

### **American Resonance: Sonic Writing and Written Sound**

When Frederick Douglass died in 1895, the suffragist Frances E. Willard lamented that “I shall never have his voice for my phonograph.” Willard believed that such a recording would be able to account for an eternal presence of Douglass, repeatedly opening a *track* (to borrow a term from the world of music) that would preserve the experience of Douglass’s unique writing and his exceptional sonic performance of the written word. Against this backdrop, the proposed workshop will attend to sonic performances of writing and literary performances of sound by reconsidering the relationships between writing and sound, literature and speech, lyric and lyrics, language and noise, of writing and reading as resonances.

We seek to move past the dichotomy of the oral and the aural, and instead unfold the more resonant interrelationships of text, sound, and reception. This workshop wants to examine the sound technologies and sonic experiences that have not only shaped works such as Poe’s “Fall of the House of Usher,” Zora Neale Hurston’s use of free indirect discourse, the Federal Writers’ Project “Slave Narratives” archive, Ellison’s *Invisible Man* or Charles Mingus and Leonard Feather’s arrangement of Langston Hughes’s “The Weary Blues,” but continue to inform much of U.S. literature, art, and culture, as in Nathaniel Mackey’s ongoing serial poem “Song of the Andoumboulou,” Glenn Ligon’s video project “The Death of Tom,” or in Fred Moten’s phenomenological analysis of “aftersounds.” Opening the workshop to an array of resonant sonic practices, we follow Jonathan Sterne’s assertion that sound technologies are “repeatable social, cultural, and material processes crystallized into mechanisms” (Sterne 2003), and thus attend to the technologies and trained social, cultural, and textual practices that underlie sound’s resounding in American life, literature, and lyrics.

As the workshop thus centers on the interplay of (literary) writing and sound, and on what Nicole Brittingham Furlonge has so poignantly called “the art of listening” (2018), it invites contributions that explore instances of sound (re)production, mediation, and retention, especially as it moves between communities, periods, and formats. The workshop particularly addresses scholars who focus on cases of denied or impeded (written or sonic) sound (re)production and thus press issues of the conditions and technologies that enable, restrict or challenge oral and aural (mis)recognition as well as (mis)representation. Accordingly, we want to bring together colleagues who reconsider, reframe, or reevaluate the dynamics that cater to or prohibit sound (re)production in a U.S. culture determined by intersecting and competing media, by social reform activism and aesthetic resistance, by pop-cultural hegemony and by artistic avant-gardism, and by a long history of building and destroying archives – all of which inform the production, perception, and heritage of resonances in American literature and culture.

Possible topics can include, but are not limited to:

- the (inter)relationship between narrative and sound/sound and text (for example, in the history of oral storytelling, slave narratives, balladic poetry)
- technologies of writing used to evoke – or silence – communities of sound (such as dialect poetry, free indirect discourse, etc.)
- affinities of sound between lyric poetry, song lyrics, and spoken word (for example in spirituals, popular music, performance art)

- works of literature that explicitly engage in sonic cultures (such as jazz, pop, and hip-hop music)
- the depiction of sounds and/or the representation of sound cultures in comics, graphic narratives, or games
- technologies that invite new sonic and transcribed formats (such as radio, audiobooks, podcasts, streaming platforms, audio archives, or literary recordings)
- the performed reproducibility and reproduction of public voicing (in oratory performances, public readings, stage performances)
- cultural, aesthetic, poetic, social theories of resonance and sound reproduction/sound reception (as, for example, in the relationship between voice and sound, sound and beat, etc.)
- the reconsideration of Walter Benjamin's famous notion of technological reproducibility as a loss of aura vis-à-vis sound (re)production (and in light of changing technical modes of sound dissemination such as streaming, pirating, and mixtaping)
- mnemonic and literary devices used to inscribe sound and knowledge (such as onomatopoeia and nursery rhymes)

**Confirmed Speaker:**

Martin Lütke (JFKI, Freie Universität Berlin), "Writing Samples: Tracklib's *Sample Breakdowns* Series as Transmedial Political Practice"

**Please send a paper proposal (app. 300 words) and a short bio to the workshop organizers!**

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