

Indigenous Sonic Sovereignty in Literature and Culture

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The expanding field of Sound Studies has so far paid insufficient attention to the significant role sound has played as a site of settler colonial oppression and Indigenous resistance in North America / on Turtle Island. Settler colonialism has not only severely oppressed Indigenous sonic practices; it has also been invested in constructing the Indigenous Other through the ear by establishing and perpetuating dichotomies of (European) music as ‘civilized’ (and desired) sound vs. Indigenous sonic practices as ‘primitive’ (and undesired) sound / noise. Indigenous cultures have actively – and often successfully – resisted settler colonial sonic oppression and challenged its taxonomies and ideological underpinnings. The conceptual binary of oppression and resistance is, however, inadequate to comprehend the complex and diverse ways in which Indigenous cultures have preserved their identities and continued their cultural practices under sonic settler colonialism. Recently, scholars working in Native and Indigenous Studies, Ethnomusicology, Cultural Legal Studies, and Religious Studies (Kraft 2021; Przybylski 2023; Reed 2019) have begun to study what they term ‘sonic sovereignty,’ that is, the ways in which Indigenous authority and self-definition find expression in sound, in the political sphere and beyond. Such scholarship has yet to pay attention to the diversity of conceptual perspectives and the aesthetics literary and cultural productions offer in their creative (re)imagination of the relation of sound and Indigenous identities.

This workshop is interested in the ways in which literary and (pop)cultural creations by Indigenous artists engage with and contribute to discourses and theories of Native and Indigenous sonic sovereignty. We particularly invite contributions by scholars working in the fields of Literary and Cultural Studies whose research is firmly grounded in conceptual debates on Native and Indigenous sovereignty and probes the heuristic value of ‘sonic sovereignty’ and its impact on Indigenous literary and artistic production as well as on Indigenous political and cultural struggles for authority. Contributors are encouraged: 1. to reflect on the role of sound in creative negotiations of settler ideology and epistemology as well as of Indigenous cosmologies and ways of knowing; 2. to examine to what degree Indigenous literature and art can contribute to Sound Studies and its understanding of sound by critically interrogating Western conceptualizations of ‘sound,’ ‘music,’ and ‘noise.’

Contributions are invited to focus on expressions of Indigenous sonic sovereignty in genres and institutional settings that include but are not limited to:

- text-based literature (drama, poetry, prose fiction and non-fiction), TV and film, and various genres of pop music (blues, country, hip hop, jazz, metal, pop, punk, rock, etc.)
- the acoustic use of new media, social media, and other digital platforms by Indigenous artists and journalists
- museums and archives as sites of sonic settler colonial oppression, Indigenous resistance, and Indigenous sonic sovereignty

Confirmed Speakers:

PD Dr. René Dietrich (Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt): “Sovereign Voices and Intimate Relations: Indigenous Podcasts in the 21st Century Mediascape”

Dr. Sabine Kim (Universität Mainz): “Sounding the Territory and Storying the Land (Back): Talking Totems and Talking Trees in Contemporary Indigenous Art and Storytelling”

Please send your abstract (300 words) and a short bio (100 words) to both organizers:

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