Her Name.”

The performance begins with a reenactment, recalling the 2020 murder of Rayshard Brooks in Lil Baby's hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. Two white male police officers approach a car where a Black man (Brooks), played by *Insecure* actor Kendrick Sampson, is sleeping. One police officer knocks on the car window, gesturing for "Brooks" to step outside, after which the officers motion for "Brooks" to turn around. From an overhead angle, we see "Brooks" handcuffed and pushed to the ground by the officers. In an attempt to get up from under the weight of one officer, "Brooks" gets up to run and is shot immediately by them. The overhead shot cuts to a ground shot, in which all three actors are in plain view until the officer goes to shoot "Brooks"; the resulting visual shift provides a partial view with a close-up on the officer's profile. None of these camera angles are neutral, and they inform how the viewer should see what is happening. The aerial shot, for example, imitates the view from drone planes used by the American government overseas, used more often than not to target and kill civilians. The obscured close-up also deliberately mimics the partial view that often occurs with police-involved killings, whether from bystander footage or from police body cameras. The *New York Times's* investigation of Brooks's murder focused heavily on *seeing*, piecing together fragments of video from various sources to complete the incomplete picture presented by the police.¹⁰² We see nothing of "Brooks" until the camera turns sharply ninety degrees; Brooks is now dead, lying face down (insinuating that he was shot in the back) at the feet of Lil Baby as he begins "The Bigger Picture."

The reenactment is sonically sparse; there is no music and at first no sound other than knocks on the car window from the police and bells tolling in the distance.¹⁰³ As the police pull "Brooks" out of the car, we hear a voiceover of the Black author James Baldwin, accompanied by a descending piano ostinato bass that sounds almost lament-like:

When I was growing up, I was taught in American history books, that Africa had no history, and neither did I. That I was a savage, about whom the less said, the better. Who had been saved by Europe and brought to America, and of course, I believed it. I didn't have much choice.¹⁰⁴

The text comes from Baldwin's Cambridge (University) Union debate with conservative pundit William F. Buckley in 1965, in which the two responded to a proposed motion: "The American dream is at the expense of the American Negro."¹⁰⁵ In a pivotal moment in Baldwin's speech, he spoke to the cyclical nature of the Black American experience and the inability to escape

102. Browne et al., "Killing of Rayshard Brooks."

103. It is not clear from the video if the bells are meant to be diegetic. They are not part of the song's original track and they could be understood as a setup for the orchestral accompaniment we hear shortly after. Either way, the presence of tolling bells has profound significance, marking the tragedy that is about to occur.

104. For a full transcript, see Baldwin, "American Dream."

105. Baldwin.

public belittling, public shame, and public death: “Nothing you have done, and as far as you can tell nothing you *can* do, will save your son or daughter from having the same disaster and from coming to the same end.”¹⁰⁶

Using Baldwin’s voice and this specific text as a part of Lil Baby’s performance situates the performance and the song itself in line with a specific kind of protest, perhaps one that would be less familiar to the audience watching on television.¹⁰⁷ Setting the moment of reenactment to Baldwin’s text thus reinforces both its cyclicity (dangerous interactions with the police) and its inevitability (public death). This reenactment is also doubly mediated as, for most people, their way of learning about these racially motivated murders is on television, through mainstream media. The performance conveys what a real-life media portrayal would contain, itself a digestible version of the altercation, captured and/or viewed through bystander cameras and followed by images of protests framed as destruction of property. In this way, the performance has the capacity to re-present trauma to listeners and watchers because it uses tools that are already well established within the American necropolitical state: television/mass media, music and sound, and spectacle.

The constructed rendition of Brooks’s murder occupies the first thirty-five seconds of the performance, shaping the song’s interpretation by its viewers. The opening scene centers the message of “The Bigger Picture” not around activism (though that appears later on) but around death, specifically a mediated and visualized Black male death-as-spectacle.¹⁰⁸ There are noted musical differences between the original song and how it was performed at the Grammys: the album version opens with clips from media and news outlets mentioning a rise in protests and unrest. This technique is similar to other rap songs from this period that include the addition of sonic markers and signifiers that remind the listener of the mediated aspect of these death moments: police sirens, various sounds from protests, and most notably, newscasts.¹⁰⁹ The hyperreal aspects of the Grammys performance make those opening sonic signifiers redundant, thus moving those markers away from the sonic and back to the visual. Replacing those sounds with a silent, visual skit achieves the same goal, reminding us from the very beginning that the song—as well as the performance—is about witnessing death.

Generally, the spectacle of Black male death is framed around embodiment, witnessing, and desire. It begins with an initial interaction between the Black subject and the State, an interaction that is *always* witnessed. That witnessing is then re-presented for the masses not as information, but as a site of

106. Baldwin (emphasis original).

107. The 2021 Grammys had the lowest viewership in the show’s history with only 8.8 million viewers. Notably, the 18–49-year-old demographic also dropped drastically, down 60% from the previous year’s telecast, shrinking the number of people who may already be engaged with social movements. Gettel, “Grammy’s Fall.”

108. The official music video is set in the Black Lives Matter protests that followed George Floyd’s murder during the summer of 2020.

109. Examples of songs that include these sonic signifiers include Jim Jones’s “The People,” Icewear Vezzo’s “No More Pain,” and Denzel Curry and Terrace Martin’s “Pig Feet.”

consumption of Black bodies for (white) pleasure. The social consumption of Black death recalls the well-attended public lynchings of Black people in the United States, as described by Ida B. Wells: “The nineteenth-century lynching mob cuts off ears, toes, and fingers, strips of flesh, and distributes portions of the body as souvenirs among the crowd.”¹¹⁰ The Black body is literally made piecemeal for white consumption to satiate white pleasure and desire.

In many rap songs that discuss fatal encounters between people and the police, the spectacle is crucial to the telling of the story—a way to ground the song in a kind of authenticity. That need for authenticity may explain rap music’s attraction to spectacle, but as Marvin Jones observes, the performance of authenticity is not monodirectional:

... Black identity through the lens of the dominant perspective is by definition alien and savage. He is received not as subject, but as an object onto which whites may project their fears. They do not hear a counternarrative, they hear the drum beats; *they gaze at the spectacle* and consume a cultural experience, as they would a trip to Africa, *with a voyeuristic relish*, but without empathy for the people who produced it.¹¹¹

In the quest for authenticity, rap artists—in the eyes and ears of their (white) audience—are instead perceived as objects, unable to wield the control over which they claim ownership. The horror of an artist’s lived experience, as told through music, becomes a site of voyeurism rather than a moment of shared community. Desire and control are superimposed onto Black artists (and bodies *via* spectacle), asserting a racial viewing over which the viewed has no control and no agency. This imposed voyeurism sits at the heart of a trauma studies analysis: is it possible to share one’s own traumatic experience in a way that does not reproduce or reinflict trauma on both the teller and the audience? Although desired, authenticity may be too painful to express accurately and without the objectification imposed by a voyeuristic, white gaze. What arises then can be a kind of minstrel performance, claiming authenticity but existing primarily to voyeurize and satiate.

And after a year of heightened focus on Black Lives Matter and the art resultant from that moment, Lil Baby gave a hyperperformance of spectacle at the Grammys.¹¹² Dancers representing protesters move amid clouds of smoke meant to resemble tear gas, and various men in shadow stand against a wall made to look like a police lineup. Then, sharply, the music drops out and we are transported to another location; activist Tamika Mallory¹¹³ stands behind a podium covered in microphones, echoing the earlier speech from Baldwin, but now calling for urgent change:

110. Wells Barnett, “Lynch Law,” 20.

111. Jones, *Race, Sex*, 58 (emphasis added).

112. Spectacle continues beyond the moment of death in the many re-presentations of the initial act, whether that be through anti-Black mockery, memefication, reduction of the moment to a single phrase, still, or physical gesture, or in the public trial of the Black subject.

113. Mallory has herself been the subject of recent debate within the Black Lives Matter movement, fueled by her decision to appear in Lil Baby’s performance. Samaria Rice, activist

It's a state of emergency. . . . My people, it's time we stand, it's time we demand the freedom that this land promises . . . and to accomplish this, we don't need allies, we need accomplices. It's bigger than black and white, this is not a trend, this is our plight. Until freedom.

The music returns as Lil Baby moves through the dancers-as-protestors standing face-to-face with police armed with riot shields. But the moment is short-lived as the camera pivots to another vignette, now featuring rapper and activist Killer Mike of Run the Jewels, standing in front of dozens of microphone stands. This section, like the previous scene with Mallory, highlights the pervasiveness of the media in the act of perpetuating spectacle. The visualization of actual Black male death through both social and mainstream media is a twenty-first century version of Wells's *body-as-souvenirs*; in witnessing, capturing, and spreading the images of those being murdered, mass media employs a commodification of those bodies.¹¹⁴ The desire, or pleasure, in owning Black suffering motivates the media's continued reliance on replaying death—on turning death into death-as-spectacle.

All of these visual and sonic aspects of Lil Baby's performance have the potential to evoke and invoke trauma in its audience, and the idea of protest music as a site of retraumatization becomes even more calcified. From the inclusion of bucket drummers placed within the midst of the protest to the background dancers and actors chanting "until freedom" or the performance's punctuated use of silence, the song as performed here is far more rooted in the sounds of protest than anything else. The performance ends with Lil Baby, standing atop a Los Angeles Police Department squad car, rapping the chorus as a refrain without a background track:

It's bigger than black and white
It's a problem with the whole way of life
It can't change overnight
But we gotta start somewhere
Might as well gon' 'head start here
We done had a hell of a year
I'ma make it count while I'm here
God is the only man I fear

The stripped-down accompaniment and absence of the song's original background trap beats and percussion almost acts as a way to separate it from its songness and place it squarely within the sounds and sonic markers of protest. Instead of music, a concentrated fireworks display goes off behind him, but these are not fireworks one might associate with awe and splendor. They are sonic and visual representations of the State: loud,

and mother of Tamir Rice, criticized Mallory publicly for this in a now-deleted Facebook post (screenshot by @_Rawilcox; https://twitter.com/_Rawilcox/status/1371469645153234946).

114. The commodification of Black death is an accusation that many made in the wake of Lil Baby's performance, including Samaria Rice and others.

bright, and overpowering. They are akin to the fireworks thought to be used by various police departments in cities throughout the United States to terrorize citizens during the summer of 2020.¹¹⁵

Since the creation of the genre, death has loomed large over rap artists and their work. But it has only been recently that a discussion of death has been coupled with trauma, stemming from the very real possibility of a violent, *witnessed* death by the police. As Lil Baby himself remarks: “I’m still thinking about it—it’s still something that I gotta face. I’m still that same guy who could fall asleep in my car one night, and I could wake up to the police in front of me.”¹¹⁶ But instead of processing that trauma, rap—in its songs of protest—chooses to *represent* it, in turn representing it for all who listen. The incessant foregrounding of Black male death-as-spectacle in rap music can result in a type of retraumatizing for listeners and viewers, and Lil Baby’s performance was no exception. My personal retraumatization and immediate need to seek out other voices during and after the performance speaks to the performance’s problematic power and was the inspiration for this essay. In response to the Grammys performance, critic Aisha Harris wrote that she was “starting to become numb to artists/creators using the imagery of police shootings of black people in their work,”¹¹⁷ going on to call police brutality “its own pop culture genre at this point.”¹¹⁸ The title of this essay was taken from a tweet from a user who, after watching Lil Baby’s performance, summarizes the exhaustion experienced by Black Americans being continually subjected to the unending cycle of death-as-spectacle: “The message Lil Baby gave was good ofc but can I enjoy one award show without having to think about black death *I’m so tired*.”¹¹⁹ A response to that tweet echoes the sentiment: “everywhere is us dying and it’s getting tiring.”¹²⁰ The prevalent sonic and dramatic language of rap songs about death by the State is currently built upon this kind of embodied traumatic performance. And as artists continue to grapple with the world around them—as they should—listeners should continue to demand more than musical reenactments of trauma. It is unclear how artists can best discuss these issues without retraumatizing their audience (and themselves); perhaps it is not possible and is therefore a risk that music must take. Regardless, we should be able to enjoy one award show without having to think about Black death.

115. Tiffany, “The Boom in Fireworks.” This kind of sonic terror occurred with the increased use of low-flying helicopters, flashbangs, and grenades in cities such as Richmond, Virginia throughout 2020 in response to renewed focus on the removal of Confederate statues as well as Black Lives Matter protests.

116. Saint-Vil, “Lil Baby responds.”

117. Harris, “I’m starting to become numb.”

118. Harris, “Almost forgot.”

119. Bagittarius, “the message lil baby gave” (emphasis added).

120. Ali Wali, “i like how.”

Reflections of a Public Musicologist During the Current Wave of Anti-Asian Discrimination

ERIC HUNG

Since the beginning of 2020, Asian American and Asian Canadian communities have been in a constant state of trauma. COVID-19 sparked a wave of anti-Asian discrimination that began even before there were large numbers of positive cases in North America, and it has spiked several times in the past four years. Media coverage of this violence peaked in the aftermath of the Atlanta spa shootings in March 2021, but continued reports of violence (including the 2022 murders of Michelle Go and Christina Yuna Lee) and 2023 studies on the devastating effects of pandemic-related anti-Asian racism in workplaces show that this wave has yet to run its course.¹²¹ Many Asian American community members, especially older women, continue to have reservations about leaving their homes.¹²²

For Asian American studies scholars, this pandemic-related wave of anti-Asian discrimination and the disproportionate effects this violence has had on women are not surprising. Ever since the 1860s, the trope of the diseased Asian has been used to justify anti-Asian violence, anti-Asian immigration laws, and regulations that made it impossible for Asians to enter certain professions or own land in many states.¹²³ In the aftermath of the 1876–77 smallpox outbreak in San Francisco, the city's health officer, J. L. Meares, wrote his official report with a sense of indignation:

[That the Chinese population] should so pertinaciously and willfully disregard our sanitary laws, so criminally neglect to report their cases of small-pox to the authorities, so maliciously pursue that course of conduct which they know is bringing distress upon our city by destroying the lives of our citizens, and seriously impairing the business of the whole community, can only be accounted for on the supposition that they are enemies of our race and people, and in their wickedness rejoice in our distress and sorrow.¹²⁴

Meares's sentiments were echoed in the cartoon on the cover of *The Wasp* in 1882 (see figure 5) and in every subsequent public health crisis with any connection to Asia.¹²⁵ Very often, this trope coupled with Orientalist ideas of the submissive and sexualized Asian woman. Treated as people who can be both

121. Kim and Shang, "Research"; Alfonseca, Webb, and Kim, "Anti-Asian Racism."

122. Liu, "A Year After"; Noe-Bustamante et al., "About a Third."

123. Since the onset of the pandemic, over thirty states have considered or passed land ownership restrictions against citizens of China and other countries that are seen as enemies of the US government. In many states, this restriction applies to documented immigrants. For more, see Behzadi Cárdenas, "National Security or National Origin?"

124. San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *Municipal Reports*, 398.

125. See Trauner, "Chinese as Medical Scapegoats"; Barde, "Prelude to the Plague"; Lansing, "Race, Space, and Chinese"; Shah, *Contagious Divides*; Person et al., "Fear and Stigma"; and Perry et al., "Prejudice and Pandemic."

fetishized and marginalized, Asian women became particularly vulnerable during waves of anti-Asian sentiment. In the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a new stereotype of Asian Americans—the model minority—came to the fore, but the tropes of the diseased Asian and the Orientalist woman persisted. Hypersexualized and submissive portrayals of Asian women still appear in many films and television shows. Meanwhile, it is no accident that the fictional virus in the 2011 film *Contagion* originated in Malaysia.

When the pandemic began, many Asian Americans had very little understanding of why anti-Asian discrimination was rising. This fact is not surprising, as Asian Americans by and large have scant knowledge of our communities' histories and the “diseased Asian” trope; approximately 57% of US residents of Asian descent were foreign-born, and thus for the majority in our communities, Asian American history makes up just a small percentage of lived experiences and family stories. Another key reason is that—with perhaps the exception of Chinese railroad workers and the WWII Japanese American incarceration—Asian American history is rarely taught in K–12 education. Under these circumstances, what is the job of a social justice-oriented public musicologist who works closely with and



Figure 5 “San Francisco’s Three Graces,” cover of *The Wasp*, May 26, 1882. Public domain. Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University (<https://hdl.handle.net/1811/baac0cf8-7dff-410c-8fc0-722cd1f21afa>).

for Asian American communities?¹²⁶ What can someone who uses music and music research to better the lives of the people they serve actually do?

In this essay, I argue that public musicology may have a role to play in alleviating personal trauma. Since trauma is associated with the inability to make sense of or narrativize an experience, public musicologists can help people understand the history behind the current wave of anti-Asian violence. Such work cannot and should never seek to replace the work of professional psychologists or social workers, but it can provide the historical and socio-political information needed for narrative therapy and other treatments. Public musicology can also amplify the cultural trauma narratives that Asian American Studies scholars are promoting. As an art form that attracts a wide variety of people, music can bring these narratives to those who might not otherwise become invested in Asian American experiences. Various types of musicking can also demonstrate the discrimination, resilience, and resistance that are central to these narratives. And, music can add an emotional component to these narratives, helping those who we are trying to reach to both empathize and sympathize with the community's challenges and courage.

In dominant narratives about North American culture, people of Asian descent are conspicuously absent. One way to elicit change is to frame Asian American history in terms of "cultural trauma." As Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, and their collaborators argue, cultural traumas arise when atrocious events affect an entire social group. However, cultural traumas do not arise automatically; instead, they are constructed. Cultural traumas are sometimes created by survivors, but they are more often fashioned and sustained by those who did not have first-hand experience of the atrocious event.¹²⁷ Since the 1970s, the field of Asian American Studies and activists have successfully documented the long history of our communities' trauma, and recovered the stories of those who fought back. Yet, such work has had only limited success at changing the racial discourse in North America.¹²⁸ It appears to me that scholars have begun the cultural trauma process by creating a new Asian American identity that highlights the experiences of our communities through the lens of US racial hierarchies, but we are having trouble maintaining it and convincing people to adopt it.

One major reason for this problem is that scholars have insufficiently communicated narratives that paint the full lives of Asian Americans to non-academic audiences. Put another way, we have not shared enough stories with which people both within and outside Asian American communities can empathize. I was reminded of this issue when I watched the 2020 PBS documentary *Asian Americans*. The five-hour program convincingly discussed the history of discrimination in Asian American history, but it said little about entertainment, food, sports, and other joys that

126. For more on this question, see Magnuson-Hung and Hung, "Opening Conversations."

127. Bond and Craps, *Trauma*, 98–102; Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*; Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*; Muller, *September 11, 2001*; Hung, "Sounds of Asian."

128. Yu, "Has Asian American Studies Failed?"

make life worth living. This lacuna is where I believe public musicology can be helpful. By sharing stories about how Asian Americans use music to express themselves, be entertained, socialize, celebrate, discuss current events, and resist, we can humanize both past and present generations of Asian Americans. This knowledge might then help our communities develop a greater sense of belonging in North America and recognize that we are not alone. During a presentation in May 2021, I played “This is Asian America,” a music video by rapper Jason Chu and the filmmaking team of Michael Tow and Teja Arboleda. It ends with shots of Asian Americans visually screaming yet aurally unheard.¹²⁹ Immediately afterwards, many people in the mostly Asian American audience spoke about how these closing shots perfectly captured their personal experiences and made them realize just how common this feeling of being unheard was for Asian North Americans. With this knowledge, a few said that the video made them see how important it is for them to speak up, particularly in their workplaces.

Since the beginning of the pandemic and this wave of anti-Asian discrimination, my work at the Music of Asian America Research Center (MAARC)—including presentations, programs, and projects—has aimed to help community members develop a better understanding of why these attacks are happening, foster a better sense of belonging, and alter dominant narratives about Asian Americans. Put another way, MAARC is trying to alleviate, in small ways, the trauma that community members feel by helping them understand Asian American history, stereotypes of our community, and the ways these stereotypes work to divide communities of color. At the same time, we are promoting the cultural trauma narratives that Asian American Studies activist-scholars have developed, but have yet to successfully popularize.

In thinking through how to achieve these objectives, MAARC made the decision to focus much of our efforts on helping our audiences—which consist primarily of Asian American adults, multiracial fans of Asian American arts, and educators—understand the Exclusion era. This historical period began with the passage of the second piece of restrictive federal immigration legislation in the United States: the Page Act of 1875, which effectively barred the migration of Chinese women on the presumption that they were coming for “immoral purposes.” Its restrictions expanded with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the Asiatic Barred Zone in 1917, the Immigration Act of 1924 (which further tightened Asian Exclusion), and the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934. Repeal of these laws began in 1943, but immigration quotas for Asians remained exceptionally low until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The Center decided to emphasize this era for three reasons. First, almost all of the anti-Asian rhetoric used in recent years can be traced back to this period. By discussing the experiences of Asian Americans during this period, we could compare how past community members resisted (often through living full lives) this injustice with the actions and strategies we use today. These discussions also

129. This video is available on YouTube.

allowed us to question common assumptions about the inevitability of greater equity, captured by Martin Luther King Jr.'s oft-quoted line, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."¹³⁰ Second, in our interviews and collaborations with musicians, many expressed that they were unable to find Asian American predecessors for their work. This is due not to the lack of Asian American musicians in the early- to mid-twentieth century, but to the fact that historians have largely erased them from history books. By focusing our programming on the Exclusion era, MAARC recovered these voices, with the intention to inspire musicians and our communities today. Finally, Exclusion-era Asian American experiences remain very relevant for many contemporary debates about undocumented immigration, the economic effects of immigrants, and assimilation. These parallels led some survivors and descendents of incarcerated to start the Tsuru for Solidarity movement, which undertakes direct action to support immigrant and refugee communities targeted by racist, inhumane immigration policies.

In the past three years, MAARC has made over two dozen virtual and in-person presentations exploring how Exclusion-era Asian Americans improved their own and their communities' wellbeing through creating and attending entertainment. By focusing on the more enjoyable aspects of life and by discussing artists with interesting stories, we have shown community members how earlier generations of Asian Americans resisted structural racism and violence by reclaiming their humanity through artistic production. Additionally, we could bring Asian American cultural trauma narratives to people who might not engage with history podcasts or political events. One of our earlier pandemic presentations took place via Zoom in July 2020, in a program co-sponsored by the 1882 Foundation and Alexandria (VA) Library. At this time, many in Asian American communities still believed that the pandemic—and, with it, this wave of anti-Asian discrimination—might be relatively short-lived. As a result, Nancy Yunhwa Rao and I began by telling the audience that there is a long history of anti-Asian discrimination in North America. Specifically, we discussed how ethnic enclaves were created largely through ethnic violence, intimidation, and legislation.¹³¹ In the remainder of the presentation, we explored how Chinatown residents in several cities created thriving Cantonese opera and nightclub scenes, and how Filipino American musicians performed in ethnic labor camps, taxi dance halls, and the mainstream entertainment industry. We closed by examining Japanese American music-making in World War II incarceration camps. Overall, we focused on artistic achievement and did not explicitly discuss political issues, at least until the question and answer period of the presentation.

As the pandemic and the wave of anti-Asian discrimination dragged on, however, it became clear that MAARC needed to make our aim of changing dominant narratives about Asian Americans more explicit. This can be

130. King, "Remaining Awake."

131. Hung and Rao, "Asian American Entertainment." A video of this presentation is available on YouTube.

seen in the evolution of my collaboration with Leslie Li, the daughter of Jenée, the third oldest of The Kim Loo Sisters. Daughters of a Chinese “paper son” and a Polish seamstress, the Minneapolis-raised jazz quartet began performing on the vaudeville circuit in the Midwest in the 1920s while they were still adolescents. They eventually became regulars in Chinese cabarets and, in 1939, became some of the first Asian Americans to perform on Broadway. During World War II, the group was featured in a Hollywood film and made soundies. As USO performers, they helped to shift Americans’ perceptions of people of Chinese descent in the immediate aftermath of the 1943 Magnuson Act, which repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act. In the early presentations in Fall 2020, we did not shy away from discussing their experiences of racism, but we focused on the quartet’s achievements. After the Atlanta shootings, however, we decided to foreground these experiences, and asked audiences how the sisters’ experiences compared to what is happening today.¹³² At our AMS Rock and Roll Hall of Fame lecture in March 2022, we expanded our discussion of racism by exploring the racial dynamics of dominant narratives about American popular music.¹³³ Specifically, we asked, “How would including Asian American performers change the story of American popular music in the first half of the twentieth century?” In forthcoming projects, we seek to complicate the dominant immigration narrative by focusing on earlier immigrants who had their citizenships and citizenship rights stripped through Supreme Court decisions, on the experiences of refugees, and on transnational adoptees.

Understanding that presentations and podcasts are unlikely to reach less-privileged segments of our community, I have also sought opportunities to develop education materials for adolescents. As more states begin to require Asian American Studies in K–12 curricula, there is an increasing demand for lesson plans and teacher guides. MAARC also has difficulty reaching older, working-class recent Asian immigrants—primarily those who work at ethnic businesses, deliver our food, and drive taxis and Ubers. In some ways, these are the people who can benefit most from what we have to offer. My hope is that some of the potentially helpful information and ideas we impart might reach their ears through their children. Currently, I am creating a learning pathway—a set of lesson plans for history, music, and language arts teachers—on Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander music for Smithsonian Folkways. Although this pathway includes exercises designed to help students build listening skills and learn key musical concepts, my primary goal is to use music to teach history in ways that can benefit the lives of learners by helping them grasp structural hierarchies with which they will be living, and helping them think about different models of cultural preservation and adaptation. By learning about Asian American history and the stories of many musicians and other

132. A recording of our presentation for the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum is available on YouTube.

133. Hung and Li, “Recovering Early Asian American Voices.”

historical figures, Asian American students can also gain a sense of “representational belonging” that is missing from their history textbooks.¹³⁴

Both public musicology and trauma studies are emerging subfields in musicology. I hope these reflections provide a sense of how their intersection might benefit communities both through alleviating personal trauma and disseminating narratives about cultural trauma to members of the community and beyond. I also want to recognize the limitations of this work. Public musicology and education can support the crucial work of therapists and activists, but it cannot replace it. Instead, we need to assist therapists who are working with community members suffering from PTSD, and we need to rally around—and if possible join—activists who are working to change laws and discriminatory practices. I look forward to collaborating with readers who are interested in working on similar projects or in developing theories about this work.

Approaching Music and Trauma in Pre-Twentieth-Century Histories

AN INTERVIEW WITH MOLLY C. DORAN, SARAH GERK, AND MARY ELLEN RYAN

Numerous scholars have argued for the importance of researching trauma prior to its modern invention, pointing to the fact that people suffer across cultures and history.¹³⁵ Thinking about cultural expressions of trauma across historical periods intersects with recent conversations about the incompleteness of archives. For many reasons, traumatic and painful experiences are often absent or only obliquely present in archival materials. Additionally, wielding historical materials to describe people and cultures in terms that they themselves did not employ understandably makes scholars hesitant. How should we do this sensitive work, especially with historical subjects from the more distant past who cannot confirm that they experienced trauma, or for whom trauma was not in their vocabulary?

To address these issues, the colloquy co-convenors, Maria Cizmici and Jillian C. Rogers, interviewed three scholars whose work focuses on eras prior to the modern development of trauma as a concept. In conversation, Molly C. Doran, Sarah Gerke, and Mary Ellen Ryan shared their thoughts on the challenges and benefits of doing this work, based on their own scholarly research and professional experiences.

Rogers: How did you find your way into trauma studies and how have you used trauma studies in your work?

Ryan: I got into trauma studies at the close of writing my dissertation, which explored sacred music of early Cinquecento Italy and its connections to this period’s disasters. I was intrigued by the different scholarly

134. Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, “To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing.”

135. Astbury, *Narrative Responses*; Brooks, “Sonic Scars”; Meinhardt and Rogers, “Theorizing Trauma.”

frameworks regarding how people cope with collective trauma as well as how they construct narratives around their suffering. Following the Sack of Rome in 1527 and the collapse of Florence's republic, many motets were copied into manuscript; they remain a significant testimony to the violence, plague, famine, and tragic aftermath of these conflicts. The wealthy patrons and sacred institutions who created and preserved this music earmarked its cultural significance for posterity, but they left few traces as to why certain pieces were selected, why they were arranged in particular ways, or what purposes they served in private and public contexts. The motets' contents indicated how this audience likely mourned and prayed for relief from these painful events, and yet the historical record lacks the correspondent reactions of the patrons, musicians, and listeners.¹³⁶

Doran: As I was writing my dissertation proposal, I became interested in how nineteenth-century operas often include disturbing narratives involving women, and how productions either overlook or turn this trauma into spectacle. Des McAnnuff's 2011 production of Gounod's *Faust*, which I first saw in 2012, shocked my senses with its in-your-face depiction of Marguerite's pregnancy, postpartum depression, psychosis, and act of infanticide. I had never before seen a production of *Faust* that confronted so seriously and starkly Marguerite's traumatic narrative and her psychology. Afterwards, I began to ask questions about how the opera engages historical truths surrounding women's suffering in nineteenth-century France and how productions created today can bear witness to those truths.¹³⁷

Gerk: My dissertation illuminates connections between Irish diaspora and US musical life in the nineteenth century.¹³⁸ The Great Famine, in which Ireland lost a quarter of its population in a few years, stands as the signal event in the history of Ireland and Irish emigration. And yet, my research did not substantively address the famine; looking back on it, I think my own ignorance stemmed from a broader scholarly lacuna. When I began expanding the scope of my research, the famine felt like an elephant in the room, so I focused on how the Irish famine shaped music-making in the US. Remarkably, I found very few records that address the famine directly. Applying trauma theory to the absence of musical-historical sources that address the famine in the US became the basis of a new project.¹³⁹

Cizmic: Your projects led each of you to questions about how people used music to respond to catastrophic events. Since trauma studies is

136. See Ryan, "Music as Spiritual Recovery" and "'Our Enemies.'" Ryan explores the content of several motet collections relating to the political disasters in central Italy: The Newberry Partbooks, the Vallicelliana Partbooks, and Florence 125bis (of Florentine provenance), and The Massimo Partbooks and Cappella Giulia XII.4 (of Roman provenance).

137. Doran, "Women's Suffering."

138. Gerk, "Away O'er the Ocean."

139. Gerk, "Songs of Famine."

such an interdisciplinary world, what were some of the first sources you turned to?

Ryan: I started with a basic introduction to the field from writers such as Caruth and Herman and then branched into work by scholars exploring the concept of trauma during my time period.¹⁴⁰ For my topic, the field of biblical studies is especially pertinent, particularly the work of Walter Brueggemann, Elizabeth Boase, and Brent Strawn.¹⁴¹ They argue for the centrality of trauma in understanding Judeo-Christian scripture, and their analyses of psalm texts provided a framework for my readings of numerous motets. In Renaissance literature, Thomas Anderson's engagement with the discursive aspects of form in Shakespeare and Milton provided another example of how one might interpret traumatic resonances within the text. The absence of articulation, or lack of symbolization in their plays, suggests that one way trauma gains potency is in its inexpressible unknowability.¹⁴²

Gerk: I read expansively in Irish history, Irish-American studies, and trauma. Irish famine historiography is curious; there is quite a rich literature on the absence of famine studies.¹⁴³ So my entry into trauma studies was through folks who could contextualize these academic holes, including Herman and Caruth, who write about *not* talking about trauma, and LaCapra, who guides historians to establish truth claims in the absence of traditional archival sources.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, even nineteenth-century folks like Charcot and Freud, who began to define trauma as a medical condition, understood silence as a signal.¹⁴⁵

Rogers: I'm noticing that you both turned to period and subdiscipline-related sources to form an understanding of what trauma looked or sounded like in a particular context, even if people in that context weren't using the word "trauma." Was this the case for you, Molly [Doran]?

Doran: When I began culling through the wealth of primary sources from mid- and late-nineteenth-century Paris using the lens of trauma studies, cultural trauma's pervasiveness became obvious. There are records of thousands of court cases involving women who had been forced into infanticide or abortion. Laws around these acts shifted throughout the century, with lower class women always suffering the most. I also looked to discussions of women's madness and

140. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

141. Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens*; Strawn, "Trauma, Psalmic Disclosure"; Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets are Hid*.

142. Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma*, 3–4.

143. Tóibín and Ferriter, *Irish Famine*; Ó Gráda, "Famine, Trauma, and Memory."

144. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; La Capra, *Writing History*.

145. Charcot, *Lectures*; Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

infanticide in criminology, which was an increasingly influential mode of thinking in France during the later part of the century, and to period medical texts that addressed women's mental health, especially in relation to reproduction and the postpartum period. Although these materials typically omit women's voices, I found that bringing them into dialogue with one another made it clear that major institutions in nineteenth-century France created and perpetuated a culture of women's suffering.

Cizmic: I find it really interesting that you're all dealing with different kinds of silences, absences, and elisions—which of course has been a major theme in trauma studies. Can you each say more about this issue?

Gerk: Elisions is a good word—many people from so many disciplines address memory in different ways. For my work, the archival holes present a challenge. But there's no way that a million people who survived a famine, and then the overseas passage to the US, weren't affected by traumas of starvation and migrations that were sometimes forced. There's a large-scale, sociologically oriented tale to tell. In my work, I note absences and examples that cut through in subtle ways. One example is the popularity in the US of Frederick Crouch's "Kathleen Mavourneen" during the 1850s and 1860s. Crouch wrote this song before the famine and only infers themes of Irish deaths and emigration. I assert that its ambiguities became a useful vehicle for processing memories of the famine. I also study Patrick Gilmore, who was the Union's favorite bandleader in the Civil War and who wore his Irish identity on his sleeve. He foregrounded Irish-American identity in his performances, but he never talked about his own origins in Ireland. I pieced together the town where he lived in the west of Ireland through the height of the famine, leaving for the US in 1849. The areas that he came from were hit hard. There's just no way he didn't witness starvation, and no way that it didn't touch him. But then he didn't talk about it; he wrote memoirs, but never talked about the famine.¹⁴⁶ This situation is typical. Having the records is rare, partially because of traumatic processing and partially because of Ireland's colonial status in the nineteenth century. In that sense, Ana María Ochoa Gautier's words about colonial archives have also helped.¹⁴⁷

Ryan: I study a Eurocentric, polyphonic sacred repertory, sung in Latin, that was written for the educated, upper echelon of society. Record-keeping is usually more robust for the wealthy; for example, one aforementioned musical source was copied for the papal choir and another was an illuminated manuscript given to England's King Henry VIII. But the archival record is slim because disasters

146. Gerk, "Songs of Famine."

147. Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality*.

and historical time are not kind to conservation. The elisions that exist in traumatic situations, I find, are not so wholly different from the work of any historian who uses the sources available until a new discovery alters the picture. In my subdiscipline, confronting these elisions is part of any early music manuscript study—the analytical work involves examining a source's features and developing a more detailed picture of its creation and purpose to the extent possible.

Cizmic: Among scholars, there is some consensus that the term *trauma* developed along with modernity in the late-nineteenth century. Some make this argument in a more neutral manner, as part of the historical record.¹⁴⁸ Others wield this point as a critique of trauma studies, arguing that we should not take our contemporary understandings of trauma as universal.¹⁴⁹ This has sparked debates in both historical and postcolonial circles as to the transhistorical and transcultural relevance of trauma studies. Since each of you works on periods before 1870, how do you approach these debates?

Doran: I firmly believe that a lack of modern language around trauma does not mean that people did not experience trauma in ways that our current vocabulary and methodologies can illuminate. There is no single definition or understanding of trauma—we must acknowledge that and always consider both the ethical implications of our work and the specific circumstances of the culture we're studying. For example, the Parisian contexts surrounding the creation and early performances of the operas I study are marked by intense interest in women's hysteria in all realms, with extensive research happening at various medical institutions and a pervasive perception of women's trauma as theatrical. Thinking about how French operas of the period participated in these cultural contexts through representations of madness and suffering reveals historical perceptions of women's traumatic experiences. For example, Sean Parr has shown that the theatrics of extensive melismas became one way of sounding women's hysteria and trauma on the Parisian stage during the mid- and late-nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰ *Faust*, though, presents its heroine's fractured, traumatized psyche through references to earlier music from the opera and through static melody, suggesting Marguerite's inability to escape intrusive, painful memories in the final act.¹⁵¹ Although representations of traumatic suffering in operas from this period may feel deeply aestheticized to us today, the beauty of their music does not preclude the application of trauma studies; Katherine Astbury has made a similar point in her work on responses in sentimental

148. Luckhurst, *Trauma Question*.

149. Bond and Craps, *Trauma*.

150. Parr, *Vocal Virtuosity*, 95–140.

151. Doran, "Performing Maternal Suffering."

novels to French Revolutionary trauma.¹⁵² In the vast majority of scholarship that deals with ethics, performance, and trauma, scholars like Patrick Duggan unsurprisingly focus on post-WWII works that include grittier representations of trauma.¹⁵³ But by applying trauma studies to artwork of the more distant past, we broaden our understanding of trauma's cultural and historical significance and its expression in different art forms and styles. This understanding can and should also inform today's performances of pre-1870 works that deal with trauma.

Ryan: At first I adhered to an historical approach that drew from disaster studies, and then branched out further to trauma and comparative studies. That shift was inspired by my subsequent work outside of academia in the field of hospice. I was intrigued by how some theorists describe post-traumatic experiences as moving toward assimilation but never quite reaching it. I sensed the motets were similarly oriented around this question. Some of the Psalms, which Renaissance composers were fond of setting, address God with a basic question, "Why is this suffering happening to me?" They include vivid language depicting the speaker's distress and agitation, as in Jacquet of Mantua's *In die tribulationis*: "My eyes prevented the watches; I was troubled and spoke not."¹⁵⁴ Philippe Verdelot's *In te domine speravi*, based on Psalm 30, indicates the capabilities composers had for musical styling and text delineation. This psalm is a prayer of hope and deliverance from God that is marked by contrasting motives, first with a melismatic passage on the words: "let me never be confounded." This statement is answered with an emphatic response—paired sets of homophonic voices declaiming the words "deliver me." Importantly, this piece was associated with a culture of religious reform circulating in Florence at the time.

Gerk: I think that the beauty of the expansive literature on trauma is that it's a widely applicable epistemological category rather than a medical diagnosis. This impression is inspired by Jeffrey Alexander, because the trauma that I deal with is societal.¹⁵⁵ I frankly don't know if somebody would have diagnosed Patrick Gilmore with PTSD, but he was working under conditions in which there was a traumatized population. We can understand the whole diaspora like that.

Rogers: To close our conversation, what advice would you offer to someone who wants to study music, sound, and trauma for a musical culture before 1870?

Doran: Know that this work is important and has ethical implications. When I see an opera director stage an unexpected sexual

152. Astbury, *Narrative Responses*.

153. Duggan, *Trauma-Tragedy*.

154. Ps. 76:5.

155. Alexander, *Trauma*.

assault—with the directors unaware that they're likely retraumatizing numerous audience members—I'm reminded why this scholarship is necessary. I've noticed shifts in how opera companies and directors think about staging historical works involving trauma. For example, representatives of Boston Lyric Opera and the Vienna State Opera have come to me with questions about staging traumatic narratives. The real-world implications of trauma studies become clear when we make such connections outside of academia. From the standpoint of pedagogy, most students who engage with trauma studies in the college classroom will grow in terms of their ethical awareness, hopefully becoming more caring and concerned global citizens. Trauma studies is worthwhile for that reason alone.

Ryan: I would really encourage any person interested in this work to be solid in the historical literature before wading into trauma studies. When you have toiled with the subject long enough, you may feel a certain confidence with your interpretation of the material. But when lingering questions prompt you to explore more widely and deeply, that is when the freedom exists to develop your research according to the creative work of your choosing.

Gerk: Trust your gut and just read. Read really widely. Charge into unconventional sources, whether primary sources or the interdisciplinary body of trauma studies. Humanists keep going back to the same late nineteenth-century people and the same contemporary humanists and psychologists like Herman, Caruth, Alexander, van der Kolk, and Brown. But I found a lot of value in reading medical literature, social sciences research, and work in disciplines that are further afield from music.

Doran: In short, don't be afraid of doing this type of work. In the end, historical applications of trauma theory almost always illuminate marginalized perspectives that have been excluded from mainstream narratives of history. That shift to consider the margins is always valuable.

Trauma and Musical Experience

FRED EVERETT MAUS

This essay draws attention to two groups of psychological concepts: *projection* and *introjection* and their elaborations, parts of a psychological process with an organic constancy akin to breathing; and *dissociation* along with related concepts including *multiplicity* and *splitting*. I explore these ideas in relation to music in the tradition of Western art music (WAM) and people to whom that music is familiar and meaningful. The concepts are valuable in understanding musical experience in general—not only experiences of

WAM, but also interactions with non-musical art—and in thinking about experiences that have been shaped by trauma.¹⁵⁶

Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882–1960) believed that projection, the fantasy of moving something out of oneself and into another (or something that stands for another), and introjection, the fantasy of bringing something into oneself, interact continuously to shape our experiences.¹⁵⁷ Edward T. Cone's 1982 essay "Schubert's Promissory Note: An Exercise in Musical Hermeneutics" gives an excellent account of projection in musical experience. While Cone did not use the word "projection," in effect he argued that music is meaningful because listeners, performers, and composers find aspects of their lives that match something in the music and project qualities of their experiences into the music. These personal associations need not be conscious.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, the music thus constructed can be imagined to enter the listener, becoming part of their inner world.¹⁵⁹

Projection is central to Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), a form of music therapy pioneered by Helen Bonny (1921–2010).¹⁶⁰ GIM invites a client, in the company of a therapist, to listen to music and spontaneously project psychological content, as a way of discovering and experiencing psychic material that might be difficult to access in other ways. A client typically lies down, eyes closed, in a relaxed, open state. The therapist has selected music from a repertory of GIM programs to evoke content that will help to move the client along in their therapeutic process. A program consists of several compositions, most often European instrumental art music, not necessarily by the same composer or from the same historical period; a program length of about forty minutes is typical today. Music is chosen based on the range of experiences it may elicit; this range is usually broad, and individual

156. I wrote about music and trauma in Maus, "Sexuality, Trauma."

157. Fantasy is a crucial concept in Kleinian thought. I have used the common spelling, but Klein preferred the spelling "phantasy" to refer to the unconscious fantasy that is fundamental in her theories. For an excellent anthology about projection, centered on Kleinian tradition, see Spillius and O'Shaughnessy, *Projective Identification*.

158. What relationship should one expect between personal associations and observable qualities of the music? Cone's essay seems to take a definite position. Analysis of a familiar kind, according to Cone, brings out the relevant qualities of the music, and associations that do not match those qualities are irrelevant to musical meaning. I would rather state the relationship in the opposite direction. We can begin with respectful attention to a listener's experience, whatever that is, and then ask what musical features might have evoked that experience. We don't need to make assumptions about what kind of musical matching we will find.

159. I wrote about introjection of music in "Listening and Possessing." Francis Grier notes that the music also projects into a listener, perhaps lovingly, perhaps painfully. I agree, though I do not presently know how a detailed account of this would go. Grier, personal correspondence, March 19, 2023.

160. Grocke, *Guided Imagery* is a superb resource approaching Bonny's work from many perspectives. Bonny's essays are gathered in Bonny, *Music Consciousness*.

responses are specific and varied.¹⁶¹ During the listening, the therapist and client speak together quietly; the therapist mostly asks the client to describe their ongoing experience. Often the therapy is an experience, guided by the music, of fantasy content in a space created and held jointly by the music, client, and therapist. In such cases the character of the music is shaped by projection, and the music is introjected to serve as a dynamic, living chamber for dreamlike imaginings and states of mind that words cannot hold.¹⁶²

I have taken the coursework for professional training as a GIM practitioner. As part of the training, students enact GIM sessions, taking the roles of client and therapist, with teachers observing. In the version of GIM that I have studied, a session begins with conversation about what issues the client might wish to engage while listening. In one training session where I was in the role of therapist, the other student, whom I shall call Ann, described distress about not feeling close to the people in her life.¹⁶³ She hoped to work with this issue in her music listening session. Our teachers, in a conversation that Ann did not hear, selected a program that they thought would be suitable, a version of the program called “Relationships” that begins with the Larghetto from Chopin’s Piano Concerto no. 1.¹⁶⁴

Shortly after the music started, Ann became troubled. Speaking softly and slowly, she said, again and again, that the piano and orchestra could not find a way to relate to each other. She listened closely and heard the same frightening failure throughout the movement, which lasts some eleven minutes. Agitated, she wept quietly. The next piece in the program, the Adagio from Rachmaninoff’s Symphony no. 2, did not sustain this projection and her experience took different directions.

161. For an excellent overview of Bonny’s own programs, see Grocke, “Helen Bonny’s Music Programs.”

162. The Kleinian term *fantasy* or *phantasy* is not common in GIM practice. Cara Marinucci wrote that a GIM practitioner would use “different language that is about the inner world of both the conscious and unconscious as it relates to the personal, archetypal, and transpersonal levels of self.” Marinucci, personal correspondence, June 24, 2022. GIM practitioners often use the term *container* to describe music in GIM. A sophisticated account of the role of containment in music listening could be developed from Wilfrid Bion’s influential work, based in Kleinian ideas. Bion identifies a containing function (not a container as a kind of object), arising first in the experience of infants. An infant may project overwhelming, disorganized thoughts and feelings into a caretaker. A caretaker who can absorb these states, containing them as the infant cannot and reflecting the states back to the infant, shows the possibility of surviving such strong experiences. The infant may introject the caretaker in its containing function, a step toward their own capacity to contain and survive experiences. As one expects in the Kleinian tradition, the structures of these early experiences remain as possibilities in later life, in relationships with other people or (I am suggesting) with music. See Bion, “Attacks on Linking.”

163. Ann is a licensed psychotherapist who studied GIM to add it to her clinical resources.

164. Bonny’s original program “Relationships” begins with music by Respighi, reaching the Chopin movement as its fourth and last part. Reordering and revision of programs is common in GIM practice. The GIM session used Murray Perahia’s recording with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta (1987).

In GIM, music is not used primarily to comfort or relax clients, but to encourage them to have significant experiences. Ann's immersion in psychic pain was not a failure of the therapy, but a point of entry for working with those feelings.¹⁶⁵ Ann's response was a surprise to our teachers and to me. But such surprises are not rare: music in GIM is not used to dominate or control the client, but to evoke associations and fantasies, always unpredictable to some significant extent.

Ann's way of hearing the Chopin reflected features of the music. The movement begins with two brief phrases for strings only, followed by a theme for piano only. As the music then changes key and introduces a new piano melody, the strings offer simple chordal accompaniment, as they will for much of the piece. Ann's experience of interpersonal distance is supported at the beginning when the strings and piano enter separately. Once they are together, a sense of difference and distance can arise from the timbral differences; the attacks and decays of the piano notes are so different from the sustained string sound.¹⁶⁶ And for almost the entire movement, the melodic interest lies in the right hand of the piano; there is no sense of reciprocity, of back-and-forth, between the piano and the accompaniment, which remains mostly string chords. The piano uses increasingly rapid figuration as the strings maintain their slow, steady pace, intensifying the contrast. Finally the strings return to the piano's opening melody, taking a melodic role for the first time since their opening phrases. This action could be heard as a delayed response in a kind of dialogue. But for a listener preoccupied with texture, this need not be heard as a rapprochement, as the piano continues its rapid motion with continuous triplets. In their simple version of the melody, the strings bring back a melodic style that the piano abandoned long ago. Ann did not need to revise her impression of incompatibility.

I find this experience of Chopin, and in general the methods of GIM, relevant to thinking about musical meaning. Alongside its central therapeutic goals, GIM is a laboratory for exploring the creation of meaning through music and projection. GIM, with its conscious intention of bringing personal associations to music listening, shines a light on qualities of musical experience that may be present but less noticed in non-clinical contexts.

Ann's worries about distance between herself and others might have had a source in trauma, or they might not. We did not go into personal history in our GIM practice sessions. Either way, this example shows someone experiencing music by projecting psychic pain about connections with

165. Relatedly, while the overall goal of the Bonny Method is self-experience and self-knowledge, perhaps leading to healing, this does not mean that closure is necessarily reached by the end of a program. Bonny sessions stir things up, and change may take place across many sessions, often in conjunction with other forms of psychotherapy. Sometimes, though, an individual session may yield decisive change.

166. Ann heard a performance with modern instruments. A performance on early nineteenth-century instruments decreases the piano volume, reducing that aspect of difference, but also brings a swifter decay of each note, intensifying that difference.

other people, and it models something that music listeners, among them trauma survivors, can also do.

The Bonny Method of GIM often needs modification for safety in working with traumatized clients. GIM typically invites clients to experience, often intensely, their memories and fantasies. Sometimes it is valuable for clients to remember traumatic events and associated feelings, but therapists need to handle such encounters carefully. Music therapy based on GIM is often modified for trauma treatment, for instance by selecting only brief, isolated pieces, or using music to provide memorable images of safety, or inviting clients to sit upright with eyes open to reduce the immersive quality of the experience.¹⁶⁷

The underlying commitment in this essay is to the study of actual musical experiences, in particular the interplay of memory, fantasy, feeling, and listening, in GIM sessions and elsewhere.¹⁶⁸ I turn now to a second example, from my own non-GIM experience.

I have long felt attachment to the Adagio from Ravel's Piano Concerto. As a teenager I identified with it consciously, hearing in the piano an image of myself as a child and adolescent. I also heard in the music my times of solitude. The piano unfolds its melody, tender and quiet, without other instruments for about three minutes. I was pleased when wind melodies joined gently and the piano was no longer alone. I savored the return of the opening melody in the last section, played in the orchestra with piano decoration. This was the protagonist of the piece—myself—now held in love by a group of others. The piano provided a kind of descant; it felt like caresses. The role of projection in this experience is obvious.¹⁶⁹

For the next part of my account, I need to acknowledge that, like many people, I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, a fact that has affected my life in many ways.

For years I knew the Ravel movement only from listening. When, in my thirties, I followed a score while listening, I was shocked to find a middle section that I had barely noticed. It sounded familiar, but I realized I had always tuned it out, my mind wandering to something else. When I recognized this pattern of inattention, I also understood the cause. The middle section is mostly unlike the melody that opens and closes the movement, introducing dissonances and passages of rising chords in the orchestra, accompanied by piano figuration. The final rising passage reaches a loud dissonant chord as the piano figuration increases its speed. It is a forceful

167. See Ahonen, "Putting the Lights on in the Room."

168. Much music scholarship describes idealized listening experiences, carefully worked out through sustained study of a musical composition. I value such work and have often practiced it. The present topic is different: what actually happens when individuals interact with music, on a particular occasion of listening or in a sustained series of interactions?

169. There is a parallel between the final sections of the Chopin and Ravel movements: a piano melody returns in the orchestra, accompanied by rapid piano figuration. Ann and I brought very different projections to these similar textures.

climax, and once I gave it my full attention, I heard it as an intrusion of adult sexual urgency into the world of the protagonist. Immediately after the climax, the passage ends, and my cherished melody returns. I was using this piece not only to reflect tender feelings of my youth, but also to dissociate from my early abusive sexualization. In that dissociation there was avoidance, but also a sense of control over experiences initially constituted by assault and loss of control.¹⁷⁰

The concept of dissociation has been used in many ways by psychologists. Here, I use it in its most familiar sense. Because of the connection with painful experience, I “spaced out,” withdrew my awareness from the middle section of the piece. One kind of dissociation, as here, is the splitting off of traumatic experience from consciousness.¹⁷¹ But there is another kind of splitting in this example. Ravel organizes the movement around a sectional contrast of two kinds of music.¹⁷² The specific qualities of the music allowed me to project a split between innocence and sexual feelings, a process that was often necessary for me to sustain my sense of self.

My account may seem paradoxical. I state both that I ignored the middle section of the Ravel and that I had a specific interpretation of it. That is a good example of dissociation: I heard and interpreted the middle section but separated that activity from my conscious experience and memory of the music. In general, dissociation operates through multiplicity of selves or states of mind, which can co-exist without communicating with each other.

Memory Slips: A Memoir of Music and Healing, by Linda Katherine Cutting, holds many examples of musical experience shaped by childhood trauma.¹⁷³ The author’s father was abusive in many ways; her mother was complicit in the abuse. Cutting narrates two times in her life: one in which her career as a concert pianist is troubled by memory slips and other psychological impediments, and a later time when she is in inpatient care after a suicide attempt. The book deserves extended commentary; here I point to only two aspects. The book describes projection. In inpatient care, Cutting plays Schumann’s *Scenes from Childhood*. The piece “Child Falling Asleep” is difficult for her; sometimes she connects it with memories of her father entering her childhood bedroom to force sex on her

170. I am grateful to Francis Grier for the observation about control. Grier, personal correspondence, March 19, 2023. The point of my description is not that the outer sections represent a state of bliss; that music has its own emotional complexities and, sometimes, pangs of pain. Pam Sorensen emphasized this to me in conversation. But it is altogether different from the climax-driven middle section. As a child and adolescent, I knew the piece from the 1958 recording by Arturo Benedetti Michelangelo and the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Ettore Gracis. In that performance the middle section is uneasy and edgy and ends with a strong climax.

171. See Howell, *Dissociative Mind*.

172. The middle section briefly drops back into the style of the opening, but then moves away, going instead to its climax.

173. Cutting, *Memory Slips*.

and cannot finish playing it.¹⁷⁴ She projects her experiences into the music and introjects the music so that she experiences the situation directly as her own. Sometimes she experiences her instrument and her music-making as a safe place separate from her family violence, even as a way of being that is entirely separate from the rest of the world. “I ought to feel like I exist in the world. I only exist in the music. When I stop playing, everything vanishes.”¹⁷⁵ In such experiences, she dissociates from the pain of her life. By the end of the book, set in the present, she feels that she can abandon this dissociative use of music. “Tonight I am finally free to make music for its own sake.”¹⁷⁶ This language might recall formalist ideas about “music for music’s sake.” But I understand it as meaning that Cutting, no longer needing music as a refuge from her family, is now free to let music move through a wide range of expression and imagination.

I hope these examples show the fruitfulness of certain psychological concepts in describing relations to music, including relations shaped by trauma. The evidence I have used—personal anecdotes, some of them from a memoir—may seem less reliable than the types of evidence often used in musicology. *Memory Slips* draws on recovered memory, and thus, to some readers, may seem especially uncertain as documentation. My self-disclosure as sexually abused may appear unseemly in professional writing. But such material is crucial for thinking about trauma. If we are to think about music in relation to trauma, we need to welcome this archive.¹⁷⁷

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174. Cutting, 16.

175. Cutting, 46.

176. Cutting, 240.

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