

Panel Title: Call and Response: Afro-Diasporic Sonic Worldmaking

DGfA 2024 – Conference: “American Soundscapes”

Panel Proposal

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This panel on sonic worldmaking offers a space to investigate how sight and sound are intertwined in the production of racial identity in transnational texts. We deploy the “call-and-response” storytelling structure as a metaphor for exploring how surviving African folk cultures and resistance traditions create continuities and rally potentials for diasporic solidarity among Afro-descendants. The persistence of these cultural practices in audio-visual and written texts, such as spirituals, Afro-diasporic narratives, and protest songs, are subversive forms towards emancipation, equality, and solidarity. It allows the oppressed to participate in alternative space-making and creates transnational soundscapes that give voice. The ritualized remembering, reclaiming, and renegotiating of experiences and historical memory sonically reject spatial and temporal constraints and emerge from traumatic diasporic ruptures such as enslavement.

Regardless, visual images still dominate the cultural analysis of belonging, yet there has been a deepened interest in sonic worldmaking as a critical modality in constructing identities. Jennifer Stoeber (2016) demonstrated through her theorization of the “sonic color line” the impact of sound and listening in the construction, continuation, and disruption of racist discourses in the US by building on W.E.B. Du Bois’ (1903, 1940) conceptualization of race as an effect of multisensory experiences. The observation that blackness is either perceived as invisible or hypervisible in the US informed critical inquiry into black diasporic writing as that of Houston Baker (1984), Henry Louis Gates (1988), Paul Gilroy (1993) in *The Black Atlantic*, and Stuart Hall in his discussion on music in black popular culture (1996). Gilroy notes that the tunes of black Atlantic modernity are “discursive modes of communication” occupying their own unique “frequency” confronting and challenging racialized injustice (37). Recently, sound has become more prominent in research on US slavery, highlighting its role in the process of emancipation and in creating and maintaining memory (Callahan, 2022; Ramey, 2008; White, 2005).

We wish to add to existing debates by engaging specifically with those aspects that make signifying practices of sonic worldmaking particularly transatlantic. We welcome contributions that question the normalization of the white masculine perspective as the dominant way to interpret sonic information. We do so because such dominant approaches attempt to erase the worldmaking potential of women and racialized and minoritized groups by making them sound irrational, emotional, and thus unimportant. The panel will combine literary and cultural studies, inviting contributions from such fields as music studies, gender studies, and postcolonial theory to explore representations of sonic worldmaking in literary texts and other forms of cultural production such as films, television series, or graphic novels to disrupt the fragmented, yet simultaneous experience of the same space by different people.

Confirmed speaker: Marian Ofori-Amofo

Title: “From Work Songs to Liberation: Soundscapes, Resistance, and Palimpsests of Subjugation”

Co-convenors:

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