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Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas

by

Thomas Patrick McEnaney

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Francine Masiello, Chair

Professor Michael Lucey

Professor Colleen Lye

Fall 2011

Abstract

Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas

by

Thomas Patrick McEnaney

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Dedicated Emphasis in New Media Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Francine Masiello, Chair

In *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* I write the unrecognized history of the co-development of radio and the novel in the middle half of the last century. I argue that just as photography helped re-invent pictorial representation in the nineteenth century, so authors across the Americas employed radio to retune the “unspeakable sentences” of the novel and string them together into rich acoustic environments, supplanting the narrator with the chorus, transforming character into a vocal effect, and turning away from the realist enumeration of Things to amplify instead the sound of social space. In representing and formally incorporating the radio into their narratives, John Dos Passos, Carson McCullers, Richard Wright, Gertrude Stein, Raymond Chandler, Severo Sarduy, and Manuel Puig wrote against the monolithic, charismatic, and nationalist orators who reached them over the radio. Taking seriously Jean-Paul Sartre’s search for a “literary art of radio” and Frederic Jameson’s speculation regarding a “radio aesthetic” in the novel, I demonstrate that authors in the radio age responded to radiophonics by developing a new kind of writing that was also a practice of listening. From the 1930s to the 1970s, they shaped the cultural imagination of radio’s new social network, and initiated a project to define the neighborhood of the Americas.

I organize my dissertation around three thematic axes: acoustic engineering and aural media innovations developed in connection with the radio; the legal and political challenges posed by the commodification of sound; and the mutual influence between the novel and the radio that transformed narrative genre and fashioned radio’s content and use. I show how, in contradistinction to the “Good Neighbor Policy,” narrative artists from the founding nations of broadcast technology—the United States, Argentina, and Cuba—built an alternative sonic community connecting neighbors North and South. I bring together this new neighborhood of writers who latch on to the long legacy of sound technology’s resistance to legal concepts of property—both intellectual and material. They find in radio a medium that occupies the domestic space of the phonograph at the same time that its range and reach contests national borders. In the novel, this means teaching readers how to listen, converting intimate scenes of overhearing into critiques of transnational relations.

However, I argue that rather than overtly seizing the means of radio production, as Brecht forcefully proposed, these writers used the novel to record the act of listening—archiving scenes radio itself cannot so easily represent. Attentive to listeners instead of speakers, these writers

valorize listening as a creative, critical, and collective action against the nationalist and colonial voice. They underscore the novel's capacity to remediate other oral technologies, and the printed medium's own particularly dense work with multiple vocal registers. In addition to its own changes, the novel becomes a testing ground in which to work through the cultural value of the radio, its distinct reconfiguration of public and private space, its new forms of rhetorical address, and its previously unheard of massive and long distance communication. In this engagement, the novel emerges as the privileged form through which to understand radio's historical and cultural influence.

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INTRODUCTION: LEARNING TO LISTEN

In John Cheever's 1947 short story "The Enormous Radio" a young couple, Jack and Irene, purchase a new radio for their Manhattan apartment.¹ The radio has trouble tuning in to stations without interference, the transistor prone to pick up the general noise of the apartment building more clearly than a Mozart quintet:

The rattling of the elevator cables and the opening and closing of the elevator doors were reproduced in her loudspeaker, and, realizing that the radio was sensitive to electrical currents of all sorts, she began to discern through the Mozart the ringing of telephone bells, the dialing of phones, and the lamentation of a vacuum cleaner. By listening more carefully, she was able to distinguish doorbells, elevator bells, electric razors, and Waring mixers, whose sounds had been picked up from the apartments that surrounded hers and transmitted through her loudspeaker (Cheever, 28).

When, a few nights later, the couple hears the voice of a neighbor's nurse emanating from the radio's loudspeaker, a voice Jim first mistakes for a radio play, Irene scolds her husband, "Turn that thing off... Maybe they can hear *us*" (Cheever, 29). Yet, despite her reservations, the device draws her in, and Irene remains pegged to the radio, eavesdropping on her neighbors through the speakers, scandalized and intrigued, and finally depressed by their private lives. Reflecting on what she has heard, she asks her husband, "We're not hypocritical or worried about money or dishonesty, are we?" (Cheever, 32-33). Jim reassures her of their happiness, and pays for a repairman to fix the radio the following day. When Irene turns it on she is "happy to hear a California wine commercial and a recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, including Schiller's 'Ode to Joy'" (Cheever, 33). However, when her husband returns that night, he complains about the cost of the radio repairs, and begins to itemize their financial worries before Irene interrupts him: "Please Jim," she said. Please. They'll hear us.' 'Who'll hear us? Emma can't hear us.' 'The radio'" (ibid). Outraged, Jim erupts, shouting Irene's secrets, from the theft of her mother's jewelry to the abortion she kept hidden from friends, and the story closes as Irene stands "before the hideous cabinet... hoping the instrument might speak to her kindly, that she might hear the Sweeney's nurse" (ibid). Instead of this hopeful voice she hears only "a voice on the radio... suave and noncommittal" read the day's news and announce the weather.

Cheever's story offers both a concrete metaphor of the radio network as one enormous collection of neighbors, and a negative example against which we can better understand radio's particularity and its relation to transformations in narrative genre. Irene and Jim's experiences align with the basic themes associated with radio, especially its physical penetration of solid space, and the subsequent sense that previously solid divisions of private and public space have blurred, if not altogether collapsed. The anchorman's weather reading at the story's close serves two purposes: it reminds us that the radio more typically grants us access to public news and events, and it reframes the couple's earlier listening to their neighbors' private lives as the constitutive other side to that public world. This dialectic opens a door between the two realms: if we can hear the public, Irene reminds her husband, then the public might be able to hear us. This paranoid worry, translated into Jim's fit of shouting, evidences the public world's

¹ John Cheever, "The Enormous Radio" in *The New Yorker*, May 17, 1947.

insinuation into the couple's domestic life. For Cheever, the entire network of neighbors sits concealed in the "suave and noncommittal" radio voice.

However, for all of the story's charms, its disruption of domestic life derives more from a past understanding of the apartment house's role in cultural life, and less from the radio's technological novelty. Irene's eavesdropping on her neighbors and her subsequent fear that her own private life will be made public owes as much to what Sharon Marcus identifies in nineteenth-century British and French realist fiction as the "apartment house plot" as it does to the particular cultural anxieties, narrative genres, and social practices ushered in with radio broadcast technology.² Read in a more positive light, in tying the radio to the apartment house, Cheever's story helps readers understand the social architecture of radio broadcasting through its similarities with the buildings in Balzac and Dickens. What Cheever's wireless apartment house misses, and what other novelists in the United States, and, I argue below, Cuba and Argentina include in their narratives, is a sense that radio blurs not only the boundaries between public and private, but also those borders between the national and transnational, the local and hemispheric.

Part of the argument I set forth in the following pages shows how the idea of the radio network as a neighborhood in which nations shared walls made permeable by radio listening became a central metaphor to writers in the founding nations of radio broadcast—Argentina, Cuba, and the United States.³ These writers, their national cultures brought into contact through radio broadcasts, economic agreements and political treaties, took up the radio to imaginatively negotiate the fluctuating local, national, and transnational borders of the Americas. In narrative works by Raymond Chandler, John Dos Passos, Carson McCullers, Severo Sarduy, Manuel Puig, and Richard Wright listening through a neighbor's walls challenges the divisions of public and private property, at the same time that it interrogates national boundaries. To take just one example, Carson McCullers's adolescent character Mick Kelly listens to radio broadcasts through the walls and windows of wealthier houses in her neighborhood, and then converts the walls of a vacant home into writing spaces where she lists the names of well known radio figures—from Dick Tracy to Mozart to Benito Mussolini—laying claim to the house's value as a semi-public place. Representing a technique central to the writers I examine here, Mick's "radio graffiti" learns writing from a practice of radio listening in order to critique the private ownership of real property.

These narrative challenges to neighborhood walls did not emerge in a historical vacuum. Rather, they counter and provide an alternative to the political narrative of the Good Neighbor Policy, as well as its cultural and economic legacy. What I identify as a particular strain of experimental realism produced by the co-evolution of radio and the novel in the Americas derived, in part, from the radio genres the Good Neighbor Policy accidentally influenced. More specifically, we can trace the development of genres such as the *radionovela*, which proved influential to later realist experiments in form, back to economic and commercial agreements between Cuba and the United States in 1934. For instance, in Manuel Puig's novel *Boquitas Pintadas* (Heartbreak Tango; 1969) about 1930s and 40s Argentina, the domestic worker Raba, under the influence of tango songs heard over the radio, murders the father of her child, Pancho,

² Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 11.

³ For more on the history of early radio see Andrea Matallana, "*Locos por la radio*": *Una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923-1947* (2006), Michael B. Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (1994), Oscar Luis López, *La radio en Cuba* (1981, 1998), Michel Hilmes, *Radio Voices* (1997), and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (2003).

for sleeping with Mabel, the daughter of Raba's employer. Mabel, whose desire for the policeman Pancho derives from her favorite *radionovela* plots, is seduced by him as he puts up a radio antenna on the police station neighboring Mabel's bourgeois home.

In this case, the *radionovela*, the cultural by-product of an economic agreement between Cuba and the United States helps lead to a policeman's murder by a domestic servant on the shared border of a police station and family home beneath a radio antenna. Attention to the history of radio and its genres, in this case, reveals an apparently domestic melodrama's entanglement in transnational economics and narrative. The murder becomes not only a critique of the confluence between state power and radio drama, but also of how such formations arise through transnational media networks and economic agreements. Just as radio enables and furthers certain economic ambitions of the Good Neighbor Policy, writers like Puig incorporate radio into their narrative to write back against that policy. Thus, we can say that authors in Argentina, Cuba and the United States renovated realist form by redefining writing as a practice of radio listening and employing scenes of neighborly eavesdropping to critique the political narrative of the Good Neighbor Policy. However, before examining the specific formal innovations of these novels, we should first understand radio's own particularity as a medium.

Radio Ontologies

Historians and theoreticians of radio both in its early years and today have argued for the medium's unique engineering and aesthetics in three fields: as a "blind art," a "live" or simultaneous transmission, and an open, massive address system. As early as 1928 the French radio producer Paul Deharme claimed that "radio broadcasting's advantage lay in...the fact that it relied solely on the voice, not on vision" (Birkenmaier, "Deharme," 403).⁴ Furthering Deharme's point, Rudolf Arnheim argues, "in praise of blindness" for an autonomous aesthetic of the radio play in his 1936 book *Radio: The Art of Sound*. There he specifies that "a wireless play is self-sufficient, completes itself in the aural," whereas a "relay," the transmission of an event such as an opera, a race, or a meeting "judged by the sound that comes through the loudspeaker, must appear to be only the part-utterance of a greater whole whose perception is denied the listener" (Arnheim, "Blindness," 21).⁵ Radio art distinguishes itself from the broadcast of live events, in Arnheim's theory, by a process in which "*resonance is eliminated*, out of a very proper feeling that the existence of the studio is not essential to the transmission and therefore has no place in the listener's consciousness" (Arnheim, *Radio*, 143).⁶ For these early producers and theoreticians, the art of radio, different from mere broadcasting, elevates the lack of vision into an autonomous and self-sufficient aesthetic realm that eliminates the sound of space.

Later theorists have misunderstood or exaggerated these early claims to praise radio as not only a "blind art," but as a medium that produces a disembodied voice.⁷ While the radio voice arrives unattached to a visible body, careful listening to a voice's tone, timbre, cadence,

⁴ Anke Birkenmaier, "Introduction to Paul Deharme" in *Modernism / modernity*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2009): 403-413.

⁵ Rudolf Arnheim, "In Praise of Blindness" in *Radiotext(e)*, (ed.) Neil Strauss (New York: Semiotext(e), 1993): 20-25.

⁶ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936).

⁷ One of the major proponents of the theoretical possibilities of disembodiment in radio and other acoustic technology has been Allen Weiss. See Allen Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan UP, 2002). Weiss and other critics in this vein derive much of the authority for the argument from the radio artist and theorist Douglas Kahn. See especially Douglas Kahn and Kevin Whitehead eds. *Wireless Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).

and accent makes audible a whole host of material markers. Almost despite itself, a voice always calls attention to its various forms of embodiment, and retains its capacity to project the image of a different body by changes in those markers. Literary theorists mostly subsume these complex residues of the body in the voice beneath Roland Barthes' evocative, but vague phrase, "the grain of the voice."⁸ While I will say more about other techniques to interpret the sonic aspects of language later in this introduction, even Barthes' "grain" calls on listeners and readers to attend to the voice's body, and hear radio's blind art as an embodied medium. And, in addition to the voice's materiality, radio broadcasting's constitutive limits of distance remind us of specific physical constraints placed on the medium. Although podcasting and internet radio have expanded radio's reach, in the historical period I discuss in this dissertation shortwave transmissions can travel as far as Montreal to Buenos Aires. However, the relative paucity of shortwave listeners in the Americas, and the increasingly crowded medium wave bandwidth for commercial stations enforce material restrictions on radio broadcasting's reach from the 1930s to the 1970s.

Despite these physical limits, radio broadcasting's simultaneous transmission has produced an imagined "live" experience some critics associate with disembodiment. Denis Hollier observes that for "the first generation of radio theorists (Paul Deharme, Rudolph Arnheim, André Coeuroy, Arno Huth)...[t]he characteristic specific to radio is that it is live" (Hollier, 18).⁹ Moreover, in Holier's Derridean-inflected schema, such "live" broadcasting of the voice, "without leaving behind any archivable precipitates," is linked to the idea of "the death of paper," rendering radio the "anarchival" opposition to print's "archival" traces (Hollier, 19).¹⁰ Although he acknowledges the 1938 construction of the French national phonotèque that began archiving radio programs, many of the earliest radio programs produced by Deharme and others had already used phonograph recordings in their production. While radio continues to allow for "live" productions—those "relays" Arnheim bemoans—the effect has more to do with the listeners' belief that others are sharing the same experience at the same time. In other words, the "live" effect derives from simultaneous transmission, or what Jean-Paul Sartre identifies as the "seriality" of radio listening, and its "indirect gatherings."¹¹ For Sartre, "the mere fact of *listening to the radio*...establishes a serial relation of *absence* between the different listeners" (Sartre, 271; emphasis in original). The "absence" does not refer to the missing body in the voice, but the missing bodies of the listeners, each of them simultaneously listening to the radio voice. This *shared* absence, therefore, produces an imagined collectivity based on the knowledge of a shared temporality.¹² Hence, radio broadcast distinguishes itself from the media of

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" in trans. Stephen Heath, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 179-189.

⁹ Denis Hollier, "The Death of Paper: A Radio Play" in *October* Vol. 78, (Autumn, 1996): 3-20.

¹⁰ Linking "live" radio to disembodiment, Hollier writes, "No critic missed the allegory [of the radio play *La cité des voix* by Pierre Descaves]: this world of disembodied voices, voices that produce—in the words of Antonin Artaud—a disembodied phonation [*une phonation sans organe*] is perceived by all as an allegory for the miracle of radio" (Hollier, 12).

¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: NLB, 1976).

¹² Sartre argues that the knowledge of other listeners that gives rise to what I am calling the "live effect" of seriality has been produced by mass media over time: "Thus, the impotent listener is constituted by the very voice as an *other-member (membre-autre)* of the indirect gathering: with the first words, a lateral relation of indefinite seriality is established between him and *the Others*. Of course, this relation originated in knowledge produced by language itself in so far as it is a means for the mass media. Everyone gets their information about French radio programmes from newspapers and the radio itself. But this knowledge (which is itself of a serial order by virtue of its origin, content and practical objective) has for a long time been transformed into a fact" (Sartre, 273; emphasis in original).

inscription—the newspaper, the printed book, the phonograph—not by failing to leave traces of the event, but rather by producing the knowledge of a previously unexperienced massive simultaneity.

Radio’s “live character” cannot occur, in this sense, without its open system of address: broadcasting. Unlike the telephone, engineered for point-to-point communication, or early versions of wireless transmission, such as wireless telephony (*radiotelefonía*), radio broadcasting (*radiodifusión*) allows listeners to tune in to a signal that was never intended for them specifically. As Erving Goffman reminds us, in listening to the radio we always “overhear.”¹³ Surprisingly, precisely this essential feature of what we now recognize as radio was the major “defect” that inventor Guglielmo Marconi labored to resolve in his development of wireless transmission: “For in those days a major shortcoming was ascribed to my invention: the possible interception of transmissions” (quoted in Kittler, “Gramophone,” 251).¹⁴ The resolution to this supposed defect influenced media histories and modernist aesthetics. Friedrich Kittler argues that the German military’s desire to encrypt signals along radio’s open system of address altered the media ecology in ways that eventually aided in the development of the personal computer, and Timothy Campbell claims that Ezra Pound employed this lesson in encryption as an aesthetic principle in his “Radio *Cantos*.”¹⁵

However, anti-colonial radio found a different means to “narrowcast,” or limit the intended audience for its messages. Franz Fanon’s study of Algerian revolutionary radio, for example, shows how Arabic language broadcasts with content appropriate to a practicing Muslim audience took hold of the very medium, radio, that French colonists had previously employed to connect the colony to the empire.¹⁶ Language, in this case, becomes a signal, if not a code, to distinguish the revolutionary message from the colonial. Writing about the radio, in this case, also affects Fanon’s style. As Brian Edwards points out, in imitation of the Algerian revolutionary broadcasts, Fanon incorporates untranslated Arabic words as well as French words with Arabic etymologies in order to produce “an Arabized French that effectively repositions French colonizers in an alien language territory” (Edwards, 101).¹⁷ Fanon thus secures “the detachment of French language from French nation” (100), an achievement that derives from his description of the revolutionary radio: “Since this French is not ‘at home’ in France or in other Francophone contexts where Arabic is unknown—*L’an V* seeks to *translate* the Algerian

¹³ As Goffman observes, “One of the basic resources of the announcer (perhaps even more than of the ordinary speaker) is that of conveying something that listeners will be privy to but which cannot stand as something they openly have been given access to. *The audience is, as it were, forced into the role of overhearers*, but of messages the announcer is sending only to himself or not to anyone at all” (Goffman, “Radio,” 303; emphasis added). He goes on to explain that through certain shifts in tone of voice, “the announcer makes his audience privy to his own feelings (not the station’s or sponsor’s or any generalized ‘we’), shifting the audience’s status to that of overhearers” (305).

Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

¹⁴ See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999).

¹⁵ More specifically, Kittler argues that the German military’s need for more efficient encryption funded Arthur Scherbius’s modified typewriter, which “liberated cryptographers from their manual work” (252), and produced an antecedent to today’s computer keyboards, as well as an encryption device that helped lead to the development of the personal computer.

For more on Pound, Marconi, and the literary impact of Italian fascism’s intersection with radio, see Timothy Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Franz Fanon, “Ici la voix de l’Algérie...” in *L’an V de la Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1962): 57-88.

¹⁷ Brian Edwards, “Fanon’s *al-Jazáir*, or Algeria Translated” in *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2002): 99-115.

revolution to foreign contexts—the non-Arabic speaking reader of Fanon (in French) receives a linguistic signal not unlike the radio signal that Fanon describes” (Edwards, 101; emphasis in original). In other words, the revolutionary radio’s distorted interruption of colonial French models a style of linguistic and national deterritorialization that simultaneously informs the local struggle while enabling the message’s dissemination beyond its initial national context.

From the other side of colonial radio, George Orwell provides an intriguing account of how radio’s unique engineering—its aural autonomy, simultaneity, and long-distance broadcast address—can affect the borders of a “world literature.” Orwell, in an essay entitled “Poetry and the Microphone,” reflects on the means by which he sought to help the BBC sustain imperial influence over an Indian audience in 1943: “If you are broadcasting poetry to *people who know your language but don’t share your cultural background*, a certain amount of comment and explanation is unavoidable, and the formula we usually followed was to broadcast what purported to be a monthly literary magazine” (329; emphasis added).¹⁸ Free from overt linguistic difference, Orwell proposes *literature* as the means by which to overcome the colonial divide and maintain imperial territory. Strangely, however, the Indian audience for whom the programs were ostensibly produced soon falls away from Orwell’s account. Instead, this colonial audience becomes the inspiration for retraining the English lyric poet and transforming the genre of lyric poetry itself:

These programmes that I have been speaking of were of no great value in themselves, but I have mentioned them because of the ideas they aroused in myself and some others about the possibilities of *the radio as a means of popularising poetry*. I was early struck by the fact that the broadcasting of a poem by the person who wrote it *does not merely produce an effect upon the audience, if any, but also on the poet himself*. . . By being set down at a microphone, especially if this happens at all regularly, the poet is brought into a new relationship with his work, *not otherwise attainable in our time and country* (330-331; emphasis added).

As in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique of radio in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Marshall McLuhan’s theory of hot media in his chapter, “Radio As Tribal Drum,” Orwell argues that radio has the potential to turn a modern society towards oral culture.¹⁹ Yet, he refrains from the critique of secondary orality as “regressive barbarism,” or primitivism present in these other accounts, and instead takes radio as the condition upon which poetry can break free from what he considers its “obscurity and ‘cleverness’” (331). Whereas Ezra Pound, in Campbell’s reading, creates an arcane poetic system from listening to radio’s encryption, Orwell learns from radio’s open system of address to produce a popular poetry. The point here is not so much Orwell’s particular aesthetics, but rather how radio might effect a change in the English (or perhaps British, or European, or “Western”) poem’s style and the social practices considered immanent to modern literature: namely, literacy, the printed page, and a certain “obscurity or cleverness” that helps objects define themselves as both modern and literary. This task, which

¹⁸ George Orwell, “Poetry and the Microphone” in *The Collected Essays Vol. 2 (1940-1943)* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2002): 120-167.
Marshall McLuhan, “Radio As Tribal Drum” in *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 1964): 297-307.

seems impossible in Orwell's "time and country," becomes possible only by means of the radio, which allows the poet to speak directly to a different temporal and national context. Broadcast's simultaneity, in this case, amplifies the (imagined or projected) asymmetry in the encounter between the imperial and colonial context, tuning Orwell's ears to the limits of British poetry.

The reflexive turn retrains the poet in an oral mode that has specifically "popularizing" tendencies. Literacy, from Orwell's perspective, has helped literature define itself against the popular, and therefore "a hostility towards poetry on the part of the common man has come to be taken for granted in any country *where everyone can read*" (331; emphasis added). To reinforce the point made above, the attempt to retain colonial authority through a "literary magazine," instead forges a populist poetics intent on opening up a new space in self-consciously modern literature for a more aurally attuned poetry available to the "common man." My intent is not to valorize such a politics or poetics (Orwell remains vague on what it would sound like), but to show how, in Orwell's case, radio's international ambitions fail at forging a shared literary space across national boundaries, and yet also disrupt the assumption that literature produced within one nation necessarily has a national audience.

Radio and (Comparative / Postcolonial / Transnational / World) Literature

Fanon and Orwell present us with two versions of how radio can alter literature, and also make the literary object audible or visible to readers and listeners, writers or speakers confronted with that object's limits. Orwell, in particular, seems to offer an account of the failings of "world literature" as imperial propaganda, at the same time that he develops a unique theory of transnational literature tied to radio address. In his case, transnational literature emerges from direct address beyond national and, Orwell insists, cultural borders. This literature is not the result of textual influence, literary translation, immersion in another culture, or the transcendental universality of a "great work." Rather, Orwell's transnational literature depends on the radio's secondary orality, and its ability to reach a country where, and this is implicit in his phrase, "[*not*] everyone can read." It is an encounter with illiteracy, the constitutive limit, as Michael Allan argues, of literary and literate experience.²⁰

Attention to the co-development of the radio and the novel, of sound technology and narrative, should enable readers to approach this limit, and to ask how writers who engage writing as a practice of listening might open a doorway between these experiences. Or remind readers that the door remains closed. To follow Allan, we might also take these investigations of literacy's borders as a reminder that "far from marveling at a range of novels from around the world, it is worth asking what forms of experience are constructed in literature and how these forms of experience ground a particular—and not necessarily universal—relationship to the world and to the supposedly human subject" (Allan, 17).²¹ In their enthusiasm for the sonic and oral lives of their characters, some of the authors in my study could be accused of the fault Allan attributes to Sartre and Fanon, who end up "eras[ing] the condition of [literature's] possibility—the assumed literacy of its public" (Allan, 17). My own attempt, explained in greater detail in the following section, to develop a more acute sense of reading for sound, might similarly overstep

²⁰ Michael Allan, "Reading With One Eye, Speaking With One Tongue: On the Problem of Address In World Literature" in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1-2 (2007): 1-19.

²¹ Furthering his claim, Allan argues that "rather than assuming that world literature is some transcendent field of potential readers, it is worth considering the conditions by which literary reading is made possible and some of the ways...that literature posits its own limitations. Here, we might point at once to the impossibility of a text's direct address and to the question of what is excluded from the horizon of literary reading" (Allan, 14). It is a limit he later identifies as "the illegibility of the untold story of the illiterate" (Allan, 16).

the bounds of literature, or mistake its object. Whatever its failings, it seeks to account for literature's limits at the same time it tracks narrative artists' use of radio and sound technology in a constant renegotiation of novelistic territory—a border dispute that parallels their own transnational itineraries, and one I argue alters the boundaries of literary form and experience.

Sound Studies

As texts become increasingly audible, it might seem strange to future scholars that we ever paid so little attention to non-musical forms of sound in literature. At the moment, contemporary scholars attuned to such practices generally fall under the category of “sound studies.” A brief genealogy of the field would include the theorists of the “soundscape,” led by R. Murray Schaefer, anthropologists of environmental sound, like Steven Feld, media archaeologists and new media scholars with an ear for disability studies, such as Mark Katz, Emily Thompson, Jonathan Sterne and Mara Mills, the film scholar Michel Chion, psychoanalytic film theorists, including Kaja Silverman and Mladen Dolar, historians of sonic culture, Alain Corbin, Karin Bijsterveld, and Mark M. Smith, scholars of “the black phonographic voice” in African-American studies, among them Stephen Best, Katherine Biers, Bryan Wagner, and Alexander Weheliye, philosophers of “noise,” including Michel Serres and Jacques Attali, anthropologists studying religious rhetoric and cassette tapes, such as Charles Hirschkind, cultural theorists of the “sonic color-line,” like Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, and literature professors who read with an ear held closely to their books, chiefly John M. Picker, Steven Connor, and Philipp Schweighauser. None of these scholars would fit comfortably within the disciplines of musicology or ethnomusicology. Their interests trend more closely to the changing technological manipulation of sound (telephone, phonograph, radio, cassette tape, film, book), the differences between sonic and visual culture, the racial, ethnic, and gender codes sound carries or can be made to carry, and some shared sense that the sound of an utterance can say abundantly more than the content alone.²²

When Mladen Dolar titles his book, *A Voice and Nothing More*, he points our attention to what Michel Chion names the “acousmatic” voice, the voice whose source we fail to place.²³ Dolar reminds us that the voice alone also means the voice without the logos, a sound Aristotle carefully tuned out for fear that such a “meaningless” voice threatened to equate humans with animals (Dolar, 23-26). Of most interest to him are the apparently “pre-linguistic” aspects of the voice (coughing, hiccupping, babbling), and the “post-linguistic” voice in song; he is bored with accent, intonation, and timbre because, with Roman Jakobson's help, these aspects of the voice “can be linguistically described and empirically verified” (21). However, in Dolar's pursuit of “the object voice,” he fails to hear sound theorists like Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman who attend to how tone catches speakers in a “sonic color-line.”²⁴ Similarly reminding us of the cultural complexity embedded in accent, intonation, and timbre, Jonathan Sterne provides a corrective to Dolar's claim that “the voice is like a fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable” (22). Sterne explains how techniques of voiceprint analysis and forensic audio that treat “speech as a technical operation,” in which “the content of the speech is almost entirely irrelevant,” ultimately

²² These principles already appear in early radio theory. Arnheim writes, “mere sound has a more direct and powerful effect than the word” (Arnheim, 27).

²³ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).

Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar *Nueva York*” in *Social Text* 102, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 59-85.

failed to authenticate the voice on a tape cassette apparently made by Bin Laden (“Enemy,” 90). In this case, “the voice’s characteristics as measurable sound” (ibid), lead commentators to listen “not to his speech but to his voice—for...evidence of the condition of his body...The anxiety here is not about the medium...The anxiety is about terrorism as an external threat” (96). Tone, timbre, and accent in this case open onto a study of how a culture (the United States news media during the George W. Bush administration) quells or fuels its anxiety, and how politicians can employ sound to justify further violence. Thus, while Dolar’s influential study helpfully returns us to those parts of the voice he finds muted by post-structuralism, these other scholars of sound more carefully acknowledge how culture can travel in the non-semantic properties of the voice.

My own reading practice is influenced by this diverse field of theorists, focusing in particular on sound’s technological mediation by the phonograph, radio, book, and cassette tape, and adding a particular emphasis in socio-linguistics to the broad range of disciplines already invoked by sound studies. Unlike Dolar’s easy dismissal of Jakobson’s phonological analysis, I borrow from one of Jakobson’s students, Michael Silverstein, to come closer to a more nuanced method of reading for tone. Silverstein’s work emphasizes what he calls a *pragmatic* mode, indebted to the American philosopher Charles Peirce more than the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. A pragmatic analysis identifies how language users construct hierarchies and otherwise organize social space. For instance, the use of the formal “usted,” in Spanish, rather than the informal “tú,” is an example of pragmatic language. The words’ value, in this instance, derives not from their reference (their signifier-signified-referent relationship)—they both reference the same person—but their construction of a socially formal interaction. Silverstein describes these words’ function as “non-referential indexicality” because the words index, or point to the social situation, without changing their reference. The *decision* to use one or another of these words Silverstein names *metapragmatic* discourse.²⁵

Tone can function pragmatically, and a speaker can metapragmatically choose one tone or accent, rather than another in order to assume what the sociologist Erving Goffman calls a specific “footing” in a given social interaction.²⁶ Whereas an employee might begin a conversation with a boss in an ironic tone, he or she might adopt a more formal and serious tone if the boss responds sternly. The metapragmatic change in tone alters the speaker’s “footing” to adjust for the evolving dynamics of the context. Whereas the employee *presupposed* one genre of interaction—a casual, sarcastic, and friendly conversation—the boss *entails*, or creates a different genre by employing a formal, and perhaps slightly caustic and authoritative tone of voice. While Dolar is right that such changes can be “linguistically described,” their description allows readers to access an entire literary soundscape, which critics have largely ignored in their analysis.

Whether in John Dos Passos’s representation of “the radio voice,” Richard Wright’s antagonism toward dialect, or Severo Sarduy’s use of tonal shifts to index character in his radio plays, reading with one’s ears open reveals texts teeming with sound. Although several of these examples remain audible to most listening readers, others require the archival work of historical context. To take one example from the following pages, the 1946 government-issued Argentine Radiobroadcasting Manual regulated actors’ tone, censoring “excessively high-pitched timbre,

²⁵ Michael Silverstein, “Cultural’ Concepts and the Language-Culture Nexus,” in *Current Anthropology* Vol. 45, No. 5, (December 2004): 621-651, and “Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description,” in *Meaning in Anthropology*, (eds) Keith H. Basso and Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976): 11-55.

²⁶ Erving Goffman, “Footing” in *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

feminized distortions, etc.”, and reminded radio station owners and orators that “the control of the national language will be one of the fundamental demands that every speaker must satisfy, as much as this concerns the propriety and correctness with which one ought to articulate phonemes, as it does the correct intonation of each word, phrase, sentence, etc.” (quoted in Matallana, 49).²⁷ When Manuel Puig’s characters make use of the slang language of *lunfardo*, or “talk like radio speaker[s] and didn’t forget to pronounce [their] ‘s’s at the ends of their words” (“Boquitas,” 78), or listen to *radionovelas* and slip between the extra-national “tú” or the Argentine “vos,” we can hear how his novel works against the government’s attempt to “educate the listener’s ear,” by providing an archive of the radio culture and language the government sought to suppress.²⁸

Acoustic Properties

My title, “Acoustic Properties,” attempts to draw attention to these sonic qualities of language, as well as sound’s ongoing resistance to different forms of property. From the phonograph to the radio to the mp3, sound technology has presented particular problems for legal copyright or intellectual property law. Conscious of “sound’s evanescence and the troubling fugacity of voice,” Stephen Best has identified how nineteenth-century legal scholars, faced with the invention of the phonograph, struggled to define the sound of the human voice “as either an inalienable aspect of personhood or an alienable property within the market” (Best, 18-19).²⁹ Although the court ultimately included phonograph records under copyright protection, sound continued to trouble definitions of property. In Jane M. Gaines’ study of twentieth century musical piracy she notes that the acoustic “has never been solid enough for copyright law to recognize” (Gaines, 89).³⁰ Without a visible image or at least a figure of writing, such as the phonograph’s grooves, the law cannot see sonic property. Thus, Best reminds us that in the first “sound-alike” case, *Gardella v. Log Cabin Products Inc.* (1937), the court rejected the plaintiff’s suit, refusing to recognize her claim to copyright the style of her performance as the radio “voice” of Aunt Jemima (Best, 47). With this history in mind it should not surprise us that the most recent sound technology, the digital mp3 file, has become the representative medium of copyright debates related to new media file sharing. However, unlike the phonograph, the digital inscription technique seems to have matched the acoustic’s “troubling fugacity” with a compressed file size and lack of degradation that allows files to be shared instead of owned.³¹

In addition to these challenges to copyright and intellectual property law, sound’s ability to move through walls and across borders has made it a frequent disturbance to the policing of social life. Unlike a painting, text, or even a moving image, sound can permeate walls, floors, and other solid markers of real property. Karen Bijsterveld’s study of the legislation of sound in the United States and the Netherlands points out that mechanical sound, such as the radio and phonograph, with their ability to play endlessly and at higher volumes than human musicians, led

²⁷ Andrea Matallana, *“Locos por la radio”: una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923-1947* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2006).

²⁸ Manuel Puig, *Boquitas Pintadas: folletín* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Sudamericana, 1970).

²⁹ See Stephen Best, *The Fugitive’s Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁰ Jame M. Gaines, “Bette Midler and the Piracy of Identity” in Simon Frith (ed.), *Music and Copyright* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

³¹ Although mp3 files lose an audible amount of acoustic information in their compression, they do not lose information when copied. See Jonathan Sterne, “The mp3 As Cultural Artifact,” in *new media and society*, Vol. 8 (2006): 825-842.

to the emergence of anti-noise campaigns. For example, New York City's Noise Abatement Commission convinced radio stations in 1930 to ask their listeners to turn down their radios every night at 10:30 (162).³² As Bijsterveld, Stoever-Ackerman, and others observe, such campaigns usually fell along class and racial lines. The sounds of the radio, the phonograph, or even the human voice resounded in the ears of the "social elite... as unwanted sound produced by thoughtless individuals who were in dire need of public education" (Bijsterveld, 162). *Public* education, that is, because these activities carried out in one's apartment or home became audible to the larger community. Domestic sounds became public issues. As we expand outwards from the family home to the national border, radio also turns domestic / national sounds into matters of international dispute—an issue I discuss at length in my analysis of the radio wars between Cuba and the United States.

Against the policing of these border-crossing sounds, the authors in my dissertation harness the sonic resistance to containment as a means to critique the divisive function of real property. I use this last term to make clear my argument's turn away from the Things of "private property," and to forge continuity between my work and those earlier studies of sound's irritation to intellectual property.³³ More specifically, the authors in my dissertation employ sound to stage scenes of listening through walls in order to imagine a hybrid space of shared property—neither wholly public nor wholly private.³⁴ In these instances, as I stated earlier, walls become social media rather than markers for property's dividing lines. We can think of McCullers's Mick Kelly here, whose radio graffiti on the walls of a vacant home I mentioned towards the beginning of this introduction. Furthermore, in the one chapter where I refrain from explicitly discussing the sonic engagement with real property, I emphasize instead radio broadcasting's transnational reach, and the implicit challenge Cuban Rebel Radio posed to private real property—a challenge made explicit in the Revolutionary government's expropriation of all private real property, including the privately owned commercial Cuban radio station CMQ's ten story "Radiocentro" complex.³⁵

However, sound's capacity for transgressing its physical container should also remind us of the importance of that container for producing a sound's particular acoustic qualities. While the title "Acoustic Properties" refers to the sonic attributes of the voice, and sound's disturbance of various definitions of property, it should also remind us that sounds depend on their spaces to create and shape their sonic value. Although Emily Thompson and others show how acoustic

³² Karen Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and the Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

³³ For more on "Thing theory" see Bill Brown *A Sense of Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas In Things*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

³⁴ The sonic understanding of walls in these novels anticipates more recent architectural theories and experiments that employ the wall to shift conceptions of public and private space. See, for instance, Nikolas Hirsch, *On Boundaries* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2007) and his essay with Michel Miller "The Making of *Making Things Public*" in *Making Things Public*, (eds.) Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): "The architectural strategy developed for 'Making Things Public' explores a material tool that can be negotiated between artists, scientists, curators: the wall as the most basic element of spatial differentiation. Neither the classical white museum wall, nor the transparent wall of modernist ideology, *this new wall reflects its own ambiguity*, thus, allowing different appropriations and changing environments... As a basic instrument to negotiate different environments, *these walls place the usually solid boundaries into an ambivalent and critical position, creating blurred transitions rather than rigid definitions, atmospheres rather than areas*" (Hirsch, "Boundaries," 47-48; emphasis added).

³⁵ Michael B. Salwen, "The Origins of CMQ: Pre-Castro Cuba's Leading Radio Network" in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol, 13, No. 3 (1993), pp. 315-332.

engineers have continually contained sound in various ways, the dependence on a room or street or other reflective surface reveals sound's lack of autonomy.³⁶ Acoustics point to the hubris of thinking that one owns one's voice, that it is proper to one's self. Just as socio-linguistics instructs us to consider context in arriving at the meaning of an utterance, acoustics tunes us in to how the sonic shape of an utterance, and hence something of its meaning, depends on the acoustic environment in which it resounds. Sound is the result of a complex interaction with the physical world, constitutive of a cultural world, and both resonate together to help us achieve the feat of hearing.

This brings us to the question of how sound, acoustics, and sonic technology can inform our thoughts about narrative. While I hope I have already answered something of this question in my earlier comments regarding Fanon and Orwell, I want to explain here how reading and writing with an ear for sound, and especially an ear for radio's specific manipulation of sound, has helped alter literary form and content. Although Sartre claimed there is "a literary art of radio" in his 1947 book, *What Is Literature?* (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*), and Frederic Jameson argues there is "a radio aesthetic" that permeates the novels of writers in the United States during the 1930s, few recent critics have helped elaborate what these provocative, but under analyzed claims might mean.³⁷ Various forms of radio's literary art arrived before and after Sartre, ranging from the poetic readings by Paul Deharme, Alejo Carpentier, and Robert Desnos on Radio France in the 1930s, to the popular *radionovelas* of Félix B. Cagnet in Cuba in the 1940s, to the hysteria inducing performance of *War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles's Mercury Theater in the United States on October 30, 1938, to the radio plays of Dylan Thomas on the BBC in England in the 1950s, and the experimental radio dramas of Samuel Beckett, Robert Pinget, and Severo Sarduy on French and British radio from the 1950s to the 1970s, among others. While I try to pay respect to the field's diversity in this dissertation, I refrain from close analysis of those popular programs (*Amos 'n' Andy*, *the Shadow*, *Dick Tracy*, in the United States, *El derecho de nacer*, *Chan Li-Po*, *El Clavelito* in Cuba, *Chispazos de Tradición* and the comedy routines of Niní Marshall in Argentina), focusing instead on how textual authors already considered "literary," if also popular (Dos Passos, Chandler, McCullers, Wright, and Puig were all best sellers), brought radio and other sonic technologies into their narratives. They did so in order to access particular histories, engage specific debates, and grasp certain formal lessons in their own work with a medium—print—concerned with representing sound without direct recourse to sonic material as a tool. As I have stated above, print's dependence on literacy also marked radio as a frontier that helped print authors recognize the real limitations on their medium's availability to publics and counterpublics. And, in the case of Severo Sarduy, radio also became a means to address the formal limits of the novel's work with tone.

Part of the trajectory I trace in these authors' engagements with radio and other sound technologies is a sophisticated thread of realist writing that eschews other forms of sonic fidelity, such as dialect, in favor of a more exchangeable, flexible, and contagious utterance. This type of utterance attempts to produce an experience for characters and readers alike akin to singing along with a voice that no one owns. John Dos Passos already hints at this project through the chorus

³⁶ Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947 / 1985); Frederic Jameson, "The Synoptic Chandler" in *Shades of Noir*, (ed.) Joan Copjec, (London, New York: Verso, 1993). Those few book length studies primarily dedicated to the analysis of literature and the radio include Anke Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006), Timothy Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), and Michel Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

of repetitions in his modern epic, *U.S.A.* (1938), which he describes as “a radio network,” and “the voice of the people,” and Carson McCullers attempts to assemble it in the character of the deaf-mute Mr. Singer in *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* (1940). However, this work receives its most significant leap in Richard Wright’s reaction against Zora Neale Hurston’s writing in dialect, and the subsequent publication of his novel, *Native Son* (1940). That novel, whose use of repeated phrases in interior monologues, free indirect discourse, spoken court briefings, and finally oral dialogue, strives to make the utterance contagious, but realizes the audio-visual voice—that is, the voice attached to the visible body—produces too much tonal distortion to complete the circuit between speakers. Only in Manuel Puig’s “cassette tape novel,” *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* (1980), written after, and in some ways as a response to the experimental work with tone in his friend Severo Sarduy’s radio play, *The Ant Killers* (1978), do I claim that we encounter what I call an “e(pop)ic mimesis.” The term, which I take from the Spanish word for epic, *epopeya*, combines the aesthetic theories of epic mimesis proposed by Eric Auerbach and Mikhail Bakhtin with the “pop art” movement’s flatness. Employing the recording device of the cassette tape, rather than the radio, Puig elevates listening to a writing practice. In this flat-toned novel with no narrator, readers sometimes fail to distinguish between one speaker and another.³⁸ And in this form, part novel, part play, “written” in English by recording an interview with a friend, Puig, I claim, arrives at a mimesis of mediation, an imitation of the language others create by listening to mass media. In doing so, he follows Wright’s injunction against dialect, and arrives at a uniquely transnational text, written in a foreign language (English) in the voice of another, set in a symbolic centerpiece of the United States: New York City’s Washington Square.

The New Neighborhood

As should by now be clear, these alterations in narrative form depended on more than the mere development of a new technology. Many of the economic negotiations that led to formal changes in radio voices, or the development of new genres in radio programming occurred as a direct result of the political decisions, treaties, and ambassadorial relationships collected under the Roosevelt administration’s Good Neighbor Policy. That policy’s major legislation, the formal repeal of the Platt Amendment in the 1934 Treaty of Relations, turned away from a doctrine of U.S. military intervention in Cuba, in favor of increased economic ties between the two countries. Signed into law the same year, the Reciprocal Trade Agreements helped make this economic goal a reality, cutting the U.S. tariff on Cuban sugar to 40% in exchange for Cuba reducing protection on its industries, “and the result was to cement the fledgling Cuban economy to that of the United States” (Schultz, 305).³⁹ In order to sell the products that the Reciprocal Agreements were already encouraging, advertisers turned to the commercial airwaves, developing the *radionovela*, or “soap opera,” whose programs kept listeners interested until the next commercial. Meanwhile, Argentina’s aforementioned 1946 Manual for Radio Broadcasting, paradoxically borrowed from regulations in Washington D.C. to police against specific speakers’ tone of voice in radio performances that were considered “non-national,” or too indebted to the

³⁸ We might also think of Franco Moretti’s claim in *Modern Epic* that “the secret (and frustrated) desire of every world text,” those texts he names “modern epics,” is “to heal the great fracture between avant-garde exploration and mass culture,” an achievement central to all of Puig’s work (Moretti, 107). See Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic* (London: Verso, 1995).

³⁹ Lars Schultz, *Beneath The United States: A History of U.S. Policy Towards Latin America*, Cambridge (MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

commercial influence of the Cuban-produced *radionovelas*. (Fifteen years later, Goar Mestre, the Cuban radio and television executive who helped produce some of the most popular *radionovelas* would go into exile from Castro's Cuba and arrive in Argentina to develop the Argentine television industry.)⁴⁰ In this way, legislative decisions, commercial trade, and inter-American struggles connected to national sovereignty and international policy participated in defining the sonic contour of radio programming.

Alongside these changes in the idea of the foreign neighbor, New Deal housing policies constructed what architectural historian Lawrence Vale calls the “public neighbor.”⁴¹ Signed into law the same year as the central components of the Good Neighbor Policy, the National Housing Act of 1934, and the subsequent Housing Act of 1937, developed government funded public housing in the United States. Taken together, we can recognize these New Deal initiatives, one foreign, one domestic, as the combined effort by the Roosevelt administration to construct something akin to “a new neighborhood of the Americas.”

I use this phrase to draw attention to how domestic and international doctrines in the United States might be thought together, and to remind readers of the unintended effects the Good Neighborhood Policy had on forging new relations and producing new genres in the Americas, as well as the resistance to that policy's economic aims and political directives. To take one example of this networked connection, while Richard Wright authored an article for the government about the New Deal's first large-scale housing project, the Harlem River Houses, in the *1939 WPA Guide to New York City*, he was also completing his 1940 novel, *Native Son*, an indictment of Chicago's racist housing policies and segregated real estate market.⁴² At the same time, Argentina's resistance to the Good Neighbor's economic policies, and the government's declared neutrality in 1940, led the U.S. government to cut exports of film stock to the country, thereby hobbling Argentina's cultural industry.⁴³ When Wright decided to make a film of his novel in 1951, U.S. studios balked at the race-conscious critique of Chicago real estate. In response, Wright headed to Argentina, where the recovering film industry was only too happy to reframe the politics of “the good neighbor” by hosting the country's first English-language film production. *Sangre Negra* (Black Blood) stands as a reminder of how foreign countries were often better neighbors to U.S. citizens than those neighbors within the country.

Wright's example, like that of the exiled NAACP activist Robert F. Williams, who established his radio program Radio Free Dixie in Havana, Cuba in 1962 to provide a soundtrack to the civil rights movement, help reveal how authors and activists rewrote the legacy of the New Deal idea of the good neighbor. Moreover, writers like Puig invert Wright's trajectory, returning some of the by-products of the New Deal—the novels of Carson McCullers and Raymond Chandler, the Cuban *radionovela*—to the United States, by incorporating their style into the narrative of a novel like *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages*. Furthermore, in alluding to this foreign policy and its afterlife, the term “neighborhood” distinguishes my grouping of writers from that other imagined idea of collectivity: the community. Unlike the community's intentional co-existence, neighborhoods depend on contingent spatial relations, bounded by certain territorial limits, which tend to remain more fluid than other borders. While some might

⁴⁰ See Salwen.

⁴¹ See Lawrence Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁴² J.J. Butts, “Writing Projects: New Deal Guidebooks, Community, and Housing Reform in New York City” in *The Space Between*, Vol. 2: 1 (2006): 113-138.

⁴³ Tamara L. Falicov, “Hollywood's Rogue Neighbor: The Argentine Film Industry during the Good Neighbor Policy, 1939-1945” in *The Americas*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (October, 2006): 245-260.

be fortunate enough to be able to choose a neighborhood to live in, one doesn't choose one's neighbors. Neighborhoods, in this sense, form accidental and dynamic collectivities. What the writers in this dissertation share, whether physical neighbors or not, is a willingness to exploit the potentials inherent in this accidental proximity, and do so with the at once broad and space-bound medium of radio sound.

The chapters that follow set out to explore the ramifications of these experiments in text and sound. In chapter One, "On the National Hookup: Radio and Realism in the New Deal," I begin by pointing to the ways in which new acoustic technologies meant to mute reverberation enabled an intimate form of political oratory emblemized in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "fireside chats." This was a development that caught the ear of certain novelists. Borrowing from, but also writing against the engineering feats of the New Acoustics and early radio theory, John Dos Passos, Raymond Chandler, and Carson McCullers seek to make legible, if not literally audible, "the sound of social space." In the service of their critique of certain uses of radio, they revise the realist enthusiasm for the enumeration of details, emptying rooms of their objects in order to convert walls into social media, rather than mere containers or property markers. In doing so, they make audible the false intimacy in Roosevelt's radio addresses, and establish a utopian image for a new listening community.

Inverting this utopia, in chapter Two "Struggling Words: Real Estate, the Phonograph, and the Position of Speech" I turn to McCullers' neighbor in 1940, Richard Wright. The chapter begins with the debate between Wright and Zora Neale Hurston, wherein Wright criticized Hurston's use of dialect and Hurston mocked Wright's stories as "tone deaf." I argue Wright's opposition to Hurston and his controversial enthusiasm for Gertrude Stein's writing in black dialect can help us hear his work between 1937 and 1940 as an attempt to detach representations of African-American speech from an ethnographic investment in authenticity, and to imagine a non subject-centered form of speech. I identify the phonograph as the operative medium through which Wright works to elaborate the possibility of shared speech, an idea intertwined with shared housing in "The Long Black Song" (1938) and *Native Son* (1940). In the chapter's coda I explore how the later filming of *Native Son* in Buenos Aires links this national critique of race and real estate in U.S. neighborhoods to the New Deal's foreign policy of the Good Neighbor.

While I focus on the national politics of radio and the novel in the dissertation's first half, I complicate this conceptual framework in chapter Three, "Radio's Forked Tongue: Pitch, Address, and Transnational Broadcast," where I demonstrate the ways in which the hemispheric policy of "the good neighbor" is re-conceived by specific anti-colonial aesthetic and activist practices. I situate exiled American civil rights leader Robert F. Williams's "Radio Free Dixie" broadcasts from Havana, Cuba to the southern United States in the early 1960s within the history of US commercial involvement in Cuban radio, and a discourse of radio and colonialism. Yet, rather than celebrate Cuba as a utopian alternative to national struggles in the US, my project argues that exiled Cuban author Severo Sarduy's 1978 radio play *Los matadores de hormigas* (The Ant Killers), which sets out to "decolonize the voice," challenges even those anti-colonial voices of the 1960s with an experimental aesthetic that separates the voice from psychology or personality.

In the dissertation's fourth and final chapter, "House Taken Over: Listening, Writing, and the Politics of the Commonplace in Manuel Puig's Fiction" I show that Puig's narratives most fully absorb acoustic media into their formal practice, transforming the novel's generic markers, questioning its reading practices, and redefining categories of literacy and the reading publics of the Americas. I close with Puig because through his use of voice-over techniques from 1930s

Hollywood melodrama, his textual appropriation of sentimental *radionovelas* produced from the United States and Cuba's cultural and economic relationship during the New Deal, and his interest in Carson McCullers's work with dialect, Puig's novels return the products of the Good Neighbor Policy in a form that complicates global media histories, as well as national and transnational aesthetics and politics. I argue that in Puig's only English language novel, *Eternal Curse On the Reader of These Pages* (1980), set in and around Washington Square in New York City, and edited from a transcript of recorded conversations, listening becomes indistinguishable from writing, and the unifying, nationalist voice that reached listeners on the radio, as well as the counter-practice of "testimonial" literature is undone by Puig's ability to listen through another voice, and to learn to write in another language. Thus, from Argentina to Cuba to the United States, I detail those factors that enable certain media to circulate, I explore how different cultural practices alter the meaning and use of similar genres of media and text, and I explain how radio helps reveal the international implications of national literary histories.

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CHAPTER 1

ON THE NATIONAL HOOKUP: Radio and Realism in the New Deal

In a section titled “ON THE NATIONAL HOOKUP” under the subheading “*On Spotlights and Microphones*” in his travelogue *In All Countries* (1934), John Dos Passos details the social and acoustic engineering that electrified the newly wired Chicago Stadium at the 1932 Democratic National Convention. Describing the scene that remained invisible to radio listeners, Dos Passos observes N.B.C pages “coaxing the speakers into poses from which they could be heard,” facilitating “the two big white disks above the speakers’ platform (the ears of the radio audience),” which “delicately caught every intonation of the oratory” (Dos Passos, 406).⁴⁴ Careful to catch how the whole event sounds, even after the amplified orchestration has ended, Dos Passos listens on to “the proud suave voice of the National Broadcasting Company...filling...jaded ears from every loudspeaker, enumerating the technical agencies that had worked together to obtain the superb hookup through which they broadcast the proceedings of the Democratic Convention of 1932” (ibid).⁴⁵ Confronted with the pageantry of the political convention—the wired and wireless sound—the reporter’s satirical tone, noted in the “proud suave voice” and the “jaded ears” that receive it, lightly amplifies the role of acoustics in national politics and social life.

Listening to Franklin Delano Roosevelt deliver his promise of a “new deal” to US citizens and “the policy of the good neighbor” to his Latin American audience in Chicago that year, Dos Passos imagines listeners attuned not to the politicians’ content, which goes largely unmentioned in his reportage, but rather the overall *tone* of “the national hookup,” and the newly entrenched forms of listening that knitted together the audience in front of the loudspeakers in Chicago and on the radio “in all countries.”⁴⁶ What Dos Passos seizes on here, at the dawn of the New Deal era and the Golden Age of Radio, is the transformative intersection between structural changes in acoustics and politics; a potent interplay forgotten when radio is reduced to Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” and the commercial tyranny Adorno and Horkheimer denounced as the “culture industry.”⁴⁷ Standing beneath the loudspeakers in Chicago Stadium, Dos Passos presciently tunes in to how radio, and what would become known as the “new acoustics,” had already begun to alter the tone of American and world culture.

⁴⁴ John Dos Passos, “ON THE NATIONAL HOOKUP: Spotlights and Microphones” in *In All Countries*, collected in *Travel Books and Other Writings 1916-1941* (New York: Library of America, 2003), pp. 405-421.

⁴⁵ For more on NBC’s role in moving radio in the United States towards a commercial medium rather than a state run system as with the BBC in England, see Michel Hilmes, “NBC and the Network Idea: Defining the ‘American System’” in *NBC: America’s Network* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). For more on the general rise and consolidation of commercial radio in the United States see Clifford Doersken, *America’s Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ If, as Dos Passos claims, the audience listened through “jaded” ears, it could be because many of them had already heard the convention’s nominee, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, speak in support of Al Smith in the first nationally broadcast convention from Madison Square Garden in 1924. Thus, when he arrived in Chicago to deliver a “new deal” to US citizens, Roosevelt spoke to an audience in the stadium and at home by now accustomed “to gather and listen to loudspeakers broadcasting reproduced sound” (Thompson, 233). Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ See Adorno and Horkheimer’s comments on radio in “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 120-167.

Part of my argument in the following pages and chapters observes how Dos Passos's listening, although keenly aware of a global change in the circulation of ideas and goods, if not always bodies, was not unique. However, before pursuing how new acoustic technologies, the radio chief among them, transformed political and cultural life in the Americas, I want to explore how writers in the United States seized on the new tone ushered in by technological innovation and cultural production to shape literature and politics.

While chapter Two will address the international debates and the reorganization of the New Deal's major foreign policy—"the good neighbor"—I will first attend to how Dos Passos, and later, Raymond Chandler, and Carson McCullers conceived an alternative to the national radio voice in the social space of their novels. They did so through particular attention to what I will call "narrative acoustics"—modes of writing about listening and aural technologies like the radio, phonograph, and voice-over, which recode legal and governmental notions of property. Listening to how voices sound in rooms, through walls, and out of windows, these authors tune in to the challenge radio broadcasting, and the acoustic more generally, poses to property's borders. Of these authors, particularly McCullers and, in the following chapter, Wright consider how new acoustic technologies contribute to new forms of listening that help imagine shared spaces that are distinct from the public housing fostered under the New Deal.

The ambition to create even a frustrated fictional idea of such new social space finds particular expression in an alteration in literary form. While each of these authors has been associated with drawing on, and in some cases founding generic forms from *Noir* Fiction to the Southern Gothic, I recognize their attention to acoustics and housing as helping them rewrite a realist tradition based on the enumeration of furnishing, and the expression of social relations through Things. Rejecting this strictly visual regime, they tune in to voices, and hear walls as connective mediums rather than isolating partitions. In doing so, I argue that they supply a means to rethink the legacy of literary form at the end of the New Deal, and to critique old and new forms of property, especially real estate, in the midst of the Depression's housing crisis.

The New Acoustics: The Sound of Social Space at the 1932 Conventions

Half way across the country from Chicago Stadium, the connection between the wired room and the wireless audience found its paradigm in the architecture, acoustics and name of New York City's Radio City Music Hall. Opening on December 27, 1932, Radio City marked the apogee of an engineering era in the United States dedicated to the electrification of sound. Historian Emily Thompson observes that "by 1930, new tools, new techniques, and a new language for describing sound had fundamentally transformed the field of acoustics. 'The New Acoustics' was proclaimed" (Thompson, 5), and Radio City was its shrine. In addition to the loudspeakers outside the hall bringing the evening's entertainment out into the street, inside the hall engineers had "learned to create electrically a spatialized sound" to the effect that "the sound of space was now a quality that could be added electrically to any sound signal in any proportion; it no longer had any relationship to the physical spaces of architectural construction" (Thompson, 7). In other words, the new acoustics' "clear and focused" sound offered "little opportunity to reflect and reverberate off the surfaces of the room in which it was generated" (Thompson, 233-234). Without reverberation, "*the sound of space was effectively eliminated* from the new modern sound" (Thompson, 234; emphasis added). Whereas the "old" acoustics relied on the particular architectural form and shape of the walls, ceilings, and other available surfaces, the "new" acoustics used microphones, insulation, and loudspeakers that rendered the hall's unique nooks and crannies acoustically insignificant. Thus, even adding an echo effect

removed the sound of a particular built space. Confronted with these changes, the engineers required a new mathematical equation, as the acoustic formula developed by Wallace Sabine for the reverberations of Boston's Symphony Hall in 1900 no longer made acoustic sense inside the walls of Radio City by 1932.⁴⁸

Thus, the jaded ears filled by loudspeakers testify to more than just Dos Passos's antipathy for NBC's monopolization of the radio dial; they typify a new acoustics manufactured to remove the difference of built forms and suppress their interaction with the human voice and ear. And just as acousticians sought to homogenize sound in buildings by removing space from their equations, the early and influential radio theorist Rudolf Arnheim, in his simply titled treatise, *Radio: The Art of Sound* (1936), proclaims that in broadcasting "*resonance is eliminated*, out of a very proper feeling that the existence of the studio is not essential to the transmission and therefore has no place in the listener's consciousness... The listener rather restricts himself to the reception of pure sound, which comes to him through the loudspeaker" (Arnheim, 143, 142; emphasis added).⁴⁹ Eliminating space at the site of production, Arnheim's theory joins the technological change in Radio City to help theorize an acoustic imaginary unencumbered by spatial difference.⁵⁰

However, already in his writings of 1932 Dos Passos complicates radio's "elimination of resonance," and what later theorists have too quickly assumed to be the medium's "disembodiment," as he listens to the distinctly embodied radio address of that year's US Communist Party's political candidate William Z. Foster.⁵¹ Recovering from a heart attack in Moscow, Foster speaks over the radio to an assembly in the New York CPUSA headquarters, and the medium helps amplify the two sonic aspects Arnheim claims it vanquishes:

His speech is going to be broadcast from his bedroom. The feeling of farawayness and emptiness is enormously intensified. Is it that we're ten thousand miles from Moscow? When his voice starts coming over, the accent and intonation of a native American workingman fills the hall for a moment with warmth. Hathaway has to finish reading it for him; his voice is American, too (DP, 413).

Although unencumbered by the explicit image of the body, Foster's voice comes across the wireless freighted with the gravitas of bodily illness. His fragile bodily condition, in turn, accents

⁴⁸ Changes to the science of acoustics were not limited to concert halls. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 also marked the first use of "acoustic phonetics," recognizing an epistemic change in the relation between sound and language as well.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936).

⁵⁰ As Alan Williams makes explicit, while the suppression of acoustic space described by Thompson derives from the ongoing electrification of space, an ideological function already inheres in the apparatus itself: "[As] microphones [are] more like ears than they are like rooms (they function as points and not as volume [in the spatial sense]), it is never the literal, original 'sound' that is reproduced in recording, but one perspective on it, a *sample*, a *reading* of it" (Williams quoted in Lawrence, 20; emphasis added).

⁵¹ One of the major proponents of the theoretical possibilities of disembodiment in radio and other acoustic technology has been Allen Weiss. See Allen Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan UP, 2002). Weiss and other critics in this vein derive much of the authority for the argument from the radio artist and theorist Douglas Kahn. See especially Douglas Kahn and Kevin Whitehead eds. *Wireless Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992). Film theory has treated the "off screen" voice and the body with more sophistication. See Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1991); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988).

“the feeling of farawayness and emptiness,” precisely the distance and resonance meant to vanish with the New Acoustics and Arnheim’s ideal announcer. When combined with Foster’s *tone*, this radio voice, carrying the signals of its absence and the sounds of a body in decline, makes felt the room’s necessary vacancies, “the wide empty platform” from which the broadcast is heard, and the negative space in which the voice resounds. In more theoretically familiar terms, affect arises out of a constitutive absence in the radio voice, rather than a naïve extension of presence. The sudden “warmth” in the hall does not abolish the feeling of “distance.”

The room’s spare qualities amplify the phenomenal difference produced by Foster’s broadcast, yet this amplification derives not from any acoustic engineering intent on the erasure of space, but from the interaction between a technologically mediated voice and its reverberation in a mostly empty space. In other words, against the homogenous neutrality of electronic information, the “clear and focused” sound promised by the New Acoustics, Dos Passos’ rendering of Foster’s broadcast voice fills the space with the noise of tonal difference (“the accent and intonation of a native American workingman”). In choosing to marshal the *tonal* aspects of political speech instead of the basic semantic content, Dos Passos’s representation of these scenes of audition calls for an attention to acoustic difference. And as these voices come to us not in audible recordings, but filtered through the written word, this listening practice necessitates a reading practice able to attend to the sound of (social) space.

In this context, Foster’s voice comes close to what Asif Agha has called “*enregistered voices*” (39; emphasis in original).⁵² Explaining how Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “social voices” imply less a specifically vocal attribute than a specific social position, Agha comments that “a register’s forms are social indexicals in that they index stereotypic social personae (viz., that speaker is male, lower-class, a doctor, a lawyer, an aristocrat, etc.)...thus every register has a *social range*, a range of figures performable through its use” (ibid; emphasis in original). In Foster’s case, Dos Passos emphasizes the oral aspect of register, his “accent and intonation” to index his social class, national heritage, and, at a slightly more interpretive level, his political position. Perhaps more importantly, Dos Passos decides for the reader into which category Foster’s voice should be placed—an “American workingman”—instead of representing his speech and allowing the reader to decipher Foster’s social register from the content of his words. Strangely, through his attention to the oral aspects of register Dos Passos delimits the social range of their possibility but also expands what Agha calls the “*social domain*,” the group for whom such indexes are recognizable.

However, in pre-selecting for readers how this voice should be recognized, the text also risks closing down the possibilities transferring this voice to others. While Hathaway can ventriloquize Foster’s speech, almost contagiously assuming the same tone as he steps into the speaker’s position, the interpretive work performed by the narrative, naming the tone as “American,” forecloses the opportunity for many readers, listeners, and potential speakers to follow Hathaway’s lead. As some of the later authors in this chapter and the next will intuit, readers can overhear the text, in a sense, but they encounter accented obstacles in any attempt to claim Foster’s voice as their own. If an attention to tone helps position Foster’s voice in social space, the narrative also includes a kind of descriptive inflexibility that fails to recognize the potentially liberating collective attributes of the invisible voice. Precisely the challenge between identifying the tonal attributes of a voice and attempting to secure the potential utopianism of an

⁵² Asif Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment” in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol 15, Issue 1, (2005): pp 38-59.

invisible and, therefore, seemingly transferable voice frames the desire Dos Passos and writers after him pursue.

However, by explicitly converting a voice's expressive features, its accent and intonation, the typically non-referential aspects of speech, into the content of his account, Dos Passos succeeds in asking his readers to incorporate their ear as much as their eye into their reading practice, and to conceive of reading as a type of listening. We might call writing that both references an acoustic situation, such as a voice in a hall, and carries the markers of oral speech's non-referential sounds in order to help tune the reader's ear, *narrative acoustics*. This writing and reading practice would amplify rather than mute the sound of space, and therefore offer a lesson learned from acoustic engineering as well as an initial response to some of its more reductive effects.

Buildings That Speak: Amplification and Aural Technology in Chicago Stadium

The intellectual attention to acoustic engineering and the stylistic investment in a speaker's acoustic properties to sketch his political portrait was not lost on the orators Dos Passos discusses. Indeed, one of William Foster's political rivals in the 1932 election, the incumbent President of the United States, former Secretary of Commerce and engineer, Herbert Hoover, set out to expand and regulate radio in the United States throughout the rise of the new acoustics in the 1920s. Despite this familiarity with radio's political and technological functions, Hoover was not entirely comfortable with the technology, and in a 1924 radio address he admonished "the deadly inexpressive microphone," and called for "a method by which a speaker over the radio may sense the feelings of his radio audience. A speaker before a public audience knows what hisses and applause mean; he cuts his speech short or adjusts himself to it" (quoted in Peters, 213).⁵³ From his position behind the radio microphone Hoover elaborates another side of the disembodied voice: the silent audience, and the lack of a communicative circuit or "positive feedback" in radio speech.⁵⁴

However, eight years after Hoover's broadcast, what intrigues Dos Passos as he reports from the same Chicago Stadium where he will listen to Roosevelt speak less than a month later, is not the problem or advantage of disembodied speech, but instead the embodied asymmetry and closed circuit established between the man he calls "the Hoover manikin" and the new acoustics. Watching Hoover deliver his speech at the Republican National Convention, Dos Passos notices a very different acoustic relation than that which governed Foster's radio address: "A dry phonograph voice comes from the loudspeakers that hang from the shadowy ceiling in the center of the hall. Through the glasses I can see the mouth barely moving. The expressionless face when he turns our way is like the face of a ventriloquist" (Dos Passos, 410). In this representation of a voice severed from the body by acoustic engineering, Dos Passos depicts the now banal trick of acoustic media, another version of Michel Chion's "acousmatic" voice, "sounds one hears without seeing their originating cause" (71).⁵⁵ Distinct from the radio's apparently disembodied voice, however, the mechanized voice in this scene has a body present,

⁵³ See John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into The Air* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Hoover's complaint is comparable to Walter Benjamin's comments about the actor whose body is carried out to an invisible audience as he stands before the apparatus of the film camera in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935).

⁵⁴ See David Mindell for more on the relationship between radio and the rise of engineering feedback in computing. David Mindell, *Between Human and Machine: Feedback, Control and Computing Before Cybernetics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

but fails to coincide with it. Asynchronous, the voice issues not from Hoover's mouth, its expected "originating cause," but a moment later from the loudspeakers, where the acoustics perform the mundane magic of the vaudeville ventriloquist, transforming the animate into the inanimate, the President into a manikin.⁵⁶ What distinguishes the scene from those familiar moments recounted in gothic fiction and theory, wherein the inanimate object becomes animated by "the voice of the dead," is that Hoover assumes the position of both ventriloquist and dummy at once.⁵⁷ In a variation on Foster's radio voice resonating on the spare platform in New York, now the wired room, and not the man, seems responsible for the voice. Hoover looks on, mutely, as Chicago Stadium speaks.

Again, if Dos Passos sounded out the political timbre of Foster's voice through attention to acoustic properties in the absence of the body, with Hoover the same attention disassociates the voice and body to the point that the "dry phonograph voice" becomes more proper to Chicago Stadium than to Hoover himself. Furthermore, while the phonographic analogy mechanizes Hoover's tone, it also dates the voice to an earlier technological moment, and therefore helps index Hoover's oratorical ineptitude and his admitted discomfort with the new acoustic media. We might think of the result in the acoustic vocabulary developed by Chion, as we move here from the acousmatic, "off screen" voice, to a version of the *acousmêtre*, "an acoustic agency...present and audible and effective within the visible scene, but...not *seen to speak*" (Connor, "Self" 221-222; emphasis in original).⁵⁸ As mentioned above, the surprise in Chicago comes from the displacement of the acoustic agency, or acoustic character away from its potential human source, and redirected onto the building and its audio technology. Thus, the essay more fully destabilizes the identification between a speaker and his or her voice, not only echoing the gothic genre's reversal of subject and object, for which the phonograph was

⁵⁶ Silverman argues that audiovisual synchronization "anchors sounds to an immediately visible source, and...focuses attention on the human voice and its discursive capabilities" in order to "suture the viewer/listener into what [Stephen] Heath calls the 'safe place of the story,' and so to conceal the site of cinematic production" (Silverman, 45). By disjoining the two moments Dos Passos calls attention to the audiovisual fissures not yet accounted for by the new acoustics.

Mladen Dolar, who discusses the acousmatic in *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) claims "every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*. Ventriloquism pertains to voice as such, to its inherently acousmatic character: the voice comes from inside the body, the belly, the stomach—from something incompatible with and irreducible to the activity of the mouth. The fact that we see the aperture does not demystify the voice; on the contrary, it enhances the enigma" (Dolar, 70).

⁵⁷ For more on these familiar examples see John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008). For more on the uncanny, the Gothic, and architecture see Susan Bernstein, *Housing Problems* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008). Frances Dyson, listening back to Edison and forward to new media theory in her book, *Sounding New Media* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2009), notes Edison's claim that the phonograph's stylus can "'effect a restoration or reproduction of vocal or other sound waves, *without loss of any property essential to producing on the ear the same sensation* as if coming from the original source'" (cited in Dyson, 47). Edison's statement gave technological authority to a belief that the recorded voice could make dead voices live by means of an exact reproduction that seemed to almost erase mediation. This dream of a medium that erased its own mediation anticipates the New Acousticians, among them Harry F. Olson who, Dyson writes, "defined the ideal of sound reproduction as 'the elimination of distortion and the reproduction at the listener's ear of sound waves identical in structure to those given out at the source'" (Dyson, 47). Literary and cultural critics and theorists have tended to embrace the metaphysical, uncanny character of the radio and phonograph voice, while ignoring or relegating to background information the engineering at work.

⁵⁸ Steven Connor observes that "the classic example" of the *acousmêtre* "is the figure of the Invisible Man in James Whale's film of 1933" ("Self" 222), thus, reinforcing the interrelationship between narrative, radio, and film and what Thompson identifies as the consolidation of the New Acoustics in 1932. See Steven Connor "The Modern Auditory I" in *Rewriting the Self*. Ed. Roy Porter (London; New York: Routledge, 1997).

emblematic, but more fundamentally challenging the difference and sustainability of either position.⁵⁹

In other words, listening to the sound of space in these wired rooms, speech no longer makes sense as an individual expression. This newly mediated form of speech participates in an interactive circuit that includes the apparatus—the radio, phonograph, or loudspeaker—the speaker’s bodily mediation (the tongue, throat, and teeth) and the built forms that help mold the sound’s acoustic shape. In Dos Passos’s work, as well as the other authors to whom I will turn later in this chapter, aural technologies like the radio tend to mediate the relationships between the other actors in the circuit, amplifying the often inaudible tension between social actors and the spaces in which they speak.

Acoustic History: The Political Legacy of Ventriloquism

In order to negotiate how these lessons from the acoustic realm might function in represented speech, we should not forget that ventriloquism serves as the operative figure to explain the electrical acoustics’ lack of synchronization between Hoover’s voice and body. I want to turn briefly to the cultural pre-history of modern sound media, such as the telephone, phonograph, and radio, in order to establish how Dos Passos’s interest in technology connects to a literary, cultural, and political interpretation of that technology. In doing so I hope to avoid allowing the argument to fall into mere technological determinism, and show instead how the literary and political world makes these technologies live in particular ways. Indeed, ventriloquism, in the history Steven Connor tells, seems a necessary corollary or antecedent to whatever acoustic and social changes might occur with the technological innovations of the twenties and thirties.

Echoing critical commentary on the technological construction of the female voice in film, as well as Arnheim and the New Acousticians’ desire to erase the sound of space through acoustic engineering, Connor’s history of ventriloquism asserts that the practice of throwing voices changed dramatically in the United States during the eighteenth century “from a condition of spiritual malady to a form of expertise and entertainment; as it became associated with the *control of space* rather than with the invasion of the body, it became a male accomplishment rather than a female malady” (Connor, 227; emphasis added).⁶⁰ Ventriloquism, in Connor’s reading, appears to anticipate, and perhaps even participate in an earlier moment of the same discursive network that associates the acousmatic voice with male control in Hollywood cinema.⁶¹

Unlike this more familiar secularizing and liberal story of modernity, Nancy Ruttenburg tunes in to a strain of speech that counters the totalizing desire of disembodiment associated with

⁵⁹ Nancy Ruttenburg identifies a similar epistemological challenge in the *acousmètre*, which she translates as “‘an acousmatic personality’: a disembodied presence made sensible to others through the faculty of hearing, but not sight, a ‘kind of talking, acting shadow’ who, in this case, interferes directly in the lives of those around him by manipulating their epistemological assumptions concerning ‘the reassuring fixation of the voice in the residence of the body’” (Ruttenburg, 216). See Nancy Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998). In the representation of Hoover, the text’s narrator both participates in and observes the epistemological manipulation which appears to derive from the acoustic engineering more than Hoover himself.

⁶⁰ See Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2000)

⁶¹ In this, Connor’s analysis aligns with the media history supplied by Friedrich Kittler in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990)

later ventriloquism and its legacy.⁶² In fact, she details the historical shift discussed by Connor as indicative of a literary and theological hybrid she names “the voice of democratic personality,” a voice we might see as the forebear to the vocal current Dos Passos seeks in his political portraits and will later call the “speech of the people.” Surprisingly, Ruttenburg’s description of this practice of enunciation dependent on the figure of ventriloquism serves as an apt historical antecedent for conceiving how authors like Dos Passos perhaps unknowingly access an alternate history that aids their attempt to imagine a new narrative acoustics meant to sound out a different form of utterance running counter to the “clear and focused” channel of the New Acoustics.

Ruttenburg writes that democratic personality develops out of the religious domain of the Salem witch trials and the eighteenth century Great Awakenings as an “uncontainable” and “conspicuously transferable” voice through which those subjects previously ignored or flatly denied the right to speak because of their race, class, gender or age spoke freely when “possessed by the spirit.” To speak as if spoken through, either by a divine agent, or a numinous “people,” as Walt Whitman later claimed to do in his poetry, performs what Ruttenburg names “the practice of *humble self-enlargement* (the publicly performed disintegration or ‘undoing’ of the preternaturally knowledgeable self which authorized disruptive popular speech)” (Ruttenburg, 24; emphasis added). For Ruttenburg such public speech disrupts the association between the speaking body and the spoken word, enabling a more expansive rhetoric less limited by self-reference and the strictures placed upon specific bodies—a flexibility achieved because of the fact that the voice in this performance claims its source comes from elsewhere.⁶³ Thus unencumbered, democratic personality makes itself available for diverse appropriation, an appropriation more easily secured because the utterance, which was “often inarticulate if radically persuasive,” depended less on what it said than how it was delivered (Ruttenburg, 16). In this manner, a new form of popular public speech that empowered socially marginal subjects to condemn a society’s most powerful members spread quickly, independent of the expertise of literacy or any specific body.⁶⁴

With this history in mind, Hoover’s speech resounds as either a vicious mockery of popular speech’s betrayal by Presidential oratory, or an indication that the disassociative properties induced by technological change might themselves help reinstate the grounds for a renewed, if revised, version of such speech. What I described earlier as the “contagious” tone picked up by Hathaway as he finished Foster’s address points to a minor example of how shared acoustic properties might begin to form a collective utterance in the spirit of Ruttenburg’s “voice of democratic personality.”

This social and historical background alters the status of the theological speech enacted in Salem and during the Great Awakenings from passive “possession” to a more complicated notion of collective speech and political action. Less enthusiastic about the gender binary

⁶² See Nancy Ruttenbrug, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁶³ The voice of democratic personality eschews attachment to particular bodies in order to achieve political empowerment for bodies usually excluded from the political process: “Unlike race or gender, however, democratic personality is conspicuous for having no prior material referent in the body. (This is not to deny the body a role in the formation of democratic personality—far from it, as we shall see. It does deny the body a delimiting function and thus denotes the radically inclusive nature of democratic personality as a category of being potentially open to everybody.)” (Ruttenburg, 10).

⁶⁴ As Ruttenburg puts it, “independence of the body lent [democratic personality] a flexibility that exceeded the text’s insofar as it required no artifact (such as the book) or expertise (such as reading) and disseminated itself without requiring a network of supportive institutions” (Ruttenburg, 186).

emphasized by Connor, Ruttenburg reads the same text he takes as indicative of the shift from female possession to male ventriloquism, and views the two forms as intimately connected. Whereas Connor's reading of Charles Brockden Browne's *Wieland* (1798) barely mentions the sister, Clara Wieland, Ruttenburg seizes on Clara's role as a narrator who retains her innocence despite her *authorship* by repeatedly asserting her ethically superior status as a victim, a hapless *character* in Carwin's insidious narrative (Ruttenburg, 186; emphasis added):

In so doing, Clara attempts to vindicate herself from the possible charge of making use of the ventriloquial power of authorship by redefining it as a legitimate form of humble self-enlargement, a form of benign ventriloquism, an innocence of power in which the author's ontological difference from his or her character might be denied and their identity asserted (Ruttenburg, 186).

Thus, when Clara forces the criminal Carwin "to ventriloquize himself," and then listens with feigned awe alongside her brother when the disembodied voice speaks, she assumes the position of both author and character, and therefore reimagines the former in the guise of the latter.

What we might add to Ruttenburg's argument is that through the character of Clara Wieland, ventriloquism and humble self-enlargement resist the association with spatial control Connor associates with throwing voices, and are conceived instead as a means to embrace listening as a creative act.⁶⁵ Attention to acoustics, the sound of space, helps Clara unmask or "de-acousmatize" Carwin, and becomes the means for Clara to access a tradition of popular speech, "the voice of democratic personality," which allows her to assume a position neither wholly contained by, nor excluded from, the narrative action. I would argue that standing in between the position of the character and of the author, the disembodied and the gendered body, Clara becomes an imaginative response to the acoustic problems of power posed by radio and film theory. Moreover, while Ruttenburg's analysis helps position the ventriloquistic act in the wired room within a longer literary and political history regarding the struggle over the popular voice in the United States, her triangulation of authorship, character, and acoustic attention suggests a means to read how Dos Passos inscribes listening into his writing practice.

The Radio Voice: FDR's "Intimate Public"

Listening once again in Chicago Stadium in 1932, Dos Passos ponders the "unassuming speech" of a man he describes as overwhelmed "by the giant muddling awesome blurs, a hundred times amplified, on the radio and screen" (Dos Passos, 406; 407). Two years later, the second book of his *U.S.A* trilogy completed, he listens to the man speak again, this time over the radio, and includes what he hears as the final piece of the section "ON THE NATIONAL HOOKUP." Entitled "The Radio Voice," the brief essay recreates a scene of a family in a barn listening to the now President Franklin Delano Roosevelt speaking over the radio:

Then there is a man leaning across his desk, speaking clearly and cordially to you and me, painstakingly explaining how he's sitting at his desk there in Washington, leaning towards you and me across his desk, speaking clearly and cordially so that you and me shall completely understand that *he sits at his desk there in*

⁶⁵ Key to such listening is that it occurs within the discursive space of the scene. Thus, it is a listening not aligned with surveillance, but as a participatory act within the frame. See Silverman, 88-90, 96-97.

Washington with his fingers on all the switchboards of the federal government
(Dos Passos, 414; emphasis added).

As with the previous descriptions of Foster, Hoover, and the then Governor Roosevelt, we hear *how* the speaker intones his words (“clearly and cordially”). However, unlike those earlier scenes, the narration does not stop with descriptive vocal adjectives. Instead, it quickly shifts into represented speech, bringing tone into the speaker’s content for the first time in these sound portraits. Most notably, rather than the pathos of “farawayness” encountered in Foster’s radio voice, the reader confronts an insistent, repetitive voice intent on demarcating space in order to interpolate its listener, thereby concealing the power divisions between listener and speaker. The simple choice of pronouns, the use of the second and first person, enables every individual in the massive audience to hear each “you” addressed to themselves alone. The massive address of “broadcasting” becomes an intimate moment, like the “narrowcasting” of a telephone conversation or face-to-face speech.⁶⁶ The audience, reinforcing the success of the speaker’s intimate tone, confides, “we feel we are right there in the White House. When the cordial explaining voice stops we want to say, ‘Thank you Frank’” (Dos Passos, 415). As if completing the imaginary circuit, the audience feels familiar enough to thank “Frank.” The evocative sensation of “farawayness and emptiness” conjured up by the weightiness of Foster’s radio voice vanishes, replaced by the intimacy and presence of a single room and a familiar name.

The mass audience’s sense of personal closeness with “Frank,” signals what has been called the logic of “radio’s intimate public.”⁶⁷ As Jason Lovoglio writes, this “new cultural space created by radio broadcasting in the 1930s” found its political embodiment in FDR, “the *best modulated* radio voice in public life,” whose “Fireside Chats invited listeners into a privileged realm of mobility that enabled them to feel as if they had crossed the boundary separating public and private, backstage and onstage... These ‘authorized transgressions—public speech in ‘intimate’ spaces—were part of the unique allure of network radio” (Lovoglio, 4; 7; 5; emphasis added).⁶⁸ Roosevelt’s radio voice, from this perspective and, to a certain degree, from that of Dos

⁶⁶ In the words of radio theorist Edward Miller, FDR enunciates his “broadcasted speeches almost as if they were ‘narrowcasted’ missives, seemingly particularized for the private home, giving the listener the illusion that he was being spoken to in a point-to-point transmission, *rather than overhearing him in a radio address*” (Miller, 89; emphasis added). In *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003), Miller adds that “Roosevelt’s use of the plural pronoun ‘you’ and the possessive pronoun ‘your’ was rare in commercial broadcasting as a way to address the audience... Dramas and comedies presented their narratives as if the listener were *overhearing* the programming” (Miller, 88). The President’s use of the second person “strengthened the idea that he entered the home via his transmitted voice” (Miller, 89). However, in *Radio’s Intimate Public* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Jason Lovoglio observes that non-commercial broadcasters such as “Roxy” Rothafel, Will Rogers, and the notorious Father Coughlin already provided a context for FDR’s chats, in that the latter “drew on radio’s already established convention of the intimate mode of address” (6).

⁶⁷ Jason Lovoglio, *Radio’s Intimate Public* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiv-xix.

For a different use of the term “intimate public” see Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Dos Passos’s attention to the significance of tone in shaping this new social space finds support in the critical taxonomy applied to Roosevelt’s speeches: “In addition to elaborate preparations in the writing of [the Fireside Chats], great care was taken in the timing and aesthetics of the broadcasts. Scholars of speech have dissected Roosevelt’s impressive radio performances from a myriad of perspectives, generally concurring with Robert T. Oliver that he had ‘the best modulated radio voice in public life.’ Studies of his pitch (tenor), intonation (‘vibrant with enthusiasm’), pronunciation (‘eastern’ mixed with elements of ‘general American’), cadence (‘measured and deliberate’), and speaking rate (a comparatively slow one hundred words per minute), and volume (great dynamics) all bear out the general scholarly, journalistic, and popular consensus that Roosevelt was a master public speaker. In

Passos's narrative, appears to partake of the technical innovations of the New Acoustics and transfer their lesson to the realm of political theater and social life, folding the social distance and difference of specific positions of power into an intimate context, and thus mimicking the erasure of space generated at the engineering level through material insulation, higher fidelity microphones, loudspeaker placement, and more precise volume control. Indeed, Roosevelt and his advisors considered his tone of such importance that they outfitted him with a dental bridge in order to close a slight gap in his teeth responsible for an occasional whistle in his speech (Lovoglio, 8). However, Lovoglio understands this action as less of an "erasure," and more of an invitation "to think about the shifting boundaries of public and private space and speech at the start of an era in which these terms had come to be understood as permanently in 'crisis'" (Lovoglio, xvi). This more generous reading suggests Roosevelt's radio voice encouraged listeners to self-consciously transgress the border between public and private, and in doing so recognize the ongoing construction of these social spaces, and thus their fluidity.

Through this keen political manipulation of micro-acoustics and radio broadcasting Roosevelt molded the medium's meaning. Distinct from the fascist oratorical styles critiqued by Adorno and Horkheimer, and the amplified zealotry of American radio orators like Aimee Semple McPherson, Huey Long, and Father Coughlin, Roosevelt's radio speeches carry with them their own particular micro-politics of acoustics and language intended to sculpt a particular place in the American imaginary.⁶⁹ In turn, Dos Passos, and authors after him struggled to counter Roosevelt's political and cultural influence by redefining his radio voice and the radio medium's function in their essays and novels.

We can hear how the work with tone exhibited in Dos Passos's essay counters the idea that friendly "Frank" sought to increase listeners' awareness of social space. Indeed, the narrative performs the work Lovoglio attributes to Roosevelt. Like any good caricature, the above excerpt from "The Radio Voice" exaggerates its subject's most recognizable features: the speaker's direct address ("you and me"), his clear enunciation ("speaking clearly and cordially") and self-reflexive contextualization ("at his desk"). And repetition, another hallmark of Roosevelt's rhetorical style, becomes the means to unstitch that style and expose its seams. For as the droning cycle proceeds, the narrative voice that began the sentence before slyly slipping beneath the radio voice, as if the initial voice's volume has been reduced in the mix, re-emerges at the very moment that the narrative reveals whose hand sits at the controls in Washington. Dissonance distinguishes the voices, one intimate ("you and me"), the other expository ("then there is a man"), and the technical skill required to sound out their difference also exposes its own hand on the narrative controls. Descriptive tone, the adjectival naming of how speech sounds, carries through here to a syntax that expresses tonal difference through writerly means. Narrative acoustics disturb the intimacy between radio speaker and listener, re-inserting the sound of social and discursive space into this written rendering of a radio voice.

The free indirect discursive mode responsible for this maneuvering between registers has been called "unspeakable."⁷⁰ However, the minute formal attention to tone and acoustics that

a study of his wartime Fireside Chats, Waldo Braden points to Roosevelt's 'short declarative sentences,' parallel structure, repetition, and 'attractive cadence'" (Lovoglio, 7). For a recent study of Roosevelt's speech patterns in a media theory context see the aforementioned text by Miller.

⁶⁹ See Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

⁷⁰ In *Unspeakable Sentences* (1982) Ann Banfield argues that her system "sees narrative fiction as linguistically constituted by two mutually exclusive kinds of sentences, optionally narratorless sentences of pure narration and sentences of represented speech and thought. Both these sentences are 'unspeakable'" (Banfield, 185). Alternatively,

characterizes each of what I am calling the “sound portraits” in “ON THE NATIONAL HOOKUP” calls for these passages to be heard as well as read. Listening, in these essays, becomes a model for writing and reading, the means to “de-acousmatize” the speaker behind the desk as the man “with his fingers on all the switchboards of the federal government.” Tuning the reader’s ears to these minute changes in tonal shape registered in writing helps instantiate a distance between the narrative voice and the radio voice, a distance the essay charges Roosevelt with attempting to erase through his intimate tone. Indeed, to revisit the language from earlier in this section, Dos Passos’s use of free indirect discourse here comes closest to written ventriloquism. However, whereas Clara Wieland oscillates between author and character to seek out a “democratic authorship” in their harmonic interplay, “The Radio Voice” works to unhinge a speaker from control of his characters / listeners through a self-exposing ventriloquism. Again, attention to acoustic properties loosens the speaker from possession of his voice, reasserting the politics of space against the erasure and control associated with the New Acoustics and the ventriloquist history established by Connor.⁷¹

U.S.A.: *The New Acoustics as Narrative*

Brought to the grander stage of the novel, the narrative lessons gleaned from listening to the acoustically engineered political soundscape at the beginning of the New Deal help Dos Passos compose what historians have often heard in Roosevelt’s voice: “the speech of the people.”⁷² The phrase closes the two page preface attached to the first bound edition of the *U.S.A* trilogy (1938), which begins with an isolated and lonely “young man,” but ends with a chorus of voices linked in to the national hookup wherein

only the ears busy to catch the speech are not alone; the ears are caught tight, linked tight by the tendrils of phrased words...his mother’s words telling...his father’s telling...the speech that clung to the ears, the link that tingled in the blood; U.S.A...a radio network...the speech of the people (Dos Passos, *U.S.A*, vi).

This lyrical passage’s movement from the heard to the spoken word, from the individual family utterance to the radio network identified with the nation sounds slightly off key when considered alongside the ironic, skeptical ear reporting from Chicago Stadium six years earlier. If the passage recreates the undulating, curling syntax reminiscent of the author’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and the aesthetic hopefulness of its modernist contemporaries, the style soon gives way to the book’s dominant mode, what Jean Paul Sartre, writing in the year of the trilogy’s publication,

Brian McHale argues that sentences in *U.S.A* break supposedly unbreakable rules in Banfield’s system (McHale, 254-255; 257). See Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Brian McHale, “Talking U.S.A.: Interpreting Free Indirect Discourse in Dos Passos’s *U.S.A*. Trilogy,” in *Degrés*, 16, 1978.

⁷¹ This notion of “acoustic properties” imagines an alternative to the mere commodification of the acoustic that the term describes in Stephen Best. See Best, *The Fugitive’s Properties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 59. As I move throughout my argument, I treat the alienability and inalienability of the acoustic dialectically.

⁷² For more on FDR and his speeches see Alan Brinkley, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Michel Himes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 200); Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, *The People and the President: America’s Conversation with FDR* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

refers to as “the garb of populism” (Sartre, “Dos Passos” 94).⁷³ Indeed, the “speech of the people” in *U.S.A* sounds little like the sweep and grandeur of the preface. While Dos Passos remains attentive to tone, he neither converts the modern din of urban overcrowding and noisy machinery into jazz like riffs of adjectives and nouns, nor seeks out the crannies of acoustic difference in protest against the erasure of the sound of space. Instead, the dominant style in *U.S.A* applies the clear and focused channel of the New Acoustics to represent the people’s speech.

In a self-assessment that coheres with the journalistic writings of 1932-1933 Dos Passos describes the ambitions of his ongoing epic as matching a specific tone with a certain sense of built form: “‘The writer who *writes straight*,’ Dos Passos maintained in a 1932 account of his own work, ‘is the architect of history’” (Denning, 169; emphasis added).⁷⁴ The author went on later to describe himself as a “frustrated architect” (ibid), constructing his trilogy like a voice, “the speech of the people,” resonating in a room. Except that resonance has vanished from the new tone created in these novels.

Sartre, in his visually focused vocabulary, describes the ambition to “write straight” as an attempt “to *show* [the world] only, without explanations or comment” (Sartre, DP, 88). The resulting style, which he describes as “American journalistic technique,” reads flatly because “for Dos Passos, narrating means adding. This accounts for the *slack air of his style*” (Sartre, DP, 90; emphasis added). Just as resonance is removed from the equation in the New Acoustics, thereby erasing the reflections and architectural syntax through which each sound must move, the additive, paratactic style of *U.S.A* removes tonal difference, and deflates narrative tension by removing the causality of occurrences, rendering them into exchangeable information, like sounds broken from their context and homogenously reproduced to every seat in the room. And just as any piece of information can be exchanged with any other, any voice can belong to any character; the style sounds “populist” because the narrative speaks from everywhere, it “adopts the point of view of the chorus, of public opinion” (Sartre, DP, 94). Literalizing the preface’s statement, USA, the nation, and *U.S.A*, the book, becomes a radio network, a mass listening audience, speaking through any body.⁷⁵

The new tone ties in, then, to a notion of how to construct character and discourse similar to how ventriloquism served as a model to shape narrative in *Wieland*. However, the theological passion responsible for that novel’s belief in ventriloquism’s power has been replaced in *U.S.A*

⁷³ “A Propos de Dos Passos et de ‘1919’” in *Critiques littéraires (Situations, I)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

⁷⁴ The passage from which this quotation is originally taken appeared in the 1932 introduction to a new version of *The Three Soldiers* (New York: Modern Library, 1932).

⁷⁵ In many ways Sartre’s notion of the “populist” style in Dos Passos comes closest to what other narrative theorists have identified as characteristic of the epic. See, for instance, Eric Auerbach’s chapter, “Odysseus’ Scar,” where he writes, “a problematic psychological condition... is impossible for any of the Homeric heroes, whose destiny is clearly defined and who wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives: their emotions, though strong, are simple and find expression instantly” (Auerbach, 12); or, “the Homeric poems conceal nothing... Homer can be analyzed... but he cannot be interpreted” (Auerbach, 13). Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin’s comments that “the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation... it is impossible to experience it, analyze it... the important thing is this formal constitutive characteristic of the epic as a genre... its reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view—which excludes any possibility of another approach” (Bakhtin, 17).

See Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

by technology and technique.⁷⁶ The dull, flat style coincides with characters free of psychological interiority or any belief in self-expression:

Dos Passos reports all his characters' utterances to us in the style of a statement to the Press. Their words are thereby cut off from thought, and become pure utterances, simple reactions that must be registered as such. . . Little does it matter, thinks the satisfied chorus, what Dick had in mind when he spoke that sentence. What matters is that it has been uttered. Besides, *it was not formed inside him, it came from afar*. Even before he uttered it, it existed as *a pompous sound*, a taboo. All he has done is to lend it his power of affirmation (Sartre, DP, 93; emphasis added).

In other words, the characters in these novels do not possess their utterances as expressions of an interior world brought out into the social world. Neither does the narration enter into their private thoughts through interior monologues. Rather, their speech, as Sartre puts it, comes from afar, like utterances floating through the air, like voices heard over the radio. The characters need only listen and then step forward to repeat the line.

Radio and Real Estate in U.S.A

A clear example of the narrative technique Sartre describes occurs towards the end of the trilogy's first book, *The 42nd Parallel*. A narrative voice begins the paragraph in free indirect discourse with the observation that "The sinking of the *Lusitania* had made everybody feel that America's going into the war was only a question of months" (Dos Passos, "USA," 298).⁷⁷ By the end of the paragraph this bland statement finds its way into the mouth of the real estate agent J. Ward Moorehouse, who declares, as Sartre says, "in the style of a statement to the Press," that "*he thought America's entering the war was only a question of months*" (USA, 298; emphasis added). Thus, Moorehouse, whose name indexes his original profession in real estate and his economic ambitions, speaks with the voice of the people, his naïve ventriloquism in debt to his position in discursive space rather than any conscious, individual self-expression. Transferring democratic personality from a religious register to a technical feat, the neutral tone that allows speech to transfer so easily between bodies in these novels seems to have shed the possessiveness of authorship.

Yet, in doing so the critical function Dos Passos gave to listening in "The Radio Voice" has vanished. The narrative no longer attends to tonal difference in order to represent the sound of space. Listening becomes instead the foundation for a cynical revision of Ruttenburg's "voice of democratic personality," as mere publicity and mimicry, echoing the betrayal of popular speech in Hoover's mute ventriloquism, and the performance of an intimate populism to mask paternalistic governance in Roosevelt's radio voice. "The speech of the people" in *U.S.A* might belong to nobody, but the political potential of "conspicuously transferable" speech in eighteenth century American religious gatherings has become, in Dos Passos's novel, a sign of that speech's political absenteeism.

⁷⁶ Father Coughlin, Aimee Semple McPherson and other religious orators brought religion to radio in fiery, ecstatic and, in Coughlin's case, often hate filled speeches. My argument is not that religion and radio failed to mix. My claim is rather that radio and other aural technologies also created an alternative model for the transferable popular speech associated with the religious movements of the 18th century.

⁷⁷ John Dos Passos, *U.S.A* (New York: Modern Library, 1938).

In grounding, for a moment, the speech of the people in J. Ward Moorehouse at the conclusion of *The 42nd Parallel*, we hear again the conflict surrounding the voice throughout Dos Passos's writings in the 1930s. It is a conflict between 1) a belief in the possessive property of the voice, the voice as identity, 2) the acoustic properties, the tonal shape of the voice in space, as it interacts with several media and no longer seems to "belong" to one particular object, and 3) the architectural forms that participate in determining tone, and, as in Hoover's speech, seem to take full possession of the voice. Keeping in mind Moorehouse's original profession, we might begin to think of the connection between the idea of possessing a voice, the acoustic properties of a voice, and the architectural forms that participate in shaping the voice as a keen attention to "real" estate, or real property. Thus, it is worth recalling Michael Denning's observation that *U.S.A* was partially conceived as an attempt to bring the building lessons of what Dos Passos called Frank Lloyd Wright's "new clean construction" to a narrative style that "writes straight" (Denning, 169). For if the people's speech in *U.S.A* seems structurally akin to voices on a "radio network," it also coheres with Dos Passos' comment that "buildings determine civilization as the cells in the honeycomb the functions of bees" (quoted in Denning, 169). In other words, *U.S.A* sounds, in the end, like Chicago Stadium in 1932, that is, like a building engineered to displace the voice from any single body and out into a network signaled by a neutral, homogenous tone that erases even the space between characters.

Radio, Realism, and Real Estate at the End of the New Deal

Dos Passos' sound bytes from the 1932 conventions, written at the end of an era of radical acoustic change, the beginning of a period of tremendous political and economic upheaval, and in the middle of the trilogy he eventually thought of as both a piece of architecture and a testament to "the speech of the people," can therefore be heard as helping to inaugurate a new literary acoustics, or at least a new attention to acoustics and its political and formal importance in the New Deal novel. What remains a dense, almost implicit connection between rethinking discourse in the novel through radio acoustics and real estate in *USA* becomes an explicit theme in the New Deal acoustic narratives at the end of the 1930s. Authors as varied as James Agee (*Let us now praise famous men*, 1940), Raymond Chandler (*Farewell, My Lovely*, 1940), Carson McCullers (*The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*, 1940), and Richard Wright (*Native Son*, 1940) exhibit a shared investment in listening attentively to changes in aesthetics, architecture, engineering, and social space, addressing the New Deal soundscape with subtle alterations in literary form and content. While Michael Szalay has named some of these writers "New Deal modernists," I want to think of them instead as writers concerned with revising the realist tradition through the construction of a vacancy, or the building of an empty room.⁷⁸ Their attention to the connection between radio, realism, and real estate prompts them to address new social configurations through a shift in narrative codes. The empty spaces in these novels signify the construction of a new public, one attuned to how voices and volume pull individuals into other people's lives. The space vacant of things reveals walls that enable a more intimate association between neighbors, precisely because sight is restricted. And radio broadcasting helped model this association, converting overhearing and eavesdropping into a more socially acceptable daily practice. In thinking through literary form and radio—the most popular commercial and political medium of the moment—they sought to address a fundamental political problem of the New Deal: public housing.

⁷⁸ See Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

Conceived as part of the same New Deal platform responsible for the Communications Act of 1934, the National Housing Act of the same year (the Caperhart Act) created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in order to provide federal insurance for home rehabilitation loans and mortgages for newly purchased homes (Radford, 179).⁷⁹ The policy was updated subsequently by the Housing Act of 1937 (the Wagner-Steagall Act), which created the United States Housing Authority (USHA) to pay government subsidies to local public housing agencies.⁸⁰ The most influential voice in calling for and helping to develop public housing in the United States, Catherine Bauer soon became USHA's director. In her 1934 study of public housing in Europe, *Modern Housing*, Bauer sought to establish the platform for the housing policy and legislation she drafted for the government. Published the same year as her mentor Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*, Bauer's housing ideas should be thought of a part with the technological developments of the age.⁸¹ However, Bauer's hope to bring Bauhaus influenced architectural and housing models to the United States met resistance, and, in some ways, we might see Dos Passos's enthusiasm for Frank Lloyd Wright as a rejection of Bauer's plan for housing reform.

For the socially engaged fiction writers of the New Deal, the housing crisis also happened to coincide with an ongoing problem of realist discourse. As Alex Woloch reminds us, even in the nineteenth century "the realist novel is structurally destabilized not by too many details or colors or corners, but by *too many people*" (Woloch, 19; emphasis in original). For a writer like Dos Passos, the "frustrated architect" who conceived of writing as a type of housing, realist fiction must answer the question: how do we house all of these people? As we saw in Sartre's reading of *USA*, Dos Passos responds by creating "the speech of the people" as a "radio network": "[the novel] adopts the point of view of the chorus, of public opinion" (Sartre, DP, 94). Part of a chorus, a voice in a network, characters reside on the same narratological plane in *USA*, each of them "housed" in the novel. Perhaps unsatisfied with this formal and largely metaphorical response, however, writers confronting the same problem at the end of the New Deal question the radio's ability to represent the voice of the people, and more explicitly connect radio to real estate and a disruption in the realist order of things.

Borrowing from Frederic Jameson's essay "The Synoptic Chandler," we might think of these New Deal narratives as diverse representatives not just of a new realism but also of a "radio aesthetic which has no equivalent in the earlier novel or silent cinema" (Jameson, 36).⁸² Such an aesthetic would address Woloch's concern about the problem of too many people as an extension, rather than refutation of Barthes's claim that realism is produced as an effect by piling up too many contingent details. The radio apparatus's strange status as an unruly object that literally talks back, bringing the extra-domestic news into the family room, points away from its

⁷⁹ See Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles In the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 177-198. For more on the racial segregation policies under the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), see Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978): 50. For more on the Communications Act of 1934 see Douglas B. Craig, "A New Deal for Radio? The Communications Act of 1934" in his *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000): 78-91.

⁸⁰ USHA was again amended by the Housing Act of 1949, and, in 1965, USHA, along with the Public Housing Administration and the House and Home Financing Agency, became part of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

⁸¹ For more on Mumford's place in media history see Mindell, 1-16, 112, 318-321.

⁸² See Frederic Jameson, "The Synoptic Chandler" in *Shades of Noir*. Ed. Joan Copjec (London, New York: Verso, 1993).

apparent owner, and seems to welcome those voices and people bourgeois walls were erected to keep out. In this sense the radio goes beyond or further literalizes even those Things Emily Apter, Bill Brown, and Elaine Freedgood have identified as burdened with histories suppressed and concealed when read as merely contingent objects.⁸³ If, as Adorno complained, one can always turn off the radio, even muted it carries the resonance of its extra-territorial purpose, and, when on, makes audible the negative space of a room, the acoustic dimension that reminds readers of meaning beyond seeing.⁸⁴

As a detective novelist acutely aware of how the contingent detail meant to produce a reality effect can slip into the realm of the clue or red herring, Raymond Chandler challenges the motivated link between the discursive enumeration of details and reality.⁸⁵ As his detective Philip Marlowe comments, “The guy that sees too much detail is just as unreliable a witness as the guy that doesn’t see any. He’s always making half of it up” (Chandler, 51).⁸⁶ Marlowe’s suspicion of “too much detail” corresponds to Jameson’s claim that Chandler’s novels distinguish themselves from the details of the Flaubertian room intended only “to stand in for the sheer massive contingency of reality itself” or the Balzatian furnishings in which “the object-world was meant to give a metonymic signal (like a wild animal’s den or an exoskeleton)” (Jameson, 40). If the objects in Chandler’s novels fail to fulfill either of these realist functions, however, we are left to ask what narrative purpose they might serve. For Jameson these objects strangely participate in the “construction of a vacancy, an empty space,” where “whatever the objects mean...they also outline a space of a specific type” (Jameson, 40). Although Jameson remains silent as to how this alteration in realism might occur, we can understand Chandler’s shift from furnishings to the rooms that contain them as a change in perception, from the eye to the ear. For instance, when Marlowe enters a building looking for clues, he hears something else entirely: “I went farther into the room and stood peering around and listening and hearing nothing except those fixed sounds *belonging to the house and having nothing to do with the humans in it*” (Chandler, 80; emphasis added).⁸⁷ Disrupting realism’s inherited design code, Chandler moves away from the intimate possession of things and toward the aural attention to spaces.

⁸³ Emily S. Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) and *A Sense of Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas In Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁸⁴ Theodor Adorno, “The Radio Symphony: An Experiment in Theory,” in *Radio Research 1941*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank N. Stanton (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941): 110-139.

⁸⁵ See Freedgood, pg 8.

⁸⁶ Raymond Chandler, *Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995).

⁸⁷ Chandler’s observation seems to anticipate what new media theorist Howard Rheingold has named “sentient things.” Rheingold, writing in 2002, speaks of “technical architecture” (86), and quotes researcher Mark Weiser’s notion of “ubiquitous computing,” which “is invisible, everywhere computing that does not live on a personal device of any sort but is in the woodwork everywhere” (quoted in Rheingold, 87). Rheingold goes on to mention software designer Intel’s expectation “that in the near future, Intel will include radio transponder circuitry in *every chip* Intel manufactures” (86; emphasis in original), thus securing a future in which “shirt labels gain the power to disclose what airplanes, trucks, and ships carried it, what substances compose it, and the URL of a webcam in the factory where the shirt was manufactured. *Things tell you where they are*” (85; emphasis added). Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 2003). One could argue that Jameson and Bill Brown’s notions of living spaces becoming work spaces and Things expressing human relationships have as much to do with the laptop computer, RSS tags, and digital wireless technology as with radio and the other technologies that paved its way.

Marlowe's recognition of the house's autonomous sounds begins to tune us in to how Chandler develops "a kind of substitution of an architectural language for that of individual characters: it is not so much that these 'people' in Chandler are their spaces, as that these spaces in Chandler are 'characters' or *actants*" (Jameson, 43). Thus, in Marlowe's encounter with the empty room, the character's personal property, the details realist discourse previously employed to index a character's identity or establish the effect of reality, has vanished, replaced by a house that *possesses* its own sounds. In more specific terms, we might say that with the evacuation of realism's things—that personal or "portable property" key to so many recent studies in realism—real estate—the immobile and "fixed" property—comes to life.⁸⁸ Rather than turning the novel into a house, Chandler's method exacerbates the housing problem in fiction by pointing to real estate's increasing power over individuals.⁸⁹

One of the group of novels published in 1940 that I cited earlier, Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* interrogates the constellation of radio, realism, and real estate I have outlined above. At first, the radio in this novel seems to stand as exactly the kind of metonymic signal Jameson attributes to Balzac. Stepping inside Mrs. Florian's living room, Marlowe's gaze is drawn to "A large handsome cabinet radio [which] droned to the left of the door in the corner of the room. *It was the only decent piece of furniture the place had. It looked brand new.* Everything else was junk" (Chandler, 784; emphasis added).⁹⁰ Since Mrs. Florian's neighbor identifies her as someone who "ain't neighborly. Plays her radio loud late nights. Sings. She don't talk to anybody" (847), her investment in a new radio should not seem surprising. Moreover, in one of her less reticent moments, she speaks to Marlowe, and "her voice came from her mouth sounding like a worn-out phonograph record" (849). Embodying the technological reproduction of sound, Mrs. Florian goes beyond metonymy. Chandler's simile literalizes the link between the sonic playback and the woman's identity: recalling Dos Passos's description of Hoover, she seems more oral technology than human subject.

⁸⁸ Perhaps it's not by chance that the apartment's apparent owner, Mrs. Fallbrook, later revealed to be Muriel Chess, responsible for murdering the tenant, lectures Marlowe on the difference between personal and real property: "'Well of course it's much easier for you,' she said. 'About the car, I mean. You can just take it away, if you have to. But taking a house with nice furniture in it isn't so easy. It takes time and money to evict a tenant'" (Chandler, 82). In Chandler's case one might also think of how his literary production functioned in less than aesthetic ways in his own life. As Judith Freeman writes in her book about Chandler and his wife Cissy, *The Long Embrace* (New York: Vintage, 2007), Chandler learned to write in order to pay the bills, and, it should be noted, to allow him and his wife to move to over thirty six different addresses in and around Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. In other words, Chandler's writing directly served his own survey of Southern Californian real estate. One could be forgiven, if, like Birdie Keppel in *The Lady in the Lake*, one were to also ask of Chandler, "Are you in the real estate business, Mr. Marlowe?" (Chandler, 51).

For more on "portable property" in particular, see John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ Chandler, who, in the introduction to his essay "The Simple Art of Murder," singles out Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton* as a "graceful and elegant evocation" (Chandler, 1019), was a keen reader of James. Thus, we might consider his work with real estate's privilege over the individual as a critical response to the ventriloquism Bill Brown identifies in James's *The American Scene*. As Brown writes, "James's ventriloquism seems...to confer rights in the mode of conferring voice in order to grant objects some belated yet originary right to narrate their own stories, and thus to express the longing to have their rights realized. Determined as their fate seems to be, they nonetheless retain, in this animating vocalization, some agency, however ghostly (Brown, 184). Brown borrows the notion of objects longing for rights from Miguel Tamen's *Friends of Interpretable Objects* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2001)

⁹⁰ All quotes are from Raymond Chandler, *Stories and Early Novels* (New York: The Library of America, 1995).

As if to assure readers of this connection between Mrs. Florian and the radio, the object's silence eventually signals her death. Returning to the house later with his fellow detective Randall, Marlowe notices, "the radio was off" (922). The acoustic signal changes the atmosphere in the room, and yet, at first, it seems we have returned to the previous scene. Repeating the narrative's earlier appraisal, Randall comments, "That's a nice radio... Cost money. If it's paid for" (922). Then he plugs the radio in, and when its sound fills the room the object's noise evokes the result of a miniature narrative within the house's confines: "The light went on at once. We waited. The thing hummed for a while and then suddenly a heavy volume of sound began to pour out of the speaker. Randall jumped at the cord and *yanked it* loose again. The sound was *snapped off sharp*. When he straightened his eyes were full of light. We went swiftly into the bedroom. Mrs. Jessie Pierce Florian lay diagonally across her bed... She had been dead long enough" (922; emphasis added). Randall's actions with the radio, mimicking what is eventually determined to be Mrs. Florian's brutal death by strangling, bring her into even more intimate identification with the radio. Yet, while the object's initial silence, and its sudden, overpowering liveliness help indicate the immediate circumstances of her death, the radio also goes on talking while Mrs. Florian lies lifeless, the scene perversely emblemizing Marx's commodity fetish. This seeming victory of the object world does not so much rewrite the earlier realist tradition as push it to its extreme: identified with the radio, Mrs. Florian herself becomes an object within the room.

As the narrative moves on, however, the "brand new" radio's peculiarity in this room points less to Mrs. Florian than an entire system of subterfuge in Chandler's Los Angeles. The radio's presence indexes a network in which Mrs. Florian's murder by radio helps reveal the alternating dynamic between public and private life in the broadcast voice. As becomes clear in the novel's climactic scene, Mrs. Florian was in fact blackmailing a former burlesque dancer, Velma Valento, who left the late Mr. Florian's now defunct bar in order to work at radio KDFK in Beverly Hills, where she met and married the station's owner, Mr. Grayle (834). In the expository style typical of detective story revelations, Marlowe describes this biography of Mrs. Grayle / Velma to Velma / Mrs. Grayle, explaining that "on the way up a shabby old woman recognized her—probably heard her singing at the radio station and recognized her voice and went to see—and this old woman had to be kept quiet" (976). The "shabby old woman" described here is Mrs. Florian, and to make sure she is "kept quiet" Mrs. Grayle enlists the help of another employee at KDFK, Mr. Lindsay Marriott (865). With her wealth as the wife of a rich radio owner, Mrs. Grayle acts through Marriott to control Mrs. Florian through her real estate, as he "made her monthly payments and owned a trust deed on her home and could throw her into the gutter any time she got funny" (976). Thus, the initial realist marker, the radio, now indicates Mrs. Florian's main means of retaining her home. Likewise, anxious to gain some leverage against the wireless binding her to a former life, Velma / Mrs. Grayle uses real estate to counter the threat indexed by the radio. With these plot points in mind, we can return to the brand new cabinet radio, "the only decent piece of furniture" in Mrs. Florian's house, and understand the radio's association with its owner as a savvy realist red-herring.⁹¹

⁹¹ There is one additional plot point that I reduce to a footnote here because I treat its consequences more fully in the next chapter. The novel opens with Marlowe encountering Velma's former lover Moose Malloy in a violent scene at Mr. Florian's former bar, which, in the time while Moose was in jail, become an African-American owned and operated bar. The racial redistricting of neighborhoods supplies yet another instantiation of the novel's interest in real estate's social impact.

In Chandler's novel radio represents the means by which Velma sought to escape her former life as a stripper and, at the same time, the medium through which Mrs. Florian heard Velma's voice and pulled her back towards that life. The public broadcast enables a breach of her private life, a breach that also threatens to transform her public image, to change her name back from Mrs. Grayle to Velma Valento. Chandler's novel thus counters Arnheim's fantasy of the disembodied voice unencumbered by spatial difference, which ignores how a voice's acoustic markers function within social space. In Velma's case, her radio voice both releases and binds her to a social class: even as she sips martinis in her mansion with Mr. Grayle, she fears Mrs. Florian will bring her back to her barroom days caught working under the male gaze.⁹² Ultimately, the radio in Chandler's novel works against the visual regime typical of the detective genre, relying on the ear instead.

Carefully manipulating social and acoustic space, as well as the overlap between reading and overhearing, the climactic conversation between Marlowe and Velma/Mrs. Grayle occurs with a third party hidden out of sight. Even as Marlowe tells Velma, "We're all alone here. Nothing either of us says has the slightest standing against what the other says. We cancel each other out" (976), he knows Velma's former lover, the ex-bouncer at Mr. Florian's bar, recently released convict and more recent murderer of Mrs. Florian, Moose Malloy can overhear the entire conversation from his position hidden in Marlowe's closet.⁹³ Marlowe therefore plays close to the part of Clara Wieland as he helps produce Velma's admission while pretending to listen to her alone. Different from the contagious tone heard in Hathaway's ventriloquization of Foster, Velma's tone threatens to limit her social range, and return her to an immobile position on the burlesque stage under the male gaze. As with her broadcasts on KDFK, however, the pretense at anonymous speech ignores the overhearing audience. As occurs repeatedly in Chandler's novels, Marlowe's bedroom becomes his office space.⁹⁴ More precisely, the room

⁹² Chandler's letters, essays, and novels emphasize his sophisticated understanding of tone. In his essay, "Notes (very brief, please) on English and American style," he writes, "The tone quality of English speech is usually overlooked. This tone quality is infinitely variable and contributes infinite meaning. The American voice is flat, toneless, and tiresome. The English tone quality makes a thinner vocabulary and a more formalized use of language capable of infinite meanings. *Its tones are of course read into written speech by association.* This makes good English a class language, and that is its fatal defect" (Chandler, 1014-1015; emphasis added). Marlowe, the character meant to combine Arthurian chivalry with cowboy curtness, makes this observation, "It just goes to show that we talk different languages to different people" (Chandler, 153). Chandler's dialogue driven style and ear for tone no doubt facilitated the adaptation of almost all of his novels to the screen and radio, revealing yet another dimension of his reciprocal stylistic relationship with radio and voice-over.

⁹³ While hunting for clues about Malloy's whereabouts in chapter thirty-five Marlowe looks out at the gambling boat, the *Montecito*, where he will eventually find a man, Brunette, who will lead him to Malloy. As he looks at the ocean, he observes "two stumpy masts just high enough for a radio antenna. There was light on the *Montecito* also and music floated across the wet dark sea" (Chandler, 947). As Lawrence Soley discusses in his book analysis of "free radio," "The term 'pirate radio' is often used to describe unlicensed radio stations because the first unlicensed stations that broadcast popular music to the United States and Europe were located aboard ships in international waters. The earliest unlicensed, offshore station appears to have been RKXR, which was based on the S.S. *City of Panama*, a floating gambling casino anchored off the California coast in 1933" (Soley, 53). See Lawrence Soley, *Free Radio Electronic Civil Disobedience* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).

⁹⁴ For instance, we encounter this reversible relationship in *The Big Sleep* (1939) when Geiger's house serves as his workplace and Harry Jones' office becomes his resting place. Jameson argues that this exchangeability of "dwelling" and "office" derives from the novel's "radio aesthetic." Of course, Chandler is not alone in associating the radio set as instituting the oscillation between public and private life. For a cinematic example contemporaneous with Chandler's novel, see the opening scenes of Jean Renoir's *La règle du jeu* (1939) in which the aviator's public revelation of his private feelings on the radio is received on the radio sets in the private boudoirs of his possible mistress and her husband. The effect, according to Christopher Faulkner's commentary in the Criterion Collection

functions as a microcosm of the radio experience, bringing the broadcast booth and the invisible listening audience all into a single space.

For a brief moment, the reader is also an eavesdropper, brought into the closet with Moose, and forced to inhabit the character's space as we listen along with him.⁹⁵ When Moose emerges from the closet and speaks, leaving the reader behind, his words and his acoustic recognition imply the same threat posed by Mrs. Florian: " 'I thought I knew the voice,' he said. 'I listened to that voice for eight years—all I could remember of it' ... *You* turned me into the cops. *You*. Little Velma" (976-977). Faced with this hulking reminder of her past, with the anonymous listener stepping into the broadcast booth, Mrs. Grayle shoots and kills Moose at the very moment he pronounces her name.

In an odd coda, which reads almost like a eulogy for her radio voice, Velma is found three months later in the dressing room of a Baltimore nightclub where she sings. As she admits to the arresting officer before taking his life and then her own, "I thought I had a voice that would be remembered. A friend recognized me by it once, just hearing it on the radio. But I've been singing with this band for a month—twice a week on a network—and nobody gave it a thought." (983). Evading the simple transposition of object and voice, Chandler's narrative resists the phonocentric maneuver of replacing the Thing as a marker of one's identity with the voice. As the policeman responds to Velma, " 'I never heard the voice'" (ibid). Rather, in moving from one coast to another, Velma realizes the lost links in "the national hookup," radio's regionalism, and the social and geographical limits of her radio voice. Having finally escaped her past, she nostalgically turns to the radio half hoping for a connection to be heard. And the radio, the object at first established as the key to one of the novel's realist interiors, becomes instead the figure to explore the reconfigurations of social space.

Writing in the radio age, at a time when, as Thompson's work shows, buildings already speak a particular electronic language, Chandler invokes an alternate narrative acoustics, modified in the aftermath of the New Acoustics wherein the project to make space heard and felt attains a political as well as aesthetic purpose. By the late 1930s it was no longer enough to give voice to buildings, as in the Gothic novel or the later narratives of Henry James. While in James such writing might remain a "thought experiment," for the writers at the end of the New Deal the new rights of buildings and the potential to change the face of "housing" becomes a central concern. From the projected rights of buildings in Bill Brown's reading of James to the acousmatic voice of Chicago stadium described by Dos Passos, to the buildings that become characters in Jameson's reading of Chandler, writers previously represented by the realist tradition should be understood as sketching the transformation of real property as it slowly gains a voice and gains possession of itself. Notably, for Chandler, or for the Dos Passos who comments that "buildings determine civilization as the cells in the honeycomb the functions of bees" (quoted in Denning, 169), it is the radio that talks back, the buzzing signal that challenges the inert furnishings of realism, emptying the room of things and filling it, instead, with sounds and voices that give the buildings a sense of animation, helps render them *actants*. It is radio that seems to speak through walls, thus challenging the notion of real property, at the same time that it seems to convert listeners into objects. It is radio, in other words, that pricks up the ears of

version of the film, is that Renoir does not so much just invert the public and private, and thus "place differing sets of values in opposition to one another, as ask us to sustain the possibility of their interchangeability." See *La règle du jeu*. Dir. Jean Renoir. 1939. Criterion, 2004. DVD.

⁹⁵ For more on overhearing and the novel, See Ann Gaylin, *Eavesdropping in the Novel From Austen to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

New Deal novelists and enables them to rethink the political connection between generic codes, acoustics, housing, and social space.

Housing Problems: New Deal Public Neighbors

What I have been referring to as a housing problem in these novelists' work with radio and narrative form pertains to a fundamental change in thinking around public and private space in the United States during the New Deal years. While I described Brown and Jameson's comments about buildings gaining rights and assuming the status of characters in mainly aesthetic terms, the new building codes and building projects of the Housing Acts of 1934 and 1937 also created new legal rights for housing under the watch of USHA. As Lawrence Vale has described this period, "the stormy history of public housing may...be seen as the confluence between the *public neighbor* and the new practice of the *public neighborhood*" (Vale, 17).⁹⁶ For Vale, the category of the "public neighbor" derives from the residents of English almshouses, "needy people whom community leaders felt an obligation to assist or, since the early nineteenth century, to reform" (Vale, 17). The public neighborhood, initially meant to house working citizens, soon took on the identity of this older social type, partially due to the fact, in Vale's words, "that there is a problem when one's neighbors become seen as 'the public' rather than as a specific set of individuals and families of known qualities" (Vale, 16). Soon after their creation, these public houses stigmatized their inhabitants, and much like residence in a hospital indicates sickness or incarceration in a prison bespeaks criminality, residents of public neighborhoods found their identities chosen for them by the houses in which they lived. In this sense also, buildings became "actants," determining the identity of their inhabitants.

Radio, Realism and Real Estate Part II

It is into this dense network of public housing, realist codes, and radio that Mick Kelly steps as she crosses the threshold of a newly finished construction site, and enters an empty building in Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* (1940). Away for a moment from the bustle of her parents' house, which is also a boarding house to help pay the mortgage, she enters

the new, empty house...

The rooms smelled of new wood, and when she walked the soles of her tennis shoes made a flopping sound that echoed through all the house. The air was hot and quiet. She stood still in the middle of the front room for a while, and then she suddenly thought of something...

...Mick drew the big block letters very slowly. At the top she wrote EDISON, and under that she drew the names of DICK TRACY and MUSSOLINI. Then in each corner with the largest letters of all, made with green and outlined in red, she wrote her initials—M.K...

...She stood in the empty room and stared at what she had done. The chalk was still in her hands and she did not feel really satisfied. She was trying to think of the name of this fellow who had written this music she heard over the radio last winter...

⁹⁶ Vale, Lawrence *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

... She hummed one of the tunes, and after a while in the hot, empty house by herself she felt the tears come in her eyes. Her throat got tight and rough and she couldn't sing any more. Quickly she wrote the fellow's name at the very top of the list—MOTSART (McCullers, 37-38).

In this “new, empty house” Mick enters into the quite literal “construction of a vacancy,” the unfurnished room made iconic in Willa Cather’s call to her fellow novelists: “How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window” (Cather, 6).⁹⁷ The acoustic resonance of her steps echoing “through all the house,” slowly shifts into inscription, as Mick attends to the walls, turning her listening into writing as she composes a strange, but semantically charged list: MOTSART, EDISON, DICK TRACY, MUSSOLINI. The phonetic spelling of Mozart, the name and music “*heard over the radio*,” supplies the acoustic and narrative organization to these proper names. Mozart is heard on the radio, Edison’s phonograph provides the material support for the radio, Dick Tracy was perhaps the most famous radio detective⁹⁸, and Mussolini notoriously employed the radio to consolidate popular support for his fascist government. Similar to, if perhaps slightly more oblique than the narrative acoustics practiced in Dos Passos’s writing, radio emerges as the absent signifier that structures this diverse semiotic chain.⁹⁹ The chosen proper names point to radio’s acoustic property: namely, its apparent transcendence of property in the open system of address that is *broadcast*. Thus, what begins as sound in empty space, becomes a translation of the exhausted voice—“she couldn’t sing any more”—into a scene of writing radio on blank walls; she writes to reclaim, in some minor sense, private “real” property for common use. Mick’s graffiti, her word art (“mots art”), in other words, emphatically inscribes the coincidence of radio, emptied realism, and the critique of property that I have argued characterizes New Deal acoustic narrative.¹⁰⁰

In dispensing with furnishing for radio graffiti, this scene literalizes the “radio aesthetic” I associated with Chandler’s writing, and the increasingly fluid borders between public and private spaces in New Deal narratives that take up the radio. If, as Brown argues, Henry James’ enduring achievement was to test “the limits of realism by evacuating the genre of... its material possessions” and move the novel toward a proto-modernist attachment to things, and especially buildings, that speak, McCullers might be thought to pick up where James left off. However, she writes with a difference, in that she presents us with a building not yet furnished by any single owner, but nevertheless marked everywhere by transient subjects. These markings, what Susan Stewart might call “crimes of writing,” enact a very different “nonproprietary possession” than that which Brown argues for on behalf of James.¹⁰¹ As each “writer” in McCullers’s building

⁹⁷ Cather’s essay, “The Novel D meubl ,” was initially circulated in *The New Republic*, 30 (April 12, 1922): 5-6. However, it reached readers in book form with Cather’s essay collection, *Not Under Forty* (1936).

⁹⁸ Although *Dick Tracy* began as a comic strip in 1931, the radio version had a popular run from 1934-1948, including a stint in primetime from 1938-1939, the years just preceding the publication of *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* (1940). See <http://otreat.com/dicktracy-p-1175.html>, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Tracy#Radio.

⁹⁹ For an interpretation of this scene more concerned with Mick’s potential exclusion from a hierarchy of male power, see Spivak, “Three Feminist Readings: McCullers, Drabble, Habermas” (1979).

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich Kittler comments, “In 1900... ‘word art’ became synonymous with literature” (“Discourse,” 185). Without merely mapping Kittler’s “discourse network” onto McCullers’s scene, we should note that Mick, in a turn representative of New Deal fiction, converts the avant-garde impulse of Dadaist collage into the demotic list of radio names. One might begin to think of a “popular vanguard” aesthetic learned from the simple montage of turning the radio dial to different types of programs on one machine.

¹⁰¹ See Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems In the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

marks their place they do not so much take possession of the real estate but challenge the claim to “real” ownership as opposed to “personal” property. Not quite or not yet a domestic interior, the new, empty house brings the domestic space over into a more public, or at least contested and unstable arena. While signs attempt to prevent children from entering, preserving the space’s sense of private ownership, the notably free indirect discourse reports that “some tough boys wee-weed all over one of the walls and wrote some pretty bad words. But no matter how many Keep Out signs were put up, they couldn’t run kids away until the house had been painted and finished and people had moved in” (McCullers, 37). The boys’ territorial markings claim transient ownership in this unfinished space, an open territory to which Mick adds her own personal writing. Likewise, the narrative style in these sentences marks the public / private dialectic; the very terms that describe the boys marking their territory (“wee-weed,” “pretty bad words”) open the discursive space to the neither wholly interior nor wholly exterior movement of free indirect discourse.

If the scene’s discursive strategies link the idea of the radio network to questioning the borders of real estate, it should not be seen as an uncritical endorsement of radio’s social possibilities, or a simplistic embrace of a shared public sphere. Indeed, Mick’s radio listening not only challenges property lines between neighbors—as when she perches on a tree “in the rich parts of town [where] every house had a radio” (102), or sits on the stairs of her parents’ boarding house “listening to Miss Brown’s radio on the floor below” (52)—but helps her distinguish between what she refers to as her “inside” and “outside” rooms. Those things she encounters over the radio, “foreign countries and plans and music were in the inside room...[it] was a very private place. She could be in the middle of a house full of people and still feel like she was locked up by herself” (163). If this intimate reception of radio, which sculpts a private space within her crowded boarding house, appears to combine with her scenes of auditory transgression or “accidental audition” to recall what Lovoglio names “radio’s intimate public,” they depart from that form’s national ambitions.¹⁰² In fact, when Mick comments that “Mister Singer was in both rooms” (163), the narrative links her “private place” to the novel’s central critique of New Deal radio politics.

Recalling Hoover’s figure from Dos Passos’s writing in *Chicago Stadium*, Mr. Singer is a deaf and mute man who rents a room in Mick’s parent’s boarding house. Early in the novel Mick admits to herself, “Maybe it was true that she came up on these top steps sometimes so she could see Mister Singer while she was listening to Miss Brown’s radio on the floor below” (52-53). When Singer eventually purchases a radio Mick goes to his room where “She seemed to listen all over to whatever it was she heard...She asked him if she could come in and listen sometimes when he was at work and he nodded yes. So for the next few days whenever he opened the door he found her by the radio” (210). Finally, at the novel’s close, she enters Singer’s room to listen to the radio and finds that he has killed himself: “She did have Mister Singer’s radio. All the installments hadn’t been paid and she took on the responsibility. It was good to have something that had belonged to him” (McCullers, 353). Through the metonymy of Mick’s dual desire, Singer and the radio come to mirror each other: the one produces discourse without listening, the other listens without speaking.

¹⁰² Lovoglio introduces his theory via a reading of Saul Bellow’s memoir *Add It Up*, where the latter recalls walking down Michigan Avenue in Chicago as Roosevelt’s voice came out of car windows and drifted into the street. Unlike the national community Bellow’s anecdote is meant to imply, Mick’s listening is an intimate yet anonymous shared listening that occurs through and across borders without the desire to assimilate to any national narrative.

Readers familiar with recent writings in media history and disability studies should not be surprised to encounter a deaf man metonymically related to radio. After all, radio's antecedent technologies—the telephone and the phonograph—developed through experiments with deaf subjects, beginning with the studies of Alexander Graham Bell's father, and continuing on through Bell and Thomas Edison.¹⁰³ However fascinating these media histories remain in their own right, McCullers positions Singer in a network that comments critically on the specific political functions they took up during the New Deal. Indeed, we might say that Singer embodies the problem of feedback Hoover and Brecht complained about early in radio's history. As a listener who does not speak, Singer foregrounds the problems associated with radio's one way street of communication, but, perhaps less expectedly, he also comes to represent the radio voice.

Mick is not the only visitor who comes to Singer's room. However, if Mick spends most of her time there listening to the radio, the others speak over the radio, using Singer as a sounding board. Jake Blount, the alcoholic union organizer, Biff Brannon, the crossdressing barman, Doctor Copeland, the avowedly Marxist African-American doctor, and Mick, the adolescent tomboy, each “would come and talk in the silent room—for they felt that the mute would always understand whatever they wanted to say to him. And maybe even more than that” (McCullers, 94). Unable to talk back, Singer can only listen and record his guests' various problems and confessions in his thoughts. Attempting to explain the book to readers of *The New Republic*, Richard Wright wrote, “the nearest I can come to indicating its theme is to refer to the Catholic confessional or the private office of the psychoanalyst.”¹⁰⁴ Fittingly, in Singer's silence the other characters encounter consolation, as they imagine he “would always understand.”¹⁰⁵

However, if Singer seemed a priest or psychoanalyst to Wright, the novel portrays him more closely to the populist ideal of the New Deal, an empathetic everyman with whom everyone can identify. In a passage that seems lifted from the tradition of folk storytelling, rumors spread, and soon

¹⁰³ See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: The Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 23-52, 83; Mara Mills, “Deaf Jam: From Inscription to Reproduction to Information” in *Social Text* 102, Vol 28, No. 1 (Spring, 2008): 35-58.

Singer, like many people in the deaf community, reacts against the deaf pedagogy practiced by Bell and that sought to make deaf people speakers: “At the school he was thought very intelligent. He learned the lessons before the rest of the pupils. But he could never become used to speaking with his lips. It was not natural to him, and his tongue felt like a whale in his mouth. From the blank expression on people's faces to whom he talked in this way he felt that there was something disgusting in his speech. It was painful for him to try to talk with his mouth, but his hands were always ready to shape the words he wished to say. When he was twenty-two he had come south to this town from Chicago and he met [the deaf] Antonapoulos immediately. Since that time he had never spoken with his mouth again, because with his friend there was no need for this” (11).

¹⁰⁴ See Richard Wright, “*The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter: Inner Landscape*” in *The New Republic* 103 (5 August 1940): 195.

¹⁰⁵ In this they are not entirely wrong: “At first he had not understood the four people at all. They talked and they talked—and as the mouths went on they talked more and more. He became so used to their lips that he understood each word they said. And then after a while he knew what each one of them would say before he began, because the meaning was always the same” (McCullers, 206).

As Singer's room becomes similar to a psychoanalyst's office, it not only recalls the oscillation between dwelling and office Jameson associated with the 1930s “radio aesthetic,” but also helps tell psychoanalysis's own media history. For, while the telephone was developed through work with deaf subjects like Singer, Freud himself modeled the psychoanalyst's method on the telephone. See Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990): 283-284; John M. Picker, “George Eliot's Ear: New Acoustics in *Daniel Deronda* and Beyond” in his *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 100-107.

The Jews said that he was a Jew. The merchants along the main street claimed he had received a large legacy and was a very rich man. It was whispered in one browbeaten textile union that the mute was an organizer for the C.I.O. A lone Turk who had roamed into the town years ago and who languished with his family behind the little store where they sold linens claimed passionately to his wife that the mute was Turkish... The rich thought that he was rich and the poor considered him a poor man like themselves. And as there was no way to disprove these rumors they grew marvelous and very real. Each man described the mute as he wished him to be... Owing to the fact that he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have. (McCullers, 200; 223; 232).

Singer's silent status as a blank slate ties together an entire community of particulars who can see themselves in him, a single entity, because they *hear* nothing different. An inversion of the disembodied voice, the embodied mute mimics the populist utopianism radio theorists have claimed for the broadcast voice: the neutral voice upon which anyone can project their desires.

With this realization in mind, we might hear Singer's intimate "conversations" with the other characters as a re-audition of the "fireside chat," especially when we learn that "for all of them together he had bought a radio and put it on the table by the window" (209). However, if the narrative's earlier sections with Mick associate radio with new notions of communal space, to read Singer as an ironic Roosevelt, or any ideal populist radio orator, reveals radio's limits, and the fundamental conflict in the project to imagine "the people." For just after Singer purchases the radio as a Christmas present for his individual friends, chaos erupts in his room:

One night soon after Christmas all four of the people chanced to visit him at the same time. This had never happened before. Singer moved about the room with smiles and refreshments and did his best in the way of politeness to make his guests comfortable. But something was wrong [210]... Each person addressed his words mainly to the mute. Their thoughts seemed to converge in him as the spokes of a wheel lead to the center hub [211]... Each one seemed to be waiting for the others to go. Then on an impulse they all rose to leave at the same time. Doctor Copeland went first and the others followed him immediately. When they were gone Singer stood alone in the room (McCullers, 210; 211; 212).

More emphatically than anywhere else in the narrative, Singer appears to embody here the near perfect inversion of the broadcast voice: the single channel converging outward to numerous particulars. The failure when these various listeners / speakers come into contact indexes the medium's fractured capacity for collectivity. Singer's awkward Christmas party gives the lie to the utopian imaginings in Lovoglio's "intimate public." Like Velma's "de-acousmatization" in Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*, McCullers's novel teaches the power of radio's *invisible speech*. It reveals the advantages in Mick's listening without seeing, and the "humble self-enlargement" she experiences as radio inspires her to write on walls.

In Mick and Singer, as well as rest of the narrative's ensemble cast, McCullers sounds out the unfinished business of the New Deal as the country once again turned towards war. The empty house, in Cather and Chandler, but also in Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* (1936), and James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let us now praise famous men* (1940) shakes with the voices on

the other side of the radio dial, and tests out the terrible, if sometimes liberating spaces between them. The boarding houses and homeless nomads in McCullers's work testify to a housing problem radio's new public spaces in the ether only obliquely begin to answer. And in Singer, the mute who listens, we confront something missing in Roosevelt's radio voice and his role as the great communicator. We encounter the lack of a *listening technology*, a correlative to the various speaking technologies, those devices that help sever speaking from listening. The communicative blockade induced by Singer's muteness, and ultimately responsible for his suicide, points to the frustrations of the permanent listener, and gestures towards the darker side of a reifying culture increasingly attuned to things that talk. On the other hand, in Mick we also find a radical listener: a character who tunes in to broadcast's disruption of property and learns a writing practice based on listening (MOTSART: "word art") in order to write against real estate. At the end of the New Deal, McCullers's novel gives a new voice to "democratic personality," and more importantly, a new ear ready to listen through walls to hear other voices in other rooms intent on sharing a struggle for a "public" housing more attuned to the rights of its inhabitants than the rights of buildings.

CHAPTER 2:

STRUGGLING WORDS: Real Estate, the Phonograph, and the Position of Speech

In a provocative and still controversial 1937 review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Richard Wright criticized Zora Neale Hurston's novel for what he called its "minstrel technique." According to Wright, Hurston was responsible for inventing a "quaint" rendition of African-American life whose tone, he argued, speaks only to a white audience that considers itself a "superior race" (Wright, "Tears," 22-23).¹⁰⁶ In response, Hurston scoffed at Wright's use of dialect in his 1938 collection of stories, *Uncle Tom's Children*: "Since the author himself is a Negro, his dialect is a puzzling thing. One wonders how he arrived at it. *Certainly he does not write by ear unless he is tone-deaf*" (Hurston, 32; emphasis added). While James T. Farrell defended Wright's "remarkable...handling of dialogue" and his "demonstration...of the possibilities of vernacular," most recent critics have sided with Hurston, questioning, in particular, the way Wright's ear was drawn to another writer in black dialect, Gertrude Stein.¹⁰⁷

While this debate has distracted critics and led to some facile binary distinctions in African-American studies dividing the legacies of Hurston and Wright, their conversation helps tune us in to how the challenge of tonal mimesis shaped the field of African-American writing, and, as Michael North observes, modernism more generally.¹⁰⁸ According to North, African-American writers in the early half of the twentieth-century tended to avoid "black dialect" because of its links to "the white minstrel tradition...a constant reminder of the literal unfreedom of slavery" and a representative of "a most intimate invasion whereby the dominant actually attempts to create the thoughts of the subordinate by providing it speech" (North, 9). However, in a study that hears white imitations of supposed black dialect as a main engine for modernism's linguistic inventiveness and social resistance, North seems troubled by the African-American author Richard Wright's insistence that it was Gertrude Stein's language in *Three Lives* which "caused him to hear 'English as Negroes spoke it'" (Miller, "Wright and Stein," 111), or Wright's claim that "Miss Stein's struggling words made the speech of the people around me vivid" (quoted in Miller, "Voice," 67).¹⁰⁹ Surprised by Wright's acceptance of Stein, coupled

¹⁰⁶ Zadie Smith, for one, would disagree. See her essay, "*Their Eyes Were Watching God*: What Does Soulful Mean?" in *Changing My Mind* (New York: Penguin, 2009): 3-13. Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears" in *New Masses*, 5 October (1937): 22-23.

¹⁰⁷ See James T. Farrell, "Partisan Review, May 1938" in *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993): 4-5. William J. Maxwell, drawing on the work of Carla Cappetti and Werner Sollors, has identified this split as emerging from the sociology department at the University of Chicago (where Farrell was an undergraduate) and the anthropology of Columbia University's Franz Boas (with whom Hurston studied). See Maxwell, "Black Belt / Black Folk: The End(s) of the Richard Wright-Zora Neale Hurston Debate" in *New Negro Old Left: African-American Writing Between the Wars*: 159-160.

See also Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1993): 188. Werner Sollors, "Modernization as Adultery: Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston and American Culture of the 1930s and 1940s." *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts*. Vol. 18 (1990): 109-155.

¹⁰⁸ Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, & Twentieth Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Again, for more on this disabling binary see Maxwell, "Black Belt," 159-160.

¹⁰⁹ See Eugene Miller, *Voice of A Native Son* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990) and "Richard Wright and Gertrude Stein" in *Black American Literature Forum* (Indianapolis: Indiana State University, 1982).

with his outspoken rejection of what he described as Hurston's "minstrel technique," North wonders, "Perhaps Wright valued the way Stein's 'struggling words' struggled against one another, producing the tension that [Henry Louis] Gates [Jr.] identifies as the 'masking function of dialect,'" "its self-conscious switch from white to black or, more properly, from standard English to the black vernacular" (North, 76). In other words, North turns to an African-American literary critic in order to recuperate white minstrelsy for Wright by resignifying such "speaking through" as a politically viable "masking function".¹¹⁰

I would argue that Wright's valorization of Stein's writing does not need to be excused by recuperative arguments, nor should it be heard as a "tone-deaf" endorsement of Stein's own modernist "minstrelsy." Instead, when we hear Stein's "struggling words" as her contemporary reviewers heard them, as "*a stubborn phonograph*," her influence helps elucidate a tradition of constructing blackness in relation to what recent critics such as Stephen Best, Katherine Biers, Lisa Gitelman, Brent Hayes Edwards, Bryan Wagner, and Alexander G. Weheliye have identified as the "black phonographic voice."¹¹¹ Of these various and in some cases opposing

¹¹⁰ North draws here on Eugene Miller's aforementioned work, which has done the most to archive Wright's statements of Stein's influence not only in his posthumously published autobiographic sequel to *Black Boy*, *American Hunger*, but also in his articles "Gertrude Stein's story Is Drenched in Hitler's Horrors" published in *P.M.* magazine on March 11, 1945, "Why I Chose 'Melanctha' by Gertrude Stein" in *I Wish I'd Written That*, edited by Whit Burnett in New York by McGraw Hill in 1946, and the unpublished paper "Memories of My Grandmother".

¹¹¹ See Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Katherine Biers, "Syncope Fever: James Weldon Johnson and the Black Phonographic Voice" in *Representations* 96 (Fall, 2006): 99-125, Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music" in *Social Text* 71, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer, 2002): 21-47. For more on the phonograph and the history of acoustic technology more generally, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Published on the back of the first edition of *Three Lives* was Georgiana Goddard King's review, which read, "The patient iteration, the odd style, with all its stops and starts, *like a stubborn phonograph*, are a part of the incantation" (quoted in Charters, xviii). While most critics emphasize Stein's method as developing out of her association with Picasso's cubism and the two artists' shared passion for Cezanne, Ann Charters observes, "in one of her later essays [Stein] said the key to understanding her books was realizing that she wrote 'by ear' rather than 'by eye'" (Charters, xvi). See Ann Charters, introduction to *Three Lives*, by Gertrude Stein (New York: Penguin, 1909 / 1990), vii-xx. Miller also points to the fact that in her essay "Portraits and Repetition" Stein connected her use of repetition to "oral tradition: 'When I first really realized the inevitable repetition in human expression that was not repetition but insistence...was when...I...lived...principally with a whole group of very lively little aunts who had to know anything...as there were ten or eleven of them they did have to say and hear said whatever was said and any one not hearing what it was they said had to come in to hear what had been said...I began consciously listening...You listen as you know'" (Miller, "Voice," 69).

Freidrich Kittler also notes the kinship between Stein's prose, the phonograph, and her research on "Normal Motor Automatism," which she published in 1896 and 1898 while a student of William James at Harvard. See Kittler, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900* (Stanford: Stanford, 1990): 225-229. Reading through a different oral technology, Sarah Wilson notes that in Stein's writing "the radio broadcast conveys a sense of an immediate and concentrated present; it begins again and again, as Stein's characteristically insistent phrasings indicate to us" (263). See Sarah Wilson, "Gertrude Stein and the Radio" in *Modernism / modernity* 11.2 (2004): 261-278.

My comments here hope to answer what has proved to be a contentious and dissonant debate about Stein's influence on Wright. As Eugene Miller observes, the available scholarship "encourages among students of Wright two views: that a literary snobbishness, however defensively and unconsciously developed during his formative years, led him to claim connection with Stein; or the seemingly kinder attitude that he did not know what he was talking about. For example, how could he condemn Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* because it presented 'quaint'

definitions, I think it most helpful to borrow from Best and Wagner's arguments in order to describe the particular historical logic in which I conceive Wright's enthusiasm for Stein, and the means by which he employs acoustics to imagine new social relationships that would undo historical bonds forged through specific legacies of property.

For Stephen Best, "fugitive sound" denotes "sound's evanescence and the troubling fugacity of the voice" (19). Oddly, the advent of the phonograph, and hence the "capture" of this "fugitive" sound, induced a crisis in copyright law, which heard the recorded voice as an inalienable aspect of personhood rendered an alienable commodity. The recorded voice thus echoed an earlier notion of the "fugitive," for, in nineteenth-century law, "reference to inalienables in market terms (terms such as 'exchange,' 'transfer,' and 'alienation')... carries with it the 'specter' of slavery" (52). As Best argues, the law's attempt to categorize the voice as either alienable property or an inalienable expression of the self borrows from and furthers the reconfiguration of personhood begun in the Fugitive Slave Laws. In dealing first with fugitive slaves—"property that, paradoxically, behaved like a person—'thinking property,' in Aristotle's memorable formulation" (19)—and then with "fugitive" voices, American jurisprudence came increasingly to recognize the previously inalienable qualities of personhood as alienable things.

If Best primarily investigates the trope of the fugitive phonographic voice in legal terms, Brian Wagner underscores the cultural means by which the phonograph creates an "authentic" black folk voice through its very "fugitivity." As Wagner puts it, alienability produces inalienability, "Alienating the voice from the body... creates rather than disrupts speech's capacity to stand for subjectivity" (194).¹¹² For ethnographers who already heard the black voice as fugitive because it resisted their established systems of notation, "the phonograph offered a new explanation for why the black voice sounded not only disenfranchised but disembodied, as if it came from nowhere" (194).¹¹³ In its "hisses, pops, and clicks, the warped passages where the acetate yielded to summer heat" (219), and through its distortion and disembodiment, the phonograph's acoustic infidelity included the notational resistance already attributed to black performance. This fit between technical infidelity and the purported elusiveness of black voices heightened the apparent cultural authenticity of the black phonographic voice. In Wagner's words,

From the point of reproduction, the black voice's primary effects became indistinguishable from their technological condition of possibility, and this led to

views of Afro-Americans, the way white Americans liked to see them, and yet call 'Melanctha,' with its stereotypical references to the 'simple, promiscuous unmorality of the black people' and 'the wide abandoned laughter that makes the warm broad glow of negro sunshine,' "the first realistic treatment of Negro life I'd seen when I was trying to learn to write" (Miller, "Wright and Stein," 108).

¹¹² Elsewhere, Wagner is more emphatic about this process as particularly embodying: "Rather than alienating the voice from the body, the phonograph appears to have grounded the black voice in the body" (Wagner, 290 n.9). In contrast to Wagner, Weheliye writes, "Paradoxically, black voices are materially disembodied by the phonograph and other sound technologies, while black subjects are inscribed as the epitome of embodiment through a multitude of U.S. cultural discourses" ("Feenin," 26). Wagner also implicitly connects what Biers wants to imagine as the liberating force of the black voice in James Weldon Johnson to the frustrations of nineteenth century music collectors "preoccupied with transcription's impossibility" (Wagner, 211).

¹¹³ "Collectors had long complained that the trajectory of black speech could not be stabilized to allow for transcription in the time when they were face-to-face with an informant. In an ethnographic exchange, black voices did not sound like they could be indexed to their speakers. This was a voice whose 'odd turns' broke the diatonic scale and whose speech had to be transcribed in tortured syntax and effusive misspelling if its timbre were even to be approximated" (Wagner, 210).

a situation where, for the first time in its history, the music could be commonly considered as folklore on the grounds that it was indexed directly to the individual consciousness of its producer... The aura is made, not destroyed, by the phonograph” (194).¹¹⁴

Hence, a technology Best understands as inducing changes in law that made personhood increasingly thing-like, becomes, in Wagner’s reading of an archive that stretches from the close of the nineteenth century through the Lomaxes recordings of Leadbelly (Huddie Leadbetter) in the 1930s, the technological means to create a cultural idea of the authentic “black folk voice.” No less a critic than Richard Wright confirmed this insight in a 1937 review of the Lomaxes’ recordings of Leadbelly, commenting, “it seems that the entire folk culture of the American Negro has found its embodiment in him” (quoted in Wagner, 293, n.23).

Heard alongside the tradition detailed by Best and Wagner, we can begin to understand Wright’s preference for Stein over Hurston not as a “tone deaf” mistake, but as participation, whether conscious or not, in a specific tradition of hearing and constructing blackness through the voice of the phonograph, rather than the ethnographic ideal represented in Hurston’s work with African-American dialect. Wright’s interest in the repetition, the *stubborn phonograph* style of Stein’s prose, full of hisses, pops and clicks, his sense that with Stein’s words he can “tap at will into the vast pool of living words” and “hear the speech of my grandmother who spoke a deep, pure Negro dialect” (quoted in Miller, “Voice,” 67), and “the language of my entire race” (quoted in Miller, “Wright and Stein,” 111), elaborates a reading practice that *listens* to writing in such a way as to hear the black folk voice in the phonograph, and the phonograph in the black folk voice.¹¹⁵ It is a reading practice that, in Wright’s case, became a writing practice, and a means to think through how the legacy of the African-American voice’s interrogation of acoustic “property” relates to a critique of New Deal housing politics.

“*The Long Black Song*”: *The Phonograph and Real Property*

Wright’s most explicit narrative treatment of these complicated exchanges between mediated voice and property appears in his story, “The Long Black Song.” Part of the collection mocked by Hurston and praised by Farrell, “The Long Black Song” pulls together the dual trajectory of the black phonographic voice: Wagner’s conception of “blackness” as dependent on the phonograph, and Best, Biers, Weheliye and others’ notion of the phonograph as helping instantiate a disembodied, “fugitive” black voice. Between the story’s opening lullaby in dialect, which fails to soothe a baby’s wailing, and its closing gunshots that draw out the opening singer’s own cry, Wright positions the phonograph as the emblem of a certain breach in real property that sutures together two formerly, and hopefully different historical times.

¹¹⁴ For another version of this argument in relation to the Lomaxes’ recordings in particular, see Wagner, 219-220.

¹¹⁵ In comparing Wright’s critic Eugene Miller’s reading of Stein with Stein’s early reviewer we can hear the same exchange of folk for phonograph. Attempting to reconcile Wright’s connection between his grandmother’s speech and Stein’s writing, Miller argues that “Stein’s prose is certainly folklike in its most famous characteristic, its *repetition*” (Miller, “Voice” 69), thus substituting the “folk” for what Stein’s early reviewer identified as “the patient iteration, the odd style, with all its stops and starts, *like a stubborn phonograph*... a part of the incantation” (quoted in Charters, xviii; emphasis added).

Differing from Miller’s criticism of Stein, Michael Denning claims *Three Lives* represents “a vernacular without the condescension of dialect, a patient detailing of ordinary acts with studied objectivity” (Denning, 242). See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

In the acoustic logic of the story's first section, the opening song, "Go t sleep baby / Papas coming back," is quickly countered by a baby's dissonant cry, "its wailing drowning out the song" (103).¹¹⁶ The song's failure to calm the infant leads its mother, Sarah, to let the baby choose its own comfort object: a clock:

The baby crawled after it, calling, 'Ahh!' Then it raised its hands and beat on the top of the clock Bink! Bink! Bink!...[Sarah] fetched a small stick from the top of a rickety dresser... 'Beat wid this, see?' She heard each blow landing squarely on top of the clock. Bang! Bang! Bang! And with each bang the baby smiled and said, 'Ahh!' Mabbe thall keep yuh quiet erwhile (104).¹¹⁷

Song, sung to induce silence, or at least a shift in volume, gives way to the refrain of the beaten clock (Bang! Bang! Bang!) and the satisfied sound of the baby kept "quiet." However, the rhythmic soundtrack also inspires Sarah's longing for her ex-lover, Tom, who is soon to return from the First World War. Thus, the shift in the sound's content recodes the waiting in her opening song as well as the refrain of "bang bang bang" into sounds of desire and wartime machinery.

Soon, Sarah's waiting and the sound's meaning changes again. Interrupting her daydreaming, Sarah hears a "dull throb," "then she heard the throb again... The throb grew louder, droning; and she heard Bang! Bang! Bang! There! A car!" (107). Instead of her expected husband, a white salesman approaches the porch, and upon hearing the banging casts his first glance inside the house. When Sarah stuns the man by explaining that the infant is beating the clock, he exclaims, "Well, this beats everything! I don't see how in the world anybody can live without time" (108). Despite Sarah's claim that "we just don need no time, Mistah" (ibid), the salesman, like a caricature of Capital and Empire come to bring mechanized time, insists, "you need a clock... That's what Im out here for. I'm selling clocks and graphophones. The clocks are made right into the graphophones, a nice sort of combination, hunh? You can have music and time all at once" (ibid). When Alexander Graham Bell's graphophone, an alternate version of Edison's more popular phonograph, begins playing what sounds like a traditional spiritual, the opening scene has been wholly recomposed.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ All quotations here are from Richard Wright's "The Long Black Song" in *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper and Row, 1937 / 1965).

¹¹⁷ Psychoanalytic critics from Klein, Winnicott, and Lacan onwards have labored the etymological implications of the "infant," the *in-fans*, or the one who can't, or can't yet, speak. See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988). To borrow from Dolar's gloss on Lacan's *Seminar XI*, infants "do not address a definite interlocutor at hand, but their solipsism is nevertheless caught into the structure of address" (Dolar, 27). In addition to the post-structuralist and psychoanalytic approach favored by these critics, my own reading of this particular infant voice in Wright's story acknowledges the overdetermined infant cry as participating in a structure of address, and, moreover, signaling in each of its iterations, unique historical factors that pertain as much to a history of technological mediation, copyright law, and slavery as they do to any ontological status of the "*cri pur*" or "*cri pour*." Indeed, the story's play with signification and "waiting" expresses a historical logic of deferral that might supply a critique of indeterminacy as participating in rather than resisting the means to keep dreams deferred.

¹¹⁸ Recalling Wright's extensive narrative and professional work with radio, the traveling graphophone salesman, who travels the region bringing music to people's doors, seems like a physical instantiation of a radio network. For more on the history of the graphophone, see Sterne, "Past," 179-180, and 256-260.

Now Sarah is sung to, listening to the Spiritual coming over the graphophone-clock, with a new message of waiting: “*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound...and time shall be no more*” (109).¹¹⁹ In response to the apocalyptic message of the black phonographic voice Sarah feels “the rise and fall of days and nights, of summer and winter; surging, ebbing, leaping about her, beyond her, far out over the fields to where earth and sky lay folded in darkness” (110). The graphophone’s Spiritual, mimicking and replacing Sarah’s opening song, transforms her waiting and longing into a religious tone of spiritual redemption tied to the passing of the seasons. Recalling Bryan Wagner’s theory of the phonograph’s *production* of authenticity, the mechanical turning of the record induces in Sarah an embodied sense of organic time that draws her into temporal folds of darkness.

The same language returns as Wright’s narrative has her give herself over to the salesman’s sudden aggressive sexual advances:

A liquid metal covered her and she rode on the curve of white bright days and dark black nights and the surge of the long gladness of summer and the ebb of the deep dream of sleep in winter till a high red wave of hotness drowned her in a deluge of silver and blue and boiled her blood and blistered her flesh
bangbangbang... (113).

The operatic scene, with its melodramatic language and climactic reiteration of the governing leitmotif, transforms this simple sound into the overburdened carrier of sensuous and narrative material. It evokes the rhythm of sexual excitement, as well as the underlying violence of the salesman’s “seduction” and the overlapping temporalities of seasonal change, while pointing to the child’s inane and innocent abuse of the clock, an action already linked to world military history (Sarah’s longing for Tom’s return from wartime Europe), as well as the impending return of Sarah’s husband (connected to the closing lines of Sarah’s opening song: “Go t sleep, baby / Papas coming back...” (103). Whatever homogenous time the clock might once have represented seems thoroughly exploded in this simple repeated sound.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹As Weheliye observes, the Spiritual was historically appropriated by white subjects: “As both Ronald Radano and Jon Cruz have shown, spirituals, once transcribed and compiled, served both white and black abolitionist purposes as embodiments of black humanity. Black sacred and later secular music took on two simultaneous functions: proving black peoples’ soul and standing in for the soul of all U.S. culture, keeping the racially particular and national universal in constant tension. Thus spirituals ushered in a long history of white appropriations of black music” (“Feenin,” 28).

¹²⁰Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 253-264.

Werner Sollors links Wright with Hurston around the question of the clock and graphophone as emblems of modernity and “the intrusion of the capitalist ethos as a sexual seduction” (quoted in Maxwell, 168) in “The Long Black Song” and Hurston’s “The Gilded Six-Bits.” Advancing Sollors’s observation, Maxwell adds that “the seducers from the North” should be analogized “with the seductions of the Great Migration” (Maxwell, 168). Sollors and Maxwell fail to address how this “seduction,” which seems more like rape, has led many feminist critics to attack Wright’s misogyny. Barbara Johnson, in an essay that primarily focuses on *Native Son*, and in a critique she connects to Wright’s inability to appreciate Hurston’s work with the black vernacular, criticizes the story’s misogyny at the level of plot: “When the black woman [Sarah] does attempt to take control of her own plot in Wright’s short story, ‘Long Black Song,’ the black man dies in an apocalyptic fire. The unavailability of new plots is deadly” (Johnson, 154). See Barbara Johnson, “The Re(a)d and the Black” in *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (ed) Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993): 149-155. While considering how Wright’s paternalistic narrative partially circumscribes Sarah in the figure of the “simple peasant woman,” Cheryl Higashida supplies a Marxist reading of the story that includes the historical specificity of

Yet, when her husband Silas eventually returns home after the salesman's departure, he recognizes the graphophone as *restoring a past history*—the time of slavery—and establishing a continuity in time that recomposes the “waiting” in the Spiritual and the return of the black phonographic voice as undermining his real property. In this machine, meant to faithfully reproduce and capture the voice, Silas identifies his wife's infidelity as linked to slavery's market in persons, a history that does not stand outside of time. Joining the alternate logics of Best and Wagner's historical arguments about the black voice and the phonograph, we might think of this voice's return as an unwanted and perversely ironic scene of the “fugitive” property come home. Best names the seemingly disembodied voice of the phonograph the “fugitive” voice, linking the machine's challenge to intellectual property or copyright law, and the formal logic of “real property,” to the legal complications surrounding fugitive slaves.¹²¹ Thus, the black phonographic voice, in Best's formulation, carries with it the “specter” of slavery” (Best, 52). However, if Best and Wagner identify the black voice emerging from the phonograph and becoming fugitive as it escapes and confounds white European and American musical and legal systems, the “fugitive” voice in Wright's story perversely “returns home” when it enters Silas's house with the intention, to his ears, of pulling him and his wife back into human bondage. Heaving the graphophone box outside his front door to smash to pieces in the dirt, Silas screams,

the Great Migration, and finds in Sarah a more sophisticated rendering of a “folk” perspective than previous critics have attributed to Wright. Acknowledging Sarah's isolation derives from her husband's concern with “accumulating land and commodities [rather] than with human relations” (Higashida, 404), her “communal-familial ethos” (Higashida, 408) hints at “the possibility of interracial cooperation” (406). Yet, her alienation from her husband, and her longing for her ex-lover Tom's return from the war resists a simple nostalgia for a folk way of life, involving her and “the rural South [as] inextricably part of the world system. International warfare and the economic structures of Southern agriculture shape Sarah's social consciousness, as African American men are drafted to fight in Europe, raise crops for exchange in the market, and leave their homes in search of better pay in industry” (Higashida, 407). See Cheryl Higashida, “Aunt Sue's Children: Re-Viewing the Gender(ed) Politics of Richard Wright's Radicalism” in *American Literature* 75.2 (2003) 395-425.

Brent Hayes Edwards, writing about Duke Ellington's use of sound to resignify literary texts by composing a “musical ‘parallel,’” describes something similar to the way Wright works with sound here: “This operation privileges the sound of words over the particular ways they are written on the page. Again, it underlines the specific parameters of a musical ‘parallel,’ an interpretive mode that reads by ‘hearing’ phonemically at a certain distance from the literary source text... It brings sound to the fore, as it were, places sound before sense, in a spirit of semantic disturbance or ‘fugitivity’ that Nathaniel Mackey, among others, has argued is endemic to black traditions of literate and musical expressions alike” (Edwards, 11). See Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Literary Ellington” in *Representations* 77, Winter 2002 (Berkeley: University of California Press): 1-29.

¹²¹In a summary of his sophisticated connection between the phonograph's effect on copyright laws and the technology's legal and historical implications for rethinking slavery in the United States, Best writes, “Alongside any analysis of the formal legal protections of voice's mechanical reproduction we must assess analogous visions of personhood's theft—specters of theft that must serve a heuristic function, as analogue and precursor to the pilfering of another's persona through the imitation of his or her voice.

We move, then, to a single example of the law's administration of specious exchange, a case in which the violation of an already suspect property right is reimaged as a species of credit fraud—a transformation of prediction into prodigality and futures into fugitiveness, which reconceives threats to the security of property as the evasions of a guilty, responsible, and obligated person... I refer, of course, to Dred Scott's challenge to John F.A. Sanford's reasonable expectation of stable market value” (Best, 64-65).

To argue that this scene somehow represents the “authentic” black voice of Silas's dialect fighting against the “inauthentic” recording would misread the framework of my analysis and its links to Wagner's work. Furthermore, as Wright's debate with Hurston makes clear, the story's acoustics resist precisely the desire to imagine an “authentic black voice” derived from an originary folk culture.

Ah works mah guts out t pay them white trash bastards whut Ah owe em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house! Ah cant go into their houses, n yuh know Gawddam well Ah cant!...Fer ten years Ah slaves lika dog t git mah farm free, givin ever peny Ah kin t em, n then Ah comes n fins they been in mah house (117-118; emphasis added).¹²²

Mechanical reproduction, the source of “blackness” in Wagner’s argument, becomes the minstrel means through which the salesman gains access to Silas’s real property. Inverting the terms of Best’s archival reading, the “fugitive” voice, liberated by the phonograph, helps dispossess Silas of his property. And this breach in real property signals the suturing over of a historical rupture, as the time of slavery, meant to have vanished by Silas’s industriousness, returns in words that link his liberating work to enslavement (“Ah slaves lika dog t git mah farm free”).

In Silas’s violent response to this newly sutured history, the sound meant to claim freedom from time, the infant’s banging on the clock, resounds instead as an encounter with the phonographic voice and the legacy of slavery. Amplifying these connections, Silas shoots the salesman upon his return for the graphophone the next morning (bang bang bang), and then holds off a white mob with his gun (bang bang bang). Resisting the phonographic “fugitive” logic of speech and access employed by the salesman, Silas continues to shoot, “bang bang bang,” as they set fire to his house, where he “stayed on to burn...stayed without a murmur” (128). Burning silently with his house amid the soundtrack of gunfire (“bang bang bang”), Silas’s acts once again revise Sarah’s opening song and the silence it hoped to conjure. If the banging silenced the baby, now Silas’s silence and the bang bang bang of the guns draws forth Sarah’s own cry as she flees to the fields in the final sentence “crying ‘Naw, Gawd!’” (ibid). The narrative’s fearful symmetry transfers the infant’s cry to Sarah’s mouth, the bang bang bang of the guns heard now as the cause of rather than the antidote to her wailing.¹²³

We might be tempted to hear sound functioning here like an empty, or floating signifier, ready to accept any one of numerous meanings. However, rather than shedding its contents as it moves, the reiterated sound only increases its burden, carrying one meaning on top of another. By the story’s end, nothing more than a simple “bang” indexes a dense network of personal and global desires, temporalities, and economies. Weighted down with history, and increasingly dangerous, Wright’s acoustics challenge the universalism of any apparently disembodied voice, and the liberating theories that attend them.¹²⁴ Indeed, the disembodied voice tells a story of

¹²² Looking back to the ethnography of the time, Silas’s status as a property holder also seems to exclude him from the type of life and song that would make him ethnographically identifiable as “authentic” in his blackness. As Wagner observes, “In ‘Some Current Folk-Songs of the Negro’ (1912), Will Thomas agrees that the ideal informant is someone who tries to ‘live in this world without working.’ ‘So far as my observation goes,’ Thomas writes, ‘the property-holding negro never sings.’ Because ‘property lends a respectability’ and ‘respectability is too great a burden’ for any tradition to bear, the only ‘negro’ who ‘sings’ is the one who is losing, or has never found, his ‘economic foothold.’ A good worker makes a bad informant because he is too respectable to waste time singing, and a bad worker makes for the best kind of informant because the dearth in industry and respectability is richly compensated by musical genius. Collecting authentic black expression became a matter of knowing where to look” (Wagner, 30).

¹²³ Wright, who had read Freud before the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Children*, might have had the “fort / da” game, the repetition compulsion and the “death drive” in mind when he linked the baby’s “bang bang bang” to Sarah’s erotic fantasies about Tom, the salesman’s aggression, and Silas’s death at the story’s end. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961).

¹²⁴ My reading departs from Allen Weiss’s readings of Poe and Mallarmé. See Allen Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan UP, 2002).

dispossession different from McCullers's hopes for listening discussed in the previous chapter. Published the same year as Dos Passos's *U.S.A* trilogy, the voice and buildings in Wright's story seem a far cry from that trilogy's "radio network...the voice of the people." Yet, in the collision of particulars within these sounds resides a resistance to the homogenizing logic of the New Acoustics, and the ideology of the presidential radio voice I described in chapter one. Hardly tone deaf, "The Long Black Song" tunes readers in to Wright's early attempt to compose what he hears as the intricate soundscape of New Deal politics and its relation to racial discourse and real estate.

Listening Out of Bounds: Native Son's Acoustic Border Crossing

When Sarah asks the white salesman in "The Long Black Song" why he is selling graphophones, he tells her "If I can make enough money out of this Ill go to Chicago" (110). Reading Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son* in the light of this earlier story, then, allows us to follow an itinerary of acoustic properties Wright constructs across his narratives, from the repeated radio reports of Lincoln's centennial in *Lawd Today* (1937 / 1963) to the falsely reported death of Cross Damon over the radio in *The Outsider* (1953). Furthermore, the attention to acoustics and housing reminds us that Wright's day job during the composition of *Native Son* involved writing about Rockefeller Center—the brain center of the New Acoustics—and the Harlem River Houses, "the first of the government's large scale housing projects" for the 1939 *WPA Guide to New York City* (Butts, 123).¹²⁵ Although Wright rarely mentions sound technologies in *Native Son*, these other texts help tune us in to how he embeds their engineering into the formal logic of his narrative's work with voice and property. In the pages that follow I demonstrate how the novel's acoustic attention structures the narrative's exchange of voices attached to social positions in order to undermine belief in a whole, autonomous, and ethnographically authentic or stable subject. Instead, the novel offers a series of voices, borrowed, echoed, and mimicked. It is a system of transfer that reveals voice in *Native Son* as a fugitive voice already thrown, meant to imagine, as Wagner writes, "the possibility of hearing the sounds of others in your own voice" (Wagner, 237).

Other critics have understood *Native Son* as a novel whose generic originality resides in the narrative's fugitive border-crossing and its manipulation of space. Recalling my comments regarding Wright's Steinian influence and his writing on the Harlem housing projects, Michael Denning joins tone and neighborhood space in plot as the twin problems of the 1930s novels he names "ghetto pastorals":

For the plebeian writers, modernism meant two things: on the one hand, a way to use a vernacular that was not an 'ethnic' dialect, always already a minstrel exercise in misspelling, broken grammar, and comic solecisms; on the other hand, a freedom from plot, a way to avoid the well-crafted intrigues and counterplotting

Likewise, Wright's work with acoustics and housing offers a historically contingent pessimism that counters the utopian desires of Gaston Bachelard's "Radio et Rêverie" in *Le doit de rêver* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970).

¹²⁵ J.J. Butts notes, "An archived production chart notes that this tour [the Harlem River Houses] was assigned to Richard Wright, but essays in the guidebooks were published anonymously and they were often heavily rewritten by both local and federal editors" (Butts, 131, n. 1). See J.J. Butts, "Writing Projects: New Deal Guidebooks, Community, and Housing Reform in New York City" in *The Space Between*, Vol. 2: 1 (2006): 113-138.

of the novel proper. The most striking aspect of the ghetto pastorals is their lack of unifying narrative, their sketchiness (Denning, 243).

Left without a “unifying narrative,” the writers Denning describes adopted “the crime stories of the popular thriller,” or chose “to lay a melodramatic plot over the sketches of everyday life. But for the most part the writers of the ghetto pastorals were left conjuring fiction out of worlds without narrative” (ibid). While *Native Son* seems to follow this generic path, it proves exceptional in surpassing one of the generic problems in representing the neighborhood: “Despite the intricacy of the neighborhood’s internal boundaries, few of the ghetto pastorals take their characters out of the neighborhood... The one novel constructed around the crossing of the border is Richard Wright’s *Native Son*” (Denning, 246).¹²⁶ As I will explain, this border crossing, which occurs because of Bigger Thomas’s attentive listening, and eventually leads to his own fugitivity and his exploration of fugitive voices, elaborates the acoustic logic of “fugitive sound” already found in “The Long Black Song.” What might appear as a “world without narrative,” emerges instead as a meticulous acoustic plot reckoning with the place of the black fugitive voice within American literature. The narrative’s work with neighborhood boundaries, boundaries constructed in the novel by the real estate mogul Charles Dalton, prepares the novel’s explicit interrogation of the limits of the acoustic imagination in the face of real property.

Going On Record: The Violence of Embodied Speech and Courtroom Listening

Perhaps the narrative’s oddest maneuver incorporates the act of overhearing into the novel’s formal structure. At the end of the book’s second section, “Flight,” the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is arrested on a South Side rooftop, in the “Black Belt” real estate district, on suspicion of murdering Mary Dalton, the daughter of a Chicago real estate mogul. In the scenes leading up to this moment we read as Bigger listens: to a newsreel identifying Mary Dalton in a movie house, to the struggling sounds Mary Dalton makes as Bigger fearfully suffocates her in her room, and, from an apartment adjoining a vacant tenement, to the voices of two men debating his crimes. The plot, in other words, develops Bigger’s character through an evolution in listening, from the movie house’s passive object of interpolation to the eavesdropper hearing his life become news.

However, when we turn to the novel’s third and final section, “Fate,” Bigger’s unspoken thoughts, “overheard” by readers in the interior monologues of the novel’s first two sections, are put on the public record in the voice of his lawyer, Boris Max. In the courtroom Bigger hears his words in a new tone, and moves closer to an act of public speech through the strange experience of ventriloquism. Earlier in the novel, Bigger thinks, “He had killed twice, but in a true sense it was not the first time he had ever killed. He had killed many times before, but only during the last two days had this impulse assumed the form of actual killing” (“Native,” 277-78). Later, in his speech before the court, his lawyer Max says, “He has murdered many times, but there are no corpses. Let me explain. This Negro boy’s entire attitude toward life is a *crime!*...Every time he

¹²⁶ “What Wright’s writing demonstrates again and again is the deadly effect both of overdetermination and of underdetermination in storytelling. It is because the ‘rape’ plot is so overdetermined that Bigger becomes a murderer. It is because there are so few available models for the plots of Indian maidens that Wright’s heroine ‘has to die.’ And it is because the ‘rape’ plot about white women or the ‘idealization’ plot about Indian women are so overdetermined that the plot about black women remains muffled beyond recognition. When the black woman does attempt to take control of her own plot in Wright’s short story, ‘Long Black Song,’ the black man dies in an apocalyptic fire. The unavailability of new plots is deadly” (Johnson, 154).

comes in contact with us, he kills!” (“Native,” 466).¹²⁷ Unable to speak publicly throughout the novel, Bigger now finds his thoughts spoken aloud by Max.

Or does he? Other critics note that Max repeats the *narrator*'s language, not Bigger's own thoughts. In doing so, Max's speech “functions to deconstruct the very rhetoric that it employs” and “underscores the limitations of the perspective shared by both” the narrator and Max (Tanner, 143).¹²⁸ Both limit themselves with a “symbolic outlook” that transforms Bigger into a “mode of life,” rather than an individual (Tanner, 142). If Max's repetition “deconstructs” the authorial rhetoric, the voice of authority, it also further tears or folds the narrative fabric that stitches one voice to one body. Echoing the narrator, Max might undermine what these critics call symbolic reasoning. More significantly, however, the novel's eloquence works to undermine attribution, to challenge the notion of property, to ask to whom a voice is proper. The transfer of utterances, beginning with the already unstable linguistic property of free indirect discourse, which is borrowed in Max's courtroom defense, and then reiterated in Bigger's final speech slowly strips the voice from any original mouth, depositing utterances across a variety of positions. We encounter speech as listening—borrowed speech that recalls Nancy Rutenburg's “humble self-enlargement” or the “speech of the people” in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* As Sartre writes about one of Dos Passos's characters, this is speech that “was not formed inside him, it came from afar... All he has done is to lend it his power of affirmation” (Sartre, DP, 93).¹²⁹ Indeed, contrary to the critical literature, *Native Son* does not progress to an articulate statement of self-understanding.¹³⁰ Its narrative maneuvers, its careful attention to listening as part of speech, work, *a priori*, to undermine a comprehensive notion of the self, and of the voice as presence. When, in his closing speech, Bigger echoes utterances already attributed to Max and the narrative, and declares “What I killed for, *I am!*” the statement resounds as a parodic representation of the *cogito* and its implied self-possessive authority. His statement asks us to seek out another way of thinking and being than Cartesian logic and the visual grid it implies.¹³¹

Yet, critics tend to read the novel's climactic broken dialogue between Max and Bigger as an example of Bigger's linguistic and psychological mastery. Such readings depend on a “tone deaf” approach inattentive to the ways Bigger's speech echoes his most unjustifiable actions

¹²⁷ Max's words also carry the weight of other earlier thoughts of Bigger: “He committed rape every time he looked into a white face. He was a long, taut piece of rubber which a thousand white hands had stretched to the snapping point, and when he snapped it was rape. But it was rape when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living day by day. That, too, was rape” (Wright, 263).

¹²⁸ Tanner, “Uncovering the Magical Disguise of Language: The Narrative Presence in Richard Wright's *Native Son*” in *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993): 132-148.

¹²⁹ See Nancy Rutenburg, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Jean-Paul Sartre, “A Propos de Dos Passos et de ‘1919’” in *Critiques littéraires (Situations, I)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

¹³⁰ Alessandro Portelli summarizes and then critiques the critical literature that reads this scene as an example of Bigger's linguistic mastery. Alessandro Portelli, “Everybody's Healing Novel: *Native Son* and Its Contemporary Critical Context” in *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 255-265. For an example of Bigger as the hyper-articulate hero, see John M. Reilly, “Giving Bigger a Voice: The Politics of Narrative in *Native Son*” in *New Essays on Native Son*, ed. Kenneth Kinnamon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 35-62. Laura E. Tanner provides the most sophisticated reading of Max and Bigger's exchange, although she too ultimately hears Bigger's speech as proof of his prowess in “the storytelling competition that governs the political world and the novel itself” (Tanner, 145).

¹³¹ For a recent attempt to rethink Descartes's connection to an acoustic philosophy, see Veit Erlann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

from earlier in the novel. Recalling the terrifying scene in which Bigger rapes and murders his girlfriend Bessie, inarticulate speech and a dreadfully articulate body collide in a terrible clash,

she spoke, not a word, but a sound that gave forth a meaning of horror accepted. Her breath went out of her lungs in long soft gasps that turned to a whisper of pleading. ‘Bigger...*Don’t!*’ Her voice came to him now from out of a deep, faraway silence and he paid her no heed. The loud demand of the tensivity of his own body was a voice that drowned out hers (“Native,” 270).

Bigger’s literal embodiment of voice silences Bessie, and seems to suffocate her speech. If Mary Dalton’s death seemed an unintentional act, Bessie’s murder and rape occur because of, not despite Bigger’s will. Wright registers the shift in terms of listening and speaking. Whereas Bigger listens and tries to stay silent when he accidentally suffocates Mary in the Dalton house, he becomes an embodied voice that refuses to listen—“he paid her no heed”—in the abandoned South Side tenement. In this third telling of the rape plot (the white salesman and Sarah, Bigger and Mary, Bigger and Bessie), the African-American man attains a type of voice, but only at the expense of an African-American woman. Embodying voice, a state of being proffered by many critics as the novel’s goal, sounds terribly wrong.

Indeed, we notice the same language return in Bigger’s final speech. Speaking with confidence for the first time in the novel, Bigger refuses to listen: “Max opened his mouth to say something and Bigger drowned out his voice... ‘I didn’t want to kill!’ Bigger shouted. ‘But what I killed for, I *am!*’” (“Native,” 501). Once again “drowning out” another’s voice, the narrative echoes Bessie’s rape at the moment critics cite as evidence for Bigger’s linguistic competence, and his status as a symbol of the freedom of black writers (Reilly, 60).¹³² Attuned to the narrative’s acoustic logic, the means by which it repeats strips of discourse across the space of the novel in order to have them resound, often dissonantly, in a new context or a new mouth, we can hear Bigger’s statement as a struggle with competing forces in American literary and social life. In *Native Son*, it is no longer enough to speak articulately; in fact, the novel runs counter to the tradition of the fugitive slave narratives of Douglas or Jacobs, wherein the act of autobiography already testifies to the subject’s success. Nor does *Native Son* fit comfortably in what Katherine Biers identifies as an American national imaginary that features blackness “as a *failure* of speech” (Biers, 100). At least not as Biers understands “failure,” as an inability to speak articulately. In Bigger’s case, articulate speech actually contributes to a failure in the belief in articulacy first registered by Max’s linguistic failure—his stutter.

Deterritorializing Real Property: Stubborn Phonographic Stutters

In the final failed dialogue between the jailed Bigger Thomas and his lawyer Max, we hear Max’s voice, “y-you’ve got to b-believe in yourself, Bigger” (“Native,” 500). It is a stutter that inspires Bigger to speak,

Sounds funny, Mr. Max, but when I think about what you say I kind of feel what I wanted’...Max opened his mouth to say something and Bigger drowned out his

¹³² “Marking Bigger’s freedom by the power of self-expression, Wright makes Bigger’s voice the emblem of his novel signifying that through the brilliant complex of linguistic acts we know as *Native Son* freedom also comes to black writers” (Reilly, 60).

voice... ‘I didn’t want to kill!’ Bigger shouted. ‘But what I killed for, I *am!*...I know what I’m saying real good and I know how it sounds. But I’m alright’...Max’s eyes were full of terror (“Native,” 500-501).

Bringing together the professional rhetorician’s stutter with the previously inarticulate fugitive’s existential affirmation, the inversion upsets and reconfigures an entire literary genealogy and the social world in which that literature and its interpretations labor. In order to piece together how these few sentences function as an intricate attempt to wrestle with these tense and knotted strains in American discourse, I want to turn to Max’s stutter, the trigger for Bigger’s speech.¹³³

Why insert the stutter into the speech of this professional rhetorician? What makes Max’s words falter, and what does this slight disruption, this “vocal defect” tell us? At first, it seems we have completed the equation drawn between Wright’s work with the African-American voice and Stein’s “stubborn phonograph.” For the Steinian style praised by Wright was phonographic precisely through its tendency to repeat and stammer, to evoke “struggling words.” Resisting the fluidity and forward movement of the mother tongue, Stein, as Deleuze writes about her modernist contemporaries, “shapes and sculpts a foreign language that does not preexist *within* h[er] own language” (“Stutter,” 25).¹³⁴ She puts the language system [*langue*] into “perpetual disequilibrium” (24), wherein “*language itself will begin to vibrate and to stutter*, and will not be confused with speech, which always assumes only one variable position among others and follows only one direction” (24; emphasis added). At first, Max’s simple stutter seems less disruptive—if it indicates disequilibrium, it does so in prosaic, basic language (“y-you’ve g-got to believe, Bigger”), seemingly remaining at the level of the single utterance [*parole*], rather than the poetic exaggerations of Stein, Beckett and the other modernists favored by Deleuze.

Despite its simplicity, Max’s stutter registers a fundamental struggle in and against language. It is akin to Barthes’s claim that stammering exists “neither in language, nor outside it; it lets us know that failure might be near” (Barthes, 76).¹³⁵ The faltering exposes, in other words, a territory riven with competing discourses, and begs the question, “Which failure?” On the one hand, Wright’s novel has struggled up to this point to condemn a culture that has fought to silence the African-American voice. At the same time, as Nancy Ruttenburg argues, that culture’s literary ideals have valued silence and inarticulacy as markers of authentic national expression (Ruttenburg, 345-346). How then does a novel address silence as oppression when silence betokens the oppressor’s highest value? How does an African-American novelist write against articulation when the tradition’s founding texts celebrate the teleology of literacy and self-expression? What kind of failure does Max’s stutter indicate?

For Nathaniel Mackey, as well as the black authors he and later critics celebrate, the turn to the inarticulate, the stutter, evinces a knowledge of linguistic and cultural rules that, when broken, open a new space for the utterance. Deleuze’s “foreign language” in Mackey’s case becomes a specific racial tone, as “the black musician’s stutter...reflects critically upon an experience of isolation or exclusion...it symbolizes a refusal to forget damage done” and stands

¹³³ Although Bigger also stutters in this closing encounter, it is Max’s stutter which breaks the generic expectations established through American literary form, and it is for that reason that I focus on his words here. Nonetheless, we might hear Max’s stutter as a “contagious” influence in which the dividing lines between lawyer and client begin to break down.

¹³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” trans. Constantin V. Boundas in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (London: Routledge, 1994):

¹³⁵ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

as a “critique and a partial rejection of an available but biased coherence” (Mackey, 252).¹³⁶ Resisting the coherence that arises out of a suppression of racial difference, the stutter is a “two way witness” to “the need to go beyond the confines of an exclusionary order” and to its “limited success at doing so. The impediments to the passage it seeks are acknowledged if not annulled, attested to by exactly the gesture that would overcome them if it could” (Mackey, 249). This impeded speech is therefore a “telling ‘inarticulacy’” whose failure in speech “implicitly indicts a white-dominated social order and the discourse of racial difference by which it explains or makes sense of itself” (Mackey, 253). Writing with a stutter differs from the code switching that North, following Gates, upholds as typical of African-American modernism. The stutter does not switch between two languages so much as disrupt, and disarticulate a language from within.

If, as Mackey and Deleuze argue, the stutter and inarticulate speech help, as Deleuze and Guattari write, to “minorize” the dominant language, why does Max, the lawyer, and not Bigger, the fugitive, stutter?¹³⁷ Indeed, Bigger’s speech in response to the stutter, his transformation into an embodied voice, invokes and revises the most famous stutter in literary history, that of Billy Budd, and his statement: “Could I have used my tongue I would not have struck him” (Melville, 102). While that famously innocent sailor issued his “stutter and blow in place of the word of self-identity” (Ruttenburg, 363), Bigger, fusing voice and body in his semi-articulate statement of self-determination (“what I killed for, I *am!*”), morally condemns himself in the eyes of Max. Putting the stutter in the mouth of the lawyer, the narrative invokes the legacy of American literature’s paragon of innocent violence only in order to adamantly reject a romantic inarticulacy as well as the teleology of the fugitive slave narrative that imagines literacy as liberation.¹³⁸

Albeit in a different manner than the models proposed by Deleuze, Max’s stumbling words help link *Native Son* to a literary genealogy the novel struggles to recompose. Rejecting the identitarian, or, at least, autobiographical tradition as a viable social model, and turning down the communist logic proposed by Max, the narrative wrestles with the role of the black vernacular and the problem of address, the two issues Wright identified as particular failures in Hurston’s writing. We should recall here that in the courtroom scenes immediately preceding their conversation in Bigger’s jail cell, Max echoed the free indirect discourse through which the reader accessed Bigger’s thoughts in the novel’s first two sections, and Bigger now speaks those words to Max. With this in mind we can hear how their exchange employs the stutter as a signal to disarticulate competing claims to any notion of linguistic mastery. Wright’s apparently “tone

¹³⁶ Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹³⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹³⁸ In Melville’s book the stutter inspires violence in the face of the law; Billy kills because he can’t speak. While Bigger’s “impulsion to try to tell was as deep as had been the urge to kill” (Wright, 358), his legal representative, speaking for him, stutters in the face of the outlaw. In this sense, the narrative displaces the stutter onto Max, which then allows Bigger to finally speak what he has thought throughout the novel. As should be clear from my argument, the dividing lines in Bigger and Max’s dialogue elaborate an entire system of differences at play. However, they do not merely repeat the separation between the referential and performative aspects of speech Barbara Johnson elaborates in her reading of *Billy Budd*. Rather, the stutter in *Native Son* organizes a discursive universe that includes Billy Budd’s innocence, fugitive slave narratives, Emersonian ideals of poetic inarticulacy, and radiophonic articulation in order to identify each as inappropriate models for imagining democratic speech at the end of the New Deal. For more on the stutter in *Billy Budd* see Barbara Johnson, “Melville’s Fist: The Execution of *Billy Budd*” in *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 79-109, and Ruttenburg, “Democratic,” 344-378.

deaf” endorsement of Stein’s “struggling words” emerges instead as a critique of imagining speech as color coded, a rejection of the phonographic and ethnographic construction of “the black voice,” and a refusal to fit established criteria of articulate liberation. Placing the stutter in Max’s mouth challenges the standard placeholder for articulate speech, and transforming articulate speech into the medium through which one attempts to justify murder undoes the heroic bildungsroman narrative others have applied to the novel. The narrative, in other words, places available discourses of African-American literature and the more general category of American literature into a state of disequilibrium registered by the fractured dialogue between the stutter and speech.¹³⁹

When Max hears Bigger speak the words Max himself stated in court, and then refuses to endorse those words, the stutter’s “fugitive” signal becomes audible. Revisiting Silas’s encounter with the graphophone in “The Long Black Song,” Bigger speaks with a “fugitive voice”—a voice unhinged from any original source and displaced onto different bodies throughout the narrative. Different than the position of the voice in its earlier instantiations, Bigger now embodies and literalizes the fugitive voice from his position as a literally captured fugitive. Speaking as a fugitive he attempts to return the fugitive voice to Max, uttering the words Max spoke, the words readers first encountered in the free indirect narration of the book’s second section: “Flight.” Attentive to the tone of Max’s voice—“*Sounds funny, Mr. Max, but when I think about what you say I kind of feel what I wanted. . . I know what I’m saying real good and I know how it sounds.*” —Bigger’s words attempt to bridge with Max’s voice in court: “He had not understood the speech, but he had felt the meaning of some of it from the *tone* of Max’s voice” (“Native,” 473; emphasis added).¹⁴⁰ The unrealized hope in Bigger and Max’s broken dialogue is that the alienable qualities of the voice will fuse with the inalienable notion of the self to produce a contagious utterance that allows each speaker to hear the voices of others in his speech. For Wright, tone becomes the affective carrier for a sympathetic knowledge precluded in the semantic field. Bigger cannot understand Max’s words, but he “feels their meaning.” Insisting on the tone of these voices, rather than their content, the narrative attempts to make Bigger’s statement of identity a shareable, transportable utterance, one whose sound would encourage the “conspicuous transference” Nancy Ruttenburg has described as the legacy of democratic personality. Yet, when Max recoils—“his eyes were full of terror”—he closes or breaks this potential circuit; the voice will no longer be shared.

This failure to share a voice marks the limit case of the novel’s hopeful ambition and its desperate pessimism. Although they speak the same words in the same tone, neither Max nor Bigger prove themselves wholly capable listeners. The fugitive voice is caught in the captured fugitive’s failure to communicate with his lawyer, and the lawyer, having spoken in the courtroom, fails to listen in the jailhouse. The communicative failure, an inability to share words, indexes a failure to re-imagine property in terms of equal access. Wright, in this instance, reveals real property to be built by words and bricks, but strives to communicate how a change in the

¹³⁹ In this staging of a problem of address between Max and Bigger we should remember Wright’s fundamental disagreement with Hurston: “In the main, her novel is *not addressed to the Negro*, but to a white audience” (Wright, “Tears,” 23; emphasis added). What takes place here is a property struggle over voice, but also an implicit hope in the possibility of sharing voice, rather than subsuming it to another, or laying claim to one voice as one’s sole property. This is not a disembodiment, but an example of the limits of visibility, and the importance of embodied listening at a distance.

¹⁴⁰ The narrative repeats this claim later: “He did want to see Max and talk with him again. He recalled the speech Max had made in court and remembered with gratitude the kind, impassioned tone. But the meaning of the words escaped him” (“Native,” 488-489).

concept of the personal utterance could also undo the property lines of the buildings Max's words indicate.

In closing, I want to show how this communicative failure makes explicit the novel's work with a speaker's tone, the transferability of an utterance, and the space of housing. We can call the interdependence of each of these elements "acoustic property," and we can find their encounter in Max's stuttering declaration, delivered at the end of a proclamation about Bigger's need to reclaim the houses of the South Side. Pointing to the buildings outside the jailhouse windows, Max asks Bigger to realize that "If men stopped believing, stopped having faith, they'd come tumbling down" (Wright, 498). Adding that building owners like the real estate mogul Dalton oppress others in order to keep them away from the buildings, Max concludes, "But men, men like you, get angry and fight to re-enter those buildings, to live again" (Wright, 499). These remarks help collect the novel's challenge to property ownership as racially and class biased. They restate, in miniature, the ideas laid out in Max's court speech where Bigger's youth in tenement housing owned by Dalton's South Side Development company indirectly led to Bigger's murder of Dalton's daughter in Dalton's house, and later, of Bessie, in one of Dalton's condemned buildings.¹⁴¹ While fleeing from the police, Bigger, in fact, did "fight to re-enter those buildings, to live again," as he broke into empty, overpriced rentals in the so-called Black Belt area of Chicago.

Fugitivity and real property, therefore, collide in this broken dialogue much as they did in Silas's speech after breaking the graphophone. However, unlike Silas's monologue, Bigger and Max's fractured conversation reveals the property lines in language. The failure to share language, a failure anticipated in Max's stutter and confirmed in his look of terror, this disarticulation brings real property and language together, as the failure in speaking undermines the claims for public housing, for housing open to the public, housing made to be shared. The scene struggles with a linguistic and material "deterritorialization," indexed by the stutter, but never achieved. Max's inability to share language, and, instead, his continued insistence on it as one's property, as pertaining to one's own position alone, only reinforces those property claims made in the simple signs on empty buildings in the so-called Black Belt real estate district: "Property of the South Side real estate company." Recalling chapter one's discussion of Fredric Jameson's speculation about a "radio aesthetic," houses, real property, act as characters within the language of Wright's novel.¹⁴² Through these placards, and the entire legal, financial and cultural system they imply, these real properties "speak" their "rights" in *Native Son*, emerging as characters endowed with more rights than their human counterparts.¹⁴³ Indeed, Bigger's "flight" through the Black Belt's houses depicts him as mere movable property, temporary furnishing in the towering vacants of the South Side. Despite his words, Max's look of terror at Bigger's "self-possession" ultimately dispossesses him, concluding that the connection between belief and real property, in the form of Dalton's South Side Real Estate Company, possesses a

¹⁴¹ To move from Bigger's existential crisis of consciousness to a Marxist explanation and justification for his crimes through Max's court room speech: Bigger murdered because of his social and economic conditions, because, as Max rhetorically asks Mr. Dalton in court: "Do you think that the terrible conditions under which the Thomas family lived in one of your houses may in some way be related to the death of your daughter?" ("Native," 379).

¹⁴² See Frederic Jameson, "The Synoptic Chandler" in *Shades of Noir*. Ed. Joan Copjec (London, New York: Verso, 1993).

¹⁴³ For more on the legal and literary discourse regarding the rights of objects, see Miguel Tamen, *Friends of Interpretable Objects* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2001) and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 184.

right to exclude and segregate communities, to force them into the streets, or, in Bigger's case, to the jailhouse.

Published six years after the National Housing Act was written into law, *Native Son* testifies to the failure to realize public housing as a social good in the New Deal United States. The new building codes and building projects under the National Housing Act of 1934, and the subsequent Housing Act of 1937, created new legal rights for housing under the watch of the United States Housing Authority, itself created in 1937. As Lawrence Vale has describes this period, "the stormy history of public housing may...be seen as the confluence between the *public neighbor* and the new practice of the *public neighborhood*" (Vale, 17).¹⁴⁴ For Vale, the category of the "public neighbor" derives from the residents of English almshouses, "needy people whom community leaders felt an obligation to assist or, since the early nineteenth century, to reform" (Vale, 17). The public neighborhood, initially meant to house working citizens, soon took on the identity of this older social type, partially due to the fact, in Vale's words, "that there is a problem when one's neighbors become seen as 'the public' rather than as a specific set of individuals and families of known qualities" (Vale, 16). Soon after their creation, these public houses stigmatized their inhabitants, and much like residence in a hospital indicates sickness or incarceration in a prison bespeaks criminality, residents of public neighborhoods found their identities chosen for them by the houses in which they lived.

As I have attempted to demonstrate over the course of this chapter, *Native Son*'s narrative works against precisely this pejorative association and apriori definition that public housing enforces on its inhabitants. At the same time, Max and Bigger's "struggling words" strive to imagine a shared property that would include shared housing. While the stutter indexes the phonograph's fugitive voice, it departs from Silas's fight for private property, in order to think through sound as a challenge to private property's limitations. Indeed, when we trace Bigger's fugitive travels throughout the narrative, we realize that what appeared to Michael Denning as the novel's lack of a "unifying narrative" emerges instead as a meticulous ordering of acoustic properties. The closing stutter suddenly reveals the resonances between the narrative's work with the fugitive voice and Bigger's fugitive movement from his family's cramped tenement to the movie house where he first hears Mary Dalton's name pronounced on the newsreel, to Mary Dalton's room, where he accidentally suffocates her to prevent her from speaking his name, to the vacant tenements where he listens to others speak about his crime, to the courtroom where he hears Max speak on his behalf, and finally to the jailhouse where he and Max speak together. An emblem of racial bondage in "The Long Black Song," the phonographic stutter becomes in *Native Son* an opportunity—broken and still not possible in 1940—to listen beyond the limitations of real estate.

In this sense, the novel holds out the promise chapter one located in the radio voice—the belief in a democratic personality that would work collectively to challenge proprietary claims on speech. Yet, this hope also ultimately fails in the closing to Wright's novel. While we can acknowledge the social and cultural symmetry Wright described in his writings for the Works Progress Administration regarding the public Harlem River Houses and the wired Rockefeller Center, his novel condemns the limits of both projects, revealing that the "speech of the people" and the dream of New Deal public housing founder against the intertwined legacies of private property and racial bias. Rather than a mere expression of architectural determinism, *Native Son*'s final scene, delivered in a jailhouse blocks from the South Side tenements and Chicago

¹⁴⁴ See Lawrence Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Stadium, stands as a careful indictment of the voices from the Republican and Democratic national conventions echoing throughout that stadium in 1932, the voices broadcast outside those walls, and the message proclaimed there of a New Deal for the people of the United States and a policy of the good neighbor for all of the Americas.

**Coda: The Argentine Afterlife of Native Son*

A decade after the publication of Wright's novel he flew to Argentina to perform the role of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son's* adaptation to film. Although the decision might seem odd at first, it makes particular political sense for Argentina and Wright himself. Placing his decision to head to Argentina in terms of a larger investigation into the connections between white racism and imperialism, Wright told Roland Barthes,

Having left America and having been living for some time in France, I have become concerned about the historical roots and the emotional problems of Western whites which make them aggressive toward colonial peoples. You can see from this that my travels in to [*sic*] the Argentine, into Africa and Asia even have an autobiographical inspiration. I was looking for explanations of the psychological reactions of whites (quoted in Phu, 46-47).¹⁴⁵

As Thy Phu argues in a recent article, Wright's interview with Barthes reveals how his time in Argentina helps him develop "a racial consciousness of the far-reaching effects of U.S. and European colonialism" (Phu, 47). I want to specify that claim here by showing how this more global awareness of U.S. race relations derives, in some ways, from the new social, political and economic alliances associated with the Roosevelt administration's Good Neighbor Policy.

Although intended to usher in a period of friendlier inter-American relations, the effects of the Good Neighbor Policy hit Argentina's powerful film industry hardest. While Orson Welles and other "good will ambassadors" traveled to Latin America to establish cultural ties between South and North America, and Hollywood made a concerted effort to curtail pejorative and stereotypical representations of Latin America in their films, Argentina's declared neutrality during World War II made them appear a less than favorable neighbor and led to severe restrictions of imported film stock from the United States. Debilitating the Argentine hold on the Latin American film market, Hollywood gained ground throughout the region. In a move to support their now flailing national film industry and react against the ill-treatment by their "neighbor" to the north, the Argentine government censored and re-edited US films, and instituted a screen quota in 1944 to limit the U.S. theatrical releases in the country.¹⁴⁶

At the same time, European directors fleeing World War Two headed to Argentina as well as Hollywood. The French director Pierre Chenal established himself within Argentina during this time, and returned in 1951 to shoot a film that would re-evaluate the terms of the "Good Neighbor." The country's first English language film, which appeared in Argentina under the title *Sangre Negra* (Black Blood), was, in fact, the first film adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Discouraged by the political and social climate in the United States, and unable to

¹⁴⁵ Thy Phu, "Bigger at the Movies: Sangre Negra and the Cinematic Projection of Native Son" in *Black Camera*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter 2010): 36-57.

¹⁴⁶ For more on the changing landscape of the Argentine film industry during the Good Neighbor Policy see Tamara L. Falicov, "Hollywood's Rogue Neighbor: The Argentine Film Industry during the Good Neighbor Policy, 1939-1945" in *The Americas*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (October, 2006): 245-260.

find a studio willing to release the race conscious film Wright insisted on, he and Chenal found a willing partner in the Argentine film industry.¹⁴⁷

We might think of the making of *Sangre Negra* as a product and revision of the Good Neighbor Policy's political and cultural legacy. While wartime Hollywood went so far as to produce Disney's *Saludos Amigos* (1943) and other films of "good will" with "Latin" or "inter-American themes" (Falicov, 248-249), the cinematic representations of African-Americans failed to achieve the same acceptance by U.S. policy makers.¹⁴⁸ Anticipating the association between U.S. Black Power movements and Fidel Castro in the early 1960s, *Sangre Negra* offered the Argentine government and film industry an opportunity to critique the United States' racial inequality as a failure of democracy.

The critique has mixed merits. When *Native Son* finally appeared in the United States it was heavily censored and received largely negative reviews.¹⁴⁹ However, in order to even make the film a possibility, Chenal and Wright had to fly in twenty African-American actors, and Wright himself played the lead role of Bigger Thomas. In other words, the director had to create a black community in Buenos Aires because, in a country dominated by European immigration that shared with the United States a history of barbaric genocide of indigenous communities in the name of "civilization," racial difference did not work in black and white terms. Furthermore, the lack of English speaking Argentine actors led the director to overdub many of the scenes with the voices of students from English language high schools and university classes, creating a film that seemed acoustically and geographically out of context.

However, the film's sound also participates in an extension of the narrative project Wright set out in *Native Son*, and anticipates the narrative experiments we will encounter in Manuel Puig's writing in chapter four. While Wright worked throughout the course of his novel's narrative to strip the voice from any sense of racial authenticity and identity, in performing the character of Bigger Thomas Wright transforms the authorial role into that of the character. Although we might think of Wright as assuming the position of the "star," he submits his authorial control to that of the director. In other words, *performing* Bigger, in some ways, undoes the apparent biographical connection between author and character, precisely by stepping into the character's place. Furthermore, the dubbed voices, while indexing the geo-political displacement in the film, also achieve something of the work with voice Wright elaborated in *Native Son*. While Jorge Luis Borges would call such dubbing "monstrous," almost twenty years later it would provide Manuel Puig with part of the professional inspiration to turn writing into a practice of listening.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 1973. Trans. Isabel Barzun. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Brunette, Peter. "Two Wrights, One Wrong," *The Modern American Novel and the Movies* (eds.) Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzkin (New York: Ungar, 1978): 131-142; Ruth Elizabeth Burks, "Cinematic Censorship and the Film Adaptations of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." Diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1993).

¹⁴⁸ See also Ana M. Lopéz and Manuel Alvarado, eds., *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute, 1993). Falicov quotes a State Department memorandum on the film policy in Latin America promoted by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) from 1942 that states, "It was the greatest outpouring of propagandistic material by a state ever" (Falicov, 249).

¹⁴⁹ See Phu, 41-45.

¹⁵⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, "On Dubbing," in *Borges in/and/on Film*, ed. Edgardo Cozarinsky, tr. Gloria Waldman and Ronald Christ (New York: Lumen, 1981). See also Mikhail Yampolsky, "Voice Devoured: Artaud and Borges on Dubbing" trans. Larry P. Joseph in *October* Vo. 64 (Spring, 1993): 57-77.

CHAPTER 3

RADIO'S FORKED TONGUE: Pitch, Address, and Transnational Broadcast

“It will remain for us, then, a theme for a future essayist—a History of radio—that will have lasted for thirty years. But thirty years during which the radio will not have become a true art”—Alejo Carpentier¹⁵¹

On October 10, 1922, the fifty-four year anniversary of the Cuban Ten Years' War for independence from Spain, Cuban President Alfredo de Zayas delivered Cuban radio's official inaugural broadcast. Speaking over station PWX, the network of the Cuban Telephone Company, a subsidiary of the U.S. owned International Telephone and Telegraph Company (ITT), de Zayas addressed himself, in English and Spanish, to listeners in the United States: “From the city of Havana, capital of the Cuban Republic, I have the great honor of directing my voice to the people of the United States of America through the marvelous invention inaugurated by the Cuban Telephone Company” (quoted in Luis López, 27).¹⁵² Acknowledging Cuba's proximity “to your shores, inside the area of operations [*radio de acción*] of your powerful commercial influence,” he closed his speech as a single individual speaking on behalf of a nation to another nation: “With my words, pronounced in the name of the Cuban people, I send my true expression of respect and admiration to the United States and your national institutions; my sincere friendship to your people and my consideration for your Government. Three ‘vivas’ to the glory of the United States! Three ‘vivas’ to the absolute independence of Cuba!” (quoted in Luis López, 29).

Although technologies like radio have been thought to collapse distance altogether, and thereby alter what Heidegger called the ‘world picture,’ De Zayas's forked address, speaking in English from Havana to listeners inside and outside of his nation's borders, within a certain “radio de acción” links his broadcast to a delimited spatial sphere formed from material (military, economic, and cultural) influence. Conscious of the United States naval base at Guantánamo and the special trade tariffs on sugar exports to the U.S., de Zayas implicitly points

Puig, after failing to finish two English language screenplays at the neo-realist Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, found work in London writing subtitles for Spanish-language films. We might think of this early training in writing *on* the screen, rather than *for* the screen, as a type of writing that is bound to the writer and reader's listening.

¹⁵¹ Alejo Carpentier, “El ocaso de la radio” in *El Nacional*, Caracas, January 16, 1954. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵² ITT was formed out of the Puerto Rican Telephone Company owned by the U.S. born brothers Sosthenes and Hernan Behn.

In his *Culture and Customs of Cuba*, William Luis claims that “[Zayas's] speech, in English, was meant to be heard in the United States, since Cuba had fewer than 100 radios at that time” (Luis, 68). Luis López writes that the Cuban president “pronounces his discourse *first in English*, and then in Spanish. This last fact has not been proven” (Luis López, 34; emphasis in original; my translation). I have found no more definitive archival proof that Alfredo de Zayas spoke in either English or Spanish, however all historians appear to agree that Raúl P. Falcón's introduction to the President's speech was delivered in English and Spanish (Luis López, 33).

See William Luis, *Culture and Customs of Cuba* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001). See Oscar Luis López, *La radio en Cuba* (La Habana, Cuba: Letras Cubanas, 1998).

Zayas might have also had in mind the listeners in the room adjacent to his office in the Presidential palace, an audience that included the U.S. General Consul in Cuba Frank Steinhart, a member of Theodore Roosevelt's “Rough Riders,” and Enoch Crowder, the personal envoy of U.S. President Warren G. Harding.

to how the apparent disembodiment of long distance broadcast remains dependent on specific embodied relations. Yet, De Zayas's decision to address his words to ears beyond his nation, thereby converting any Cuban listeners into eavesdroppers, speaks to how the radio in Cuba was already bound by the "radio de acción," the area of operations of its neighbor to the north.¹⁵³ The broadcast's ability to transcend the nation, in other words, also points to the unstable sovereignty of Cuba's borders.

In linking the United States's area of operations to "powerful commercial influence," however, de Zayas was in some ways attempting to improve the future power dynamic between Cuba and the U.S. Just two years after the latest military invasion by the United States in 1920, the Cuban government sought to alter the legacy of U.S. military on the island through increased, and what they hoped would be mutually beneficial trade. De Zayas could recall that the United States had claimed official control over the island only two decades earlier, from August 1898 to January 1899, as a result of their intervention in the fight for Cuban independence against Spanish colonialism in what U.S. historians continue to refer to as the "Spanish-American war." A U.S. military government remained in charge of Cuban affairs, forcing the freely elected Cuban constitutional convention, under threat of permanent military occupation, to sign the Platt Amendment, Article III of which stated that "the Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberty."¹⁵⁴ Only after this amendment, and the uncontested election of Cuban President Estrada Palma, who was living in the United States at the time, did the military government vacate the island on May 20, 1902. Thus, while Cuban radio historians have rightfully denounced de Zayas's kowtowing speech, we should also recognize that the President's address in 1922 employed the radio as an opportunity to speak beyond borders, that in some way invoked the earlier borders of the fall of 1898.

¹⁵³ Reports about the broadcast came from listeners as far away as New York, but no other nation in the Americas, aside from Argentina, had access to radio, and there are no records indicating the broadcast reached listeners there. Of course, there were also listeners in Cuba—the unofficial station LRC had already been in operation for three months before the president's address.

In a sense uniting both points in a chapter on "Radio Talk", Erving Goffman observes, "One of the basic resources of the announcer (perhaps even more than of the ordinary speaker) is that of conveying something that listeners will be privy to but which cannot stand as something they openly have been given access to. *The audience is, as it were, forced into the role of overhearers*, but of messages the announcer is sending only to himself or not to anyone at all" (Goffman, "Radio," 303; emphasis added). He goes on to explain that through certain shifts in tone of voice, "the announcer makes his audience privy to his own feelings (not the station's or sponsor's or any generalized 'we'), shifting the audience's status to that of overhearers" (305). Thus, while all radio communication is not, by necessity, *overheard*, the medium does allow the announcer to force his audience into the role of overhearing.

Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁴ Based on the Platt Amendment, in 1902 the U.S. leased Guantánamo Bay and Bahía Honda, the latter of which was released in 1912 with the expansion of the lease on Guantánamo. The U.S. signed a lease to pay \$2,000 a year with no stipulated end date (Thomas, 502). See Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

The Platt Amendment's doctrine of intervention was supplemented by President Theodore Roosevelt's 1904 "Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, in which "the United States gave itself the right to preemptive military intervention [in Latin American countries]" (Schoultz, 290; see also Thomas, 476). As a result of these adjustments to U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. sent the marines to Cuba to address labor disputes and apparently fraudulent elections in 1906, 1912, 1917, and 1920.

See Lars Schoultz, *Beneath The United States: A History of U.S. Policy Towards Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Twelve years after the Cuban President's speech, three new Deal legislative changes related to domestic broadcasting and foreign policy pushed Cuba and the United States toward de Zayas's ambitions. With Cuban—U.S. relations in mind, we can identify the 1934 Treaty of Relations, Reciprocal Trade Agreements and Federal Communications Act as the documents that supplanted U.S. military might in Cuba in favor of commercial influence and economic dependence. This transformation was what Franklin Delano Roosevelt had in mind when, after four U.S. military interventions in Cuba, he spoke to the democratic convention in Chicago of a policy of the Good Neighbor. Roosevelt had borrowed the term and much of its meaning from his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, who, as Secretary of Commerce from 1921-1928, "was responsible for redirecting U.S. policy away from what the nation has always done poorly—military occupation—and toward what it does exceptionally well—business" (Schoulz, 295).¹⁵⁵ When, in 1933, Roosevelt resisted calls by his special envoy to Cuba, Sumner Welles, to send the military to "police" the island soon after the dictator Gerardo Machado was toppled by a bloodless military coup, partially instigated by a clandestine Cuban radio station, Roosevelt demonstrated his loyalty to the doctrine of the Good Neighbor Policy's respect for Cuban sovereignty in a way unmatched by Hoover.¹⁵⁶ By the following year, May 29, 1934, Roosevelt formalized the Good Neighbor Policy with respect to Cuba through the Treaty of Relations, rejecting the Platt Amendment's doctrine of military intervention on the island, but retaining the rights to the naval station at Guantánamo.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Schoulz claims Hoover had already talked about being a "good neighbor" in his 1928 goodwill tour of Latin America (Schoulz, 290). FDR's eventual policy borrowed from Hoover's early policy, and the legacy of 1928 Secretary of State Frank Kellogg's "Kellog-Brian Pact", which opposed a (Teddy) Rooseveltian reading of the Monroe Doctrine, known as the Roosevelt "Corollary." Kellogg wrote an official document to these ends, but it was suppressed by Hoover in 1929 and 1930 in order to pass the "London Naval Treaty", and then published quietly in 1930 as a 236 page government document (Schoulz, 291-292).

As the Coolidge administration's Secretary of Commerce, Hoover was responsible for authorizing radio licensing, and became a powerful advocate of the Radio Corporation of America's (RCA) lobbying interests to monopolize the radio waves (Soley, 35).

See Lawrence Soley, *Free Radio* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999).

¹⁵⁶ As Lawrence Soley points out, "In 1933, encouraged by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's criticisms of Cuban leader Gerardo Machado, young Cubans organized demonstrations and protests against the Cuban dictator. In the midst of the protests a free radio station appeared, broadcasting anti-Machado commentaries and calling upon the Cuban army to join the rebellion. Although the government located the transmitter and arrested its operators, other freedom stations soon appeared. These stations also called upon the army to rebel, which it did, and Machado was ousted and forced into exile" (Soley, 8).

Surprisingly, in early 1933 the same Welles had "sent the President-elect three pages of draft language about Latin America for his inaugural address, and suggested a prohibition on 'the dispatch of the armed forces of the United States to any foreign soil whatsoever.' This commitment to military nonintervention became the defining characteristic of FDR's Good Neighbor policy" (Schoulz, 299). However, later in the same year, after Welles's friend, the U.S. born former Cuban ambassador to the U.S., Carlos Manuel de Céspedes was deposed by a group led by General Fulgencio Batista and replaced with Ramón Grau San Martín, Welles sent repeated requests to Washington "for 'a strictly limited intervention,' which he said would require 'the landing of a considerable force at Habana and lesser forces in certain of the most important ports of the Republic.' Realizing that the literal-minded might interpret this as a proposal for military intervention, Welles argued that U.S. troops would be only 'an armed force lent by the United States as a policing power' and therefore 'would most decidedly be construed as well within the limits of the policy of the "good neighbor."'" (Schoulz, 300).

¹⁵⁷ A decade after FDR refused to send the US military (although he did decline to recognize Grau's government, ringed the island with gunships, and sent Welles back to undermine the Cuban government), "when FDR welcomed a rehabilitated Grau San Martín to Washington, he remarked that 'the President-Elect is largely responsible for the good neighbor policy' because he forced the 1933 decision not to send U.S. troops into Cuba. Because the term 'nonintervention' was defined narrowly to encompass only a military invasion, the outcome in Cuba was considered

The Treaty of Relations was supplemented in the same year with the Reciprocal Trade Agreements, the first of which was signed on August 24, 1934, after it was proposed to Latin American nations by U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull at the Pan-American conference in Montevideo in December of 1933. The Treaty, which has been called “the basis of New Deal foreign economic policy” (Gellman, 113), quickly supplanted American military intervention with Cuban economic dependence:

Almost immediately the United States and Cuba signed the first reciprocal trade agreement, cutting the U.S. tariff on Cuban sugar by 40 percent and providing for equally advantageous reductions in tobacco and other products of tropical agriculture; in return, Cuba substantially reduced the protection that it was offering its infant industries, and *the result was to cement the fledgling Cuban economy to that of the United States* (Schoulz, 305; my emphasis).

Reducing Cuba’s opportunity to diversify its economy, the agreements made the Cuban economy dependent on sugar sales to the United States in order to produce money to purchase agricultural and industrial commodities from the U.S. (Gellman, 115).¹⁵⁸ Given this dependent model, it should be no surprise that historian Robert Dallek comments that “the reciprocal trade program chiefly served American rather than world economic interests” (Dallek, 93). Historian Lars Schoulz adds,

When trade reciprocity was combined with other New Deal initiatives, especially the 1934 creation of the Export-Import Bank, the net economic result of the

a major victory for the new administration’s nonintervention policy” (Schoulz, 303). However, in 1933 Grau had felt differently, and “responded that America’s non-recognition policy was ‘a new type of intervention—intervention by inertia’” (Dallek, 64). In Robert Dallek’s view, “while the President rejected intervention in Cuba, he believed that pressing domestic need and preservation of the Good Neighbor idea required him to interfere in its affairs...though political interference...deprived Cuba of the freedom fully to decide its own political fate, it impressed Roosevelt as the best means to both immediate domestic and long-term foreign goals” (Dallek, 65).

Dallek also points out that Roosevelt’s idea of the Good Neighbor carried through diplomatically. He met with the Argentinian, Brazilian, Chilean, and Mexican envoys to discuss his decision about intervention in Cuba, making him “the first President in the nation’s history to discuss current United States policy in the Hemisphere with Latin diplomats...[and] he remained convinced that direct military involvement in Cuba would distract from pressing domestic concerns and all but destroy the Good Neighbor idea” (Dallek, 63).

See Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ Gellman makes clear the connections between the abrogation of the Platt Amendment’s policy of intervention and Cuba’s newly strengthened dependency on the U.S. economy: “This political alignment was closely associated with economic actions. The Eximbank loans, the Jones-Costigan Act, the lowering of the Cuban sugar tariff, and the reciprocal trade agreement have given authors reason to praise Roosevelt for his assistance in alleviating Cuba’s abysmal economic situation, but in fact, Cuba paid a tremendous price. *Signing the agreement damaged the island’s diversification program severely. The lowering of duties on 426 products from the mainland made Cuba even more dependent on American goods.* The Cuban government’s freedom to sign commercial treaties with other nations was also greatly impaired. Finally, the trade agreement helped to continue the status quo against any reformist alternatives” (Gellman, 120; my emphasis).

See Irwin F. Gellman, *Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Policy in Cuba, 1933-1945* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973).

Depression years and the ensuing European devastation was to increase further the dominant U.S. role in Latin American markets” (Schoulz, 305).¹⁵⁹

Twelve years after de Zayas’s radio address, the United States was only too happy to trade with Cuba, and expand its sphere of commercial influence over the island.

What scholars have failed to include in this story of changing hemispheric relations is the importance of a seemingly unrelated change in domestic broadcasting. Adding to the Treaty of Relations and the Reciprocal Trade Agreements in 1934 the U.S. Congress passed the Communications Act, which I discussed in chapter one, replacing the Federal Radio Commission with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Communications Act guaranteed the dominance of commercial radio and “opponents of corporate control were effectively barred from the air waves” (Soley, 37). The synergy between these three New Deal policies meant that U.S. military intervention in Cuba had been replaced with economic dependency, which translated into corporate cultural influence through the commercial airwaves. Cuba, which in 1931 had the second most licensed radio stations in the world, after the United States, became a major market for advertisers eager to sell the goods the Reciprocal Agreements were already encouraging.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the U.S. commercial influence could be heard in radio advertising aired during Cuban *radionovelas*. These advertisements, primarily from U.S. soap manufacturers who bought airtime to sell their household goods to the largely female and domestic audience that listened to the melodramatic afternoon programs, eventually lent their name to the genre of the “soap opera” (Salwen, “Origins,” 315).¹⁶¹ Thus we should consider the soap opera, or *radionovela* one of the major cultural products of the new relations produced by the 1934 decisions.

With the help of this new economic and cultural relationship, the island’s most popular stations, CMQ, founded in 1933, and RHC, which eventually became RHC-Cadena Azul, grew in influence during the 1930s. However, the stations expanded explosively only in the early 1940s, when the U.S. government encouraged broadcasters to find Latin American affiliates (CMQ became affiliated with NBC and RHC with CBS), and when the Mestre brothers, led by the youngest brother, Goar, took over CMQ through the money they had made distributing American products from Bestov Foods, and eventually General Foods, American Home

¹⁵⁹ Writing of the international importance of this economic policy, David Haglund points out that the Reciprocal Trade Agreements, established by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, were “considered an adequate solution to the problem of extrahemispheric economic incursions” in 1936, but Hull’s efforts “on behalf of free trade would later come under scathing attack from critics who feared that the Reciprocal Trade Agreements were an impotent response to the German challenge” (Haglund, 52; see also 47-48). See David Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

¹⁶⁰ Commenting on the growth of radio listeners worldwide, Soley writes, “In 1934, for example, there were 42 million radio receivers in the world. Only 100,000 of these were in Africa, 2 million in Asia, and 900,000 in Latin America. By 1949 there were 160 million receivers worldwide with 2 million in Africa, 8 million in Asia, and 6.5 million in Latin America. Radio penetration had grown quickly during World War II because it was an efficient, safe, and inexpensive method for obtaining information, which could be easily assessed for accuracy by comparing the information provided by one station...with that of another” (Soley, 17).

¹⁶¹ See Michael B. Salwen, “The Origins of CMQ: Pre-Castro Cuba’s Leading Radio Network” in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1993): 315-332.

For the definitive Cuban account of U.S. commercial influence and melodramatic radio programs see Reynaldo González, *Llorar es un placer* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1988).

Products, and Norwich Pharmaceutical (Salwen, “Origins,” 318).¹⁶² The principal inspiration behind the new CMQ, Goar Mestre, who received his business degree from Yale in 1936, only decided to purchase the station after he flew to New York in the summer of 1942 and met with the Mexican radio tycoon Emilio Azcárraga. Azcárraga, who he knew from hiring Mexican talent to appear on his clients’ radio spots in Cuba, had close ties to NBC, and suggested Mestre purchase an existing Cuban station (Salwen, “Origins,” 138).¹⁶³ By 1943 the Mestre brothers held a controlling interest in CMQ, which became the nation’s largest and most influential radio and television station by the time it was expropriated by Fidel Castro’s government in September of 1960.

The Radio Discourse of the Passions: Chibás, Castro, Guevara

One might assume that the radio revolution that arrived with the consolidation of Fidel Castro’s guerrillas in Cuba’s eastern mountain range of the Sierra Maestre in 1958 opposed CMQ’s commercial and sentimental content from the start. However, if Cuban historians and scholars Reynaldo González and, to a lesser extent, Oscar Luis López depict the pre-Revolutionary radio as mostly crass commercialism, the divisions between politics and melodrama were more like the studio glass at CMQ: *radionovela* celebrities could get distracted in their rehearsals while watching the leader of the political Ortodoxo Party Eduardo “Eddy” Chibás and his younger protégé Fidel Castro Ruz deliver their political denunciations of government corruption in the adjoining studio.¹⁶⁴ And the studio glass was two-way. Thus, Anke

¹⁶² Salwen observes that Goar’s initial interest in radio ownership came after RHC cancelled an advertising contract with him when the station realized they could make more money using the airtime for other purposes. Realizing that CMQ and RHC had monopolized the airwaves, Mestre decided that he and his brothers should take over financial control of one of the stations. They were able to do so only after joining with the advertising firm of Augusto Godoy, whose accounts included Pepsi Cola (Salwen, “Origins,” 318).

Salwen notes that “during the war years, RHC-Cadena Azul and CMQ together accounted for as much as 80% of the audience in Havana’s 30-plus station market” (“Origins,” 317). Regarding the stations’ North American affiliations, he writes, “The United States government encouraged American radio networks to establish Latin American affiliates to counter what it viewed as hostile Axis propaganda in the region. The American networks needed little encouragement. They went into pan-American broadcasting as much for profit as for patriotism...NBC and CBS, with 124 and 76 Latin American affiliates, respectively, led the way in pan-American broadcasting in 1941. Pan-American broadcasting turned out to be far less profitable than the American networks hoped” (Salwen, “Origins,” 316-317).

Howard Frederick points out that the U.S. began to counter Nazi radio propaganda to Latin America with the 1940 appointment of Nelson Rockefeller as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs: “President Roosevelt organized a collation of broadcasters to set up a government shortwave service to Latin America. By July 1941, *Business Week* reported that WRUL in Massachusetts was broadcasting 50 kilowatts to Latin America. It was put on the air with \$200,000 in contributions from the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), Westinghouse Corporation, and others ‘to counteract the deluge of shortwave propaganda emanating from Europe’” (Frederick, 16).

¹⁶³ Writing more generally about the commercial relationship between the United States and Cuba, Michael Chanan observes, “The island became an offshore testing laboratory for U.S. penetration of Latin American media markets from the end of World War I, a bridgehead for companies like ITT and RCA—the latter took to promoting Cuban music and radio productions throughout Central America, supported by advertising agencies that trained up Cuban artists and copywriters” (Chanan, 17). See Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁴ In an interview with Luis López the radio actress Sol Pinelli recalls working for one of Alejo Carpentier’s *Dramas de la guerra* programs at CMQ where the “studio, divided by an enormous glass window, which was next to us, allowed you to see what they were rehearsing or broadcasting on the other side. On more than one occasion, Carpentier had to call us, the actresses above all, to attention, because unconsciously we were all entertaining ourselves looking at the neighboring participants [*participantes vecinos*], whose broadcast started an hour before our

Birkenmaier describes “the contamination of political discourse by the *radionovela*’s emotional discourse,” and points to the political orator Eddy Chibás’s on-air suicide, and its legacy as the culmination of a process in which “the radio helped construct a passionate public narrative with which everyone could identify” (Birkenmaier, 209).¹⁶⁵ Everyone, but above all, Fidel Castro, who Birkenmaier suggests “found the antecedent for the Revolution’s passionate discourse” in Chibás’s own rhetorical flourishes over the radio (*ibid.*).

Chibás, who began his radio career as a supporter of former president Ramón Grau San Martín’s Auténtico Party, before establishing his own Ortodoxo Party on a platform of cleaning up corrupt Cuban governments, became Cuba’s most well known radio orator, denouncing real and imaginary corruption over the air for thirty minutes every Sunday evening from 1943 to 1951 (Thomas, ???). Often incensing the efficient minded business model of CMQ’s Goar Mestre for failing to pay for his program, and typically running past his allotted time, Chibás’s verbal attacks inspired the last democratically elected Cuban government to establish a “right to reply” law in 1950, which “permitted anyone personally attacked over radio to petition the Ministry of Communications for free air time on the offending station” (Salwen, “Book,” 73).¹⁶⁶ Compelled to supply more evidence behind his denunciations, a year later Chibás issued less than damning proof in documents accusing President Prio’s Minister of Education, Dr. Aureliano Sánchez Arango of embezzling funds (Salwen, “Book,” 75). On August 5, 1951, Chibás, his numbers down in the polls, and still stung by his critics’ responses to his accusation against Sánchez Arango, went on air and shot himself in the stomach towards the end of his program. However, in accordance with Goar Mestre’s stringent business model, learned from his time at Yale and NBC, the CMQ technicians cut Chibás off in mid-sentence, just before his gun went off (Salwen, “Book,” 75).¹⁶⁷ A victim of the marketer’s bottom line and his own belief in radio’s oratorical power, Chibás’s death marks a later stage in the neo-colonial radio relationship between Cuba and the United States, and a hinge to the anti-colonial project to come.

rehearsals. We knew about the enormous popularity and charisma of the space’s director, the leader of the Ortodoxo Party Dr. Eddy Chibás, who was often accompanied by a young revolutionary and student leader... Fidel Castro Ruz” (Luis López, “Carpentier,” 79).

See Oscar Luis López, *Alejo Carpentier y la Radio* (La Habana, Cuba: Letras Cubanas, 2003).

¹⁶⁵ See Anke Birkenmaier, *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006).

The link between sentimentalism and both Latin American politics and the struggle for racial equality in the 19th century Americas has been treated most recently in David Luis-Brown’s *Waves of Decolonization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008). Citing Nancy Armstrong, Elizabeth Barnes, Lauren Berlant, Ann Douglas, Juli Ellison, Arthur Riis, and Gillian Silverman, as well as primary documents from Harriet Beecher Stowe and Helen Hunt Jackson, Luis-Brown argues that as “sentimental melodrama” and “romantic racialism” travel from the U.S. and England to “politically contested zones of empire” they become the conflicted but politically persuasive means to imagine a more expansive community to contest colonial power. Among those influenced by sentimentalism, according to Luis-Brown, were WEB DuBois and José Martí, the latter of whom saw the US sentimental tradition as fundamental to moving towards what he called “Our America” (Nuestra América).

¹⁶⁶ Michael B. Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1994).

¹⁶⁷ According to the collective memoir of Radio Rebelde, these were the last words of Chibás on the CMQ: “¡Compañeros de la Ortodoxia, adelante! ¡Por la independencia económica, la libertad política y la justicia social! ¡A borrar a los ladrones del Gobierno! ¡Pueblo de Cuba, levántate y anda! ¡Pueblo cubano, despierta! ¡Este es mi último ALDABONAZO!” (7RR, 23).

Ricardo Martínez Vítores, *7RR: La Historia de Radio Rebelde* (La Habana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978).

Chibás's belief in radio's revolutionary potential to turn words and sounds into instant political change was not singular in Cuban history. In 1933 and 1957 rebels occupied radio stations and prematurely declared the respective governments' overthrow.¹⁶⁸ However, in his 1953 defense *La historia me absolverá* (History Will Absolve Me), delivered before the dictator Fulgencio Batista's military tribunal, Fidel Castro invokes and then departs from these antecedents. There he claims,

With only ten men I could have occupied a radio station and launched the *pueblo* into the fight. It wasn't possible to doubt their spirit [*ánimo*]; I had Eduardo Chibás's last speech from the CMQ, recorded in his own words...and I didn't want to make use of it, despite the desperation of our situation (Castro, 31).¹⁶⁹

From Castro's perspective, he turns away from Chibás's galvanizing address in order to defend the people. As he says, "We agreed not to take over any radio station...and our attitude saved the citizenry a river of blood" (Castro, 30).¹⁷⁰ Thus, the radio retains its capacity for instantaneous uprising, as it had for Chibás in his planned "live suicide," but precisely this power to fuse *armas y letras*, or weapons and words—the utopian belief of the twentieth century vanguardist movements—becomes, from Castro's perspective, an unnecessarily dangerous tool.

Radio's danger, for Castro, derives from its notorious disembodiment. As I have written elsewhere, Castro's entire defense in this speech belabors the importance of the *body in uniform* as necessary to his military *decorum*, which seeks to assure that his fellow revolutionaries are

¹⁶⁸ As Reynaldo González points out, "La agitación desde la radio tiene su climax en marzo de 1933, cuando se lanza una falsa noticia desde una emisora portátil: '¡Pueblo cubano, eres libre! ¡Ha caído la dictadura de Gerardo Machado!' 'La población habanera se lanzó a la calle, a celebrar el acontecimiento, y se produjo un lamentable disturbio'" (González, 93). In 1957, "armed groups belonging to the Directorio Revolucionario led by José Antonio Echeverría, together with some of Carlos Prio's *auténticos*, had launched an audacious daylight assault on the Presidential Palace, and temporarily seized the twenty-four-hour Radio Reloj station in Havana. But the assaults failed, and in the shoot-outs that ensued, over forty people had died" (Anderson, 246). See Jon Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).

As Hugh Thomas describes the scene, "Echeverría had captured the radio station and broadcast an excited message: 'People of Havana! The Revolution is in progress. The presidential palace has been taken by our forces and the Dictator has been executed in his den!' But after he had blown up the central control panel in the radio station, Echeverría was shot dead in the street by police" (Thomas, 929).

¹⁶⁹ See Fidel Castro, *La historia me absolverá* (Lima, Peru: Ediciones Futuro, 1961).

In this connection between radio waves and spontaneous revolution he is not far from Hans Ezensberger's provocative claim that "Revolutionary situations always bring with the *discontinuous, spontaneous changes* brought about by the masses in the existing aggregate of the media" (Ezensberger, 27; emphasis added). Castro's anxiety about such "discontinuous" change brought about by the masses through the media will find a compelling echo and transformation in the carefully staged choreography of media in the digital photograph. It should be no surprise that his investment in historical continuity would lead him to reject the radio here, as it is radio, the 'live' medium, that Denis Hollier, borrowing a term from Derrida's *Archive Fever*, names "*anarchival*" (Hollier, 19; emphasis in original).

See Hans Magnus Ezensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of Media" in *The Consciousness Industry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), pp. 95-128; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Denis Hollier, "The Death of Paper: A Radio Play" in *October* Vol. 78, Autumn, (1996): 3-20

¹⁷⁰ The belief that the recorded sound can propel the masses to draw blood recalls Friedrich Kittler's media chronology in which the radio derives from the phonograph, the medium from which Edison "found a way to transfer the functions of his ear to his sense of touch" (Kittler, 28), drawing blood with his voice as he touched the needle. See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999)

recognized as lawful combatants.¹⁷¹ In this context, his rejection of radio's *disembodied* voice to call out the non-uniformed *pueblo* from their homes bolsters his adherence to international law. And yet the effect is strange: Castro seems to say that a people's revolution must not be carried out by the people.

More precisely, Castro's speech retracts from the people's spirit [*ánimo*]. Without delving too far into the kind of hauntology that has come to typify post-structuralist accounts of radio as ghostly disembodiment, it is worth recognizing that Castro mutes Chibás's words because he fears that a voice from the past made to sound as if it lives in the present will overwhelm his own control.¹⁷² Playing Chibás's *recorded* voice over the radio's *live* transmission threatens to enact the leaderless animation of the *pueblo* that would undo his role.¹⁷³ Whether we read the *ánimo* as Birkenmaier's "passionate discourse," or a more particularly radiophonic affect, by April, 1958, encouraged by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Castro signed on to the idea of rebel radio as essential to the guerrilla warfare that would finally undo Cuba's economic dependency on the United States. What happened between 1953 and 1958 to changes his belief in radio as an appropriate tool for revolution?

Although sources remain scarce to help answer this question, we can recognize that a specific change in content became central to making radio revolutionary. As the radio became a major force in the rebels' guerrilla warfare tactics, Castro, Guevara, and lead propagandist Carlos Franqui debated what content best served political ends. If Castro had rejected the idea of playing Eddy Chibás's voice, what would they broadcast instead? Franqui recalls, "Despite [Castro's] intentions, I wouldn't let him put bad poetry nor even *radionovelas* on Radio Rebelde. If he accepted my decisions, it was because my work on Radio Rebelde was effective, and he was the first beneficiary" (Franqui, "Mito," 258). Elsewhere, adding to his criticism of Castro's taste, he writes that "back in the Sierra, Fidel had wanted us to broadcast scenes from the war on Radio Rebelde, while Che and I insisted reading poetry" (Franqui, "Portrait," 65).¹⁷⁴ In the

¹⁷¹ See Tom McEnaney, "The Digital Revolution? History, Photography, and the Body of Fidel Castro" in *La Habana Elegante*, no. 49 (Spring-Summer): 2011.

¹⁷² Allen S. Weis, Douglas Kahn, and even Birkenmaier's readings of Carpentier and Desnos's radio experiments in Paris are typical examples of this trend to hear radio as ghostly. While I tend to oppose this analytical method for failing to attend to the medium's materiality, I invoke it here because of Castro's own anxiety about bodies, history, and control. Derrida's *Specters of Marx* seems instructive in this case, and might help indicate why the *animus* represents an especially troubling concept for Castro's status as a commander intent on galvanizing a unified community: "the specters of Marx. Why this plural? Would there be more than one of them? *Plus d'un* [More than one / No more than one]: this can mean a crowd, if not masses, the horde, or society, or else some population of ghosts with or without a people, some community with or without a leader—but also the *less than one* of pure and simple dispersion. Without any possible gathering together. Then, if the specter is always animated by spirit, one wonders who would dare to speak of a spirit of Marx, or more serious still, of a spirit of Marxism. Not only in order to predict a future for them today, but to appeal even to their multiplicity, or more serious still, to their heterogeneity" (Derrida, 3).

See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

See Allen S. Weis, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), and *Experimental Sound and Radio*, ed. Allen S. Weiss (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001). See Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

For more on haunting and media more generally, see Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁷³ Thus, Denis Hollier's insistence on radio's "live" ontology as similar to the Derridean *anarchival* becomes complicated by this scene of mixed media.

¹⁷⁴ Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait with Fidel: A Memoir*. Trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Random House, 1984).

ongoing struggle to define the Revolution's history, Franqui, who invited Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and other cultural luminaries to the island, depicts Radio Rebelde's objective as disseminating Culture (poetry) to the populace, opposing melodramatic *radionovelas* and live-action battle scenes.

On the other hand, officially sanctioned memoirs of Radio Rebelde published in Cuba depict the scenes of war as a substitute for *radionovelas*, wherein the station's "*great novel* was the epic of challenging a tyrannical oligarchy defended by a professionally armed military supported and trained by the United States" (Santana, 7RR, 9; my emphasis). For these memoirists, Radio Rebelde, station 7RR served as a cultural corrective against the commercial stations' "low level of programming," their melodrama and "neocolonialist" imposition of "Yankee" shows:

The entire country (when I say *country* I mean *pueblo*), during the nighttime hours of Radio Rebelde's broadcast, turned their back on...the weepy radio novels to tune in to [*pegar su oído a*] that call of fiery Martinian sermon and absolutely honest news" (Santana, 7RR, 10).

Chibás's voice, "his last speech from CMQ," vanishes here in favor of a broader figure of politics and poetry—the passionate rhetoric of José Martí. Likewise, Martí's "fiery" language can now mask the passionate discourse inherited from the radio novel. In both Franqui's summation and that of the Revolution's record, the *radionovelas*, depicted as carriers for the virus of U.S. capitalism, encounter their antidote in Radio Rebelde's poetry or "honest news."

While these accounts tend to ignore the diversity of programs broadcast over the country's two major stations, they foreground how a central component of the rebel attack on Batista included a radio resistance to the economic dependency amplified by the Good Neighbor Policy's three seemingly unrelated decisions of 1934. Yet, in addition to these battles over radio's content, radio became a centerpiece to the specific tactics of resistance developed by Guevara in his handbook, *La guerra de guerrillas* (Guerrilla Warfare; 1961). Writing about radio as if it embodied the kind of promethean speech act we heard described by Ruttenburg in chapter one, and rejected by Castro in his 1953 defense, Guevara insists,

The propaganda that will be the most effective in spite of everything, that which will spread most freely over the whole national area to reach the reason and the sentiments of the people, is spoken words over the radio [*la oral por radio*]. The radio is a factor of extraordinary importance. At moments when war fever is more or less palpitating in every one in a region or a country, the inspiring, burning word increases this fever and communicates it to every one of the future combatants (Guevara, 137-138).¹⁷⁵

Radio, which does not require its users to be literate, can reach a larger audience, and allows the isolated rebel army "to speak directly to the Cuban people, bypassing its urban underground and other opposition groups that had previously served as interlocutors" (Soley and Nichols, 169).¹⁷⁶ The French journalist and media theorist, Régis Debray, who was arrested in Bolivia in 1967 for aiding Guevara's insurgency there, adds that radio allows the guerrillas "to play an ever larger

¹⁷⁵ Ernesto Che Guevara, *La Guerra de guerrillas* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985).

¹⁷⁶ Lawrence C. Soley and John S. Nichols, *Clandestine Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Revolutionary and Counterrevolutionary Electronic Communication* (New York: Prager, 1987).

role in the country's civilian life...Increasingly, everyone [in Cuba]—from Catholics to Communists—looked to the Sierra, tuned in [to Radio Rebelde] to get reliable news, to know ‘what to do’ and ‘where the action is.’ Clandestinity became public” (Debray, 108), and thus, “radio produces a qualitative change in the guerrilla movement” (109).¹⁷⁷ This “qualitative change” is known as Guevara's *foco* theory of revolution, in which

guerrillas comprise an elite revolutionary group (the *foco*) which stimulates opposition to the status quo among the relatively passive masses. The masses are inspired by the guerrillas' actions and would remain passive without them. Guerrillas use radio to direct the actions of the civilian opposition. Radio is an instrument by which guerrillas maintain leadership of civilian organizations even though they remain geographically remote from the cities and population” (Soley and Nichols, 14).¹⁷⁸

Thus, radio allows for a formal change in revolutionary armed struggle, based on the location of address, its massive oral transmission of messages, and its ability to translate this speech into massive direct action. The radio no longer becomes a means to speak directly to U.S. commercial concerns, but rather bypasses those corporate models, and speaks “directly to the Cuban people.” In other words, Rebel Radio becomes a specific corrective to de Zayas's inaugural broadcast in English.

The most powerful example of radio's importance for the Revolution came on the first official day of the Revolutionary calendar. As Fulgencio Batista fled the island on January 1, 1959, a group of military personnel attempted a coup d'état, which threatened to undo the rebels' claim to the government (Thomas, 1029). Radio Rebelde's directors, including Carlos Franqui, went on the air immediately, and asked other stations to link up with and rebroadcast 7RR's signal (Castro, “Rebelde,” 78). As Castro later recalled,

it was necessary to stop any illusion that the coup d'état could signal the triumph of the Revolution. It was necessary to alert the masses, to alert the *pueblo*. And in that moment Radio Rebelde played, I mean, carried out its last fundamental role in wartime. That was transmitting—in a chain, practically, with all of the other national stations—the instructions to stop the coup d'état (Castro, “Rebelde,” 14).

In a total reversal of his proclamation six years before against radio's address to the people, Fidel spoke the following message: “¡Revolución, sí; golpe militar, no!” (Anderson, 370). As a result, workers across the country declared a general strike, effectively rejecting any government not led by the rebels. Castro's radio call, issued from the eastern capital, Santiago de Cuba, linked the country's two main cities through a single voice. If Castro had followed Guevara's belief in

¹⁷⁷ Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*. Trans. Bobbye Ortiz (New York: MR Press, 1967).

¹⁷⁸ Recalling the station's military role, Fidel Castro says, “Through Radio Rebelde we communicated with the different fronts and columns. Thus, as a communications center it was supremely important for the military, in addition to having been an instrument of mass broadcasting that played a greatly transcendental political role during the entire war” (Castro, “Rebelde,” 13). See Fidel Castro, *Fidel en Radio Rebelde* (La Habana: Gente Nueva, 1979). Radio Rebelde also developed an international audience: “In May [1958], Jules Dubois, the *Chicago Tribune* correspondent, used Radio Rebelde's newly boosted transmitter links with the outside world to conduct an interview with Fidel from Caracas” (Anderson, 322).

radio's ability to speak directly to the people, he did so with his own voice, not a recording of Chibás's last words. This "qualitative change" in the guerrilla movement, from Chibás's jeremiads against the government, to Castro's turn against the radio, to his final praise, through Guevara, of the radio's power "to alert the *pueblo*" proves the previously vague claim that Castro's "passionate discourse" emerges from Chibás's own radio deliveries.

RADIO WARS

In the wake of Radio Rebelde's military success, which secured the rebel victory, and soon thereafter marked the end of commercial U.S. radio influence on the island (CMQ was taken over by the government in the spring of 1960), an information war began over the airwaves (Thomas, 1273-74).¹⁷⁹ With the covert help of the CIA, in 1960 Thomas Dudley Cabot, former President of United Fruit Company and ex-director of the State Department's Office of International Security Affairs, began using United Fruit's former relay station on Swan Island, off the coast of Honduras (Frederick, 6).¹⁸⁰ The station, dubbed Radio Swan, broadcast programs taped in Massachusetts from Pepita Rivera, a Cuban exile billed as 'Havana Rose', and rebroadcast signals from stations in Miami, including the instructions to Cuban dissidents during the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961 (ibid).¹⁸¹ With the invasion's failure, the U.S. propaganda station, Voice of America (VOA), increased its budget by \$3 million, expanding the Latin American service from six to twenty-two hours of daily Spanish and Portuguese broadcast in order to counter, in President Kennedy's words, "broadcasts from Havana...encouraging new revolution in the hemisphere" (Frederick, 17).¹⁸² With the eventual transmission of shortwave

¹⁷⁹ Thomas writes that after the closure of CMQ "The only effective vocal opposition to the government could now come from the old newspapers, *Diario de la Marina* and *Prensa Libre*, and from the pulpit, since Channel 12, the other big television network, was under a government intervener and since all the small radio stations had by force or intimidation been grouped together in a new government-inspired corporation ironically known as FIEL (*Frente Independiente de Emisoras Libres*), under the virulent-voiced commentator Pardo Llada" (Thomas, 1274).

Wryly pointing to the irony of this and subsequent transitions, Thomas describes the soundscape in Cuba in 1961: "In the streets the revolutionary songs still, almost continuously, blared from gramophones, and, above all the *Hymn of the 26 July*, still jingled to their seaside rhythm. One of the best known voices of the revolution, however, Pardo Llada, the chief of the radio and television corporation FIEL, nicknamed the 'Minister of Hate', defected to Mexico late in March, screaming 'betrayal' in the same voice as he had until then screamed 'imperialism'" (Thomas, 1343).

¹⁸⁰ Howard H. Frederick, *Cuban-American Radio Wars: Ideology in International Telecommunications* (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1986).

¹⁸¹ In the meantime, the Argentine journalist, activist, and crime writer Rodolfo Walsh had already decoded a cable from the head of the CIA in Guatemala informing Washington of the preparations carried out for the invasion of Cuba, including the Guatemalan training camps for the attack's mercenaries. Walsh, who was working for *Prensa Latina*, was given the mysterious coded cable by the news agency's director, Jorge Ricardo Masetti, deciphering the accidentally intercepted message in his apartment at the Focsa building in Havana. See Enrique Arrosagaray, *Rodolfo Walsh en Cuba: Agencia Prensa Latina, milicia, ron, y criptografía* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 2004).

¹⁸² Recognizing that shortwave transmissions could only reach the limited number of shortwave receivers in Cuba, Kennedy's Press Secretary, Pierre Salinger "devised a plan whereby a powerful network of American commercial AM stations from Florida and the Gulf could flood the Cuban AM band with American reports" (Frederick, 17). Ten stations volunteered their services, from Miami, Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and two shortwave stations in Scituate, Massachusetts and Redwood City, California (Frederick, 18). In addition, the U.S. established a 50-kilowatt transmitter at Tortuga in the Florida Keys, which was on the same frequency as WHO (AM) in Des Moines, Iowa, and another at Marathon, also in the Keys, which has been "interfering with WHAM [Rochester, NY] illegally for 19 years...in violation of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocations and international treaties.' Radio Marathon can be heard throughout Cuba and the Caribbean, and WHAM complains that Cuban jamming of that frequency interferes with its signal. The violation of international treaties referred to is the fact that

and medium wave (AM) broadcasts, the U.S. established simultaneous commercial and governmental broadcasts to Cuba.

Whatever the intended effect of these broadcasts, critics in Cuba and elsewhere have noted their failings. In an August 27, 1963 article in the Cuban newspaper *Revolución*, under the subtitle, “Bandera de Pirátas” (The Pirates’ Flag), the paper rails against the United States’s “Voice of America.” The writer bemoans the North American broadcasters’

pretension of paying homage to what they hate most. Those of the ‘voice’ read verses from different Cuban poets about their national flag. In the station’s mouth they sounded like insults. But the worst...was that, for the background music for those poems, they chose nothing less than pieces from the song, ‘Nena,’ from the movie, ‘El Último Cuplé’, played on guitar. Neither the movie, nor the song, nor anything else was Cuban.¹⁸³

Once again, the location of the address alters the words’ meaning. Cuban poetry spoken through the “Voice of America” sounds like an insult. Part of what alters the meaning is the soundtrack, which fails to acknowledge its distance from the poetry for nationalist listeners. If, on the one hand, the poetry is insulting for its Cubanness spoken in a foreign mouth, on the other, the music is insulting because its speakers fail to realize it’s not Cuban.

The cultural and national asymmetry that emerges in this instance of failed propaganda further complicates how words shift in meaning as they tote their cultural baggage with them across the ether. Citing the analytic philosopher C.L. Stevenson’s concept of “persuasive definitions,” according to which “a term changes its descriptive meaning without substantially changing its emotive meaning—the emotion that the term expresses,” Philo Washburn observes that

‘freedom’ on the VOA generally referred to personal liberties such as freedom of expression, assembly, and religion, while on [Radio Havana Cuba], ‘freedom’ generally referred to collective rights such as freedom from poverty and hunger and access to guaranteed housing, health care, and education (Washburn, 87).¹⁸⁴

What Washburn does not discuss is how the reception of a given message by a listener outside the intended ambit of the broadcast might inflect these terms with her own cultural formation. While the VOA and RHC broadcasters might share an “emotive meaning” with many listeners, and frame their terms toward specific semantic fields, the above example from *Revolución* makes clear that listening also transforms—reframes or redirects—the words’ at the site of reception.

Such semantic questions about the place of listening carry specific political weight as well. The proliferation of techniques and stations used on all sides to “win” the radio war often ran up against, and sometimes ignored national and international law. While the VOA’s charter forbids it from broadcasting within the United States, in order to prevent the government from “propagandizing” within the country, the Kennedy administration’s decision to use domestic AM

Radio Marathon was not reported to the International Frequency Registration Board, part of the International Telecommunication Union in Geneva until 1981” (Frederick, 18).

¹⁸³ “Bandera de Pirátas.” *Revolución*. 27 August 1963. Print

¹⁸⁴ Philo C. Washburn, *Broadcasting Propaganda* (London: Praeger, 1992).

stations to broadcast to Cuba has been seen by some to violate the law, as domestic listeners could tune in to programs intended for Cuba (Washburn, 39).¹⁸⁵

Indeed, as radio broadcasts leapt from Massachusetts to Miami to a Honduran island to Cuba, or from the Sierra Maestra to Caracas to Miami to Havana, national uprisings or bi-national wars became awash with hemispheric noise. Cuban station CMBL tried to block Dominican dictator Trujillo's Radio Caribe's rebroadcasts from the U.S. based Cuban Freedom Committee, Radio Budapest inadvertently interfered with Cuba's Radio Aeropuerto broadcasts to the U.S., and yet, Radio Havana Cuba's signal, established in early 1961, pestered Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, who complained "that he could hear accusations against him 'in my own home as if [Radio Havana Cuba] were installed in Managua'" (Frederick, 7-9).¹⁸⁶ When, in the summer of 1963, Cuba began the hemisphere's first electronic signal jamming with a device provided by the Soviet Union, it blocked VOA transmitters in the Florida Keys, Radio Swan, WGBS Miami, WMIE Miami, WKWF in Key West, and those stations in Florida, New Orleans, and the Dominican Republic broadcasting Illinois Democrat Roman Pucinski's aforementioned Cuban Freedom Committee programs (Frederick, 10-11). As early as May 19, 1959 Cuban newspaper *Revolución* depicted Castro's speech on agrarian reform as a battle won over the airwaves:

6:28 Violeta Casal identifies the station: 'Radio Rebelde here, and its Chain of Liberty from the heart of the Sierra Maestra.' 6:29 The reading of the Agrarian Law begins. Jorge Enrique and Violeta alternate: 'Regarding...' 6:31 Brief pause in order to change the fuel for the portable radio transmitter. 6:36 Renewed contact with La Plata. The reading resumes. 6:45 Interference. A speaker, in English. Possibly some Florida radio station... 8:45 Fidel begins: 'Certainly, the most common emotions invade one in these instants'. 9:00 Interference. Electronic noise. Mechanical roars. Noises. Sirens. But Fidel's voice conquers. He can be heard above the interference (*Revolución*, 12).¹⁸⁷

Staging the interference and distortion of the radio signal as a struggle against foreign influence ("A reader in English. Possibly some Florida station."), the speech's content falls away, replaced by the simple feat of transmission: "Fidel's voice conquers." The speech's purpose—to declare the law of agrarian reform that would strip U.S. businesses of their property in Cuba and deliver the land to the Cuban people—is heard in the non-semantic properties of the broadcast: the noise to signal ratio of Fidel's voice.

¹⁸⁵ The issue of officially intentional or unintentional domestic propaganda has remained relevant. For a more recent discussion regarding the United States involvement in Iraq, see David Barstow, "Two Inquiries Set on Pentagon Publicity Effort." *The New York Times*. 24 May 2008. Web. 27 May 2011.

¹⁸⁶ Frederick notes, "In the beginning, RHC's broadcasts were in Spanish and were repeated many times. In mid-evening, there were also broadcasts in English. Later, broadcasts were transmitted in French, Portuguese, Arabic, guarani, Quechua, and Creole. By 1963, 188 hours were transmitted per week. By the end of the year, RHC's weekly programming had reach 267 hours" (Frederick, 9). He adds, "by 1963, Cuba held fourth place among Communist international broadcasters in hours per week beamed abroad. By 1965, Cuba was broadcasting an estimated 160 hours per week to Latin America. Programming emphasized the coordination of revolutionary action programs. Relatively simple broadcasts were beamed in Creole to Haiti; guerrilla warfare manuals were read over the air" (Frederick, 10).

¹⁸⁷ Augilles Heel, "Radio y TV: Panorámicas." *Revolución*. 19 May 1959: 12. Print.

RADIO FREE DIXIE

Among the broadcasts involved in the radio war, the most explicit revision of the forked address by President de Zayas we heard at the beginning of this chapter, and inflected by the history of commercial broadcasting and Radio Rebelde, is Robert F. Williams's "Radio Free Dixie." As with the other transnational broadcasts I have discussed, Williams's program focuses on the place of his enunciation—Havana, Cuba—and the meaning that arises from this context for listeners in the United States. An African-American man advocating armed revolt against "racist white America," Williams' broadcasts recall the unevenness in the New Deal's project to imagine a people—a problem I highlighted in Richard Wright's work, and one he sought to address by emigrating to Paris, and filming *Native Son* in Argentina. With its first broadcast only a year after the Kennedy administration's revision of the Good Neighbor Policy under the name of "The Alliance for Progress", Williams's "Radio Free Dixie" speaks—in English—from Havana to the United States to reframe the political and ethical questions of the neighbor in a transnational field that similarly questions the status of the "foreign" in the policy of the Good Neighbor.¹⁸⁸

Commenting on his first visit to Havana in June of 1960, Williams, who self-identified as a "black inter-nationalist", recalled that a white reporter from the United States told him, "I had no business talking about the race problem over here and that I should do my talking at home" (quoted in Tyson, 225).¹⁸⁹ Williams, by this point, had been talking at home for years. As president of his local chapter of the NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina, he had spoken out

¹⁸⁸ Writing in the pages of his broadsheet *The Crusader* from Havana, Williams argued, "The only Alliance for Progress for the black man is a close alliance with the struggling peoples of South America, Asia, and Africa" (2). See Robert F. Williams, *The Crusader*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (August 1962): 1-8. In a later issue, he wrote, "The U.S. Government and the Ku Klux Klan's Alliance for Terror is becoming a menace to the entire world" (7). See *The Crusader*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 1962): 1-8.

For more on Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" see JF Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007), and F Rosen, *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Williams supposedly told Manuel Piñero, the Cuban rebel known as "Barbaroja" or "Red Beard," "What I propose is that the Revolution provide me with radio facilities for a regular program aimed at Black America" (Cohen, 209). Tyson writes, "Despite its range, Radio Free Dixie 'was aimed at the South, primarily,' [Williams] recounted, 'because the black people in the South didn't have any voice'" (Tyson, 287). Cohen adds that Williams, tuning in to Radio Havana Cuba from Monroe, told the visiting Bob Taber of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in 1960, "if the Cubans were to use some English in their long-wave programs, they'd be able to get through to millions of listeners in the United States who have ordinary receivers" (Cohen, 209). By 1963, FBI agents had tuned in to the program: "Reminding Hoover that state authorities in Alabama had complained about the program, the agents noted that Radio Free Dixie was 'directed to the Negroes in the southern part of the United States, calling upon the oppressed Negroes to rise and free themselves'" (Tyson, 287).

See Robert Carl Cohen, *Black Crusader: A Biography of Robert Franklin Williams* (Secaucus: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1972).

See Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹⁸⁹ Williams also recalls this comment in his remarks before the Bay Area Fair Play for Cuba Committee on 11 March 1961.

Williams's laid out a broad "inter-nationalist" position, writing in the first issue of *The Crusader* he published from Cuba that "We must be willing to join hands with forces throughout the world that are now fighting to rid the universe of the evil enemy that has plagued the Afro-American for so long in the racist U.S.A. We must realize that the people of Latin America, Asia and Africa are engaging the same enemy in the same liberation struggle" (2). Elsewhere in the same issue, criticizing the resistance to his platform of armed self-defense, he writes, "All of the passive morality in the world will not save [the Afro-American] if he fails to make friends on an international plane" (5). See Robert F. Williams, *The Crusader*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (April 1962): 1-8.

vehemently against the Ku Klux Klan, and since 1956 he published a broadside he named *The Crusader*, whose pages were dedicated to denouncing racism in the United States. Williams was most infamous for advocating and practicing armed resistance to racial oppression. As a supplement to the non-violent tactics officially supported by the NAACP and Martin Luther King Jr., Williams told the national press in 1959 that African-Americans must meet “violence with violence,” a position he formalized in his 1962 book, *Negroes with Guns*.¹⁹⁰ That book, which opens with the question, “Why do I write to you from exile?” was published in Cuba, where Williams fled in order to escape first a white mob in Monroe, and then the FBI, who were pursuing him on trumped-up charges of kidnapping a white couple.¹⁹¹ Thus, two years after the reporter had told Williams to do his talking at home, he found he could no longer speak from home. In exile in Cuba from 1962 to 1966, and then in Mao Tse-Tung’s China from 1966 to 1969, Williams finally returned to the United States at the end of the 1960s to advise the State Department on normalizing relations with China. Coming full circle, he now taught people at home how to talk “over there.”¹⁹²

Keeping in mind the reporter’s question, I want to ask once again what it means to speak from one place or another. Why does Williams’s place of enunciation anger his listener? What does it mean to speak *from* home as opposed to speaking *towards* home? How does the geopolitical context of an utterance alter the form and content of the utterance? Where does his address fit in the history of the policy of the Good Neighbor? In asking these questions, I also hope to come closer to understanding something more about the particularity of radio: the medium Williams embraced in Radio Free Dixie, and which allowed his voice in Cuba to emanate from speakers in living rooms, cars, and on park benches *inside* the United States.

In temporarily bridging the gulf between Havana and Monroe, Radio Free Dixie reversed the current of the Good Neighbor’s commercial influence, exporting music, literature, and culture to the United States. And yet, part of the program’s originality in the “radio wars” derives from Williams’ decision to broadcast in English, and his insistence on a program with musical content exclusively imported from the United States. The only English language program on Radio Progreso at the time, Radio Free Dixie did not attempt to export Afro-Cuban culture, nor explain to listeners the more varied and flexible racial categories in Cuba that departed from the

¹⁹⁰ Robert F. Williams, *Negroes With Guns* (New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1962).

¹⁹¹ While these charges were eventually dropped, four others were wrongfully charged and sentenced. Among them was Williams’s friend Mae Mallory, a single mother who was sentenced to sixteen to twenty years in prison (Cohen, 268). *The Crusader* featured repeated appeals for legal help with Mallory’s case. In one of these, under the headline “Hands Across the Mason-Dixon” Williams compares Ohio governor DiSalle’s decision to extradite Mallory to Monroe to the time of the fugitive slave law. He adds, “It is an indictment of American justice to have a Northern state collaborate with the South in a legal lynching. The Mallory case proves that even a Northern State like Ohio is not half as humane as integrated Cuba. Realizing how Fidel Castro feels about racial injustice, the racist U.s. Government has not even bothered to ask Cuba to return an Afro-American to North Carolina lynch justice” (3). See Robert F. Williams, *The Crusader*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (May 1962): 1-8.

¹⁹² Williams cabled Mao Tse-Tung, Algeria’s Ben Bella, Ghana’s Nkrumah, and Indonesia’s Sukarno in 1963, after the Birmingham church bombings, asking for a statement of support for African-Americans against the racist violence in the United States (Cohen, 250). Of the four, only Mao issued a statement, which Williams published in *The Crusader*’s 1964 special edition of October. For more on Williams’s time in China see Cohen, 253-266, 279-281, 319-330; Tyson, 294-296; Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution,” Fred Ho, “The Inspiration of Mao and the Chinese Revolution on the Black Liberation Movement and the Asian Movement on the East Coast,” and Diane C. Fujino, “The Black Liberation Movement and Japanese American Activism: The Radical Activism of Richard Aoki and Yuri Kochiyama” in *Afro-Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, eds. Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

simple binary distinction between “black” and “white” operative in the U.S.¹⁹³ Instead, explicitly directed at the audience of “Black America,” Williams sought to export U.S. culture back to the U.S. Whereas forty years earlier de Zayas addressed himself in English to U.S. listeners recognizing Cuba’s place in the United States’ commercial sphere of influence [*radio de acción*], Williams spoke in English to inspire radio action, to propagandize on behalf of an African-American revolution in the United States, and provide an oral and musical soundtrack to the ongoing civil rights movement.

Such a project poses particular problems for theories of transnational cultural exchange intent to depict hybridity in race or language as the apex of progressive politics. Radio Free Dixie’s broadcasts do not resist racial binaries, and they flatly ignore the potential “translation zone” comprising the Caribbean and the southern United States.¹⁹⁴ Instead, Williams’s somewhat opportunistic use of Radio Progreso recalls the earlier colonial and neo-colonial period in Cuban history, wherein the United States included Cuba as part of its territory.¹⁹⁵ Invoking that period of Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders,” Amy Kaplan writes that “the links between disenfranchisement in occupied Cuba and the Jim Crow South point to imperialism as the *exporter of the domestic color line* and recontextualize racism at home [in the United States] as part of a global imperial strategy of rule” (Kaplan, 138; emphasis added). In a strange sense, Williams takes this previous imperial model and, due to the Revolution’s own successes, inverts it. Precisely the geographic proximity between Cuba and the United States, and the political imbrication of the two countries, generates the anti-colonial power behind the station’s slogan: “You are tuned to Radio Free Dixie, from Havana, Cuba, where integration is an accomplished fact” (quoted in Tyson, 286). Through the radio wavelength, Williams stretches Dixie to Havana, and the wireless imaginatively snaps the color line, erasing its inevitability. He restores the

¹⁹³ Writing about the literary exchanges between Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, and the cultural climate in which they occurred, Vera Kutzinski writes, “In the postwar US, a cultural and political environment still steeped in racial binarisms and anxieties about intermarriage--this is still well before the last antimiscegenation law was repealed in Virginia -the very idea of conceding, let alone celebrating, the impact of racial mixing on the national culture would have been anathema to prevailing social sensibilities on both sides of the color line” (Kutzinski, 124). See Vera Kutzinski, “Fearful Asymmetries: Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, and ‘Cuba Libre’” in *Diacritics*, Vol. 34, No. ¾ (Autumn-Winter, 2004): 112-142.

¹⁹⁴ Emily Apter defines a “translation zone” as “a linguistic hot spot,” similar to a “military zone,” and, ultimately, “a translation no-fly zone, an area of border trouble where the lines diving discrete languages are muddy and disputatious; where linguistic separatism is enforced by high surveillance missions; or where misfired, off-kilter semantic missiles are beached or disabled” (Apter, 69). Linking translation to black internationalism, and what he names, “the practice of diaspora,” Brent Hayes-Edwards writes, “Diaspora is a term that marks the ways that internationalism is pursued by translation” (Hayes-Edwards, 11). As I have already written, Williams does not make translation, whether from dialect to dialect, or major language to major language, part of his political platform. Although he played his friend Langston Hughes’s spoken-word pieces on his radio program, the broadcast eschewed dialect. Uninterested in Hughes’s translations of Nicolás Guillén, Williams did not confront the racial politics Kutzinski describes inhered in the translation of the Spanish word “negro,” for instance (Kutzinski, 115). Nor did he seek to broadcast translations of other authors from Cuba, Martinique, or any of the African nations. However, the pages of *The Crusader* did include translations of Fidel Castro’s speeches, and telegrams from Mao Tse-Tung, and Chinese and Vietnamese school children.

See Emily Apter, “Balkan Babel: Translation Zones, Military Zones” in *Public Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter 2001): 65-80. See Brent Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁹⁵ Amy Kaplan and David Luis-Brown describe, in different ways, how cultural production intertwined the two countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kaplan, in particular, demonstrates how the “domestic” and “imperial” spheres of U.S. government and private life influenced each other. See Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire: In the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

dialectical relationship wherein Cuba's place in the U.S. sphere of influence places the United States under Cuba's sphere of influence. For listeners in Monroe or Montgomery or elsewhere in the South, Radio Free Dixie was not a utopian fantasy: it came from a real island, and spoke through an embodied voice too close to home to be ignored.

Broadcasting from his anti-colonial outpost, Williams borrowed from the legacy of radio along the U.S.—Mexican border, playing music without paying heed to sponsors or censors.¹⁹⁶ In *The Crusader's* first advertisement for the program, Williams wrote,

The object of 'Radio Free Dixie' is to create a better understanding of the Afro-American problem in the USA, and to expose the true nature of U.S. Racism. The program will consist of Jazz, Afro-American Folklore, news, interviews and commentary. This will be the first completely free radio voice that black people have had to air their case against brutal racial oppression (5).

While Williams and his wife Mabel read news about racial violence in the U.S. and editorials from *The Crusader*, or the black nationalist theologian, the Reverend Albert B. Cleage Jr., they used music, specifically the "new jazz" of Max Roach and Ornette Coleman, as well as soul music from Curtis Mayfield, Nina Simone, and Sam Cooke "to create 'a new psychological concept of propaganda' by combining 'the type of music people could feel, that would motivate them.' He envisioned 'something similar to what is used in the churches—[in] the "sanctified church," there is a certain emotion that people reach'" (Tyson, 288). Advertising in *The Crusader* for "jazz, Dixieland, folk-music and recordings of the current protest movement in the South" (6), and receiving records from friends such as Amiri Baraka, Richard Gibson, and William Worthy, Radio Free Dixie was able to broadcast "the anthems of the Southern movement" (Tyson, 288).¹⁹⁷ With a keen understanding of radio's unique capacity to balance words and music, political commentary about African American life throughout the United States and the musical revolution led by African American musicians, Williams helped provide the soundtrack for civil rights.

As the "new music" changes, so too did Radio Free Dixie's own mode of address. In a January 21, 1966 broadcast, Robert Williams's wife and co-producer Mabel Williams praised "hep" jazz and rock musicians. Repeatedly comparing the music of "socially conscious rock n rollers" to "their forefathers spirituals," she exalted the musicians' "crying and moaning," as "symbolic of the frustrated black souls who labor and suffer in racist white America. [These

¹⁹⁶ The first notice for Radio Free Dixie appeared in the pages of *The Crusader's* August 1962 edition, and stated, "This will be the first completely free radio voice that black people have had to air their case against brutal racial oppression." (5). See Williams, *The Crusader*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (August 1962): 1-8. Speaking of Radio Free Dixie, Williams claimed, "This was really the first true radio where the black people could say what they want to say and they didn't have to worry about sponsors, they didn't have to worry about censors" (quoted in Tyson, 287-288). For more on the Mexican—U.S. history of border radio see Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio* (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1987).

Brian Ward points out, "the two most militant black voices regularly heard on radio in the South during the late 1950s and early 1960s emanated from outside the country. The Black Muslims weekly *Muhammed Speaks* shows covered much of the United States, thanks to a 250,000—watt transmitter at XERF in northern Mexico. The proto-black power *Radio Free Dixie* programs produced by North Carolina's controversial NAAACP leader and armed-self-reliance advocate Robert Williams were beamed in from Cuba" (Ward, 124). See Brian Ward, *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2004).

¹⁹⁷ The advertisement for records was framed by images of undulating "radio waves," and repeated "S.O.S." signals, and asked readers to send their records to an address in Canada, which sent them on to Williams around the U.S. blockade to Cuba. See *The Crusader*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 1962): 1-8.

musicians]” she went on, “are becoming the epic force of the Afro-American revolt... These new cats are no slackers. We are tuned in to their wavelength and we dig them plenty.”¹⁹⁸ Juxtaposing political speech and music, the Williams’s joined fellow African-American DJs who, as historian William Barlow argues, “were instrumental in popularizing the new soul music [of Nina Simone, Sam Cooke, Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, and others]... As a result, *soul music became a race-coded soundtrack for the assault on Jim Crow*, and black appeal radio became an important means of spreading the civil rights message” (204; emphasis added).¹⁹⁹ Broadening the audience for this music through his 50,000-watt transmitter at Radio Progreso, Williams reached listeners, both black and white, as far away as Los Angeles and Saskatchewan, Canada.²⁰⁰ With the ability to circumvent the censors, Williams effectively altered the soundscape in the United States, changing what could and could not be said, and framing his musical content with political speeches so that each reverberated in the other. To borrow from the sound scholar Jennifer Stover-Ackerman, we can say that Williams’ broadcasts changed “the sonic color-line.”²⁰¹

However, it was precisely this music that contributed to Williams’s departure from Havana. Early in Radio Free Dixie’s development, the head of the CMCA English-language station initially opposed Williams’s insistence on jazz as “decadent imperialist noise” (Cohen, 211). Although Castro approved Williams’s program, he came under fire again for publishing an article in the Cuban magazine *Bohemia*, where he distinguished jazz from swing, writing that “jazz is the music of the Black people of America... and it’s an insult to call it decadent” (quoted in Cohen, 215). Williams’s interest in jazz, and his refusal to advocate Socialism in his broadcasts—Williams never enlisted in the Communist party, and included the line, “printed as a private publication in Cuba” in every issue of *The Crusader*—further distanced him from the increasingly dogmatic communist line in Cuba.²⁰² As Cohen, Tyson, and Thomas all agree, Williams left Havana for Mao’s China because he felt alienated by communist ideology, and the insistence on subjugating the African American struggle against “racist white America” to the issues of class revolution. By 1966, he departed Cuba, and never returned.

The Ant Killers: *The Experimental Aesthetics of Anti-Colonial Radio*

“Los que debían de leerme, que son los cubanos, no me conocen ni me pueden leer”—Severo Sarduy²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ This quote is taken from a recording of the broadcast available on the website for the Public Broadcasting System’s documentary, *Negroes with Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power*. Independent Lens. Web. 3 May 2011.

¹⁹⁹ William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

²⁰⁰ “What surprised Williams most of all was [sic] the letters from White Southerners who said they were happy someone had the courage to tell the truth about what was going on in the United States” (Cohen, 212).

Ward notes the importance radio programs like Williams’s played in shifting the political landscape through the soundscape: “By helping to publicize the goals and methods of the early movement beyond Dixie, radio contributed to a national process of legitimization that by 1965 had persuaded even some southern stations to allow pro-civil rights programming” (Ward, 124).

²⁰¹ Jennifer Stover-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar *Nueva York*” in *Social Text*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 2010): 59-85.

²⁰² In the October-November, 1962 edition of *The Crusader*, Williams writes, that his pamphlet “has no political affiliation and does not reflect any official policy. It is printed in Cuba by workers who want to help the Afroamerican struggle in the racist USA... It is not a project sponsored by the Cuban Government, therefore, the workers themselves make its continued publication possible... THE CRUSADER enjoys a freedom of the press that the racists of the USA could never bring themselves to tolerate” (1).

²⁰³ Severo Sarduy, “Para una biografía pulverizada en el número de *Quimera*” in *Obra Completa: Tomo 1*, eds. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl (Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, 1999): 13.

(The Cubans, who should be reading me, don't know me, and can't read me.)

A year before Williams left Cuba, already frustrated with the CPUSA's antagonism toward Radio Free Dixie and the case for African-American civil rights in the United States, he began to harbor suspicions that Che Guevara had been forced out of Cuba due to his own struggle with Communist Party leaders. In fact, Guevara had traveled to the Congo (Zaire) under a false passport, and from April 24, 1965 until just November 1965, he attempted to aid in the guerrilla struggle there. However, Williams's frustration and Che's clandestine mission were actually interrelated. As Piero Gleijeses puts it, in their struggle against the United States,

The Cubans...were not suicidal...They gave moral support to radical African American groups, but were careful not to provide them any material assistance, and certainly not military training. The Cubans tried to avoid the lion's jaw. They responded to the U.S. challenge, instead, in the Third World. In the years immediately after the revolution, Cuba had focused on aiding rebels in Latin America. By 1965, however, its attention had shifted to Africa (Gleijeses, 98).²⁰⁴

Although Guevara's attempt to establish a guerrilla column in the Congo largely failed, Cuban fighters and doctors who had worked alongside Guevara were the only foreigners who participated in the successful independence movement of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) in their fight against the Portuguese in Guinea Bissau beginning in May of 1966, and ending in 1974.²⁰⁵ By July of 1975, the Cubans had moved on to Angola to help the MPLA (The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) in their struggle against the Portuguese colonialists and the opposing rebel groups, the U.S. funded UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola). Africa, in particular those guerrillas fighting for independence from Portugal, became the focus of Cuban military aid, and the site for exporting revolution.

With this history in mind, we can hear the Cuban born experimental author Severo Sarduy's radio play, *Los matadores de hormigas* (The Ant Killers; 1978), about the use of radio during the end of the colonial struggle in Angola, as equally concerned with the legacy of Cuban rebels, and rebel radio. Told in five acts or "sequences," the play, originally broadcast in translation over French radio, recalls the early days of the Cuban revolution, and the visits by international intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, as it satirizes a group of "revolutionary tourists" from Germany who seek out "free love" in a Portugal under siege by guerrillas. Additionally, we hear four other Germans, played by the same actors, take photographs in Angola, and two Portuguese soldiers, also voiced by some of the same actors, abandon their outpost in Angola. While the first tourists crash their car in Sequence One, the soldiers, recently

²⁰⁴ Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

²⁰⁵ See Gleijeses, 185-213. The PAIGC almost accepted African American fighters as well. Gleijeses reports that the Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael went to Cuba in June of 1967 and "told his Cuban hosts that he wanted African Americans to fight alongside the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau to stress their solidarity with Africa and to atone for their participation in the war of aggression against Vietnam" (193). The PAIGC leader Amílcar Cabral met with Carmichael in Conakry at the Cubans behest, as long as the fighters were trained in another country. Nyerere in Tanzania agreed to allow the men to train there, but Carmichael then "met the South African singer Miriam Makeba, and his plans changed. 'He dropped us!' Dreke remarked. He married Makeba, became a citizen of Guinea, and settled down" (193-194).

returned from Angola in Sequence Five, drive them to a rental car service, and, in the play's final scene, the tourists find themselves stopped by Portuguese rebels who have occupied the Salazar bridge entering into Lisbon. For Sarduy, who left Cuba in 1960 on an art scholarship to study painting in France, and never returned because of the Revolution's persecution of homosexuals and experimental artists—he identified with both groups—, this oblique connection between the Cuban revolutionary project and Angola's independence mirrors Cuba's cold war decision to involve itself in Angola: unable to attack Cuba head on, Sarduy turned his sights to Angola.

Indeed, Sarduy's play shows little interest in Angola itself. Although we hear music from Portugal's former colonies, we never hear the voice of an Angolan. The independence movement arrives via radio newscasts within the play's diegetic narrative. The photographers only take snapshots of zebras, whose stripes, through the colored lens, become the green and red stripes of the Portuguese flag (Sarduy, 1087).²⁰⁶ As is typical in much of Sarduy's work, the densely mediated encounter with the countries, filtered through magazines and tourist brochures, produces an artificial landscape described as “acrylic. And superimposed, glued on, cut out, excessively clear, a canvas with lists of colors slowly unfolding themselves, like a flower in slow motion (*caméra lenta*)” (1079). However, the most ubiquitous reference to media is to the radio itself. In corner stores, in cars, at military barracks, on jungle paths, the radio blares out with music and news of the independence movements.

The play's investment in the radio derives from its own conditions of production, the lasting influence of Cuban rebel radio in international guerrilla movements, and the importance Sarduy lends to writing as a practice of listening. Discussing the connections between his own professional work on French radio and his literary production in a 1985 article, “I'm A Present Day Electronic Joan of Arc,” Sarduy writes, “I earn my living as a radio journalist, on French International Radio. However, not only the radio broadcasts, but rather everything that I write is suitable for broadcast, is *essentially vocal*” (Sarduy, 30).²⁰⁷ Writing “for the voice” (to name the collection in which *The Ant Killers* was first published), Sarduy has to learn to listen. Comparing himself to Joan of Arc (“Like the warrior saint, I hear voices”), he describes how his writing practice derives from a listening practice, and claims, “I don't write for anything but those voices... Everything is already ‘said’ from the beginning. There is no other beginning necessary than listening” (Sarduy, 30). This emphasis on the voice might seem odd for readers familiar with the decadent visual vocabulary of Sarduy's essays in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (Written On / About A Body), and he acknowledges as much: “The radio writing is a consequence, the result of an initial listening [*una escucha inicial*]. But one could ask me: Why the voice, and not the image, for example?” (Sarduy, 30). He answers this question by praising the “erotics” of the voice. Recalling how he and Roland Barthes “explored the labyrinth of many voices... from their nocturnal echoes in some little plaza in Tangier,” he glosses Barthes' idea of “the grain of the voice” as “a texture, an intonation, a bumpiness [*rugosidad*], a timbre, an accent [*un deje*]: something that unites the body with something else, that at the same time centers it, motivates it

²⁰⁶ See Severo Sarduy, *Los matadores de hormigas* in *Obra Completa: Tomo II*, eds. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl (Madrid: Galaxi Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, 1999): 1077-1093. All translations from the play are mine, although I have consulted Philip Barnard's excellent translation, “The Ant Killers” in *For Voice* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1985): 111-136.

²⁰⁷ See Severo Sarduy, “Soy una Juana de Arco electrónica, actual” in *Obra Completa: Tomo I*, eds. Gustavo Guerrero and François Wahl (Madrid: Galaxi Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, 1999): 30-31.

and transcends it” (Sarduy, 30).²⁰⁸ In this listening, the sounds that make up a voice function like a hinge between the body and some other space beyond corporeality.

However, in the introductory note that accompanies *The Ant Killers* we find that this hinge has been obliterated. Voice, especially the radio voice, in this play, will liberate the body: “*The Ant Killers* is a text about decolonization: of territories and bodies” (1077). The radio newscasts I mentioned earlier, “become embodied, introducing themselves among the others and marginalizing them” (ibid). And yet, in praise of the acousmatic, voices no longer connect with bodies, “what one person says could be said, in the end, by another. The voice is not an indicator of a psychology or a personality” (ibid). Borrowing from Guevara’s *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare, and Franz Fanon’s writing on radio in the Algerian revolution, Sarduy sets out to create an experimental guerrilla aesthetics for radio drama.²⁰⁹ Although my reading will complicate this theory, the play’s ubiquitous radios, and the narrative use of multiple speakers to voice single strips of discourse, harness broadcast’s fantasy of the disembodied voice to challenge personal, national, and imperial boundaries.

However, while radios overpopulate this play, they do not turn *The Ant Killers* into the kind of self-reflexive hall-of-mirrors Sarduy associates with his friend Manuel Puig’s novels. Instead, the medium appears as a kind of relay-station between the play’s different sequences. For instance, if we hear a song hummed in one section, we find it broadcast in the next. An event, like the car crash, occurs in “Sequence One,” and becomes part of a news broadcast in “Sequence Three.” Attentive to this repetition, the listener learns to link the events and understand their correlation. In this way, the play’s narrative structure succeeds in interpolating listeners into the radio’s colonial role. Similar to the way we saw Dos Passos’ repetition of discursive strips help him create *USA* as both “a radio network” and “the voice of the people,” forging these connections between a sequence in Lisbon and another in Angola imitates the ways in which the radio sustains the empire’s contact with its colonies.

On the other hand, the radio also fulfills an anti-colonial role through the narrative’s use of musical and sonic sequencing. As I just mentioned, in Sequence One a character hums the French singer Michel Delpech’s ballad, *Ça ira / Que Marianne était jolie* (1080). At the end of Sequence Two, a different voice (identified as man two), which we also heard in Sequence One, describes the sound of a car crash, and then “A song on the radio, in French. (*He more-or-less hums the song Ça ira*)” (1083). However, only at the end of Sequence Three, after the voice of “man one,” who originally hummed the song in Sequence One, takes on the voice of a radio newscaster to report a car accident near the Portuguese town of Almancil, do we hear the song included in the play’s “sonorous elements” in the following sequence: [1] “Music from Guinea

²⁰⁸ Notably, the voices he identifies here, and elsewhere in the essay, are voices that come from somewhere else: Tangier, a female African-American singer (“her voice was ‘whitening’ [*blanqueando*]... very close to a *degree zero of the voice*”), another female singer from Bahía in Brazil (“the noise of the Earth...the sound of my land”), and a journalist from the Canary Islands (“the voice of the islands...with its hot and ashy stratus”). The voice’s “grain,” the material difference or “bumpiness” that derives from tone, accent, and timbre attaches to bodies by means of their ability to carry with them some residue of “earthiness.” Perhaps embarrassed by the simple exoticized desire he expresses in listening to these voices, which he names only reluctantly, Sarduy warns his reader that it would be better if “each listener...could imagine them [*fantasmarlas*], and embody them [*encarnarlas*] in the body [*el cuerpo*] that they wanted” (Sarduy, 31). However, this fantasy only furthers the exotic eros Sarduy attaches to the voice. See Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977): 179-189.

²⁰⁹ See Frantz Fanon, “Ici la voix de l’Algérie...” in *L’an V de la Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1962), 57-88.

Bissau,” [3] “A Car Braking,” [5] “A public meeting or demonstration,” [6] “Michel Delpech’s song *Ça ira*,” [4] “Music from Angola,” [2] “Music from Mozambique” (1085). Whereas the mere repetition of the events that I described in the previous paragraph helps imitate the consolidation of the empire, the sequence here and those later on in the narrative’s development are intended to enact a kind of sonic “decolonization.” As Sarduy explains in his note, “the basic [sonic] elements—the music from Portugal’s former colonies—continually accept other sounds into their interior, which progressively push them towards the edges of the page, and of our hearing” (1077).

Numbering each of the play’s sonorous elements, he represents the above scene as [1] [2] [5] [6] [4] [5] [2]. While the first sequence includes only [1] [2], the second is [1] [3] [2], and the last of this grouping is the large series just mentioned, in which the music of Guinea Bissau [1], and that of Mozambique [2], has been displaced by a car’s brakes, demonstrations, and the French song. In bringing together the soundscapes of Portugal’s current and former colonies through the radio, the play points to the radio’s colonial force in managing the far off territories of empire, as well as a possible network or constellation of anti-imperial sounds returned to deterritorialize Portuguese culture. The radio, in this case, becomes a portal open to the dialectical movement between empire and colony, imperialism and anti-colonial struggle, a doorway through which a far off event, such as the car crash, can make its way into the listeners’ experience.

Although Sarduy intends this sonic marginalization to aurally represent the anti-colonial process, its effect is ambiguous at best. Other anti-colonial models, such as Franz Fanon’s analysis of radio in the Algerian revolution, argue that rebel radio becomes audible to the population when the rebels offer programming audibly different from the colonial programs’ emphasis on the empire’s music and culture. Even if we read Fanon’s essay in line with Brian Edwards’s interpretation, wherein Fanon’s own writing imitates the rebel radio signal and “decolonizes” French by employing Arabic words, or French terms with Arabic etymologies, we would expect that Sarduy would place Portuguese music as the “basic sonorous elements,” and marginalize them to the “edges of our hearing.”²¹⁰

Of course, we can also read / listen against the grain of Sarduy’s self-analysis, and hear the music on the edges actually containing those sounds that come between them. In this case, the empire falls into the fold of the former colonies. One selection in the second series, however, complicates even this hearing. Billie Holiday’s *Lady In Satin* first appears in the play when “man one” in sequence Two says that the “ant killers,” young Portuguese men camped out in the scrubland outside of Lisbon, “knew *Lady In Satin* by heart and sang it with exaggerated ‘ch’” (1082). Not until sequence Five, just as we transition from the tourists to the stories from Portuguese soldiers in Angola, does Holliday’s album enter into one of the “sonorous elements” breaks in the play, sandwiched between music from Brazil, Goa, Portugal, and the sound of African birds (1089). Why do we encounter the music from the great jazz vocalist from the United States in this play about decolonizing Angola? We hear the album twice more: at the end of the sequence, and at the end of the play. In those moments Portuguese music precedes it, and *Lady Day* is followed by the play’s first sentence: “It takes place in Portugal” (1079). What does it mean to hear Billie Holiday’s voice in this context? Does it carry the same resonance as when Robert Williams played it for listeners in the United States in his broadcasts from Cuba? Should

²¹⁰ See Brian Edwards, “Fanon’s *al-Jazáir*, or Algeria Translated” in *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2002), 99-115, and John Mowitt, “Breaking up Fanon’s Voice,” in Anthony C. Allesandrini, ed., *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Holiday become just another “foreign” popular singer, like Michel Delpech in the play’s first half?²¹¹ Perhaps in hearing this album out of context it becomes easier to hear how Sarduy’s sonic “decolonization” works.

On the one hand, Billie Holiday’s inclusion participates in the disruption of the Euro-African political and cultural field shaped by the sonorous elements in the first half of this play on French radio about Angola’s independence movement and the collapse of the Portuguese empire. Already by including music from Goa and Brazil in the play’s second grouping of “sonorous elements,” Sarduy breaks with the westward flow of slavery, reminding listeners that the Portuguese slave trade moved towards India, as well as the Americas. In this context, the familiar tendency to hear Holiday’s voice on French radio as another example of the ongoing movement of the “black Atlantic” is disrupted, and similarly disorients the listener expecting to hear more music from former Portuguese colonies.²¹² Holiday’s voice trails off here in different directions. The context asks us to hear in her voice the echo of that trail of bodies—recalling that the slave trade extended far beyond Portugal’s imperial desires—and the potent protest against racial hatred most famously rendered in her version of “Strange Fruit.” The personal ruin, audible in *Lady In Satin* (1958), the last of her recordings she heard released, would stand in for the historical suffering of an entire mass of peoples.²¹³

And yet, even as Holiday’s voice might resound here as part of Robert Williams’s work on Radio Free Dixie, connected to a larger moment of black internationalism that we hear in the

²¹¹ Commenting on Delpech’s song as it plays over the speakers from a bar at a Portuguese port near Faro in sequence one, “women one” says, “It was a French song, with astute references to the revolution” (1080). The quoted lyrics include these lines: “Oh, Marianne was so pretty / when she sang from the rooftops / It will be fine, it will be fine” (1080). The reference to “Marianne,” the symbolic name for the French Republic, and the expression “ça ira” (it will be fine), which references the song “Ah, ça ira” popular during the French revolution, encode revolutionary sentiment into the play’s soundscape. It is a song whose message seems more directed to the French radio audience than the German, Portuguese, and Angolan characters in the play.

The song’s reference recalls how songs functioned as hidden signals during the civil rights movement, and in anti-colonial wars. An impressively direct musical “encoding” occurred during the 1963 Birmingham civil rights demonstrations, where the local gospel show host, the Reverend Erskine Fausch, converted one song into an actual marching order. In order to confuse Bull Connor’s police force, which had placed barricades around the city to prevent marchers from organizing, young activists were positioned with portable radios in basements throughout Birmingham. When Fausch played the song “All Men Are Made By God,” the marchers emerged from en masse, and from all different directions (Barlow, 207-208). This kind of large-scale mobilization through radio and social networking embodied the promise Williams claimed for radio.

²¹² In fact, Sarduy’s inclusion of music from Goa and Brazil to frame the sequence goes far beyond the limited category of the “black Atlantic.” From the middle half of the sixteenth century until 1752 Portuguese colonizers referenced the “Estado da Índia Portuguesa,” or the “State of Portuguese India” to include imperial possessions from Southern Africa to Southeast Asia, including Goa and Mozambique. Portuguese colonists also employed African slaves in Goa, thus forcing the current of the “black Atlantic” to run eastwards as well. Geographically, Goa and Brazil “frame” Africa, indicating the two directions toward which African slaves were displaced by the Portuguese empire.

There is a large amount of literature in “Atlantic studies,” much of it responding to John Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

For a critique of Gilroy’s frame of reference in defining the black Atlantic, see Yogita Goyal, “Theorizing Africa in Black Diaspora Studies: Caryl Phillips’ *Crossing the River*” in *Diaspora*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2003): 5-38.

²¹³ Whatever bodily history we might want to hear in Holliday’s voice should not forget the important role the microphone played in making the intense intimacy of her delivery audible. See Murray Horowitz, interview with A.B. Spellman, “Billie Holliday: ‘Lady In Satin’” on *National Public Radio*, August 1, 2001. Web. Accessed 15 May 2011.

For more on the importance of recording in developing singing style, see Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

play's radio broadcasts of the Angolan independence movement, it also points to a commercial empire outside the ambit of the colonial project. This broader commercialism threatens to convert the musical selections into instances of "world music" in a radio play that complicates notions of "world literature."²¹⁴ Caught in this vague category, the music's possible disorientation can find itself already normalized by the radio apparatus itself, which includes musical montage like this as a basic condition of its listening experience, as the turning of the dial.²¹⁵

If this attempt to wrestle radio from its colonial use only opens the door to commercial power, the play resists arguing for the mere seizure of the means of production as part of the decolonial effort. Eschewing a wholly economic rationale for the region's devastating social conditions, the play returns us to think about radio's role in the colonial project. Not the specific relationship between Portugal and Angola, and the struggle for national sovereignty, but rather the micrological forms of interpersonal communication that govern radio discourse. Commenting on "the decolonization of the body...[and] the liberated voice," Sarduy writes, "I'm trying...to destroy the radio dialogue, an archaic form of communication between two voices in which one always tries to 'colonize' the other" (1077). Notably, this "liberated voice" (*voz liberada*) distinguishes itself from Marinetti's "liberation of the word" (*parole in libertà*), by replacing the desire to absorb a multiplicity of listeners into the voice of the single speaker with the desire (*sexualidad liberada*) to dissolve the single speaker into a "galaxy of voices" (1077). Sidestepping the critical commonplace to hear radio as fascist discourse, the play's "galaxy of voices" also resists the Bakhtinian utopia of the dialogical imagination. Anti-colonial radio, Sarduy suggests, will not adhere to belief in the rational conversation of the public sphere. Rather, dialogue itself contains the colonial project in miniature.

To be yet more specific, we might say that the colonial project emerges, for Sarduy, from dialogue's insistence on the pronoun *I*. After all, he concludes his introductory note with this fractured sentence: "The Dissolution. Of the *I*" (1077). In the introduction to *Never Say I*, a study of the French modernist novel and the artful practices authors developed for speaking about same-sex sexuality, Michael Lucey quotes Oswald Ducrot as saying,

What is remarkable about the pronoun *I* is not just that it constitutes a shorthand way of speaking about oneself. It is more that it obliges the person speaking to refer to herself with the same word that her interlocutor will use in turn for the same task. The use of *I* (and much the same could be said of *you*) thus constitutes an apprenticeship in and a constant practice of reciprocity (quoted in Lucey, 15).²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Michael Denning writes that "like 'world music,' the 'world novel' is a category to be distrusted; if it genuinely points to the transformed geography of the novel, it is also a marketing device that flattens distinct regional and linguistic traditions into a single cosmopolitan 'world beat'" (Denning, "World," 703). See Michael Denning, "The Novelists' International" in *The Novel, Vol 1* (ed.) Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006): 703-725.

²¹⁵ The radio dial's ability to flatten out generic difference reveals the darker side of Peter Hallward's more positive imagining of horizontal relations in Sarduy's work with the voice: "Sarduy explores a univocal regime of 'constant variation', a singular plane of immanence in which 'everything is real' and everything coheres on the same level, the same exclusive (or all-inclusive) scale of intensity" (Hallward, 254).

See Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

²¹⁶ Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Ducrot's view of this reciprocal process seems positive. The pronoun's remarkable indexical flexibility allows it to correspond to a multiple number of speakers, training them how to borrow the word and release it to the other. However, given his comments on dialogue, we might assume that for Sarduy such "reciprocity" is "colonial"; hence his desire to dissolve the first-person singular.²¹⁷ While Sarduy—a queer author in exile in Paris from Cuba's Revolution, steeped in French novels and culture—might be thought among the aesthetic and social inheritors of the novelists in Lucey's study, his insistence on the radio, not the novel, as the medium to challenge the first-person singular deserves particular attention.

We can recognize Sarduy's antagonism toward the "I" as the philosophical result of one of radio art's basic issues of engineering. Discussing the discursive theory of the French radio pioneer Paul Deharme, Anke Birkenmaier explains, "the grammar of the radiophonic discourse... uses deictics that include the listener... in order to avoid creating a division between 'you' and 'I', the listener and the radio discourse" (Birkenmaier, 160). In this reading, the "dissolution of the I" responds to a practical problem for early radio writers: how to interpellate the audience into the drama. Advancing this theory in favor of suppressing the possible obstacles between a listener and the radio, Deharme, and his employee, the Cuban novelist and radio sound engineer Alejo Carpentier, suggest speakers adopt a toneless delivery. As Carpentier puts it in his 1933 article, "The Radio and Its New Possibilities" (*La radio y sus nuevas posibilidades*), "[The radio speaker] should dehumanize his voice as far as possible, adopting a *neutral tone*, a uniform one that stands out over the rest as a sort of talking machine" (Carpentier, 26; emphasis added).²¹⁸ This call for a machine-like voice echoes Deharme's point, made in his 1928 article, "Proposition for a Radiophonic Art" (*Proposition d'un art radiophonique*), that the speaker should "forget the art of reading aloud... *Grey diction* is recommended, arguably a difficult task for the speaker, but after a while he will be a specialist at it, a kind of phonograph" (Deharme, 408; emphasis in original).²¹⁹ In both cases, Carpentier and Deharme's "speaker" takes the position of the objective narrator in the platonic form of a realist novel, removed from the action of "direct speech," and orchestrating events from above. However, as Deharme insists, this speech should not derive from text—"forget the art of reading aloud." Rather, the speaker should become something like an oral recorder, the phonograph that bypasses textual mediation.

This fantasy of the toneless voice complements the suppression of pronominal obstacles to create a new fluidity of discourse in radio, "the blind art." Anticipating Sarduy's technique by almost half a century, Deharme writes that

The words of a given character can be spoken at times by one individual voice, at times by the speaker, as well as the character's deeds and gestures. The particular voice that, for a moment is at the character's service, will then become available to be used for other characters on another occasion. This should not pose a

²¹⁷ Pushing Ducrot's point further, Erving Goffman perceives, in Michael Lucey's gloss, that different uses of the first-person pronoun "involve sufficiently different aspects of a same speaker that it could be argued... that the referent of the pronoun—even though it is the 'same' pronoun—is not the same" (Goffman, quoted in Lucey, "Never," 18). However, even this referential flexibility remains part of "interactional discourse" (8), which Sarduy considers "colonial."

²¹⁸ Timothy Brennan, "Introduction to the English Edition" in Alejo Carpentier, *Music In Cuba*, trans. Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 1-58.

²¹⁹ Paul Deharme, "Proposition for a Radiophonic Art" trans. Anke Birkenmaier in *MODERNISM / modernity* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2009): 403-413.

problem for the balanced listener; does it not also happen in our dreams that a sentence begun by one person is finished by another person, or even by us? (Deharme, 409).

In these guidelines, the voice becomes something like a mask, able to be passed from one *character* to another. The speaker makes him or herself available to the characters. The speaker becomes a mask that the characters put on, rather than the other way around.

Sarduy, recognizing a similar principle when he writes, “What one person says could be said, ultimately, by another”, adds to Deharme’s idea by applying radio’s particular artistic form to the colonial situation. Constructing his “galaxy of voices,” the play arrives at the “destruction of the individual as a metropolis—the conscience or the soul—with its colonies—the voice, the sex, etc.” (1077). The cosmological metaphor, in this case, stands against the cosmopolitan. No subject exists to anchor one city to another, for even this non-national association retains its colonial inevitability. In contrast to the Sarduy of 1985, who hears “the grain of the voice” as a carrier for land and materiality, the author of *The Ant Killers* seems to work against tonal difference. The absence of tone, in this theory, allows the same speaker to adopt different positions. The voice of a Portuguese soldier sounds the same as a German photographer in Angola, or a German tourist in Lisbon. As the production notes say, “*Two Portuguese soldiers: the voices of M3 and M4, or any two other voices*” (1078). In this work written for the voice, tonelessness, the absence of marked speech, holds open the door for decolonization, allowing voices to travel back and forth between the eroding colony and the empire.

As I said before, the early radio theorists’ promotion of a toneless delivery is a fantasy, one we might associate with Arnheim’s fascination with the great fiction of radio: the disembodied voice. It would be a familiar mistake to hear the *voz liberada* as another instantiation of the “floating signifier.” However, we should recognize, with Sarduy’s critic Peter Hallward, that

What survives this destruction is a certain *style*, a certain tone of voice or manner of expression... ‘A novel is nothing other than variations around a character who is himself *not an entity but a tone given to his manner of existing*’ (Hallward, 307).

The “dissolution of the I” does not lead to the “free play” of signifiers, but rather to a renewed attention to tone, and what the sociologist Erving Goffman called “forms of talk,” a play with signifiers limited by specific *rules of use*. Instead of the mere dislocation of meaning, the play’s dynamic work with acknowledging and rearranging context develops a more active, particular, and *pragmatic* understanding of meaning. While Hallward imagines this work as “an exercise in *Creative thought* in the Deleuzian sense” (Hallward, 257), I think we come closer to understanding this abstract principle through listening that retunes our ears to the deployment of pronouns, sound, and deictic placement in the play.

Strangely, the seeming erasure of position by the fantasy of toneless discourse helps reveal how the residue of tone works to further Sarduy’s anti-colonial aesthetic. To begin with, his characters require tonal difference, as well as some sense of individual tonal marking in order for listeners to tune in to the “dissolution of the I.” Thus, at the end of the play’s opening Sequence “man four” tells us, “the car’s radio stayed on” (1080), and then “man one” speaks “as a radio announcer,” followed by “man two” and “man three,” both of whom speak different lines

“as a female radio announcer” (1081). Speaking with the same tone, “man two” and “man three” become or “voice” the same professional register and gender. The assumption in the production notes that listeners and actors alike can distinguish the voice of a radio announcer from that of a school child, for example, helps inform the performances. However, we only understand them as an example of the dissolving “I” if we realize that they are different speakers sharing the same voice, or men playing the role of a woman, or, in the case of “man three,” a voice that will soon become a Portuguese soldier in Angola. Our ability to recognize these transformations through the residue of individual tone gives the voices their narrative and social value.

Tone, in this case, collaborates with referential language to allow speakers and listeners to create and dissolve frames of reference, and the positions of address. While some of the contextual work occurs in semantic phrases—“This takes place in Portugal”—the speaker’s tone carries other information. As I have just described above, shifts in tone correspond to shifts in frame. Tone helps listeners establish their “footing” in relation to the narrative. When we hear “three chimes from the marimba,” followed by a voice that speaks in complete, but direct sentences, delivering news items in a professional vocabulary and syntax, and a serious register, we recognize a newscaster speaking. The tone that indexes the professional role—“radio newscaster”—derives from this specific assembly of linguistic markers—syntax, vocabulary, register, timbre, pitch—encountered on the radio. Rather than conceal these complexities in Barthes’ rich, but inexact descriptor, “the grain of the voice,” we might better think of them as “non-referential indexicals,” parts of speech that possess social or narrative value without any necessary semantic or denotative meaning.

For socio-linguists, such non-referential indexicality helps organize social space. A typical example would be the difference between formal and informal registers marked in romance languages as the shift between “tú” and “usted” in Spanish, or “tu” and “vous” in French. Although the reference remains the same—either word refers to the same object—the word choice alters the social atmosphere. Referring to one’s boss as “tú,” for instance, could index a familiarity that others in the office don’t share, or simply mark the casual space of a Silicon Valley start-up. Sound can work in a similarly indexical fashion.²²⁰

As the linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein observes, oral narrative can employ sound to organize the shift between narrator and character, as well as the infection of the character’s point of view with that of the narrator, in what narrative theory names “free indirect discourse.” Whereas Silverstein’s study of a Wasco narrator observes that the speaker accomplishes such shifts through “attitudinal colorings...in the phonic substance of the language of narration,” I have claimed above that Sarduy’s speakers use changes in tone, along with their residual vocal tone, as a similar “infection” between characters and speaker, similar to that between character and narrator in the more familiar example of free indirect discourse (Silverstein, “Wasco,” 53). To put this same point slightly differently, sound functions *pragmatically*, in that it organizes different contextual frames. To borrow from Michael Lucey,

²²⁰ My argument here departs from “sound symbolism,” the denotative function of phonic utterances. A good example of this other use of sound comes from Silverstein, who observes that sonic changes in the Wasco-Wishram Chinookan language can shift the phrase “I skate on (some location)” to the otherwise structurally identical form “I (go to) squat someplace [sc. For defecation]” (Silverstein, “Wasco,” 52). Sound, in this case, changes the referential meaning of the phrase, rather than the non-referential, but indexical function I hear in *The Ant Killers*. See Michael Silverstein, “Relative motivation in denotational and indexical sound symbolism of Wasco-Wishram Chinookan” in *Sound Symbolism*, eds. Hinton, Nichols, Ohala (2003): 40-53.

It is by way of its pragmatic aspect that a discourse participates in the creation and the perpetuation of a social universe with all of its divisions into classes. It is through the pragmatic function of a discourse that interlocutors either indicate their well-established places within their social universe, or make implicit claims upon a place that is not yet established as theirs, or else *put* somebody in their place (Lucey, 61).

In *The Ant Killers*, such pragmatic work, carried out through tone, helps construct a national, as well as a social context. When we hear an utterance repeated with a different tone in a different context, but with a residual tone that links both speakers, we can hear the two contexts dissolve into each other, thus taking an expected, or “presupposed” context, and “entailing,” or producing a new context (Lucey, 64-66). Moving from the micro-social interactions of interpersonal discourse to the colonial relations in the play, this pragmatic understanding of tone reveals that *how* something is said tunes listeners in to the play’s experimental use of rebel radio to represent an anti-colonial critique.

To understand how the narrative value of tone allows listeners to recognize the shifting and collapsing borders between empire and colony, let us follow “man three” through the performance. In Sequence One this voice plays a German tourist in a car crash in Lisbon, as well as a female radio broadcaster reading news that “Portugal recognizes her African territories’ right to independence” (1081). Absent in Sequence Two, the voice re-emerges as a different German tourist outside of Lisbon, watching a group of rebels, “naked and plastered with makeup, wearing branches on their head” dance around a radio, which broadcasts the closure of several Portuguese military outposts in Angola (1084). In Sequence Four the voice is heard again as an announcer, describing “the transfer of power to the black majority” (1088) in Angola, and then, in Sequence Five, we hear it as a Portuguese soldier, abandoning his military post. In the play’s final sequence, the voice is again that of a German tourist, halted on the occupied Salazar bridge entering Lisbon, describing boys with “their faces and feet painted black, wearing strange hats made of branches” (1092). If we fail to recognize this voice as carried by the same performer, then we fail to hear how the “liberated voice” travels from Lisbon to Angola, into the body of a Portuguese soldier, a female radio announcer, and a German tourist. Furthermore, we fail to hear how the voice returns to Lisbon, much like the primitivist rebels, created by the colonial imagination, return to undo the imperial state.

Before turning to this last point, however, we should note how the “liberated voice” threatens to return to the charismatic, monolithic voice of the dictator all too familiar throughout the history of radio. For while I have focused mainly on the play’s explicit theme of decolonization in Africa and Europe, only with difficulty can we tune out the resonances with the Cuban Radio Rebelde the younger Sarduy listened to as a novice writer in Camaguey and Havana during the late 1950s. If, as I mentioned toward the beginning of this section, Sarduy adapts something of Guevara’s “*foco* theory” to the aesthetics of the radio drama, it should be clear that he works against any single voice possessing the radio. The ambition to return rebellion to radio by producing a play “where whatever one says could be said by another,” turns against the unification of Rebel Radio in the single, national voice of Fidel Castro, and returns to Guevara’s theory, in which the radio voice, like rumor, could never be individual, and becomes an “inspiring, burning word” that spreads like wildfire across the population.

However, while we encounter this experimental guerrilla radio in the play’s production, the rebels within the diegetic space of *The Ant Killers* more closely approximate a parody of

rebel radio. Rather than sending messages from their concealed destinations to lead the passive urban masses, as per Guevara's *foco* theory, these "wild boys," their camp described as "a terrified anthill," safely conceal themselves behind the desert dunes where "they had maintained one symbolic contact with civilization: a radio, always turned on" (1084). Dancing around the radio to news of the Angolan liberation, the sinking of a Spanish ship near the "Spanish Sahara," and the German tourists' car accident, the painted rebels with headdresses made of branches recall Marshall McLuhan's 1964 theory of "the radio as tribal drum."²²¹ As they stream across the Salazar bridge in the imperial capital of Lisbon, and then reappear at the play's end in blackface on the same bridge, we see the face of colonial primitivism come home. This is not to follow McLuhan's primitivist logic, which attaches the radio to the "archaic forces" of "the resonating African within" (301). Rather, these rebels represent the distorted portal that has opened between Angola and Portugal by means of imperialism, and by means of the radio. They do not imitate any actual African rebels, but rather the European fantasy of Africa as primitive. It is a fantasy passed through further fictions associated with radio and renewed primitivism, such as the 1971 novel *Wild Boys*, by William Burroughs, whose name the rebels scrawl across one of the pillars of the bridge across from that of Bakunin, announcing the fall of the Estado Novo, founded by the former Prime Minister Salazar (1084).²²² In this deterritorialized space, on the middle of a rebel occupied bridge renamed for a Russian anarchist and the U.S. inventor of the "cut-up" technique, where a German tourist waits for his car radio to talk to him, and the speakers finish each others' sentences as if they shared one mouth, the empire has turned colonization back on itself.

And to remind us that this story has also always been about Cuba, the play ends with "a lump of sugar" (1093). As the rebels, burdened by bedrolls and provisions, file in single line across the bridge,

[M1] Some, hesitating and struggling, carried, together, a single bundle, [M2] they retreated at times: [M3] others, ready, came to replace those who had fallen.

²²¹ See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994 / 1964): 298-307. In a chapter that largely borrows from Frankfurt School theories of radio, McLuhan describes the radio as "a profound archaic force" (301), "a mighty awakener of archaic memories, forces, and animosities" (306) with "a tribal magic" (302) that allowed the German people, "brooding upon the resonating Africa within" (301), to "dance entranced to the tribal drum of radio that extended their central nervous system to create depth of involvement for everybody" (298).

²²² In addition to calling to mind the alternative society of male same-sex misogyny depicted in that novel, the reference to Burroughs in this radio play obsessed with the radio recalls his earlier novel *Naked Lunch*. Set in Tangier during the years in which the United States "was protecting the radio transfer stations built in the Tangier Zone (Mackay, RCA, and Voice of America)", *Naked Lunch* develops "the connection between Tangier as international radio relay station, as a site where the voices of the world mingle din static, and as a historical crossroads on which imperial and emergent nations encounter one another in proximity (both geographical and historical). In his journals, Burroughs writes: 'It is frequently said that the Great Powers will never give up the Interzone because of its value as a listening post. It is in fact the listening post of the world'" (Edwards, 180). Sarduy quotes from *Naked Lunch* in his radio play, *Relato*, published alongside *Los matadores de hormigas* in his collection, *Para La Voz*. The link between Burroughs' novel and anti-colonial radio becomes clearer when Edwards points out, "Burroughs makes frequent reference in *Naked Lunch* to radio signals, whether to the 1920 crystal set I mentioned before, or to the noise of Cairo stations blaring through Tangier cafés... Like Frantz Fanon, whose writing about the ongoing Algerian revolution in the late 1950s brought him to advocate a broken signal and a clear message emanating from jammed radio signals as the true voice that would break France's hold on the Algerian nation, Burroughs saw a ruptured 'voice' in Tangier as a means to disrupt American hypocrisy, both global and domestic" (Edwards, 179).

See Brian Edwards, *Morocco Unbound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[M4] And the bundle continued advancing, [M1] without touching the ground, [M2] on high, like a trophy. [M3] Like an insect's corpse, [M4] or a lump of sugar (1093).

The speakers share the burden of the words here, just as the rebels share the bundle. But the language recalls earlier moments, when the men of a rebel camp, “the ant killers,” formed three concentric circles of defense to protect “[M2] an already opened can of sardines and a packet of sugar (1082). Or again, when the Portuguese soldiers abandon their post in Angola, where, like “the ant killers” they organize their retreat progressively, “in three concentric circles” (1089), at the center of which they bury “[M3] an already opened can of sardines and a packet of sugar” (1090). In other words, in this play about radio and decolonization, repeated strips of discourse spoken by different voices knit together different imperial and colonial contexts, and then disrupt those contexts, breaking through the concentric circles of defense, just as the tourists in the final scene on the bridge realize, “without knowing it, we had crossed a forbidden circle” (1092). When they see, at the center of that circle, men carrying a bundle, “like a lump of sugar,” and they themselves imitate this procedure in sharing the utterance and voice, we as listeners realize that the voice too is “like a lump of sugar” (1093), the very product that began Cuba's colonial process, that fueled its uneven trade relationship with the United States, that inspired radio commercials for saccharine melodramas with advertisements for Coca-Cola, and continues to define Cuba's ailing monoculture today. Looking back at Cuba's rebel radio, Sarduy only imagines rebels killing ants to hold onto the crop that has colonized them from the start.

CHAPTER 4

HOUSE TAKEN OVER: Listening, Writing, and the Politics of the Common Place in Manuel Puig's Fiction

“En *La traición* nadie ve nada, todos dicen que ven”-Alan Pauls
(In Puig’s *Betrayed By Rita Hayworth* no one sees anything. Everyone says they see.)

“Sens de mots diffère, d’abord, puis le ton: on trouve du nouveau dans le ton dont une personne dit telle ou telle chose. Nous prendrons le ton de la conversation, comme limite suprême, et où nous devons arrêter pour ne pas toucher à la science—comme arrêt des cercles vibratoires de notre pensée”—Stéphane Mallarmé
(The meaning of words differs, first, then the tone: one discovers something new in the tone in which someone says something or other. We take a conversation’s tone as a supreme limit where we ought to stop in order to avoid reaching science—the limit of the vibrating circles of our thought.)

The first transnational radio broadcast in the Americas, and the moment that made radio a truly mass medium in Argentina, was the 1923 fight between the United States heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey and the Argentine boxer Luis Ángel Firpo.²²³ Broadcast from New York City’s Polo Grounds, it reached listeners in Argentina, Cuba, and the United States—the founding nations of radio broadcast. Listeners in Cuba described the event as a “miracle,” and the Argentine author Julio Cortázar later declared, “it was the most important moment I experienced in twentieth century history” (124).²²⁴

Dempsey and Firpo’s clash was heavy with implications for an author like Cortázar who often used boxing as an analogy for writing. Given the title of one of his surrealist collections of essays and poetry, *Final Round* (Último Round; 1969), the plot of his boxing story, “The Night of Butter,” and his statements to a Cuban audience in 1962 that short stories win by “knockout” and the novel by “technical knock out,” it should not be surprising that what he calls “the birth of radio and the death of boxing” (124) stood out as a key moment in his personal, national, and transnational history.²²⁵

²²³ For more on the event’s significance in changing radio’s popularity in Argentina see Ricardo Gallo, *La radio: ese mundo tan sonoro* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1991), Carlos Ulanovsky (ed.) *Días de radio (1920-1959)* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1995, 2004), Andrea Matallana, “*Locos por la radio*”: *Una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923-1947* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2006): 83, Beatriz Sarlo, *La imaginación técnica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1992), Robert Claxton, *From Parsifal to Perón* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007).

²²⁴ Michael B. Salwen, *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (1994). Julio Cortázar “El noble arte” in *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos: Tomo II* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1967, 2005). All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

²²⁵ Julio Cortázar, “Some Aspects of the Short Story” in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (Summer, 1999): 25-37. [First appeared in *Casa de las Américas* Nos. IS16 (1962-1963)]: “An Argentine writer, very fond of boxing, told me that in that fight that takes place between an absorbing text and its reader, the novel wins a technical victory, while the story must win by knockout. It’s true, in that the novel progressively builds up its effect upon the reader, while a good story is incisive, mordant, and shows no clemency from the first lines on. This shouldn’t be taken too literally, since the good story writer is a very wise boxer, and many of his first blows may

In the fight's first round, Firpo knocked Dempsey over the ropes, where the latter landed on a ringside typewriter. Ignoring guidelines and rulebooks, the referee allowed the US boxer to re-enter the ring after the legal time limit had passed. In the second round, Dempsey won. As Cortázar remembers, "Yes, Firpo had his immortal hour of three minutes and, furthermore, he won the match if we hold to the rules. But with that mania that truth has to supplant illusion," Dempsey knocked Firpo to the ground "along with fifteen million Argentines twisting themselves into various postures and asking, among other things, for the break in relations, the declaration of war, and the burning of the United States embassy" (Cortázar, 128).²²⁶ Rather than bring listeners together in the kind of utopian "logosphere" Gaston Bachelard proposed in "Radio et Rêverie," this transnational hookup leads to instant desires of nationalist violence. Furthermore, Cortázar's apparent apology for U.S. hegemony—"truth defeated illusion"—resounds with irony when we recall his enthusiasm for the Cuban revolution at this time, 1967, and his attempt to write a *littérature engagée* that would participate in a hemispheric turn of Latin and North American writers, including Gabriel García Márquez, who sought to imagine their writing as direct political interventions.²²⁷ Firpo's ability to knock Dempsey onto the typewriter, writing, in some sense, with Dempsey's body, or symbolically "knocking out" the typewriter to be supplanted by the radio's "live" broadcast voice, constructs a discourse network of "The Nobel Art" that brings together North and South in a scene in which writing, violence, and the radio take center stage.²²⁸

We have already heard something of this story, especially the engagement between Cuba and the United States, in the previous chapters: before examining how another Argentine writer, Manuel Puig, brought the history of radio into the novel in a radically different manner, we should first note that while the 1923 broadcast marked the "birth of radio" for Cortázar, historians of technology provide a different birthday for radio in Argentina. Officially, the first radio broadcast (*radiodifusión*) in Argentina took place on August 27, 1920, two months before the inaugural broadcast in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.²²⁹ Argentina's paper of record, *La Nación*, reported the event on August 30:

seem ineffectual when he's really tearing down his opponent's most solid defenses. Take any great story you prefer and analyze the first page of it. I'd be surprised if you found any gratuitous elements just there for show."

²²⁶ The nationalist fervor occurred on both sides of the airwaves. Daniel Fridman and David Sheinin point out that *The New York Times* "suggested that if Firpo were to win, Americans would have to rethink the Monroe Doctrine and its meaning" (57). They go on to cite Boyden Sparkes of *The New York Tribune* who "suggested that only a duel between George Washington and Simon Bolívar might have generated equivalent attention...As a result of the fight, he went on, Latin Americans would begin to buy 'American automobiles, American drugs, American hardware, [and] American clothing'" (57). See Daniel Fridman and David Sheinin, "Wild Bulls, Discarded Foreigner, and Brash Champions: US Empire and the Cultural Constructions of Argentine Boxers" in *Left History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring / Summer, 2007): 52-77).

The American realist painter George Bellows's depiction of the scene in his 1924 painting, *Dempsey and Firpo*, hangs at the entrance to the Whitney Museum of American Art. For a discussion of the political implications of this decision see Jamie Wood, "Madness at the Whitney: Resistance to Genre in *Dempsey and Firpo*" in *Dandelion: Post-Graduate Arts Journal and Research Network*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2010). Web. 20 Jan. 2011.

²²⁷ For one of the early debates about this turn see Óscar Collazos, Julio Cortázar, and Mario Vargas Llosa, *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1970).

²²⁸ Thinking through the Kittlerian framework of the typewriter as the technology of the "symbolic" and the phonograph and radio as representatives of the "real," we can recognize how Dempsey's collision with the writing machine (*máquina de escribir*) signals the type of immediate contact with the Real desired in the writings of militant political authors in the Americas of the 1960s and '70s.

²²⁹ See the aforementioned histories of radio in Argentina for the contentious debates regarding when and where "broadcast" officially began in the world. Spanish vocabulary more easily distinguishes between two types of

In the Coliseo they're performing a curious and extremely interesting experiment... In a great space around Buenos Aires, one can attend on these nights a truly marvelous spectacle [*un espectáculo realmente maravilloso*]: a group of people, with an attentive and transfixed attitude, listen without seeing [*escuchan sin ver*] the performance of the lyrical spectacles from the Coliseo. The listening group [*el auditorio*], in the living room or in the dining room, encircles a small apparatus that *resounds with better clarity than the phonograph and without the noise* [*rumor*] of the needle on the disc: the receiver's membrane desperately vibrates in its magnetic box and an amplifier expands the environment of the grave chords of "Parsifal" or the burning melodies of "Iris" (quoted in Matallana, 13-14; emphasis added).²³⁰

As with the 1923 broadcast and many other inaugural moments in media history, it remains remarkable to read the wonder in the reporting of an occurrence now taken for granted in daily life. Moreover, this first Argentine broadcast illuminates a different national story than that which Cortázar names "the birth of radio." The broadcast of Wagner's *Parsifal* on that winter night matters to cultural and media historians because it troubles the standard narratives that situate technology radiating from Europe and the United States to the global South, or to far flung colonies. And yet, in the broadcaster's choice of content, the broadcast also tends to reinforce those narratives of cultural dominance. These amateur radio aficionados did not choose to broadcast a conversation from the street, a reading of gaucho poetry, or even the gaucho-inspired *Martín Fierro*, or a vanguardist manifesto. If Cortázar's story marks radio's beginning as a popular, massive, transnational event, the "Parsifal" broadcast represents a nationalist claim for primacy and technological innovation linked to a European paradigm of high culture. Instead of listeners streaming into the streets, the 1920 broadcasters began Argentine radio history, and radio history everywhere, with the German composer most closely associated with European radio criticism, and the Frankfurt School's link between radio and fascism. The struggle between these two cultural paradigms for broadcasting—a struggle developing in the United States, with the rise of commercial broadcasting, which began infiltrating and defining Cuban radio by the end of the 1920s, and in the British Broadcasting Corporation's resistance to commercial control in favor of public or state-sponsored radio—quickly came to settle on the politics of language in Argentina.

The Voice of the Nation?

"radio": "*radiodifusión*," or "broadcast," and *radiotelefonía*, the kind of point-to-point wireless systems developed by Lee De Forest and others earlier in the century.

²³⁰ It is worth noting the acoustic difference of broadcasting. In the reporter's words, the radio "sounds [*resuena*] clearer than the phonograph, and without the noise [*rumor*] of the needle on the disc." Radio brought with it not only a new way of hearing—"listening without seeing"—but also, in the ears of our reporter, a more refined sound. Yet, given the attention to sound, historians of acoustics will find it strange that radio began broadcasting from the Teatro Coliseo, when Buenos Aires's more famous Teatro Colón, like Boston's Symphony Hall, remains among the top five acoustic spaces in the world. See Marshall Long, "What Is So Special About Shoebox Halls? Envelopment, Envelopment, Envelopment." Notably, Long singles out the Teatro Colon as the only one of the top five music halls whose shape, the European shoehorn, distinguishes itself from the shoebox model. Long cites Leo Beranek, *Concert Halls: How They Sound* (Woodbury, NY : Published for the Acoustical Society of America through the American Institute of Physics, 1996).

If radio did not begin the debates about the “proper” use of language in Argentina, it brought oral speech into the legislative realm, and provided a platform for political nationalists to push for linguistic norms in a country with a still fluctuating ethnic and national identity. Summarizing some of the country’s linguistic history, Beatriz Sarlo argues that for statesmen like Juan Batista Alberdi, the nineteenth century search for a national language and culture in Argentina often promoted the “‘good’ heterogeneity of European immigration” against the “bad heterogeneity” of the “Hispanic-creole and Indian” populations (Sarlo, “Oralidad” 30).²³¹ By the early twentieth century, the debate had shifted, as intellectuals and writers determined there were “two types of foreign languages, or that the same foreign language has two starkly different socio-cultural forms”: that of a cultured public and that of the masses (32). These class distinctions within a language also existed across languages, as the cultural elite determined which foreign languages were “legitimate [French, English, or German]...and wouldn’t disturb the constitution of Argentine writing,” and those that were “illegitimate (Italian dialects, Yiddish, and Russian)” (33). For Sarlo, Jorge Luis Borges is the key transitional figure who seeks to create a national literature from these debates through two operations: first, he imagines a literary utopia in which certain nineteenth-century writers were able to “capture a national semantics in the tone and connotation of the oral voice,” and second, in his *Universal History of Infamy*, he borrows narratives from a “universal” tradition in order to support a national literature, thus establishing the “good” mixture between national literature and foreign languages, all the while sidestepping the problems of nationalism (36).

While Borges argued in essays and story collections for an Argentine language that could only be inherited but not adopted, and yet, if inherited, should make use of specific foreign languages (English, French, German) in order for it to reach the status of these “universal” models, his fellow writers and contemporary legislators focused their attention on the newly massive disseminator of oral language and culture: the radio. As early as 1929, Argentina had over five hundred thousand radios, more than twice the number in Italy, Russia, and Denmark, and by 1934, Argentina accounted for 66% of the radios in Latin America (Matallana, 35-36). As the listening public expanded, radio became the centerpiece for linguistic reform. In 1933, two years before Borges published his “Universal History,” and one year before the United States established its own Broadcasting Law, Argentina put in place its first Radio Communications Rule in order to assure that broadcasting programs were “highly artistic.”²³² Two years later, in the government’s “Instructions for Radio Stations,” the term “artistic” was clarified by prohibiting programs that used “slang terms [*modismos*] that bastardize the language,” in addition to any use of “humorously low tones that support mimicking other languages, misunderstandings, angry exclamations, harsh or discordant voices [*voces destempladas*], etc.” (quoted in Fraga, 39). These regulations of Argentine language were intended to conform to the guidelines set out in the first “International Radio Conference” in Washington D.C. in 1927 (Matallana, 46). Thus, regional Argentine speech, in particular the use of the *lunfardo* dialect, was prohibited from the airwaves in order to match ideal speech tones first regulated in Washington.

²³¹ All translations in this chapter are mine unless otherwise noted. Beatriz Sarlo, “Oralidad y lenguas extranjeras” in *Oralidad y Argentinidad*, eds. Walter Bruno Berg and Markus Klaus Schäffauer (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1997).

²³² See Andrea Matallana for the co-development of U.S. and Argentine broadcasting regulations. Andrea Matallana, *Locos*: 24.

As different wartime alliances weakened relationships with the United States, the main exporter of radios to Argentina, the Argentine government further nationalized the radio at the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, resulting in more language reforms and regulations meant to curb the commercial and cultural influence of other countries. This process reached its legislative climax in the first radio reform of the newly elected, and former military leader, President Juan Perón's first year in office. The May 1946 Radio Broadcasting Manual fixed titles for radio genres ("Works of Imagination," "Oratory," "News and Information," "Miscellany and Publicity"), insisted that stations play at least one "radionovela" connected to "Argentine tradition or history," and, expanding the rules of 1935, regulated actors' tone: "The tone of voice, including sighs or the emotional relief of figures of intonation, will be appropriate for each situation, but will always avoid the falsettos of low comedy, excessively high-pitched timbre, feminized distortions, etc." (Matallana, 49). The desire to "educate the listener's cultural ear" (Matallana, 61) was part of a nationalist program the Manual highlights by informing radio station owners and orators that "the control of the national language will be one of the fundamental demands that every speaker must satisfy, as much as this concerns the propriety and correctness with which one ought to articulate phonemes, as it does the correct intonation of each word, phrase, sentence, etc." (quoted in Matallana, 49). Through these dictates, the tone and timber of voices, the particular diction of a speaker, the verbal inventiveness of a comedian became freighted with political and legal import. In this way, the sound of a voice, not just its semantic content, signaled national, regional, and political alliances.

These linguistic clashes were not lost on attentive listeners. Manuel Puig, an early fan of the immensely popular but often censored radio comedian Niní Marshall, praised how radio voices like Marshall's could assume a host of different social positions through the studied shifts in pitch and timber.²³³ Marshall's impersonations, a mix of sociology and comedy, brought characters to life through a voice able to morph into sounds that called up different social classes, races, and genders in the still evolving national community of the 1940s.²³⁴ Her impersonations, performed by Puig later in life for friends and family, provided Puig with a model for how to imagine social types through a shifting spectrum of vocabulary, accent, and tone (Levine, "Spider," 68). More than twenty five years later, Puig acknowledged how radio might "educate the listener's ear," albeit opposing the state's desires, and how such listening might relate to a particular practice of writing. In an interview following the publication of his 1969 novel, *Boquitas Pintadas* (Heartbreak Tango), Puig commented,

When I wrote this novel, I was very interested *in working with the language of characters, because the way they spoke tells more about them than anything the author could explain*. Most of the characters in the book are first generation Argentines, of Italian or Spanish parents, most of them peasants who hadn't been able to give their children any cultural heritage... This meant that *the children of these people had no models of conduct at home, and, least of all, no models of speech*. They therefore had to invent a language of their own, using the culture they had at hand. (quoted in Jill Levine, *Subversive*, 123-124; emphasis added).²³⁵

²³³ See Suzanne Jill Levine, *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000): 68.

²³⁴ See Matallana, 89, 116, 120-121.

²³⁵ Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1991).

Puig goes on to specify the “culture at hand” as radio culture, “radionovelas, the lyrics of tangos and boleros, comedy shows,” whose oral programs create a model for immigrant speech, a speech that, in turn, provides a model for his writing. Against the grain of the government’s desires, Puig links radio’s pedagogical role in popular, unofficial national culture to his own process of writing. Attentive to constructing characters through “the way they spoke,” through those pragmatic markers the government was careful to censor in *radionovelas*, Puig realizes a formal principle: imitating the speech patterns of immigrants amounts to representing the insinuation of radio’s speech models into the newly forming language. The author’s role is not to explain, but rather to listen and record.

Puig’s double *imitatio*, what we can begin to think of as his mimesis of mediation, runs against not just the government’s language politics but also those linguistic ideas Borges had worked to establish throughout the first half of the century. For Borges, intent on pursuing the construction of Argentine identity in language, recent immigrants’ imitations of Argentine speech forms ran the risk of exaggerating a prototype of the language that was not “truly theirs,” pursuing the language’s loud linguistic signals without realizing that “nationality resides in the nuances of *tone*” (Sarlo, “Oralidad,” 37). Much as Borges had written in “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” following an observation by Gibbon that what proves the authenticity of the Koran as an Arabic book is its absence of camels, he heard the authenticating sounds of Argentine speech as those an outsider could not hear, and therefore would not be able to imitate. Sarlo argues that precisely what marks an Argentine speaker for Borges is “*an effect of the detail* [efecto del detalle] perceived by those who know a language from the inside and very closely, establishing relations of spontaneous interiority and of property [*propiedad*] not acquired but rather transmitted as an inheritance across time” (Sarlo, 37; emphasis in original).²³⁶ Sarlo’s term, “detail effect,” recalls Barthes’s famous “reality effect,” and matches a particular modernist notion of realism as elision and compression at play in Borges’s writings, as well as those of Samuel Beckett and, to a different degree, Ernest Hemingway and even Raymond Chandler. The idea is helpful here less because of what it tells us about Borges, and more because of what it reveals about how Puig modifies these modernist impulses. Equally attentive to tone, Puig’s writing attempts to record precisely those imitations Borges condemns, seeking out a language defined by its lack of property—one not “truly theirs”—whose realism derives, once again, from his imitation of their imitation of radiophonic speech.²³⁷

The Unstable Properties of “Literary Listening”

²³⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” in *Labyrinths* trans. Donald A. Yates (New York: New Directions, 1962).

²³⁷ In this sense, Puig aligns himself with Borges’s contemporary, Roberto Arlt, whose central European name, monolingualism, and propensity for reading and incorporating “bad translations” into his writing, along with his keen ear for *lunfardo*, has made him the pillar of “lo popular” in late twentieth and twenty-first century Argentine literary culture. Perhaps more than any other writer and critic, Ricardo Piglia has helped immortalize Arlt as a radically non-proprietary writer, most infamously through Piglia’s own edited collection wherein he passed off one of his own imitations of Arlt as a missing Arlt story. The “falsely attributed” story, “Luba,” was first discovered by an academic critic years after the anthology was published, at which time Piglia revealed the story was not an imitation of Arlt at all, but rather of the Russian writer Leonid Andreyev’s “The Dark,” who Arlt had read in translation. Thus, Piglia challenged the entire concept of authorship as property by revealing Arlt’s own writing as an imitation of another. See Graciela Speranza, “Ricardo Piglia o el arte del desvío” in *Fuera de campo* (Buenos Aires: Anagrama, 2006).

Although Puig’s writing favors such challenges to property, he himself complained about Arlt’s overuse of *lunfardo* and dialect in general.

While earlier critics have overlooked the ways Puig's work with language intervenes in specific socio-linguistic debates fundamental to the rise of radio in Argentine national politics, some have recognized the connection between what Alberto Giordano calls Puig's "literary listening" and his writing program.²³⁸ Most emphatically, the novelist and critic Alan Pauls, writing about Puig's first novel, *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (Betrayed by Rita Hayworth; 1968), explains how

Each voice is in itself a mosaic of rumors, a conflagration of echoes. The voice, in *La traición*, doesn't make simple circuits of emission: it always establishes mediations, screens, citations. Each voice takes up, refers to, deforms, or reproduces the voices of the others...to speak is an exasperated exercise of *oratorio obliqua* (Pauls, 22).

As Pauls makes clear, to speak through other voices renders the individual voice in Puig's novel into a transmission circuit for other voices. The voice itself become part of a media circuit, or discourse network, influenced by the novel's ambient media (cinema, radio, newspaper), and equivalent with them. More specifically, the voice's reproductive character, its passage on through imitation, transforms speaking into an act of listening.

To speak as a listener, to appropriate other voices, to borrow from others' words, brings with it a specific politics of listening. For Pauls, this includes a politics of gossip, what he calls the "soundtrack" [*banda sonora*] to the novel, a background of secrets always shared, passed on as if by "contagion" to create a world in which "there are no *private* experiences" (Pauls, 47). In this "hearsay novel" [*un relato de oídas*], the young protagonist, Toto, "is *dispossessed* of his own discourse. He doesn't say what he thinks: he listens. If he listens, it's because his telling requires nourishment from the words of others in order to begin its itinerary" (Pauls, 48). Gossip, a narrative art that combines listening and telling is "anti-judicial," it is "against *property*" because it is "impossible to attribute it to an enunciator, an author. Gossip doesn't tolerate *copyrights*... We have to stop talking about gossip as if it had a subject: there is only a *carrier* [portador] (as we say that someone carries a virus)" (Pauls, 50). The politics of listening as writing, in this case, constructs a fluid discourse wherein the notion of language as property gives way to what William Burroughs called "the word virus."²³⁹

Gossip, listening-as-telling or telling-as-listening, responsible for the novel's content, also relates to Puig's broader "politics of style," the citational method that reproduces other generic discourses (*radionovelas*, *noir* fiction, science fiction). Again, Pauls argues that *La traición*

conspires at all levels against the notion of literary style as an idiolect (the private use of language), and postulates a style as the generic and social formation of enunciations. Thus, the 'private' genres that the text manipulates (thought notebook, intimate diary, letters) appear systematically de-privatized: they aren't

²³⁸ Alberto Giordano, *Manuel Puig: La conversación infinita* (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2001).

²³⁹ For more on Burroughs and the notion of the word virus connected to radio listening, see Brian Edwards, *Morocco Unbound* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 158-197. "Steven Shaviro has suggested that one of the 'lessons' Burroughs teaches his readers is that language is a virus...Language's function in this frame is not to communicate but to replicate itself. From this Shaviro derives the observation that individuals / authors do not try to express a 'self' but rather speak in tongues, channel messages as the radio does" (Edwards, 181).

modes of private expression, but rather citations from a cultural memory whose function consists precisely in impugning them, sabotaging all illusion of a ‘proper voice’ (Pauls, 86).²⁴⁰

This pitched battle against a private use of language carries over into the generic modes manipulated throughout Puig’s career. What Pauls considers valuable in this re-use of genres and this stylistic resistance to private language is precisely what Puig’s early detractors, such as Juan Carlos Onetti, found reprehensible. Whereas Onetti dismissed Puig for lacking an individual style (“After reading two of Mr. Puig’s books, I know how his characters talk, I just don’t know how he writes”), Pauls argues that the resistance to style indexes a non-proprietary relationship to language and identity. As I said before, we might think of such writing as reception driven, as a writing style that listens.

Learning to Listen to the “Commonplace” in Heartbreak Tango

After completing *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* in between shifts as a ticket agent for Air France at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City, Puig returned to Argentina at the end of the 1960s to finish writing *Boquitas Pintadas: un folletín* (Heartbreak Tango: A Serial Novel; 1969). The latter novel, an attempt to write in the serial form popular in magazines intended for female readers, closed the two-book reflection on his childhood and the rise of Peronism.²⁴¹ Like its predecessor, *Boquitas Pintadas* examines the 1930s life in a province of Buenos Aires, and sets its primary action between 1938 and 1947, with occasional forays into the novel’s contemporary 1968. Without mentioning the Broadcasting Manual of 1946, instituted the year before the novel begins, or discussing the government’s nationalist censorship of speech forms, the narrative’s repeated recourse to *lunfardo*, the “voseo,” tango and bolero lyrics, U.S. radio commercials, and extra-national *radionovelas* presents the novel as an archive of radio culture government censors meant to have disappeared.²⁴² If, as Pauls and other critics have written, *Rita*

²⁴⁰ Francine Masiello makes a different point about Puig’s work with and against property. For Masiello, Puig’s writing focuses on questions of sexual identity, spectacle and monetary exchange related to the Chicago school’s introduction of neoliberal economic policies in Latin America: “Much like the play of words suggested, in Spanish, by the cognates *invertido* and *inversión*, Puig links the interplay between ‘deviant’ sexuality and money. *Invertir*: to turn outside in or to clothe or envelop. *Inversión*: an economic practice whereby one hopes that an original sum will expand to yield a greater return... the play of *inverted* identities becomes Puig’s *investment* in a form of social exchange” (84-85). Francine Masiello, *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and the Neoliberal Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁴¹ “For the first part of my life, I had been submerged in the reality of the first Peronist regime, and later on in that of the second and third” (Corbatta, 169). Manuel Puig and Jorgelina Corbatta, “Interview” in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Fall 1991, Vol. XI, No. 3).

²⁴² Puig, who participated in the translations of his own works, paid detailed attention to the epigraphs in the English language version of *Boquitas Pintadas*, translated as *Heartbreak Tango*. As his main English translator and biographer Suzanne Jill Levine recounts, “Puig’s vast knowledge of North American mass culture was invaluable to our creative collaboration. The solution we finally came up with was to translate some tango lyrics that were *essential* to the plot (I’ll soon explain), but to replace at least half of the epigraph quotations with either tag lines from Hollywood films or Argentine radio commercials, originally borrowed from Madison Avenue inventions. That is, artifacts relevant to the original context but [128] that rang a funny, familiar, exaggerated bell for American readers... These substitutions added a new dimension of interpretation, or more precisely, they emphasized certain elements in the text that had been more implied than explicit. The highlighted advertisements as in the epigraph to episode II underscore Puig’s implied comment on the commercialization of culture as well as his intent, in writing the books he writes, to show how popular media have dissipated traditional distinctions between consumerism and art” (Levine, “Scribe,” 128).

creates a new novelistic style through the incorporation and transformation of the formal language of the 1930s Hollywood melodramas it references throughout, *Boquitas* mixes this engagement of the cultural products of the Good Neighbor Policy with the national politics of Argentine radio. However, unlike Borges's attempt to insert an Argentine language into the "universal history" of European or North American traditions, Puig's novel develops a new form by mimicking the regionalisms and slang popularized over the radio in a language neither Borges nor the government recognized as their own. Rather than worry about whether or not the immigrant's language is "theirs," Puig turns to "common place" phrases and clichés that apparently belong to everyone.

One of the narrative's clearest examples of the contagious or commonplace speech Puig imitates is found in those scenes where characters listen to tango and bolero songs over the radio. Both musical genres carry specific social indexicals, with tango primarily identifying a working class Argentine public, and the Cuban song form of the bolero indicating a listening public with extra-national pretensions linked to the Caribbean, but, especially in the 1930s and 40s, the U.S. entertainment market.²⁴³ In *Boquitas Pintadas*, Raba (renamed "Fanny" in the English translation), the housekeeper who lives in a converted pantry, listens to tangos, as does the future father of her child, the construction worker Pancho. On the other hand, the more bourgeois Nené, a friend of Mabel, whose family employs and houses Raba, listens to boleros. As if to underscore the thematic importance of the division, the first chapter features Nené listening to a radio program titled, "Tango versus Bolero," whose alternating plots give different versions, one dark and violent, the other romantic and hopeful, of what we come to recognize by the end of the novel as Nené's own failed love story with the tubercular Juan Carlos. Additionally, Nené's letters, which she writes while listening to the program, portray the desires she turns to the radio to fulfill (30).²⁴⁴ Nené, who Pancho says "talked like a radio speaker and didn't forget to pronounce her 's's at the end of the words" (78)²⁴⁵, not only learns pronunciation from the radio, but thinks through uncited lyrics from boleros in the novel's penultimate chapter. Nené's unfiltered absorption of bolero lyrics into a stream of consciousness marks the creation of an "intimate public" in which Nené's supposedly private thoughts borrow from public forms, thus unfolding the logic of the radio's public broadcast reaching the intimacy of private homes. Moreover, the bolero's transmission, from its rise in Cuba to its subsequent popularity in Argentina, categorizes her mixed discourse as participating in not just a "public" realm, but a transnational market in musical forms dependent on the radio, catching and producing thoughts in what we might call a "gulf stream" of consciousness distinct from privatized and / or locally or nationally bounded interior monologues.

²⁴³ "In Spanish American popular music there are two genres that have crossed national boundaries and become continuing sources of common myths and emotional expression about relationships: the tango and the bolero. Of the two, the bolero has been identified with romantic feelings, lyricism, and persistent hope in love" (Campos, 637). More particularly, the bolero traveled to Argentina because of its popularization on Mexican radio in the 1930s, and its boom in Mexican cinema in the 1940s. Mexican cinema's own rise resulted, in part, from Argentina's weakened film industry during the 1940s, which, as I explained in chapter two, came about through tensions with the United States over Argentina's refusal to accept the political and economic program of the New Deal. See René A. Campos, "The Poetics of the Bolero in the Novels of Manuel Puig" in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn, 1991): 637-642.

²⁴⁴ Ellen McCracken, "Manuel Puig's 'Heartbreak Tango': Women and Mass Culture" in *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 9, No. 18 (Spring, 1981): 27-35.

²⁴⁵ All quotes from Manuel Puig, *Boquitas Pintadas* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1972).

While the bolero links the novel to extra-national influences through the radio, the play with linguistic property and radio heard in Nené's discourse, and already familiar from Pauls's analysis, moves into a more specific interrogation of real property and Argentine political history in the four chapters or "episodes" (*entregas*) most explicitly organized around the radio. At the center of these scenes Pancho, the former construction worker who has become a police officer, is murdered by Raba, Mabel's housekeeper. In the first half of the novel, Pancho, employed as a bricklayer in the construction of the new municipal police station, seduces Raba after a dance, and the two make love in the field around the construction site. Here is the scene in the narrative's neutralized tone: "Reason of which Pancho availed himself to make Fanny pass the construction site of the new police station: the necessity to talk a while longer" (85). Notably, this turn to the construction site sets their amorous connection in the property neighboring Mabel's family, where Raba lives and works.

By the second half of the novel, Raba has given birth to Pancho's son, and Pancho, now hired as a police officer in the completed police station next door to Mabel's home, refuses to acknowledge her or the baby. In episode ten, Pancho has turned his attention to Raba's employer. As he walks along the wall dividing Mabel's property from the police station, he flirts with her while he puts up the station's radio antenna, the scene concluding with an agreement that he will come to her room that evening, as she looks at the phallic radio antenna and asks, "Did you get it up?" (144). The overt sexual dialogue is notable if only because the bourgeois Mabel indicates her willingness, through reference to the radio, for Pancho to cross the border between the police station and her parent's home, and to cross the class and racial borders the novel has firmly held in place through the romances up to this point.

Mabel and Pancho's sexual pact, however, ignores Pancho's earlier amorous relationship with Raba on the other side of the wall. Unknown to Pancho, Raba returns from Buenos Aires to Mabel's family home the same day (although in the following chapter) with the tango songs she has listened to throughout the novel still ringing in her head. Similar to what we encountered in Nené's radio discourse, as Raba waits hopefully to reconcile with Pancho, she mixes her memories of their last night together, or her imagination of that night, with tango lyrics:

i'm not going to leave you, Raba, i promise you that i'll never leave you, i'm a bricklayer and i'm a good man '...they gave me the illusion of the dawn...' i love you, Raba, i love you forever '...in the sad night of my blindness' he takes advantage of my blindness, and brings me to a whiter woman, the servant of the Municipal Police Station (170-171).

The interpolated tango lyrics, some of which reference the same songs used as epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter, frame Raba's reflections on her life. However, with the invocation of another woman, the tango begins to anticipate the novel's plot—Pancho's affair with Mabel—and shape Raba's actions as she cites the tango again,

my pupils were like mirrors where one saw happiness[...] the broken glass shatters, a pointed splinter, and the girl from the factory bleeds: a big piece of glass slashes her like a knife cutting meat, through the ribs, and it splits her heart in two! and with one chop i cut the feet, the wing, and the head of a plucked chicken and remove its heart (171).

Here the tango's lyrics melt into her memories of working in the factories of Buenos Aires, but she reinterprets an accident there as part of the tango, which now becomes a violent awakening in which Raba's "blindness" and illusory joy ("my pupils were like mirrors where one saw happiness") is shattered by the kitchen knife she uses to prepare the chicken in her role as a domestic servant. When the scene changes frames, marked by a date, "June, 1939," an unidentified consciousness opens by mentioning "a mature fig," last seen in Pancho's hand as he and Mabel flirted next to the radio antenna. As the consciousness, now recognizable as Pancho, leaves a room (Mabel's) through the window, the narrative lists "the frogs, the puddle, the vine, the servant is sleeping, the flowerbeds, the rosebushes, the ants," until it stops, "i'm shaking, from the cold, there's a cat...it's nothing...who's walking on dry leaves?[...] i thought you were a cat. something is shining in your hand. cat claws? the kitchen knife" (174). While the following chapter's police report makes it clear that Raba has killed Pancho, (although it misidentifies her reasons), the link between the image from Raba's thoughts of the tango and Pancho's last vision of the kitchen knife establishes a peculiar network of connections between radio, melodrama, state and domestic violence. As Josefina Ludmer writes, "[Raba] kills [Pancho] with a kitchen knife; she applies the justice of the tango and of the radio and cinematic serial" (132-133).²⁴⁶

In this 1939 murder of a police officer and former construction worker by a domestic servant with a kitchen knife on the border between a municipal police station and a bourgeois home, in a revenge inspired by the radio's tango lyrics against an affair arranged around a conversation about a radio antenna, Puig reassembles the narratives of the New Deal in order to critique the collusion between state violence and domestic melodrama in Peronist Argentina. I want to argue here that the centrality of radio and real property in this scene derives from the influence of Carson McCullers and Raymond Chandler, two of the very few authors Puig ever mentioned as influencing his own development as a novelist.²⁴⁷ However, if Puig consciously returns to these New Deal novelists in his serial novel about mass media forms in the Argentina of the 1930s and 40s, he does so with a keen sense of the difference between the two countries, as well as an awareness of his own historical distance in 1969 from the political and cultural programs of that moment some thirty years earlier. Indeed, Puig presents a bleaker picture of radio's potential for creating an improved neighborhood of the Americas, and marks radio's property concerns within a very different political framework.

Discussing some of these national differences, as well as the connections between the two countries—Argentina and the United States—Emir Rodríguez Monegal has written about the influence of Hollywood melodrama on Eva Perón's career as a radio actress, and the importance of reading Puig with an ear for the influence of the *radioteatro*. In his 1973 article, "Evita's Dreams: A Propos of Manuel Puig's Most Recent Novel," Monegal argues that "in *Boquitas Pintadas*, the tangos and the boleros, and, above all, the afternoon *radioteatro*, acquires more importance than Hollywood film" (34).²⁴⁸ At the same time that he distinguishes *Boquitas* from

²⁴⁶ Josefina Ludmer, *The Corpus Delicti*, trans. Glen S. Close (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004).

²⁴⁷ For more on McCullers's influence on Puig, see his December 3, 1959 letter to his family. Manuel Puig, *Querida Familia: Tomo 1, Cartas Europeas (1956-1962)* (Buenos Aires: Entropía, 2005): 195.

For more on Chandler and Puig see Gene Richie, Ellen Leder, F.B. Claire, "Interview with Manuel Puig" in *City 5* (winter 1976-7).

²⁴⁸ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Los sueños de Evita: A propósito de la última novela de Manuel Puig" in *Plural*, Vo. 22, (July 1973): 34-36. For a more recent, and archivally inclined analysis of the connections between Eva Duarte's radio dramas and her political radio speeches see Christine Ehrick, "'Savage Dissonance': Gender, Voice, and Women's Radio Speech in Argentina, 1930-1945" in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, eds. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

Puig's first novel, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, he also acknowledges the importance of Hollywood film in establishing the *radioteatro*'s content and, to some degree, its form. For Monegal, Evita Duarte's (soon to become Eva Perón) passion for the films of Bette Davis (*Elizabeth and Essex*, 1939), Ethel Barrymore (*Rasputin and the Empress*, 1932), Marlene Dietrich (*The Scarlett Empress*, 1934), and other actresses performing powerful historical women influenced her own celebrated radio performances, from 1943-1945, in which she embodied the voice of famous women throughout history. By the time she organized a popular uprising in favor of Juan Perón on October 17, 1945, she had herself begun to fulfill what Perón, visiting her in a radio studio during one of her performances of some of these famous women, called "the social function of radio" (quoted in Monegal, 34). By the time she died in July of 1952 she had become "the most important woman in [Argentine] history" (34). For Monegal, Eva Duarte's work as a radio actress impersonating famous women served as the training ground for becoming Evita:

Evita's dreams were the materialization—beneath the form of a voice that performed pleasure and pain on the radio—of the dreams of all the *cabecitas negras*, of all those women from the countryside, who lived in a desert, only relieved by the radio voice...that they (like Evita) also dreamed to become one day (Monegal, 34).

When Puig brings the radio into his novels, and even alters their form to mimic the serial dramas of *radioteatro*, he retells radio culture, "retrains," in some sense, the reader's ear to appreciate the radio's intervention in the political life of Argentina from the 30s to the 1960s. Without loudly proclaiming his political stance, he threads his novel into the country's history. And, at the same time, in turning from Hollywood melodramas in *Rita* to the radio novel in *Boquitas*, Puig mimics the cultural movement in which Hollywood's melodramas provided a vocabulary Eva Perón and her writers transformed into a radio voice to carry a national politics in support of Juan Perón's state.

Thus, when Raba murders Pancho with the kitchen knife on the border of the two properties—the domestic home and the municipal police station—the narrative indexes radio's dialectical movement between the openness of its engineering—the *broadcasting* of wireless, or what Marinetti's radio poetics called "parole in libertà," "free words" or "words spoken freely"—and the conflicting social desires of its content: Evita's dream of rising to power from the provinces, and the melodramatic *radioteatro*'s promise of love surpassing all social class distinctions.²⁴⁹ By placing the murder on the property line and under the radio antenna, Puig signals the collision between radio's wireless promises and the material constraints of real property. At the same time, he diagrams the collusion between melodrama and state violence, as the bourgeois Mabel, whose desire for the working class Pancho mimics an early bolero in the novel, transgresses social divisions, while the representative of the state, Pancho, receives the death penalty for a similar transgression up, rather than down the social ladder.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ For more on Marinetti's writing and the radio see Timothy Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

²⁵⁰ Thus, Puig does not repeat the anti-Peronist politics of Cortázar's "Casa Tomada" (House Taken Over), in which a wealthy brother and sister are driven from their home by mysterious sounds, often read by critics as the populist overthrow of the bourgeois.

Taking seriously Ricardo Piglia's assessment that the murder in *Boquitas Pintadas* "condenses Puig's narrative world" (116), we can also recognize how Pancho's death represents, in plain sight, a stylistic issue that has troubled Puig's critics for decades.²⁵¹ In placing the event in this common place (*el lugar común*), on the margin between two properties, Puig allegorizes his aesthetic politics, and writes the unrecognized history of radio in Argentine literature as a history of the struggle around common places—both those expressions the government sought to ban on the radio, and the desire for housing and radically democratic equality made iconic in the famous photographs of working class "descamisados" bathing in the fountains in front of Argentina's presidential palace in popular support of Perón on the 17th of October, 1945. Much like McCullers and Wright's interest in real estate served as a figure for thinking through the local, national, and international politics of the neighborhood in chapters one and two, Puig places this murder at the converging point of construction sites, radio, and neighborliness, foregrounding what Daniel Link calls the central issue in Puig's work: "How do we live together?"²⁵² Which we might also hear as, "How do we be good neighbors?"

One potential answer to this question emerges in Puig's formal work with "commonplaces." From the Argentine critics José Amícola to Graciela Speranza, those attributes I identified above as deriving from what Alberto Giordano calls "literary listening" (65), have been attributed to a more general 1960s aesthetic of pop art.²⁵³ On the one hand, the "pop" label distinguishes Puig's novels from another type of 1960s literature. As Graciela Goldchluk writes,

at a time in which writers fought to 'be the voice of those who didn't have a voice,' Puig decided that he would prefer to remain silent and listen with attention. With his silence he was able to quiet, momentarily, the overwhelming rhetoric established as literary culture or political compromise, and create a space where a singular writing, a writing like any other, could emerge (Goldchluk, "ñ," 10).²⁵⁴

Unlike the *littérature engagée* promoted by his 1960s contemporaries, including Cortázar, Puig achieves this paradoxically singular and general writing through listening and an adherence to and manipulation of popular generic forms. In its adherence to borrowed expressions, clichés, and set phrases Puig's listening and recording style is best thought of as an aesthetic of the "common place".²⁵⁵

The "common place" approaches Warhol's pop art, admits room for Pauls's analysis of gossip, and highlights the importance of place in Puig's emphatically local, and always transnational texts. In the aesthetics of textual production, "place" refers to Puig's texts situated between mass culture and "high literature" (Romero, 16), or between kitsch and camp (Amícola, 89).²⁵⁶ In terms of gender and language, Puig sketches out a "third term that transcends and

²⁵¹ Ricardo Piglia, *La argentina en pedazos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Urraca, 1993).

²⁵² "Puig's work is the obsessive and systematic unfolding of the same single question: How do we live together? (Which is literally equivalent to: How can we be contemporary?)" (Link, "ñ," 9).

²⁵³ Giordano, "Conversación."

²⁵⁴ Graciela Goldchluk, ñ, pg 10-11, July 24, 2010: "El archivo Puig: Los papeles privados"

²⁵⁵ Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

²⁵⁶ "Puig's *La traición* is a question of place: it situates itself in the middle road between the trivial and the consecrated space of *high* literature" (Romero, 16; translation mine). See Julia Romero, "Las traiciones de Manuel Puig: Otra Lectura de '*La traición de Rita Hayworth*'" in Amícola, José (ed.), *Homenaje a Manuel Puig* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de la Plata, 1994): 15-20.

makes evident the fragile difference of sexual binaries” (Speranza, “Fuera,” 218).²⁵⁷ For Daniel Link, Puig’s writing exists in the “*casi*”, the “almost,” which is neither one thing nor the other, neither masculine nor feminine, “the voice in Puig’s novels is the voice of the *casi* in all its forms” (Link, “Cómo se lee,” 268).²⁵⁸ In Alan Pauls’s reading of *La traición*, he similarly comments,

Ne-uter: neither one, nor the other, between the two. This in-between [*entre-medio*] isn’t a place of synthesis nor a scene of complementarity. It’s the condition of possibility for a literary practice that speaks in the swing between discourses, writings, and genres. Not to reconcile them, but rather to put them in communication, pressure their resistances and their vulnerabilities, and connect their heterogeneities (Pauls, 56-57).

Somewhat against the grain of Link’s argument, and in contrast with Josefina Ludmer’s assertion that Puig’s female characters “belong neither to the middle class nor the *middle ground*” (Ludmer, 133), I am arguing here that precisely what troubles these critics is Puig’s “commonplace” aesthetic, which indexes a location equally difficult to define as Link’s “almost,” and yet one that Puig places at the center of *Boquitas Pintadas*.

Writing for the Commonplace, Writing Against Parody

Such a reading sides with the author against a tradition that hails his work as a parodic critique of media’s alienating relationship with its consumers. The most influential and well known of these readings is Puig’s friend and fellow novelist and radio aficionado Severo Sarduy’s 1971 essay, “Note to the Notes to the Notes... A Propos of Manuel Puig”.²⁵⁹ Opening with an epigraph from Jacques Derrida, Sarduy situates himself within the *Tel Quel* group’s post-structuralist practice, arguing that *Boquitas Pintadas* is “a parody of the novel” (556), “the parodic transgression, the derisive double of the serial novel” (557). Sarduy’s Bakhtinian reading—he footnotes Bakhtin’s notion of “parody” in particular—counters the novel’s potential pop reception, as he argues, “it’s not a pop book,” “the chapters are not themselves common places [*lugares comunes*], but rather they draw attention to the syntax that has produced [*ha dado*

José Amícola, *Camp y posvanguardia: Manifestaciones culturales de un siglo fenecido* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2000).

²⁵⁷ Speranza identifies Puig’s existence as between social worlds: “The always double experience of that limbo in which he lives (two languages, two cultures), the movement between two realities equally lived (inside and outside of the dark room) and the shift between two sexual identities (inside and outside of the family) pressurize the opposition and encourage a new aesthetic form capable of suturing them” (Speranza, “Fuera,” 212).

Logie and Romero write, “Graciela Speranza has described that place, neither peripheral, nor central occupied by Puig, in the following terms: Puig goes beyond narrative modernization in Latin America and thus breaks with a long tradition with respect to the literatures of the center” (Logie and Romero, 33). See Ilse Logie and Julia Romero, “Extranjería: Lengua y traducción en la obra de Manuel Puig” in *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol 74, No. 222 (January-March, 2008): 33-51.

²⁵⁸ More recently, in the weekly cultural supplement *Ñ* dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Puig’s death, Link writes of “an admirable equilibrium” in the influence of Puig’s characters on the author or viceversa. See Daniel Link, “La obra como exigencia de vida” in *Ñ*, Year 7, No. 356 (July 24, 2010): 8-9.

²⁵⁹ Severo Sarduy, “Notas a las Notas as las Notas... A Propósito de Manuel Puig” in *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. 37, Nos. 76-77 (July-December, 1971): 555-567.

lugar] a kind of fiction that is now a common place” (556).²⁶⁰ As opposed to the novelist’s apparent mastery, his characters, argues Sarduy, are “intoxicated with common places [*drogados de lugar común*]—their consumption must precede every dialogue; conversation, alienated by this vertigo, has been reduced to a simple ‘*connection*’” (565). As the pinnacle of Puig’s apparent parody, Sarduy points to the “serial novel inside the serial novel,” the chapter immediately following the report of Pancho’s death, in which Mabel and Nené reunite in Buenos Aires and listen to a *radionovela* as they talk for the first time in two years.

For Sarduy the scene of listening serves three narrative functions: 1) it pacifies the characters’ *lack* by situating them in the story’s fantasy; 2) as with Hamlet’s “Mousetrap,” it makes the reader aware of her potential “being-in-fiction”; 3) it makes the parody’s model emerge in its midst, reveals the “common place...alienating us” (567), and allows the novel to “question” this model, a critical function that renders *Boquitas Pintadas* “subversive.” Sarduy’s emphasis on alienation and parody as key terms meant to elucidate the text’s “subversive” potential make his own writing appear somewhat commonplace forty years later. Rather than follow this familiar critique of the culture industry, I want to argue that the narrative’s political heft lies elsewhere, in its comedy of manners rather than its parodic play with genre and semiotics. This subtle distinction between comedy and parody retunes the reader’s attention to the narrative’s use of radio to create a medium through which characters organize social space by listening. In turn, as Sarduy admits, the reference to a *radionovela* from the early 1940s also draws attention to the historical period: a period, as I have demonstrated above, which operates under particular linguistic codes associated with the radio.²⁶¹ Lastly, the turn away from parody recalls Puig’s own listening technique, in which he reveals, “For me, parody means mockery, and I don’t mock my characters. I share with them a number of things, among them their language and their taste” (Corbatta, 168). He adds, “The point is that the ordinary speech of these people is already a parody. *All I do is record their imitation*” (quoted in Levine, *Subversive*, 124; emphasis added). Moving beyond the problems with listening I identified in Bigger and Max’s failed exchange in *Native Son*, Puig’s listening technique, which records imitation, allows for a discourse that “shares” language between author and character. It thus transforms a scene that might appear to subsume meaningful dialogue into mere “consumption,” and produces instead a depiction of listening as a communicative act.

More a game of social cat and mouse than simple alienation, Mabel and Nené use the *radionovela* to organize their discourse even as it guides their conversation. From the moment Mabel interrupts Nené’s questions about life in the provinces to ask if they can listen to the “afternoon novel,” the latter feels she has lost in the social game: “Nené remembered that her friend always had discovered before her which was the best movie, the best actress, the best star, the best *radionovela*. Why did she always win?” (194).²⁶² Realizing that “as hostess she ought to

²⁶⁰ I have consulted Suanne Jill Levine’s translation of Sarduy’s essay here. See Severo Sarduy, “Note to the Notes to the Notes...A Propos of Manuel Puig” trans. Suzanne Jill Levine in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn, 1991): 625-630.

²⁶¹ Sarduy writes that the use of the *radionovela* produces a sense of “being-in-the-past. The action in *Boquitas Pintadas* takes place ten years before it is recounted by its own characters; the events in the radio soap opera ‘occur’ twenty years before the soap opera” (566).

²⁶² Later in the scene Mabel asks Nené’s opinion of the program, and the latter criticizes the actress: “Nené was afraid to praise the actress’s work. She remembered that her friend didn’t like Argentine actresses. ‘Why no, she’s very good, I like her.’ Mabel replied, remembering that Nené never did know how to judge movies, theater, and radio” (199). In this way, the aesthetics of listening enter into the social pragmatics of organizing the power relations in the room.

entertain her guest” (195), Nené is forced to turn on the radio, which places Mabel, the listener who can recount the series, in the position to guide the conversation. At the same time, it allows Mabel to resist answering questions about the past—“after the show don’t forget to tell me about Raba” (195)—and displace these personal questions into the radio story. Unlike the isolated reading of a print novel, the radio novel allows the two to continue their conversation, tuning in and out of the story, drawing attention to it to highlight another meaning and drowning it out when it too closely approximates a personal detail one of the women is trying to conceal from her friend. For instance, Mabel explains that in the previous episodes of the serial radio novel, “The Injured Captain,” set at the end of the First World War, a French captain from an aristocratic family disguises himself in the uniform of a fallen German soldier in order to escape detection in German territory, where he encounters a farmer’s wife who had grown up near his castle, and had made love with him in the nearby forests until his parents forced him to marry someone of his social class. Nené responds,

he can only truly love one.’ Mabel preferred not to respond. Nené turned on the radio, Mabel observed her and it was no longer through the veil of her hat but through the veil of appearances that she was able to see Nené’s heart. There was no doubt about it: if the latter believed it impossible to love more than one man it was because she hadn’t succeeded in loving her husband, since she had certainly loved Juan Carlos (196-197).

Thus, the radio novel, even its mere recounting, allows Mabel to determine Nené’s intimate secrets. At the same time, the scene points back to Mabel’s affair with Pancho, and thus Nené’s comment about the story also serves as a veiled critique of Mabel’s past.

As these personal manipulations of the radio program continue throughout the episode, the conversation becomes increasingly marked by national and transnational radio and linguistic politics. Most notably, the program, set in the First World War, but broadcast, according to the story’s diegesis, in 1941, references the ongoing Second World War, and, by association, Argentina’s contentious political neutrality. Furthermore, as a program based on extra-Argentine themes, it goes against the policies outlined in the Argentina broadcasting manual. And as these “foreign” voices enter the room and play out over the radio—the same medium that brought news of the war into domestic households throughout Argentina—the listeners’ language is marked by the incursion. Whereas the rest of the Spanish-speaking world uses the word “tú” as the informal second person, Argentine speakers commonly use “vos.” However, as Norma Carricaburo points out in her study of the “voseo,” or the use of the “vos,” across history in Argentine literature, the “tú,” appears in *Boquitas Pintadas* only when characters listen to boleros, the Cuban song form played over the radio, or in this scene of audition to the radio novel. Switching between the “tú” and the “vos,” Nené and Mabel establish a fluid territorial language in the domestic space, which indicates their attention to the program. Thus, as their attention wanes, they switch from the “tú” to the “vos,” indicating a re-emergence of the national language. While such code switching might not appear as elaborate or explicitly political as the “deterritorializing” function Brian Edwards finds in Frantz Fanon’s use of Arabized French words in his writing about Algerian revolutionary radio, Puig’s seemingly inconsequential additions carefully map the small social and pragmatic power games—the comedy of manners—

linked to the changing linguistic rules of radio use that went on to define the Peronist era.²⁶³ Through these commonplace scenes and attention to commonplace language, Puig's recording of imitation, or his mimesis of mediation sets the groundwork for his final novelistic experiments with listening.

E(pop)ic Mimesis: Recording Imitation

Puig's "commonplace" writing around the radio in *Boquitas Pintadas* recalls Sartre's reading of Dos Passos. As with J Ward Moorehouse, the characters in *Boquitas* speak as if a thought "was not formed inside [them], it came from afar" (Sartre, 93). In Dos Passos's case this formation of the utterance produced a "flat" style, a non-psychological, non-expressive tautness on the page, which Sartre characterizes as "slack air," representing the perspective of the chorus. Such a "populist" form countered Roosevelt's "false intimacy" by imitating the very sound technologies that dampened the "sound of space" and allowed "voices from afar" to sound like a voice in the next room. In its lack of psychological depth and the apparent wholeness it draws between the perspective of the individual and the chorus, I noted that Dos Passos's writing could be said to approach the Homeric mimesis discussed by Eric Auerbach, or what Mikhail Bakhtin named "epic" mimesis. Auerbach writes that "a problematic psychological condition... is impossible for any of the Homeric heroes, whose destiny is clearly defined" (12), and that Homeric poems conceal nothing...Homer can be analyzed...but he cannot be interpreted" (13). Similarly, Bakhtin comments that

the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation...it is impossible to experience it, analyze it...the important thing is this formal constitutive characteristic of the epic as a genre...its reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view—which excludes any possibility of another approach (17).

Strangely, while these summations of "epic" or "mythic" mimesis resonate with Sartre's descriptions of Dos Passos's mimetic strategies, they also intersect with what I identified earlier as the "pop" aesthetic critics find in Puig's writing.²⁶⁴ In her chapter "After the End of Literature: From Pop Art to Manuel Puig," Graciela Speranza sums up Puig's style as "suggestively flat" (74).²⁶⁵ In a similar vein, Beatriz Sarlo writes, "Like the pop artists, Puig resolves to erase [*llevar*

²⁶³ Edwards draws on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "deterritorialization" to demonstrate how the radio's mixed signals lead to a mixed linguistic "signal" in Fanon's writing that undoes French as a single, national language. See Edwards, "Fanon".

²⁶⁴ These forms of "epic" or "mythic" mimesis are not equivalent with Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of "myth and enlightenment" in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1999). However, their use of the Odyssean resistance to the Sirens through a self-imposed temporary deafness, and its relation to their opposition to radio in their chapter, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception," contrasts with the aesthetic I find in Puig. Indeed, Puig's writing approaches the extreme limits of Adorno's "critical mimesis," which focuses on mimesis as a relation that acknowledges difference, rather than an identification between subject and object that would transform representation into a relationship similar to exchange value. Puig's later novels attempt to renegotiate representation by turning the apparent object, his interviewee, into the subject, thereby undoing the mimetic categories.

²⁶⁵ "Just as in the work of pop art, through the apparent anonymity and minimal intervention, Puig achieves the effect of a deceiving impersonality. The sentimental and emotional outbursts of his characters openly contrast with the objectivity—the distance—of the technique of reproduction. The original discourse transforms itself into art

a cero] the personal traces of his writing and, also like the pop artists, he is opposed to expressionism.”²⁶⁶ What differentiates Puig’s “flatness” from that of Dos Passos, and even Sarduy? Does the “voice of the chorus” exist in Puig’s novels as it does in *U.S.A.*? Why would a “pop” aesthetic valorize an “epic” mimesis meant, in Bakhtin’s analysis, to stand against the novel’s democratic heteroglossia? What does such a narrative mode allow Puig to say about his cultural moment that we can’t already find in the period’s other (social, magical, primitive) “realisms”?

While Dos Passos distances himself from his characters, Puig identifies himself with his. Against Dos Passos’s cold cynicism, Puig produces a melodramatic narrative that produces the “voice of the chorus” by following the pop procedure of imitating and incorporating genres from the mass media (radio novels, Hollywood cinema, serialized novels in so-called “woman’s magazines”), clichés, stereotypes, and commonplace objects. Furthermore, like Warhol and Lichtenstein, but different from Dos Passos, Puig “privileges the genres of feminine consumption,” at the same time that he inverts gender roles in male genres (the tango) to the point that a woman (Raba) can occupy the male’s place by murdering him (Speranza, “Fin” 96).²⁶⁷ In this sense, the novel narrates the socio-cultural tension that tends to separate the opposing terms he brings together (ibid, 108). Moreover, unlike the parody Sarduy claims for Puig, the boleros, tangos, and *radionovelas* in the latter’s novels can “offer fragments of a lover’s discourse that work like interpretative keys with which characters can communicate affective relationships” (ibid, 106). Against parody and alienation, Puig presents a strangely affective pop art. Furthermore, and equally surprising, the erasure of a personal style, the production of epic mimetic flatness, allows for a new conception of the multi-voiced text, in which the author identifies with his characters to the point that he literally lets them speak for themselves. However, it is this last desire that brings Puig to turn from the radiophonic discourse of his earlier novels towards the tape recorder in his final works.

The Tape Recorder, Testimonio, Translation

The political impulse to “erase the marks” of the author, to transform the novel, in Dos Passos’s words, into “a radio network,” derives, in Puig’s work, from a particular engagement with crises of memory and disappearance in the Argentine dictatorship of the 1970s. With *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* (1981), Puig takes up the tape recorder as his prime instrument in composing his novels. An already culturally burdened technology, the tape recorder references both the techniques of a dictatorial state intent on building an archive of “intelligence,” as well as the genre of testimonial literature meant to respond to the state’s program of “disappearing” citizens. The “testimonio” offers a counter-archive of eye-witness accounts of government atrocities and personal memories to tell the stories the state wants to forget and exclude from its official history. If, as I said above, Puig’s early novels provided an alternative to the “engaged literature” of the 1960s, these final novels work through the other dominant political form of literature in 1960s Latin America, the “testimonio,” in order to

without losing the objective property that links it to daily experience and without producing, therefore, aesthetic or moral judgments” (“Fin,” 114).

Graciela Speranza, *Manuel Puig: Después del fin de la literatura* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2000).

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Speranza, pg. 91. Originally appears in Beatriz Sarlo, “El brillo, la parodia, Hollywood y la modestia,” in *Página 12*, (July 29, 1990).

²⁶⁷ Speranza cites Lucy Lippard, who writes, “In the ‘60s, male artists entered feminine spaces and pillaged them without punishment. The result was Pop Art, the most popular art movement in U.S. history...If the pop artists had been men, the movement never would have left the kitchen” (Speranza, “Fin,” 93).

produce a new form of realism dependent on the tape recorder; it is a new realism which, as Ricardo Piglia writes, “fictionalizes the testimonial and erases its traces” [Puig ficcionaliza lo testimonial y borra sus huellas] (“Pedazos,” 116).

The fictionalization of a genre whose intended purpose, political value, and ethical weight hinges on its ability to present the Real poses questions about this new and potentially parasitical form that seeks to draw its meaning, in part, from the pre-existing genre’s contract with its readers. As Beatriz Sarlo comments regarding the testimonial’s archival function, “Memory is a common good, a duty [*deber*] (as was said in the European case) and a legal, moral, and political necessity. Based on these characteristics it’s difficult to establish a perspective in which one proposes to critically examine the victims’ narratives” (“Tiempo,” 62).²⁶⁸ At the same time, Sarlo points out that the *testimonio*, which arose on the political left at the same moment that Derrida and DeMan denounced Western philosophy’s logocentric belief in the voice as immediate presence, poses particular problems to a critical tradition skeptical and still unsure how to value “experience.”²⁶⁹ In combining the techniques of the testimonial with the techniques of the novelist, Puig, as in his previous fiction, charts a course that avoids the critical condescension of parody, but releases the testimonial’s need to establish a belief in the one-to-one relationship between the author and the content.

Fiction, in this case, produces a space that withholds the foreclosure or the privatization of the speaker’s words from any appropriation by the reader. As María Moreno has written recently, after listening to recordings Puig made for the second of his two cassette tape novels, *Blood of Requited Love* (*Sangre de amor correspondido*; 1982), Puig manages to literally merge his writing with listening:

Not only does Puig seem to realize [the late Argentine journalist and founder of non-fiction Rodolfo] Walsh’s utopia regarding a literature in which only selection, montage and the ordering of a *testimonio*’s pages ‘will open infinite artistic possibilities.’ His major intervention is during the recording, through questions that repeatedly interrupt the turn of the story to demand that his speaker stop on some details, forcing them by systematic induction. It is as if Puig decided to extract the writing from the oral story at that moment [*en directo*]. Each question allows the emergence of that which is still not a text, phrase by phrase (Moreno, 3).²⁷⁰

We might say that the writer, in this case, becomes an editor. He compiles and orders the transcript, but the composition emerges in the dialogue. The listening attends to the properties of the voice—“it possesses ‘its own musical and pictorial qualities’”—, at the same time that it seeks to undo the writer’s claim over the text, as well as the speaker’s claim over his or her voice. However, the cassette tape novels go beyond even the hundreds of pages of notes Puig took interviewing political prisoners and organized into the dialogues in *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976). There, like Richard Wright, who sought to unhook the voice from the speaker, and therefore opposed Zora Neale Hurston’s ethnographic dialect, Puig erased any mark of

²⁶⁸ Beatriz Sarlo, *Tiempo Pasado* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2005).

²⁶⁹ Indeed, Walter Benjamin’s distinction between *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*, most particularly in his essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” remains one of the key categorical issues in approaching questions of narrative representation or aesthetic work of any kind.

²⁷⁰ María Moreno, “Doble casetera,” *Página 12*, 25 Oct. 2010. Web.

“prison jargon” from the finished novel (“Fin,” 112). As Moreno explains, the editing in his cassette tape writing occurs in the questioning, in the listening and recording.²⁷¹

With Puig’s fictionalized testimonials in mind, we can recognize a culmination of the path I have been tracing throughout this dissertation. While the novelists in this dissertation’s first chapter attempted to revise realism to make room for a larger popular community, and Richard Wright, in chapter two, sought in narrative a method to detach the racial identification between the speaker and his voice, chapter three examined how Robert Williams attempted to provide a radiophonic “voice over” for political action against racism and Sarduy employed the radioplay as a means to “decolonize the ‘I’”, and write against the racist colonization of Angola. Puig, from the films of Hollywood to the radionovelas of Argentina, finally encounters in the genre of the testimonial and the technology of the tape recorder, the means to write alongside his characters, and provide both author and character with that “humble self-englargement” Ruttenburg identified in 18th century religious speech as a marker of “democratic personality.” In other words, Puig’s recordings create a new literature “allowing [his] characters to become authors” (Moreno, 1).

However, if the pathways throughout the chapters have shown that the trail to what I am calling Puig’s e(pop)ic realism have relied on technological changes and transnational exchanges, we must realize that Puig’s turn to the cassette tape depends not only on the influence of the testimonial literature of Argentina’s dictatorial ‘70s, but from Puig’s own return to the United States and his desire to write in English. After all, *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages*, written in English, but translated into Spanish and published in 1981 before its eventual publication in English in 1982, emerges from a set of recordings Puig made with a young NYU lecturer named Mark: “I wanted to be him and, it turns out, he wanted to be me,” Puig later recounted (Levine, “Spider,” 294). The transcripts, in this case, become the means for Puig to learn to write as he listens, and, at the same time, allow his character, his interlocutor Mark, to speak for himself. In some sense, however, the turn to English is more of a return. His first attempts at writing screenplays while a student at the neo-realist Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome were in English, and he wrote his first novel, *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*, during breaks from his job behind the Air France ticket desk at JFK airport. Thus, *Eternal Curse* confirms Speranza’s assessment that Puig “writes a literature irreducible in its freedom from the national tradition and the consecrated foreign models” (“Fin,” 31).

In his English language narrative Puig incorporates the cassette’s ontology into the novel’s content. Absent of a narrator for more than two hundred pages, readers “overhear” a series of dialogues between Larry, a thirty eight year old nurse with a PhD in history, and his frail patient, Mr. Ramirez, an amnesiac whose fragmented memories slowly reveal his life as a former labor organizer jailed and tortured by the Argentine government. Puig establishes his themes of memory, experience, and linguistic homelessness on the novel’s opening page, where he unites the material and formal *commonplace* in the novel’s first sentences:

What is this? ‘Washington Square’ Mr. Ramirez. –I know ‘square’ but not ‘Washington.’ Not really. –Washington is the name of a man, the first President of the United States. –Yes, I know. Thanks so much. –... —Washington... — Forget it, it’s not important, Mr. Ramirez. It’s just a name and nothing more. — Was he the owner of this land? —No. They simply named it after him. —‘Named?’

²⁷¹ Moreno adds, “the corrections to the transcripts that I could see are typos and the transcriptions were done by professionals” (3).

—Yes. Why are you looking at me like that? —Named... —My name is Larry. Yours is Ramirez. And Washington is the name of this square, all right? The square is named Washington. —I know. What I don't know is what one is supposed to feel when one says 'Washington' ("Curse," 3).²⁷²

Ramirez's aphasia derives, in part, from his national displacement and encounter with the symbolic centerpiece of the United States in Washington Square. However, as he points out to Larry, his difficulty lies less with the semiotic problem of naming, and more with the experiential issue of finding the proper emotion to fit the name. Ramirez's encounter with learning to feel in a foreign language points back to the novel's composition, in which Puig learns to write a novel in English by listening.

Given my reading of *Boquitas Pintadas*, we might wonder whether Ramirez's puzzlement in his encounter with Washington Square is another example of the "commonplace," or a rejection of this idea. Arguing for the latter point, Ilse Logie and Julia Romero claim that "the city in this novel functions as a 'no-place...that seems organized to forget and lose one's identity'" (41). Clarifying this "no-place" in a reading of another of Puig's novels, Francine Masiello contends that "Puig responds to the danger of stasis by playing in transient spaces, favoring a *no-man's-land* of uncharted wilderness in the field of representation... [He] prefers to confuse a single story of origins that might link location with locution" (Masiello, 87; emphasis added). With Masiello's observation in mind, Washington Square—the symbolic public space of the nation-state—appears more like the "no-place," or no-man's land of transnational wandering. In this case, the novel's constant movement around the square, as Ramirez becomes paranoid of his former captors in Argentina following him, and Larry complains about his displacement, his feeling of abandonment from the American dream, calls into question Washington Square's potential status as a public sphere and "common place."

The apparent rejection of the common place is linked to Puig's work with tone. Rather than follow the more general ethnographic realism of the works of authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Puig does not turn to the hallmark of literary fidelity, writing in dialect, in order to re-establish a connection between the speaker, the utterance, and the place of enunciation. Instead, he amplifies sonic fidelity into an equally troubling issue, as Ramirez tries to acclimate himself to not just the affective association of a word's *content*, but also the signifying sounds that accompany it. As Ramirez repeats at numerous times throughout the novel, "I still don't know what to make of certain tones. The expression of sincere regret...I wouldn't be able to recognize it" ("Curse," 15). And if this is a particular problem for Ramirez, it is also a general problem involved in moving spoken speech to writing, and making tonal difference available to readers.

However, as Puig demonstrates across the course of this novel, writing from listening in a foreign language can teach us not just how to write in another language, but literally through another person, and to incorporate the lesson of translation into the realist project. Thus, we might revise Masiello's earlier point by saying that in *Eternal Curse* the narrative does "link location with locution" precisely in order to "confuse a single story of origins," and to find a way to live in another country by writing through another's mouth, by writing as a practice of listening. We arrive at some sense of this productive confusion by noticing how the absence of tonal markers in the opening pages allows utterances to come from both mouths. This narrative confusion is further thematized in the novel when the exiled Ramirez constantly asks Larry to invent stories, and describe sensations in order for Ramirez to be able to connect language and

²⁷² Manuel Puig, *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

affect. In one scene, Ramirez induces Larry to tell him a story about his sexual experiences during the Vietnam War in order to ease his (Ramirez's) chest pains. Although Larry, who has previously talked about Vietnam, now claims he was never there, Ramirez helps set the scene and Larry begins either remembering or inventing a story.²⁷³ Eager for experience, Ramirez asks,

Would it be possible for you to explain to me what you feel in your member at such moments?' 'It's not only there; the feeling floods your whole body. It's...I don't know how to explain...' 'Try to make an effort.' 'What's the point?' Since you can't explain what you feel, could you at least tell me what it resembles? Something I might experience or remember in my present condition? (60).

The narrative thus mimics the scene of its production and the desire to experience through another's words. Puig makes of his own writing a translation, in order to borrow from translation's own challenge to property. As Piglia says,

Language is a common possession, in language there is no such thing as private property...I have always been interested in the relationship between translation and property, because the translator writes a new text that belongs to him or her, and at the same time does not. The translator is placed in a strange position, in the sense that what he or she does is move to a new language a kind of experience that does and does not belong there. The translator is a strange figure, moving between plagiarism and quotation; he or she makes a strange figure as a writer ("Voice-Over," 64).²⁷⁴

As Larry, the ex-history professor, learns more about Argentine history, and thus helps Ramirez remember the terrible facts of his life in Argentina, Puig foregrounds the question of history, memory, and the translatability of experience central to testimonial writing. And yet, in his desire to make experience available, in his unceasing novelistic search for forms that communicate, to find voices that are "communicable," Puig fictionalizes the testimonial, as Piglia writes, erasing its traces, and creates instead a new realism born of a transnational network of media, mass culture, literary and political history, and personal experience meant to imagine the "real" in the image of language, as a "common possession" where "there is no such thing as private property."

As I said above, I think we should understand this narrative maneuver, away from the particularity of a character's tone and toward a more easily confused, less defined, and more communicable discourse as a shift from older versions of literary fidelity to an e(pop)ic mimesis. Puig's style, his sometimes awkwardly flat English, cobbled together through an imitation of another's discourse, represents this transnational language. Yet, like the epic described by

²⁷³ As Daniel Link comments, "if certain genres like the interview fictionalize a conversation among socially significant interlocutors...in Puig we attend the spectacle of always insignificant speakers." As opposed to Chandler's stories, in which "important characters in the story make significant utterances," Puig recognizes that "conversation...is a thematic and discursive drift: speech without a reason and a specific destination; life itself...The most scandalous thing about Puig's writing is the rigorous stubbornness with which he constructs a literature from conversational waste" ("Lee," 267-268). Daniel Link, *Cómo se lee: y otras intervenciones críticas* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003).

²⁷⁴ Ricardo Piglia, "Writing and Translation" in *Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature*, eds. Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002): 64-67.

Bakhtin as “the absolute past, inaccessible to personal experience and cut off from an individual, personal point of view or evaluation,” Ramirez strives to imitate Larry’s speech and experience in order to help cut him off from a past he does not want to remember. In Ramirez’s actions we see the overdubbing of one experience by another. This recording *and* erasing enables Ramirez to at first share, and then create an experience personal neither to him nor Larry. Such minor forgetting serves a political purpose, as well, in that it will allow Ramirez to resist providing secretive knowledge to his torturers if they should ever return.

One of the novel’s dark jokes is that Larry, the lapsed academic and current nursing home assistant, becomes a different iteration of Ramirez’s old interrogators. Notably, this change occurs with the arrival of another technology, the book, or more particularly a series of French novels, including *Dangerous Liasons*, *The Princess of Cleve*, and *Adolphe*. The books, sent by a humanitarian agency that had recovered them from Ramirez’s by now long forgotten jail cell in Argentina, include a series of numbers attached to specific words, phrases, or paragraphs. Larry, who holds a PhD in history, sets about interrogating Ramirez about the books, and then decodes the system, which reveals Ramirez’s memoir written through the words of the French novels. Soon enough, Larry is in touch with a friend at Columbia University, and, with a fellowship from a university in Montreal, is ready to return to his academic life by publishing Ramirez’s memoirs with an introduction by Larry himself. However, when Larry reads a long passage aloud, Ramirez responds, “I don’t believe a word of it. It’s all twisted, according to your whims. I can’t see what you got out of that. Changing the text” (“Curse,” 190). The novel closes soon thereafter, as Ramirez dies, and Larry, attempting to steal the memoir, is rebuffed by the Human Rights center, and left jobless.

Admittedly, this is a strange turn in a novel I have been reading up to this point as invested in the communicability of experience. It returns us to question the novel’s opening at Washington Square. In striving to create a style of the commonplace, an e(pop)ic mimesis, that attempts to use listening and recording to write a novel in another language, it should not surprise us that Puig opens his novel in the symbolic commons of the United States. However, now we are left to ask again why Puig turned to English to write *Eternal Curse On The Reader of These Pages*. Was it, as his long time English translator Suzanne Jill Levine has suggested, that Puig was dissatisfied with the troubles of working with translators, and thus wanted to avoid putting the process in someone else’s hands?²⁷⁵ If so, the novel registers an anxiety about sharing language, rather than an openness to collaborative experience. Larry’s attempted treachery at the novel’s end would support this claim. And yet, perhaps despite himself, Puig composed a novel that confuses a single story of origins that might link location with locution. He uses listening and recording to sculpt a place in the novel for other voices to resound. And he does so through a flatness of style that reduces literary fidelity in favor of an experimental realism that makes his two speakers sound like each other, their dialogue blurring together on the page. He uses the cassette tape to arrive at a new written language. In reducing these voices’ singularity, and unhinging them from proprietary claims, his novel uses the cassette tape not to access the real, but rather to fictionalize experience and expand its affective range. He replaces the search for the real, with a new, shareable realism, one situated at the commons of the United States, and asking what it means to listen and write in English.

²⁷⁵ Levine, *The Subversive Scribe*.

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