



REMAPPING

||| SOUND |||

STUDIES

GAVIN STEINGO & JIM SYKES, EDITORS

REMAPPING SOUND STUDIES

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Remapping Sound Studies

GAVIN STEINGO AND JIM SYKES, EDITORS

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Introduction

REMAPPING SOUND STUDIES
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes

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SOUND AND SOUTH

From at least the time of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Western thought has associated sound with “South.” Rousseau averred that the origin of language in warmer, southern climes was connected to music and the natural inflections of the voice. The frigid harshness of the North, he argued, allowed for no such melodiousness of speech: there, communication resulted in lifeless words. Sound, body, and presence on the one hand; arid speech—in close proximity to the “dead letter” of writing—on the other.¹

To be sure, Rousseau’s notion of sound is very different from our own, just as his Mediterranean South is not equivalent to the so-called global South of the twenty-first century. And yet one cannot help but notice an uncanny historical continuity: sound and South run like intertwined red threads through modernity, like a double-helix DNA constituting our underground makeup. Ever since Rousseau, the South has been associated with sound, music, body, presence, nature, and warmth. The North, by contrast, sees itself as dominated by writing and vision—by a cultural coldness born of the snowcapped peaks of the Alps.²

For Rousseau, as for us, sound was at once an empirical phenomenon and a concept burdened with tremendous political weight. The same, of course, can be said of “the South,” a term that continues to designate a (loose and vague) geographical location while simultaneously harboring multiple ideological connotations with little empirical relation to geography and space. Sound and the South are, importantly, relational figures: they function only

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in relation to what they are not. Whether the relationship is dialectical, supplementary, or hybrid, sound and the South are the Others of the visual and the North. And like poles in any binary opposition, “sound” and “South” can easily be substituted for multiple “Other” terms, including “nature,” “woman,” “native,” “Africa,” “black,” “queer,” and “disabled.”³

As negative figures of their respective binary relations, sound and the South historically have been positioned as resistant to analysis. For example, to this day phenomena associated with sound—such as timbre and music—are often deemed ineffable. The global South, for its part, is often derided as stubbornly failing to obey the (supposedly rational) logic of the state, that *sine qua non* of Western modernity. The North is often presumed to be the home of rationality and science; the South, of irrationality and magic. Precisely because they seem to evade the epistemic grip of Western reason, sound and the South are frequently offered as radical *alternatives* to the dilemmas of modernity. The problem here, as many have noted, is that celebrating “sound and the South” *against* “vision and the North” reaffirms the binary opposition on which all of the terms depend.⁴

In his magisterial *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne (2003: 14) notices that, in the West, the “differences between hearing and seeing usually appear in the form of a list.” Sterne calls this list “the audiovisual litany,” which includes dictums such as “Hearing is spherical; visual is directional”; “Hearing immerses its subject; vision offers a perspective”; and “Sound comes to us, but vision travels to its objects.” To this litany, one could easily add, “Sound is Southern; vision is Northern.”

The most important thing to observe about the audiovisual litany, Sterne says, is that it is *ideologically loaded*. Despite being ostensibly a description of secular modernity, the litany’s debt to Judeo-Christian theology is incontestable: the audiovisual litany is “essentially a restatement of the longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism” (Sterne 2003: 16). As a deeply ideological and theologically inflected construct, the audiovisual litany is largely responsible for producing a calculus of value according to which sound or vision are—depending on your subject position—variously considered “good,” “bad,” “pure,” or “impure.”

But Sterne warns us against thinking of sound or vision as good or bad in and of themselves. If Western modernity is guilty of commodification and reification, this is not due to an overreliance on the eye and the gaze, as many have argued. “The primacy of vision cannot be held to account for the objectification of the world,” writes Timothy Ingold. “Rather the reverse; it is through its co-option in the service of a peculiarly modern project of

objectification that vision has been reduced to a faculty of pure, disinterested reflection, whose role is merely to deliver up ‘things’ to a transcendent consciousness” (Ingold 2000: 235).

The Rousseauist equation of sound and the South haunts twentieth-century writing.⁵ Much research on non-Western cultures, including research that claims to be scientific or empiricist in nature, reaffirms the ideology of the audiovisual litany. From Edmund Carpenter, Walter Ong, and R. Murray Schafer all the way (arguably) to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Marshall McLuhan, non-Western peoples are positioned as closer to sound and hearing than their European counterparts. It is no coincidence, then, that some of the twenty-first century’s most prominent theorists of sound—Veit Erlmann, Jonathan Sterne, and Peter Szendy—begin with Jacques Derrida’s famous deconstruction of binary oppositions (voice and writing, sound and vision, presence and distance).⁶ The first move in any critical discourse on sound is to denaturalize and de-essentialize it.

Like “sound,” “South” is a nebulous term that oscillates between an empirical category and ideological construct. The term “global South” is clearly not synonymous with the Southern Hemisphere, especially when one considers politically powerful settler colonies such as Australia, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the existence of destitute ghettos located smack-dab in the middle of the world’s richest countries. The term has also been criticized (sometimes even rejected outright) by people living in regions designated as the “global South,” especially as a response to the term’s deployment by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.⁷ Others from “the global South” advocate a strategic appropriation of the term (see, e.g., Mahler 2015). All this being said, one cannot deny the coincidence (the “happening at the same time”) of the European *idea* of the South as a place of poverty and naturalness and the expropriation and structural violence committed on large swaths of the Southern Hemisphere, including South America, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The South is at once an idea, a socially constructed reality, and a partitioning of space. It is an ideology—a concept that appears in the form of an objective reality (Yuran 2014).

For the purposes of this book, we think of the global South as a set of global externalities produced through colonialism (of the “official” type, as well as contemporary settler colonies in North America and Palestine) and neoliberalism (particularly by imperialist practices such as “structural adjustment”). For reasons that are at once theoretical, heuristic, and strategic, we resist viewing any and all peripheries as part of the South. The vast majority

of essays collected here address sound outside North America, Europe, and the advanced capitalist countries of northeastern Asia. The only exception is Hervé Tchumkam's chapter on the French *banlieues*, which we include because it shows precisely how contemporary France applies the logic of a Southern-trained colonialism within its borders.

If the South and sound are conjoined concepts lying at the heart of modernity, what might it mean to think these terms together in a way that does not reproduce colonial logic? *Remapping Sound Studies* proposes thinking sound not *as* the South (or as analogous *with* the South) but, rather, *in* and *from* the South.⁸ Our approach consists of (1) an orientation toward ethnography and archives in diverse languages (including non-European languages) as ways to recognize that everyone — not only professional scholars — theorizes sound; and (2) a commitment to situating sound in and from the South not as a unified, alternative notion of what sound is but as diverse sonic ontologies, processes, and actions that cumulatively make up core components of the history of sound in global modernity.

What we are proposing is not simply a remapping of the dominant themes, narratives, and arguments of the heretofore Northern-focused field of sound studies *onto* the South; nor do we demarcate the South simply as a space for sonic difference. Rather, we develop a new cartography of global modernity for sound studies. This entails conceptualizing the South as a kind of radical horizon of geopolitics while dislodging the North as the site of the “original” and the “true” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2011). It also entails the “excavat[ion] of forgotten maps, imagining new ones or valorizing those that have been marginalized” (Vergès 2015). The invention of new cartographies requires, moreover, new ways to see and listen, as well as new navigational tools. From the birds and canoes of Marshallese “seascape epistemology” (chapter 3) and the natal charts used to generate Sinhala Buddhist (Sri Lankan) acts of sonic protection (chapter 9) to the oscillating tongues of Zulu ululators (chapter 2) and the fetal stethoscopes employed by Colombian midwives (chapter 4), *Remapping Sound Studies* offers myriad potent examples.

Are the narratives on the development of sound in global modernity that sound studies has told relevant for the global South? And are those narratives adequate as descriptions of modernity itself? Or do investigations into sound in the South allow us to challenge and reshape the conceptualization of modernity? These are some of the central questions raised in *Remapping Sound Studies* through case studies set in Southern locales.

We have deliberately framed this volume as an exercise in “remapping” rather than “decolonization” because we do not wish to overstate our con-

tribution. Make no mistake: we wholeheartedly advocate all forms of decolonization, and we do draw on decolonization theory at strategic moments (more about this later). Our aims in this book, however, are rather more humble. What we hope to achieve is nothing more than laying out some potential alternatives to thinking about sound. We readily acknowledge this book's limitations: the contributors to *Remapping Sound Studies* are primarily based at Northern institutions (although not all of us are, and although some of us spend uneven amounts of time in different locales); there is also a general lopsidedness toward ethnography and anthropology (the result, in large part, of our extant professional network).⁹ A more far-reaching project would require more money, more labor, and more infrastructure. It would include more writers based in the South; probably a few events in different geographical areas; and more writing and thinking in different languages, which would necessitate complex (and costly) mechanisms of translation. In short, what we have is not sufficient; one might even reasonably say that it is completely inadequate. We view this volume simply as an editorial effort that underscores the silence of the South in research on sound while beginning to map possible avenues for bringing Southern locales more clearly into sonic and auditory awareness.

The remainder of this introduction queries older and recent literature on sound in the global South to build a Southern-focused corpus for sound studies. We then articulate three domains—the technology problematic, sound's limits, and sonic histories of encounter—as basic grounds through which a Southern sound studies can fruitfully broaden (and, we argue, in some cases challenge) the narratives on sound in global modernity that have been produced to date by sound studies.

WHITHER SOUND STUDIES?

In 2005, Michele Hilmes (2005: 249) wrote that the study of sound, “hailed as an ‘emerging field’ for the last hundred years, exhibits a strong tendency to remain that way, always emerging, never emerged.” In some sense, the ten-plus years following Hilmes’s observation have proved her wrong. Today, we can safely say that sound studies has fully emerged as a robust field, with its own journals, anthologies, and institutional positions. The sound studies boom has allowed for the useful recognition and claiming of disciplinary ancestors whose work had been recognized but had always appeared somewhat marginal to their respective disciplines (e.g., Attali 1977; Born 1995; Schafer 1977). Simultaneously, new vistas opened up for fields as disparate

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as the anthropology of the senses, the sociology of science, ethnomusicology, and aesthetics, leading to the further articulation of subfields (such as “ecomusicology”) and the creation of research projects that could not have been glimpsed a decade earlier (see, e.g., Friedner and Helmreich 2012).

But there is another sense in which Hilmes is probably correct: disciplinary boom notwithstanding, the deep ideological framing of sound as the Other of vision will likely mean that it remains on the peripheries of knowledge. In terms of global hegemony, sound and South remain “marginal” almost by definition.

Noticing again the parallelism between sound and South, we are struck by the fact that the establishment of sound studies as a fledgling discipline has largely elided the global South. This lacuna is partially attributable to the fact that the sound studies boom has come largely from those working on the historical development of sound reproduction technologies; thus, emphasis has been placed on histories of technological innovation and progress.¹⁰ This emphasis is closely associated with a certain homogenization of the listening subject (in much canonic work, he or she is white and middle class) and a tendency to flatten the sonic architecture of urban spaces, rendered simply as “global cities” or “the city.”¹¹

The neglect of Africa and Asia in recent anthologies and readers is striking. For instance, Routledge’s four-volume *Sound Studies* anthology—containing seventy-two chapters and more than 1,500 pages (Bull 2013)—does not contain a single chapter on Africa or Asia (which together form more than half of the world’s landmass and currently comprise more than one hundred sovereign nation-states).¹² Neither have any of the specific sub-genres of sound studies that have emerged routinely focused on the global South, such as studies of sound in film (e.g., Coates 2008; Hilmes 2008); sound art and soundscape compositions (e.g., Cox and Warner 2004; Kelly 2011); or the recent wave of philosophical writing on “sound,” “listening,” and “noise” (e.g., Szendy 2008; van Maas 2015).¹³

One might assume that this neglect is attributable merely to the paucity of existing literature—that if we bracket work on *sound-related* topics (e.g., music, language), there is not very much rigorous research explicitly about sound in the global South. But even a cursory scan of the literature shows that this is not true. A bibliography for sound in the global South exists; it simply has not been integrated into the sound studies canon, save for a small number of well-known works.¹⁴ It quickly becomes obvious, though, that once one sets to incorporate a broader range of texts on the South

into sound studies, one finds *so many* texts that could reasonably be included that one's bibliography is quickly overwhelmed—so much so that it begs the question of what should constitute sound studies in the first place, much less a Southern-oriented version of it. Several bodies of literature, then, may not exactly “count as” sound studies, but they are certainly things to be aware of in any remotely comprehensive study of sound: work on sound in religious ritual (e.g., trance and funerary practices), the voluminous scholarship on music in India and Africa, and anthropological studies of speech acts related to the production of gender, power, and political oratory.

There is little to gain from employing the term “sound studies” for any and all literature that is even vaguely associated with sound. For example, we see little use in claims to the effect that musicology (or ethnomusicology) has “been doing sound studies all along.”¹⁵ Indeed, the histories of sound and music are relatively distinct: the philosophy of music has often deliberately elided sound, while scientific and medical approaches to sound historically have had minimal connection with music (see Barrett 2016). Taking a cue from Sterne, we therefore see much value in a *conjunctural* approach to sound that thinks various domains—musical, scientific, linguistic, theological, political—in relation to one another.¹⁶ We are interested in an investigation that “gesture[s] toward more fundamental and synthetic theoretical, cultural, and historical questions” about sound (Sterne 2003: 5).

However, we hope to contest what exactly constitutes the so-called fundamental and synthetic questions of sound. Sound studies, as a disciplinary configuration, has begun to calcify around a specific—and, we would argue, quite narrow—set of concerns: the historical development in the West of “sound” as a concept and phenomenon separable from the other senses; the broader process of secularization and increased isolation of sound that was afforded by the invention of new technologies, including sound reproduction devices, medicinal technologies (such as the stethoscope), modern architectural spaces, and the science of acoustics; and the increasingly sharp division between public and private space. It is fair to say that these emphases produced an overarching *narrative* about sound in global modernity. We contend that a Southern sound studies will need to consider what the South “says” about this narrative; but we also suggest that to focus *only* on it would unwittingly turn sound studies into a story of Western influence on the South through the importation of the audiovisual litany and Western audio technologies—a neocolonial or imperialist narrative in which the West remains the protagonist.

As a way out of this deadlock, we propose listening to and from the South. This will bring to the fore a new set of conjunctures and raise a new set of questions. But listening from the South will also require insisting on the importance of several studies of sound that, for various definitional or ideological reasons, have been omitted from the quickly calcifying sound studies canon. We thus propose, both in this introduction and in the chapters that follow, using this literature as a jumping-off point for thinking sound and South together.¹⁷ By rethinking the definitions of technology, of politics—and, indeed, of sound itself—*Remapping Sound Studies* listens backward and forward at the same time.

What follows is an “imaginary reader” that groups together Southern-focused sound studies literature that has been largely omitted from the sound studies canon. Perhaps the anthology will someday be published; perhaps not. As a thought experiment, however, our proposed “Southern Sound Studies Reader” serves two important functions: first, it highlights that substantive discourses on sound in the global South have long existed; and second, it begins to ask general (if not fundamental and synthetic) questions by demarcating key topics.¹⁸

The hypothetical reader consists of texts that had already been published when the extant anthologies were being compiled.¹⁹ It therefore includes only work published before 2010.

An Imaginary Southern Sound Studies Reader (First Attempt)

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SOUND ECOLOGIES

- Agawu, Kofi. “Rhythms of Society.” In *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective*, 8–30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Argenti-Pillen, Alex. “‘We Can Tell Anything to the Milk Tree’: Udahenagama Soundscapes.” In *Masking Terror: How Women Contain Violence in Southern Sri Lanka*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Colombijn, Freek. “Toooot! Vrooom! The Urban Soundscape in Indonesia.” *Sojourn* 22, no. 2 (2007): 255–73.²⁰
- Gupta, R. P. “Sounds and Street-Cries of Calcutta.” *India International Centre Quarterly* 17, nos. 3–4 (1990–91): 209–19.
- Mbembe, Achille. “Variations on the Beautiful in Congolese Worlds of Sound.” *Politique Africaine* 100 (2005–2006): 71–91.
- Morris, Rosalind. “The Miner’s Ear.” *Transition* 98 (2008): 96–115.

Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. "García Márquez, Macondismo, and the Soundscapes of Vallenato." *Popular Music* 24, no. 2 (2005): 207–22.

SPEECH ACTS AND ORATORY

- Bate, Bernard. "The King's Red Tongue." In *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. "History of the Voice." In *Roots*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.
- Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. "Notation and Oral Tradition." In *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, vol. 1, ed. Ruth M. Stone. New York: Garland, 2000.
- Tambiah, Stanley. "The Magical Power of Words." *Man* 3, no. 2 (1968): 175–208.

RACE, ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND GENDER

- Chandola, Tripta. "The Mingling of Modalities of Mingling: Sensorial Practices in the Karimnagar Slums." In "Listening into Others: In-between Noise and Silence." Ph.D. diss., Queensland University of Technology, 2010.
- Marsden, Magnus. "All-Male Sonic Gatherings, Islamic Reform, and Masculinity in Northern Pakistan." *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (2007): 473–90.
- Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Mother's Talk." In *The Politics of M(O)thering*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Weidman, Amanda. "Gender and the Politics of the Voice: Colonial Modernity and Classical Music in South India." *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (2003): 194–232.

SONIC ONTOLOGIES AND RELIGIONS

- Becker, Judith. "Time and Tune in Java." In *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Coherence Systems*, ed. Alton L. Becker and Aram A. Yengoyan. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1979.
- Feld, Steven. "The Boy Who Became a Muni Bird" (1979). In *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.
- Hirschkind, Charles. "The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt." *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 3 (2001): 623–49.
- Nzewi, Meki. "African Musical Arts Creativity and Performance: The Science of Sound." *Nigerian Music Review* 6 (2005): 1–8.
- Stoller, Paul. "Sound in Songhay Possession." In *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.

COLONIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM:
ENCOUNTERS AND DOMINATION

- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." *Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 782–94.
- Roberts, Michael. "Noise as Cultural Struggle: Tom-Tom Beating, the British and Communal Disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880s–1930s." In *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- DiPaolo Loren, Diana. "Beyond the Visual: Considering the Archaeology of Colonial Sounds." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 12, no. 4 (2008): 360–69.
- Kun, Josh D. "The Aural Border." *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (2000): 1–21.²¹
- Tomlinson, Gary. "Unlearning the Aztec *Cantares* (Preliminaries to a Postcolonial History)." In *Object and Subject in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA

- Baucom, Ian. "Frantz Fanon's Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora, and the Tactics of Listening." *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 1 (2001): 15–49.²²
- Larkin, Brian. "Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy." *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2004): 289–314.
- Lee, Tong Soon. "Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore." *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 1 (1999): 86–100.
- Moisa, Lebona, Charles Riddle, and Jim Zaffiro. "From Revolutionary to Regime Radio: Three Decades of Nationalist Broadcasting in Southern Africa." *African Media Review* 8, no. 1 (1994): 1–24.
- Pietz, William. "The Phonograph in Africa." In *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoffrey Bennington, and Robert Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

In addition, a "Southern Sound Studies Reader" would have to include new translations of texts from other languages. From Spanish, for example, the reader might include texts by Jesús Martín-Barbero, Orián Jiménez, Ángel Rama, and Julio Ramos.²³

Important, explicitly Southern-focused interventions since 2010 include work by Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher (2012), Andrew Eisenberg (2013),

Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2014), Laura Kunreuther (2014), and Alejandra Bronfman (2016).²⁴ The edited volume *Keywords in Sound* (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015) is a powerful attempt at a truly global synthesis of sound theory—although this volume, too, is paradigmatically geared toward Euro-America.²⁵ Another important recent volume is *Audible Empire* (Radano and Olaniyan 2016), which provides a much needed consideration of how music was and remains integral to the circulation of “imperial logics” around the world. We see *Remapping Sound Studies* as participating in the same intellectual moment as *Audible Empire*, but our emphasis is more overtly on the global South, and we are less invested in “music” as a fundamental category of analysis. Indeed, it is possible to conceptualize these three volumes—*Keywords in Sound*, *Audible Empire*, and *Remapping Sound Studies*—as a kind of trilogy that carves out a crucial space in twenty-first century thinking about sound.

SOUND STUDIES REMAPPED

Considering the most serious limitations of “sound studies” as a rapidly calcifying discipline, as well as the six key areas that emerge from our imaginary reader, it is possible to begin constructing a new cartography of sound theory. While there is, of course, no single way to remap sound studies, the chapters in this volume engage a coherent set of concerns. *Remapping Sound Studies* makes three principal proposals:

1. *Sound's relationship to technology.* We propose a shift from a focus on technology as a “modern” Western practice that reproduces, isolates, and idealizes sound to an analysis of “constitutive technicity” (Gallope 2011)—that is, of any and every supplement that humans engage in the production, reception, transduction, and attenuation of sound. In other words, we argue for a shift from technology as a set of inventions developed at a particular place and historical juncture to an exploration of the infinite series of objects and techniques through which “culture” is always already constituted.
2. *The question of sound as a relationship between listener and something listened to.* Sound necessitates a listener but *also* something heard. To say that something is heard means that there is some “thing” beyond and preceding human perception. In other words, the issue is not only a sensory one. It is also resolutely ontological, because the various peoples of the world understand that which is heard in radically different

manners. Thus, we propose viewing sound studies as an experiment with the thresholds or limits of audibility rather than simply a consideration of sound as a historically contingent “social construction.” What we have in mind is a perspective that at once acknowledges the ontology of sound from a noncorrelational perspective (i.e., there exists an independent entity beyond human experience) *and* cultural differences in prehending sound. We suggest that ethnographies of the interrelations between these domains will form a critical component of a remapped sound studies.

3. *A conceptualization of sonic history as nonlinear and saturated with friction.* We propose that sonic history should be conceived as a narrative of jagged histories of encounter, including friction, antagonism, surveillance, mitigation, navigation, negotiation, and nonlinear feedbacks, rather than as efficiency, inexhaustibility, increasing isolation of the listening subject, and increasing circulation. Thus, in this volume we have incorporated a consideration of sound and the body—not only gendered sounds, but also how sound is used to listen in and through others and form social relations. This part of our project allows for politicized, historically situated, and culturally diverse narratives of sonic encounters in global modernity among variously defined peoples and their notions of sound.

Taken together, these three proposals suggest that sound studies can actively participate in remapping—if not exactly, or not yet, in decolonization proper—as an affirmative gesture and not simply as critique. We now turn to elaborating these three proposals, each of which culminates with a summary of how essays in this volume promote the proposals to work toward a comprehensive remapping of the study of sound.

*The Technology Problematic:
A Proposal for Constitutive Technicity*

Much initial work in sound studies as an intellectual field of inquiry was propelled by scholars working within science and technology studies and related disciplines such as communications and media theory (e.g., Bull 2007; Sterne 2003; Thompson 2002).²⁶ The focus of that work was the historical development of sound reproduction technologies, positioned as roughly analogous with Western “modern” devices. On the few occasions that “underdeveloped” areas of the world appear in the subsequent sound studies readers (e.g., Sterne 2012b), they are positioned mainly as laboratories for

exploring how Northern technologies spread.²⁷ Some readers are quite bold in their reduction of “sound studies” to “sound technologies”—for example, the *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Pinch and Bijsterveld 2011), which focuses exclusively on technology-related topics such as machine sound, tuning forks, ear plugs, sound in Pixar films, radio, and iPods.²⁸

Because of the centrality of technology to canonical writings in sound studies and sound studies readers, many uses and encounters with sound by people in the global South that might otherwise count as sound studies are categorized differently, as *anthropology*—that is, as the study of Man.²⁹ But such a division is possible only if we assume an extremely limited view of both technology and anthropology. Taking a cue from Bernard Stiegler, we posit, first, that the term “technology” should refer to any technical object (not just so-called modern Western ones); and second, that there is no human prior to a relation with technical objects. In other words, there is no meaningful distinction between premodern, nontechnological humans and modern, technological ones. As Stiegler (1998: 193) remarks, “The being of humankind is to be outside itself.” Humans are always already constituted through relations to technical prostheses. Accepting this insight would imply a realignment of sound studies’ boundaries, since in our view the eighteenth-century Mexica song volutes described by Gary Tomlinson (2007), for example, are resolutely technological. Furthermore, by following the important move to rethink the distinction between nature and culture, the given and the made (Latour 1993; Ochoa Gautier 2006, 2014; Viveiros de Castro 1998), it is possible to think even of waterfalls—which, as Steven Feld (1996) explains, are constitutive of Kaluli acoustemology—as technical prostheses, thus further opening up possible terrain for sound studies.

The kind of conceptual tendencies we have noted are symptomatic of “a group of scholars operating within a field of discourse, an intellectual space defined by Euro-American traditions of ordering knowledge” (Agawu 2003: 58). Milisuthando Bongela defines the global South as a geopolitical space in which privileged bodies historically have constituted themselves through “naturalist study” (see Motlatsi 2016). We reject this naturalist epistemology and argue strongly for alternatives. Feld (2015) echoes these concerns in an impassioned statement. “What is most problematic to me about ‘sound studies,’” he writes, “is that ninety-five percent of it is sound technology studies, and ninety-five percent of that is Western. So if I refuse ‘sound studies’ it is because I think plants, animals, and humans everywhere are equally important to technologies, and I think that studying dynamic interactions of species

and materials in all places and times are equally important and should be equally valued” (1).

Heeding Feld’s warning, we are invested in a double maneuver. First, we are certainly in favor of studies that take seriously the dense interplay between humans and their multiple constitutive “outsides” (Ochoa Gautier 2014), whether through multispecies ethnography (Kirsky 2014), critical debates surrounding divine potency (Graeber 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2015), or various other possible means. But the turn toward (nonhuman) animal sound and various other sonic “ecologies” should in no way encourage a lapse into nativism. For this reason, we suggest looking at how “global” technologies are localized: regional social media platforms (such as South Africa’s Mxit) or the specific entanglement of WhatsApp and Hindu nationalism in contemporary India, to provide just two examples.³⁰

One aim, then, is simply to broaden the scope of what counts as a “sound technology.” But we also contend that studies of “advanced” media and technology harbor problematic *theoretical* assumptions. For example, researchers tend to assume that, because of technological advances, music is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, moving at an ever faster pace in an unimpeded flow (Gopinath and Stanyek 2014; Kassabian 2013). Consider, for instance, that the aim of the *Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies* (Gopinath and Stanyek 2014) is to examine “how electrical technologies and their corresponding economies of scale have rendered music and sound increasingly mobile-portable, fungible, and ubiquitous.”³¹ But why assume in the first place that technologies and their corresponding economies have rendered music and sound increasingly mobile-portable, fungible, and ubiquitous? By stating from the outset that authors for the *Handbook* examine *how* music has become more mobile, for example, the editors foreclose the possibility that in some places music has *not* become more mobile, or even, perhaps, that it has become *less* mobile. While the assumption about music’s increasing mobility, fungibility, and ubiquity may be true of the global North (although even this is contestable), there are many contexts in Africa, Latin America, and Asia where technologies are marked by interruption, obduracy, and failure. *Remapping Sound Studies* does not aim to show *how* any given x (e.g., technology) has rendered music and sound y (e.g., more mobile). Instead, it aims to radically expand the x so we can reorient the y, so to speak.

Granted, sound and media studies researchers have paid increasing attention to technological failure in recent years, but the inclination is to look at failed devices to enrich or undermine dominant narratives about the technologies that *did* work (thus the emphasis on “quirky” objects). But as Brian

Larkin (2004: 291) has argued, “The inability of technologies to perform the operations they were assigned must be subject to the same critical scrutiny as their achievements.” For Larkin, technological “inability” does not refer simply to quirks in a narrative structured around “modernity.” Instead, his point is that failure and imperfection have *generative* as well as negative effects and that these effects are important in and of themselves (see also Morris 2010; Steingo 2015, 2016). This insight is particularly applicable in certain parts of the world—such as Kano, Nigeria, where Larkin conducted fieldwork—where technological failure or imperfection is a quotidian and normal part of life. Through the constant reduplication of analogue videocassettes in Kano, sound is distorted to the point of unintelligibility. The people in Larkin’s account should by no means be conflated with middle-class Northern consumers who deliberately engage degraded, broken, outmoded, or remediated devices (Bijsterveld and van Dijck 2009), since the horizon of perfectly functioning technology is completely different in the two cases. But the point is precisely to explore different horizons or aspirations, different conceptions of what sound is and what it should be.³²

Our proposal is therefore to think sound in relation to a wide range of technical supplements that constitute, rather than simply enhance, culture and history. At the same time, *Remapping Sound Studies* proposes a reassessment of the tropes of sonic mobility and fungibility, offering historically emplaced studies that engage issues such as failure, friction, and excess. As Gallope (2011: 49) suggests, “risk and failure” are also “*constitutive* of what it means to live.” In short, we find that many of the elements largely absent from sound studies are in fact constitutive of any thinking about sound. This includes thinking about the global South in general: one does not think first about the global North and then, to go further or to be more politically correct, think also about the global South. Instead, the global South is constitutive of the global North—our task is to find ways to understand this constitutive process.

In his contribution to this volume, Gavin Steingo directly engages sound studies’ technology problematic. For Steingo, the fact that sound studies’ conclusions are based on evidence from Europe and North America is not in itself entirely problematic. What troubles him is that the cultural specificity of these conclusions is rarely acknowledged. Instead, certain observations are generalized, sometimes even becoming axiomatic. His chapter examines three common arguments made by sound studies researchers—(1) that sound technologies are increasingly isolating the listening subject into individual “bubbles” (e.g., in automobiles and through mobile listening devices);

(2) that musical circulation is continually accelerating due to technological innovation and various forms of deregulation; and (3) that listening is associated with biopolitical investment and efficiency, as articulated, for example, by scholars dealing with attempts to combat workers' hearing loss in European industrial settings—and then places these arguments in dialogue with Southern contexts, particularly with the townships of South Africa, where he has conducted extensive fieldwork over the past ten years. Based on rigorous ethnographic evidence, Steingo challenges each of these arguments. Against the notion of audition in mobile bubbles, for example, he shows that in South Africa cars are both social and sonically “open” (see also Livermon 2008). Against accelerating circulation, he points to technological marginalization in the townships and maps out emerging forms of nonlinear sonic movement. And finally, he shows that hearing loss in South Africa's gold mines is characterized less by biopolitical investment than by logics of superfluity and abandonment (see also Morris 2008). Beyond simply critiquing the assumptions, methods, and conclusions of sound studies scholars, Steingo presents a grounded ethnographic study of a radically different relationship to sound.

Also focusing on South Africa, Louise Meintjes's contribution offers a quite different approach to sonic technicity. Meintjes undertakes a study of ululation as a vocal technique and as a form of acoustic reverberation that amplifies a woman's voice. Her essay remaps sound studies by focusing on reverberation—the *ululululu* of the ululator—as acoustic and relational, as African (and Middle Eastern), and as a metaphor for dialogue returning amplified and inflected from the South.³³ In particular, that dialogue shifts the attention in sound studies from technology to the technicity of voice; genders sound studies, thereby filling out the multiplicity of sound studies narratives; and finds sympathetic vibrations with black studies, which is also curiously underplayed in sound studies as it is evolving.

A third essay in part I addresses sound and technology in the global South. Jessica Schwartz examines sound reproduction and acoustical inscription in the Marshall Islands, as well as in the Marshallese diaspora. Through a close examination of heterogeneous technologies—from canoes and birds to radio programs and the mail—Schwartz puts pressure on orthodox notions of sound transmission and circulation. Among other significant insights, she shows that for her Marshallese interlocutors, sound is registered not as a scattered dispersal radiating outward (and dissipating gradually as it moves from the sender) but, rather, as a kind of connective tissue, a socio-sonic *accumulation*.

Taken together, the contributions by Steingo, Meintjes, and Schwartz form a kind of disjunctive synthesis that goes some way toward remapping sound studies' technology problematic. The focus on South Africa—unintended and unanticipated by the editors of this volume—results in an intriguing constellation of related ideas and concepts. Schwartz's chapter, meanwhile, bolsters Meintjes's expansion of the definition of sound technology far beyond its normative usage.

Listening at Sound's Limits: An Ontological Proposal

What are the limits of sound? Does it make sense of speak about sound beyond the threshold of a listening ear? Perhaps sound is not limited to audition (i.e., a sensory modality) but also encompasses the propagation of sounds by vibrating bodies prior to the audition of human perceivers. But can such a distinction be maintained? Can we move from sounds as they appear to us (i.e., phenomena) to sounds-in-themselves (i.e., noumena) without regressing into precritical naïveté? Perhaps twenty years ago such a move would have struck readers as hopeless, but in the wake of a renewed speculation (Bryant et al. 2011), the impulse to think sound outside of or beyond its human correlation is strong. Thus, for example, in a passionate and wide-ranging text, Steve Goodman (2009: 81) proposes an “ontology of vibrational force” that structures the entire cosmos and suggests that “sound is only a tiny slice, the vibrations audible to humans and animal.” For Goodman, in other words, “sound” is what becomes of vibration when perceived by the (human and nonhuman) animal ear.

But how can we know what vibration is before it is transduced into sound by the ear? How can we know that it is, in fact, *vibration* if we know it only in relation to *us* as sound? Without succumbing to the viciousness of the “correlationist circle” (Meillassoux 2008), according to which “if I consider *x*, then *I* consider *x* always and only in relation to myself,” there is no reason to assume with Goodman that what we call “sound” is really “vibration” prior to audition.³⁴ After all, anthropology is littered with examples of people hearing spirits and of shamanic travels to distant sonic worlds.

For our purposes, it is therefore enough to notice that sound is not identical to audition precisely because sound theorists often make claims about what lies beyond hearing—that is, what is *being heard*. In other words, sound studies is not reducible to the human sensorium, which means that sound studies is not identical to, or simply a branch of, sensory studies. What if we think of audition not in relation to the other senses but, rather, in terms of that which the auditory system intends or prehends? Given what Benjamin

Tausig (2013) terms the “posthumanist” emphasis of much sound studies,³⁵ it would be a mistake to fold sound studies into any cultural or ethnographic project that focuses exclusively on human perceptions, experiences, concepts, or sensations.

But if this is so, then where does that leave the remapping of sound studies? In our view, what the preceding discussion opens up is precisely the ontological stakes of sound.³⁶ But for us this does not mean simply positing vibration or some other figure as a unified ontological ground and then extrapolating humanly perceived sound as one minor hypostatization of that figure. It means, instead, taking seriously the existence of multiple ontologies, or as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2003: 18) famously put it, the “ontological self-determination of the world’s peoples.” Taking Viveiros de Castro seriously means recognizing multiple *natures* rather than multiple cultures—multinaturalism (perspectivism) rather than multiculturalism (relativism that presumes a “common nature or reality” [Ochoa Gautier 2014; Vanzolini and Cesarino 2014]).

While one task of remapping sound studies is to offer robust analyses of the different ways humans configure and relate to nonhuman sounds, another is to explore nonhuman sonic efficacy. Such a conjuncture of “natural and critical life” has much in common with the perspective mobilized by Anna Tsing (2015; see also Sykes 2018). As Elizabeth Povinelli (2016: 13) puts it, Tsing calls for “a more inclusive politics of well-being: a political imaginary which conceptualizes the good as a world in which humans and nonhumans alike thrive. And yet this thriving is, perhaps as it must be, measured according to specific human points of view, which becomes clear when various other species . . . come into view.” Recognizing the difficulty and even the futility of such an inclusive politics, Povinelli (2016: 13) recommends that when exhaustion emerges from trying to solve the problem of universal inclusion, we focus instead on “local problems.” This is a turn that several contributors make in this volume.

One way to capture local conjunctures between natural and critical life, without committing oneself wholeheartedly to some or other “ontological turn,” is to pursue a rigorous analysis of variable thresholds or limits beyond which sound cannot be heard—what Jairo Moreno (2013: 215) calls a “general liminology.” Rather than focusing on human audition or what lies beyond it, we advocate studies of the nexus through which audition is overwhelmed, exceeded, or repelled; elaborating on Moreno’s work, then, we call for *multiple liminologies*.

Tripta Chandola (2010), for example, invites us to consider the permeability of the body in its relation to sound, pointing to the fundamentally relational character of auditory experience. Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2014: 8–9), taking a different approach, calls that which withdraws from audition the “spectrality of sound,” asking us to consider the “excesses of the acoustic.” But how precisely do we examine that excess? What is the excess exceeding? How is the limit constituted, and what, one might ask, is the limit of the limit? As a way to begin to answer such questions, we propose sound studies as an anthropological exploration of the multiply constituted limits of audibility.

In part II of this volume, chapters by Jairo Moreno, Michael Birenbaum Quintero, Michele Friedner and Benjamin Tausig, and Jeff Roy variously engage what we are calling multiple liminologies. Moreno brings his theoretical work on liminology to bear on an ethnographic case study of the listening practices of midwives in the Pacific Afro-Colombian region. He focuses on how midwives listen to the not-yet-born as “lives” that, because they are both human and near-divine according to local belief, have unique powers to listen in to the living. Listening, for Moreno’s interlocutors, takes place at the threshold between the living and the nonliving—an ontological border zone he calls “quasi-life.”

Like Moreno’s, Quintero’s essay in this volume focuses on Afro-Colombian populations and on the contingencies of the limits of sound. But in many ways, Quintero’s context could not be more different: he explores the excessive, ear-splitting, bone-shaking volume of home sound systems as part of the musical aesthetic of the Pacific coast. Quintero begins by taking up theoretical arguments about excess and sovereignty from economic anthropologists and continental philosophers to suggest that loud music, as a site for the production of sensory excess, is part of people’s (particularly men’s) everyday performances of and micropolitical bids for prestige and sovereignty. In other words, *that which exceeds audition is constitutive of auditory experience*. Second, he examines a particular volume-related musical practice: raising volume to its technological limits while singing in groups at a throat-shredding full volume that is nonetheless inaudible below the sound pouring from the speakers. Quintero argues that in a local context of precariousness, violence, and seemingly perpetual impasse, musical volume functions as a kind of counterrepertoire to spoken language. This is necessitated by the fact that experiences of violence and endangerment in the Colombian Pacific are made banal by available registers of language

(journalistic, confessional, political), even as life takes place in a temporality in which futurity is devoured by the permanent holding pattern of the precarious present. The unspeakability of violence and the inconceivability of a future without it belie psychological teleologies of trauma that identify memory, testimony, and witnessing as the ideal and even inevitable response to violence. In the breach between the unspeakability of violent experience and the inevitable incompleteness of attempts to repress it, practices of sonic excess provide a gestural, nonlinguistic, and nonliteral engagement with affect in an ambience marked by experiences of violence.

Next, Friedner and Tausig push the discussion of limits in a different direction in their collaborative study of deafness and value. Based on case studies from India and Thailand, they illustrate that sensory capacities are not biologically determined before a person steps into a network of cultural projects and local distinctions. Rather, capacity and value emerge within social, political, and economic contingencies. The border between hearing and deafness is therefore a variable one, and “disability” only ever marks the valuation of biological fact within a particular system of coordinates.

A final chapter in part II considers the entanglement of voice and sound with the gendering of bodies. Roy examines the crossing of sonic limits in a chapter on *hijrā* performance, where the term “*hijrā*” refers to transgender individuals in India. Roy suggests that the multifaceted queer and transgender-*hijrā* (or trans-*hijrā*) communities he works with invite us to understand the voice differently. He puts forth the claim that in trans-*hijrā* contexts, the voice and its correlative identities should be understood outside the determinative framework of virtuosity and within the framework of *izzat* (roughly translated as “respect” vis-à-vis Gayatri Reddy [2005]), since it pertains to identity expressions that elude the stable logics of gender in which national and transnational identities are exchanged. Through case studies of vocal performance, Roy shows how trans-*hijrā* communities sing—or otherwise “sound out” through uniquely stylized nonvirtuosic vocalic practices—as a means of generating respect among its members and transcending normative sonic spaces that engender normative behavior and identities. Situated explicitly within the volume’s call for a turn toward the global South, Roy remaps the sonic understanding of identities that contest or ignore conventions of aural approval. The voices that Roy discusses do more than shift from one gender to another. They explode the very binary logic on which gender is constituted in the first place.

*The Politics of Sound:
A Proposal for Sonic Historiography as Encounter*

“Culture” is a mechanism of transduction, and it is a key hinge for relating to what is beyond human perceptibility. Studies of cultural constructions of sound in the global South can thus lay groundwork for thinking about sound generally and are indeed necessary for interpreting thresholds of audibility outside a Northern lens.

First, we need to question the veracity of the story of Western exceptionalism—that the West was the first to conceive of sound apart from the other senses.³⁷ Perhaps a study such as Erlmann’s *Reason and Resonance* (which is a study of constructions of aurality and the ear in the Western philosophical tradition) is possible outside the West. What we are envisioning here is the possibility for textually based studies with a broad historical lens, something like Lewis Rowell’s ([1992] 2015) work on South Asian musical manuscripts but looking not at discourses on “music” but at texts that locate non-Western traditions of thinking about “sound.” Such a project will need to bear in mind the historical construction of “sound” as a category of Western modernity and not read that into non-Western materials. Rather, such materials should be read for their constructions of sound prior to and different from their engagements with Western notions.

Besides the articulation of sonic ontologies relating to distinct cultural zones and peoples, we propose that sound studies theorize sonic history as “encounters” constituted by friction and integration. One starting point is Andrew Sartori’s (2008) argument that political liberalism and culturalism were two distinct but overlapping phases in early and late nineteenth-century India, respectively, which resulted in the conceptualization of “the arts” and “culture” apart from politics and economics. The latter were assigned to public space and gendered male, while the former were assigned to “private” domains such as the household and temples and gendered female (Birla 2009; Sartori 2008, 2014).³⁸ Placing sound within such colonial transformations will require attending to how the tendency for some sounds to become metonymic for certain kinds of people and traditions facilitated legal determinations of what sonic practices were deemed to belong in “public” and “private” spaces. Native sounds, as equivalent to South/female/domestic/indigenous (and so on), came to appear as disruptive intrusions into a public space that was defined as rightfully belonging to politics and the market (Sykes 2015, 2017).

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The first chapter of part III, by Hervé Tchumkam, shows that such spatial divisions and the power of sound to act as a disruption can easily be mapped onto the relationship between today's ethnicized suburbs and the centers of global cities. Tchumkam explores the politicization of inaudibility in contemporary France, employing a study of sound to analyze the social, political, and historical conditions for urban riots. He begins by reflecting on the explosive events of 2005, when France was struck by violence in the *banlieues*, the projects on the outskirts of French cities that are populated mainly by African migrants and their offspring. Tchumkam's essay sheds light on the ways in which the banlieues become a primary site for the replication of colonial rules. At the same time, because they are contained within the state, these spaces represent a serious threat to the political order. Caught between inclusion and exclusion, the invisible and unheard citizens of France have turned into rioters for justice and equality. Ultimately, his study of the invisibility and *inaudibility* of "visible minorities" in a space relegated to the periphery of major French cities seeks to show that the only sounds the relegated periphery of France is left to produce is that of uprisings. By examining distributions of sensory perception—audible and inaudible, visible and invisible—Tchumkam focuses on the relationships between power, sound, and that which is not yet heard. While not technically about the global South, the paper addresses France as a postcolonial space that replicates the logic of coloniality within the metropolitan center. Tchumkam illustrates how an analysis of "postcolonial France" forces us to reconsider notions of justice, equality, voice, and sonic politics.

Jim Sykes's chapter explores the relationship among Theravada Buddhist sonic ontology, colonialism, and the history of Christian missionization. Sykes shows how the ritual practices of Sri Lanka's Sinhala Buddhist ethnic majority involve numerous forms of efficacious speech and sonic exchange with gods and demons, in conjunction with the placement of the stars, which function to protect and heal individuals and the population at large. To unlock these powers, sonic utterances (including drumming) must be made in certain directions and at certain times (determined by an astrologer), and may require the holding of specific objects. Sykes argues that Christian missionaries defined Buddhism as an ideally silent religion whose sonic elements consist mainly of the chanting of monks; thus, they found the religion's noisiness (as they witnessed it) to be the result of the religion's decline in the hands of Sinhalese and the infiltration of supposedly "Hindu" elements such as astrology and deity propitiation. Sykes warns that if scholars think they are doing sound studies simply by exploring sound in religious

contexts in isolation from the other senses, objects, supernatural beings, astrology, and the like, they run the risk of reproducing a European ideology of “sound in itself” that, in the global South, has a specifically colonial and Christian heritage.

The final two chapters in part III focus explicitly on gender and embodiment. Tripta Chandola’s essay explores the relationships among sound, womanhood, adulthood, memory, and social relations (male-female and female friendships) as they emerge for young women who live in three adjoining slum settlements (called Govindpuri) on the outskirts of the Indian city of Delhi. The anecdotes narrated by Chandola’s interlocutors show how some young women in Govindpuri revel in manipulating men by using sound to “fake” certain emotions, such as moans and groans during staged phone sex in exchange for new iPhones. In another anecdote, young girls fool a female friend by facilitating a cassette mixtape exchange in which she thinks she is receiving a carefully constructed playlist of romantic songs from her imagined lover. In a third anecdote, Chandola and her female confidant stage a conflict with an older singing salesman in the local market, whom they accuse of lip syncing. Through Chandola’s (and her consultants’) recalling of incidents in which they “faked it” or accused others of “faking it” through sound, Chandola deftly shows the power of women to use sound for their own agency and how their successes and failures at “faking it” through sound were a key domain through which these Govindpuri girls played at being (and became) adults. Now married women with children of their own, many of Chandola’s interlocutors now look back wistfully on those times.

Finally, Shayna Silverstein’s chapter brings the discussion of the politics of sound to the level of the self, the body, the ethnographic encounter, and representation. In turn, she situates her memories of learning and experiencing Syrian *dabke*, a highly participatory and interactive popular type of dance music, in preconflict Syria and within a contemporary politics of the importance of expressive culture for Syria’s refugee community. At its heart, Silverstein’s essay rethinks the relationship between listener and sound object by engaging with nonauditory senses as crucial to the constitution of selfhood. Based on ethnographic fieldwork on performance dynamics in *dabke*, Silverstein stages several encounters between herself and her interlocutors that pivot on moments of sensory disorientation—that is, moments that reveal how the contingencies of lived experience entrain our bodies to perceive the world in culturally specific ways. In particular, she focuses on kinesthetics to raise questions about how proprioception, movement, and tactility direct bodies in sonically dense environments. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s queering

of modes of perception, she suggests that ethnographic encounters disrupt the “habitual and elided” (Ahmed 2006) relations of bodies, space, and time. As a mode of performance ethnography, the work of sensory disorientation both engages in and disrupts interpersonal and intercorporeal acts of performance in ways that help us to better understand the cultural logics and performative processes that shape ethnographic subjectivity. Disorientation of the ethnographer’s sensibilities thus informs how we approach sound and the insights we gain through its study because it accounts for body techniques such as listening and dancing as incidental, subject to spatiotemporal disjunctures, and indicative of social distinctions between researchers and their object of study. By embodying the ethnographic process through dabke practice, Silverstein deprivileges intellectual modes of knowledge production and redistributes the senses in ways that challenge the disciplinary genealogy of sound studies.

CLOSING REMARKS, OR, “THE SOUTH WAS THE
PROMISE OF OTHER THINGS TO COME”

Remapping sound studies participates in a remapping—and, indeed, a partial decolonization—of thinking and listening. Drawing on Viveiros de Castro’s (2004) notion of conceptual “equivocation,” we advocate a “transformation or even disfiguration” (Holbraad et al. 2013) of thinking about sound, about ways of hearing, and about the constitution of entities that hear via Southern perspectives. To “remap” sound studies, then, means engaging potential equivocations head-on—listening across time and place in a manner that lives up to the challenges of twenty-first-century geopolitics.

“On a global scale,” writes Françoise Vergès (2015), “following the mapping and remapping of what matters—and what does not—means following the routes of racial capitalism, the transformation of land into spaces for the working of capital” (28). But, she continues, “Historical and political cartographies mix with personal cartographies, building a multi-dimensional space of memories” (28). We quote Vergès’s account of these intertwining cartographies at length:

Where and how I grew up gave me a cartography of global resistance to power, colonialism, and imperialism. From the Greek χάρτης, or “map,” and γράφειν, “write,” cartography is, of course, the art and science of drawing maps. My first geography of resistance was drawn by the Réunion Island anticolonial movement. It was from this small island

in the Indian Ocean that I read the world. To the local cartography of cultural and political resistance, I added the millenary world of exchanges between Africa and Asia; the world of solidarity routes among anti-imperialist movements of the various Souths; the Southern world of music, literature, and images. (28)

Europe, Vergès writes, “was geographically and culturally on the periphery” (28). In her youth, “The South was the promise of other things to come . . . a map of third-world feminism, of national liberation movements, of the promise of Bandung” (28). But Vergès found this hopeful and potentially liberating “solid cartography” she inhabited during the 1960s and ’70s crumbling as time went on (28). Yet even as the “mutilated and mutilating cartography” (40) created by racial capitalism persists, Vergès notes that we have entered a new era, “an environmental wasteland where media never die, and [have facilitated] a colonization of the self . . . in which new sites of forgetfulness are created, new Souths” (39). Conjuring up the hopefulness of her youth, she concludes, “I have still a South. I look for its emergence in the resistance to the constant process of territorialization and deterritorialization operated by racial capital” (33).

It is in this spirit that *Remapping Sound Studies* listens for and from the South, with the aim of resisting the unwitting convergence of sound studies’ Northern-centric narrative and the ever mutilating cartographies of racial capital, by configuring sonic solidarities across Southern spaces defined by difference and agency.

Notes

1. The key text here is Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues* (published in 1781). The secondary literature is vast. See, e.g., Starobinski 1989; Thomas 1995. On the relationship between culture and the environment in the history of Western thought, see Glacken 1976.

2. Similarly, nineteenth-century British writers described the Malay language as the “Italian of the East,” referring to a sweet melodiousness in Malay that they found lacking in East Asian languages (Irving 2014).

3. For important work on this manifold construction, see Haraway 1991; Minh-ha 1989.

4. For a particularly potent and relevant critique, see Cimini 2011.

5. We focus here on twentieth-century social science, although much could be said about earlier periods and other modes of knowledge production: see, e.g., the recent, excellent critique of sound in nineteenth-century colonial literature in Napolin 2013, which echoes an earlier critique in Achebe 1977.

6. Deconstruction is treated very differently in the work of Sterne, Szendy, and Erlmann: see esp. Sterne 2003: 17–18; Szendy 2015: 18–19; Erlmann 2010: 14–16, 48–50.

For a relevant deconstructivist text, see Derrida [1967] 1976. For a useful critique of binary oppositions in Carpenter, McLuhan, and Ong from a different perspective, see Feld 1986.

7. For a critique along these lines, see the contributions to Roy and Crane 2005.

8. Important inspirations for this move include Comaroff and Comaroff 2011 (as well as the series of responses collected in Obbario 2012); Connell 2007; Santos 2014. For a useful set of reflections on cities in the global South, see the contributions in Dawson and Edwards 2004. The journal *Global South* (published biannually since 2007) is another important resource. For a different perspective, see Latimer and Szymczyk 2015.

9. Speculating on what types of theorization may yet emerge from other disciplinary perspectives is tantalizing indeed. For an excellent example of what a historian may do with Southern sound, see Bronfman 2016.

10. At the turn of the twenty-first century, important studies appeared on topics such as technological modernity (Sterne 2003, 2012b), architectural acoustics (Thompson 2002), and histories of hearing, listening, and aurality (Erlmann 2004, 2010; Szendy 2008)—to name just some of the more celebrated examples.

11. We recognize the importance of this scholarship (see, e.g., Bull 2007; LaBelle 2010). One of our aims is to put it in dialogue with writings on urban life, design, and spatiality outside the global North (see, e.g., Kusno 2010; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Simone 2009).

12. To provide a few other representative examples: *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Pinch and Bijsterveld 2011) contains twenty-three chapters on topics ranging from Pixar and birdsong to cochlear implants and iPod culture, but Africa and Asia are absent there as well. The earlier edited collection *Hearing Cultures* (Erlmann 2004) is also North-centric, the lone exception being Charles Hirschkind's chapter on Egypt. Routledge's single-volume *Sound Studies Reader* (Sterne 2012b) fares slightly better: of its forty-five chapters, there is just one on southern Africa (by Louise Meintjes) and two on North Africa (one by Hirschkind and an early text by Frantz Fanon). David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (2015: 7) make the point forcefully: "But despite the interdisciplinary breadth of sound studies, the field as a whole has remained deeply committed to Western intellectual lineages and histories. As one example, of the dozens of books about sound published by MIT Press—a leader in science and technology studies, philosophies of aesthetics, and cognition—none is principally invested in non-Western perspectives or subjects. Sound studies has often reinforced Western ideals of a normative subject, placed within a common context of hearing and listening."

13. This situation seems set to change, though, as recent years have witnessed a trickle of publications that theorize sound in specific locations of the global South (see, e.g., Bronfman and Wood 2012; see also Bronfman 2016). Another example is the recent issue on Southeast Asian soundscapes in *Journal of Sonic Studies*: see <http://sonicstudies.org/JSS12>.

14. These include the aforementioned works of Fanon, Meintjes, Hirschkind, and Ochoa Gautier (see note 12).

15. As ethnomusicologists, we have occasionally encountered this sentiment from colleagues in informal conversations.

16. Sterne (2012a: 3) writes, “To think sonically is to think conjuncturally about sound and culture. . . . Sound studies’ challenge is to think across sounds, to consider sonic phenomena in relations to one another.”

17. In doing so, we systematically elaborate a conjuncture alluded to in several recent texts (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015; Stadler 2010). Novak and Sakakeeny (2015) have also recently pointed to the Eurocentricism of music work on sound. We heed their call for increasing attention to a plurality of sonic practices.

18. We do not suggest our list is exhaustive; we have picked valuable texts that remain altogether unincorporated into sound studies. Each essay points toward topics with their own long bibliographies. Also, we have placed the voluminous literature on “music” off to one side but do include a few musicological sources that explicate broader sound-related topics under “sonic ontologies and religions.” Finally, our reader should be placed in dialogue with a few subgenres of sound studies that can be seen as running parallel to this “hidden” Southern version of the discipline, such as recent writings on sound, listening and blackness in North America (see, e.g., Brooks 2010; Nyong’o 2014; Radano 2016; Stadler 2010; Stoever 2016; Weheliye 2000, 2014; White and White 2006) and the auditory turn in American studies (see, e.g., Daughtry 2014; Morat 2014; Schmidt 2002).

19. Extant anthologies include Bull 2013; Pinch and Bijsterveld 2011; Sterne 2012b.

20. See also Barbara Watson Andaya’s (2011) essay on sound and power in the pre-modern Malay world, as well as the discussion on the Indonesian and Malay concept of *ramai* (busy noisiness) in Rasmussen 2010.

21. This piece is about aural constructions of the U.S.-Mexico border.

22. We include this text rather than Fanon’s “This Is the Voice of Algeria” because the latter is included in some sound studies anthologies and because Baucom’s piece theorizes the importance of radio for anticolonial movements broadly.

23. Also of interest is the Argentinian journal *El oído pensante*.

24. Also of note at the 2010 dividing line are two landmark articles in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Porcello et al. 2010; Samuels et al. 2010), both of which are relevant to (and have helped us conceptualize) the current introduction, but both of which ultimately have different aims to our own.

25. See the comments in this regard in Sterne 2015: 71, 74n3.

26. Note that we do not say science and technology studies was the *only* site for the crystallization of “sound studies” as a formal discipline in the early-to-mid-2000s. For example, parallel (and occasionally intersecting) lines of inquiry at that time include writings on sound and music in everyday life (see, e.g., Bull 2000; DeNora 2000) and sound art (see, e.g., Cox and Warner 2004; Kahn 2001; Kelly 2011; Kim-Cohen 2009).

27. We are thinking particularly here of why Fanon's famous text on radio in Algeria, Hirschkind's work on cassette sermons in Egypt, and Meintjes monograph on recording studios in South Africa are three of the only texts focusing on the South that are widely recognized as a part of sound studies.

28. It bears emphasizing that, while the scholarly study of sound art builds on a long history of experimenting with sound through technology, from the Italian futurists through John Cage, *musique concrète*, the development of the synthesizer, and so on, we suggest that neither these nor the scholarly writings about them should be reduced to or taken as equivalent to sound studies. Embedded in our critique of the technology problematic in this section, in other words, is a critique of the tendency for some writers to reduce sound studies to a narrative on experimenting with new musical instruments.

29. This may explain why Feld's work on the Kaluli is absent in the various sound studies readers.

30. On Mxit, see, e.g., Kreutzer 2009. On WhatsApp and nationalism in India, we have in mind Ravi Sundaram's keynote address the "What Is Comparative Media?" conference held at Columbia University in 2016. Another relevant example would be Sumanth Gopinath's (2013) study of cellphone ringtones, which is quite impressive in its geographical breadth.

31. This motivation is stated on the Oxford University Press website, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780195375725.do>.

32. One study that seeks to mediate these different kinds of engagement with technological "failure" is "The Sublime Frequencies of New Old Media" (Novak 2011), on the importance of distortion to the aesthetics and processes of remediating "world music" in the digital age. Novak compellingly describes the investments in distortion made by Northern underground musicians since the 1980s — not just amplifiers and effects pedals but the circulation of cassettes — and the ways that distortion both is and is not valued in similar ways by those from Southern locations whose musics have been remediated for Northern markets in the digital age.

33. For a similar position, see Muller and Benjamin (2011) on musical echoes.

34. Brian Kane (2015) suggests that Goodman and a few other authors proclaiming the "ontological turn" in sound studies carry with them preconceived cultural notions about sound even as they proclaim to produce "culture-free analyses." See the following footnote for additional references to the contemporary debate.

35. "Posthumanist" may not, in fact, be the best or most precise word — at least in the way that we intend it. A more appropriate term for our own meaning would probably be "anti-correlationist."

36. A great deal of controversy surrounds the recent "ontological turn" in anthropology. Although often claiming a longer historical trajectory — going back at least to the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Marilyn Strathern, Marshall Sahlins, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) or, more controversially, to the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss — so-called "ontological anthropology" has garnered several potent manifestos in recent

years (e.g., Holbraad and Pederson 2017), as well as numerous hard-hitting critiques (e.g., Bessire and Bond 2014; Graeber 2015). See Alberti et al. 2011; Venkatesan et al. 2010. See also the thread “The Politics of Ontology” on *Cultural Anthropology’s* Theorizing the Contemporary platform, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/461-the-politics-of-ontology>. Anthropology’s own ontological turn has taken place alongside a similar turn in continental philosophy, referred to variously as “speculative realism” (Bryant et al. 2011) and “new materialism” (Coole and Frost 2010). An invaluable contribution from the perspective of music and sound is Ochoa Gautier 2014.

37. For example, Adrien Tien (2015: 38) writes that the words *sheng* (sound), *yin* (sound), and *yue* (music) have been in use in China since the pre-Qin and Qin periods (before and up to 206 BCE). *Sheng* is “an acoustic stimulus generated by something in the environment, e.g., an event or an action, with no immediately identifiable agent” (Tien 2015: 49). For ancient Chinese philosophers, there was a distinction between sound and non-sound, and “both [are] equally valid aspects of sonic experience” (he remarks that “the word ‘non-sound’ is preferred over the word *silence* since . . . *silence* is an Anglo-centric word which does not have readily available, lexical and translational equivalents in other languages, including Chinese” [Tien 2015: 49]). Although this example is not from the global South, it points to the need for studies that consider how sound was configured in relation to the other senses in different locations around the world.

38. Amanda Weidman (2006), drawing on the earlier contributions of Partha Chatterjee, shows how “the female voice” became perceived as a site of an authentic and ancient Indian identity that was useful for the anticolonial movement, on account of this association of culture and women with the private sphere in India’s colonial period.

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