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Loud: Death by Garbage Truck

MJ Thompson

Abstract

A writer speculates on waste sounds in the city.

I live on Roy Est in the Plateau, Montréal. It's a charming tree-lined street, a two-block stretch bound by a public square and small épicerie at one end and Parc La Fontaine at the other. It's a through-way for skaters, cyclists, and walkers heading from this busy, urban neighborhood filled with shops, bars, and apartments into the cool greenscape of the park. It's also a throughway for trucks: snow removal, grocery, recycling and garbage, many of which rest up on the curbs, idling their engines and having a coffee before heading back to work and the circuitous transportation routes of the city. The garbage trucks are loud, with engines that rev and idle like jet planes, and young men in safety vests hanging off the back who run to keep up when the work starts again. I wonder how to connect this bottom-line, union-free labor with news of another death by garbage truck. It seems the trucks back up and run over people, the latest casualty a 26-year-old woman hit early morning as she walked out of a depanneur in the city's east end. Did she cry out? The driver left the scene, he had no idea. Loud but unhearing, loud but unheard. Wasted sound, and unsound waste practice--our habits of expenditure slowly killing us.

Note:

This piece on garbage trucks was developed as part of a year-long zoom Writing Salon, initiated by Michelle Dent, involving eight former colleagues from the Department of Performance Studies at New York University.

About the author

A fan of dance in all its forms, MJ Thompson has been watching and writing about movement and performance for over twenty years. Committed to popular culture and everyday aesthetics, she has written for a wide variety of publications, including *Ballettanz*, *Border Crossings*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Canadian Art*, *Dance Current*, *Dance Ink*, *Dance Magazine*, *The Drama Review*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Women and Performance*, *Theatre Journal* and more. She is Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies and Practices, at Concordia University in Montreal. Her academic work is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada; and her essays have appeared in several anthologies, including *Performance Studies Canada* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2017). Most recently, she received the National Park Service Arts and Sciences Residency, Cape Cod National Seashore, August 2019, where she worked on a long-form essay about the concept of the view as embodied (forthcoming, *Departures* 2020). She was a Lillian S. Robinson Fellow at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute in Montreal in 2010. Her dissertation, "Impure Movement: Mundane Body Techniques in 20th Century American Choreography" (NYU 2009), was recipient of the Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull Memorial Award for Academic Excellence. Her book about the dancer Louise Lecavalier is forthcoming from Bloomsbury/Methuen 2022. Email: mj.thompson@concordia.ca