Black Flânerie, Non-White Soundscapes, and the Fantastic in Teju Cole's *Open City*

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ABSTRACT

This essay develops an alternative notion of Black flânerie, one that foregrounds the flâneur's auditory experiences and practices in the city, explaining how sound patterns work as indexes of historical traumas such as slavery, colonialism, and indigenous dispossession. More specifically, it investigates how sound and space are connected and what these connections may reveal about acoustical and historical conditions of urban sites. Analyses advance readings of spaces as shadowed by sonic traces, echoes, afterlives, and memories, which point to the sedimentation of sound in geographic as well as psychic structures and ruptures and hence show how different soundscapes suggest different forms of relationality: alienation, rupture, intersection, connection, and transformation. Finally, it demonstrates how sound imagery—including music, dialects, noise, voices, and silence—functions to signal fantastic spaces and places, fantastic or speculative linkages in particular, and produces a version of the non-White fantastic. (DKM)

KEYWORDS: flâneur, non-White fantastic, sound studies, urban space, Teju Cole

Published to great acclaim in 2011, *Open City* is a haunting novel by the Nigerian-American writer, essayist, photographer and art historian, Teju Cole.[1] The novel is told through the eyes of Julius, an American psychiatry resident with Nigerian and German roots, who aimlessly wanders the streets of present-day New York and Brussels. In the course of his walks around the city, he encounters a whole catalogue of friends and strangers and ruminates on the

Nigeria of his youth and the history of racial capitalism and its afterlife. The novel combines the narrative present and excursions into Julius's or his interlocutors' narrated memories. Throughout, Cole calls into question Julius's idea of himself as "the listener, the compassionate African" and, in the penultimate chapter, sets up a rape accusation, shocking the reader (70).

Conjured up by Walter Benjamin in his analysis of Charles Baudelaire and Baudelaire's analysis of painter Constantin Guys, the figure of the flâneur is an idly strolling consumer and visionary of urban imagery, questioning the image's relationship to the commodity form and the public spaces of nineteenth-century Paris. Flânerie is a White, masculine form of viewership and connoisseurship, predicated on the leisure time of the bourgeoisie. Benjamin's comments on the flâneur embody the crises of capitalism in the twenties: the withering of experience (*Erfahrung*) under commodity capitalism and the increasing alienation, ambivalence, and commodification of the bourgeois poet. Whereas the alienation and homelessness of the Parisian flâneur are predicated on the freedoms and attendant privileges of the White liberal individual, Black flânerie is a form of negotiating and performing the homelessness, dislocation, alienation, and objectification of the Black subject. Reacting to what he calls the "Starbucks thing" when the store manager calls the cops on two Black men waiting for a friend, Cole comments, "That is why I always say you can't be a Black flâneur. Flânerie is for Whites. For Blacks in White terrain, all spaces are charged."[2] Walking Black is a performative production of space and subjectivity, a "spatial acting-out of the place," and an everyday tactic of appropriation and evasion, which superimposes a "migrational, or metaphorical" soundscape onto the White supremacist text of "the planned and readable city" (de Certeau 93).

Mahlerian, non-western, and fugal musics: Western versus non-western music

Even though Julius feels that record shops "should be silent spaces," when he hears the Otto Klemperer recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, he "acclimatizes" to the music; listening to its emotional movements and Christa Ludwig's voice with rapt attention, he sinks into a kind of "reverie" in the Tower Records on the Upper West side (16). He listens to the emotionally charged movements, recognizing their subliminal shifts in mood and vibration, gradually entwining himself with the music. His merging with the music is reminiscent of the flâneur's mixing with the crowd: allowing his individuality to be swallowed up by the flux of the music, he creates a metropolitan experience for himself. Waiting for the emotional climax of the final movement, he claims that, in the end, it "wasn't simply possible to enter the music fully, not in that public space" (17). In the public space of the store, he cannot bind himself to the blinding ecstasy of "*Der Abschied*" (*Farewell*), which "was as though the lights had . . . come blazing into my eyes," because it is embedded within the world of visual capture and arrest, within regimes of racial surveillance and subjugation (17). Whereas the White flâneur's "princely incognito" allows him to disappear into the anonymity of the crowd, Julius's presence in the shop is contested; he remains alert and cannot relax while listening (Baudelaire 24).

Mahler's music falls out of the normal course of linear and homogenous time, however, following him and enveloping his activities at Columbia Presbyterian hospital on the following day; as *Das Lied* circulates, it becomes an itinerant sound, traveling beyond the location of its original sounding. Moving about the hospital to the tunes of this "mental music" Julius becomes a ghostly figure suspended between the existing environment and elsewhere (14). His sonic experience "articulate[s] a second, poetic geography" (de Certeau 105) on top of the hospital's psychogeography: "[t]here was some new intensity in even the most ordinary things . . . as if the precision of orchestral texture had been transferred to the world of visible things, and every detail had somehow become significant" (18). The most

ordinary details, such as “the gleam” on the glass doors, gain significance: his patient’s foot twitching in its “polished black shoe” works itself into Mahler’s “intricate musical world” (18). Julius ascribes new tonalities to the territory of the hospital, different from those assigned to it by the analytical, disciplinary, and normalizing gaze of the medical establishment. While classical music apotheosizes the practice of psychiatry, as he draws near to Harlem, it falls silent, unable to penetrate the space. In stark contrast to the way in which the Mahlerian “orchestral texture” (re)creates the uptown world, Harlem is not musicalized via this fantastic mobile listening experience. Strangely enough, the reason for the failure to include Harlem in this listening experience is not that it calls for other forms of rhythm or audition. If we are to believe Julius, in the Harlem night there are no sounds: he only mentions the vernacular artifacts and photos of lynchings for sale, the “opaque” and soundless “choreography” of the denizens of the informal economy, and the “silent greeting[s]” exchanged between Black men (18). His practice of flânerie is not evenly distributed across Manhattan’s geography: he is more invested in strolling through and listening to White spaces than being home in and sounding out Black spaces.

In contrast to the elitist, poetic vision invoked by western music, “vaguely martial pop music” is beckoning to Julius in Battery Park, accompanying the calisthenics of Chinese women (164). When there is a pause, Julius picks up the sound of an instrument being played at the other end of the park, which, to him, seems to call up American Indian spirits:

> How clear its sound in the park, how unlike the whine the same instrument made when it was played by a subway busker competing with the screech of subway trains. . . . The song, the clear day, and the elms: it could have been any day from the last fifteen hundred years. . . . The thin sound of the erhu still slithered in among the drums of the

> dancers' tape player, and it seemed to summon to my mind's eye the long-ago spirits that V. had been so concerned to honor in her work. (164-65)

Hovering on the edges of perception, there is nothing definite about the sound when Julius hears it for the first time. The sound of the erhu is initially acousmatic, that is, a sound which Julius hears without seeing what is causing it (*Larousse* qtd. in Schaeffer 64),[3] one which "unsettle[s] relations between sound and image, between what we see and what we hear" (LaBelle, *Sonic Agency* 17). The unsettling effect of acousmatic sound rouses the spirits of the original inhabitants, forcing Julius to reckon with a New York City with almost no Native Americans (27). To detect the source of the sound, he needs to move past the noise of the children and the creaking of their swings, and place himself in the orbit of the erhu players and the singer, where the clear, soft, thin sound of the instrument can resound because it is not in competition with, for example, the noise of the subway. While the White flâneur exposes the phantasmagoria of commodity capitalism by seeing beyond the reified appearance of public places, the Black flâneur illuminates historically co-constitutive racialized economies of dispossession by abandoning himself to the activity of listening.[4] The cross-cultural interweaving of the "thin sound of the erhu" with those from the drums summons the violent histories hidden in the hum of capitalist commerce such as the vibratory traces of the violent and irrevocable destruction of the American indigenous population, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the "executions of paupers and slaves" in the neighboring Customs House (164).

Mahler's music versus silence "in the interval"

Musicologists argue that the Ninth is an example of Mahler's late style which abandons the sonata form in favor of counterpoint (see Rothkamm 495; Adorno, *Mahler* 95) and it is thus a musical reflection of Cole's narrative structure based on counterpoint where

"particular elements . . . are offset by very different, even contrasting elements, . . . leaving the reader with a virtual web of echoes, contrasts, and connections between and across different domains" (Vermeulen 45). Mahler's Ninth Symphony can be seen as part of his "farewell trilogy" exploring the themes of death and farewell (Rothkamm 495, 502). Julius also interprets its cortège-like movement as a kind of leave-taking, which is full of light in spite of the tragedies unfolding in Mahler's life. "The overwhelming impression [his final works] give is of light," Julius claims, "the light of a passionate hunger for life, the light of a sorrowful mind contemplating death's implacable approach" (250).

Julius finds music to be a repository of (otherworldly) possibilities while the White gaze ruptures his identification with human geographies and their inhabitants. While he listens to the forward march of the symphony, a reworking of Fanon's account of going to the cinema and waiting for himself in the interval (140),[5] the music appeals to his imagination and emotional being; he identifies with Mahler, the progression of his disease and his work through it, his final journey back to and tragic death in Vienna. As he says, "Mahler's music is not white, or black . . . , and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question" (252). The "impossible possibility" of these "universal vibrations" marks a formal and temporal disruption which is "a felt presence of the unknowable, the content of which exceeds its expression and therefore points toward a different epistemological, if not ontological and empirical, regime" (Keeling, "Looking for M—" 567). The "dream like-episode" of the symphony's third movement *imagines otherwise*, an illustration of the Mahlerian category of "Musik aus weitester Ferne" [music from the furthest distance] (Rothkamm 509). Mahler's otherworldly music, then, momentarily raises the possibility of escaping from this world illuminated by Whiteness, towards an outer world where Black lives matter.

Theodor Adorno notes that "music, always and forever, has utilized the pause as an element of its form" (*Essays on Music* 625). Cole turns silence into a musical actor,[6] as Mahler's Ninth echoes and pulsates in the concert hall after the music is over:

> The music stopped. Perfect silence in the hall. Simon Rattle was stock-still on the podium, his baton still in the air, and the musicians, too, were still, their instruments up. I looked around the hall, at the illuminated faces, all flooded with that silence. The seconds stretched on. No one coughed, and no one moved. We could hear the faint sound of traffic in the far distance outside the hall. But inside it, not a sound: even the hundreds of racing thoughts had stopped. Then Rattle brought his hands down, and the auditorium exploded with applause. (254)

The "perfect silence" fills the acoustic space evacuated by music and reveals the faint sounds of the everyday. "Silence is," sound studies scholar Salomé Voegelin notes, "not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening" and of "sound making," which acts constitute the listeners as a sonic community (83). Silence in the hall is, then, the beginning of listening and of sound-making; it cancels the listeners' habitual thoughts and bodily movements: bound to the sonic materiality of silence, small, tiny sounds "enter and pull on [them], inside and out . . . silence captures [their] body within itself" (86). Although their capture by the totality of silence is fleeting, the "openness" cultivated by such modes of collective listening is the ground for mutually shared forms of revelation and possibility which, however, do not have the capacity to encompass the political realm.

Although Mahler's music establishes a form of sonic relation, it does not have the capacity to shift the racial structure of space and subjectivity. Julius cannot help noticing that "[a]lmost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white" (252, 251). In fact, he

relays that, waiting in line during intermission, sometimes "[he] get[s] looks that make [him] feel like Ota Benga," the Mbuti man exhibited at the Monkey House in the Bronx Zoo in 1906 (252). In the acoustics of the interval, the normative modes of sense perception and distributions of the sensible violently annihilate the symphony's otherworldly *commoning*. The realm of representation and visibility returns Julius to the impossibilities of Black being, puncturing his affective identification with human geographies and their inhabitants, and, by locking him in the "hellish cycle" of colonial geo-temporality, interrupts his move toward a "universal" future (Fanon 140). In contrast to White flânerie, which is about the modernist desire of looking and being looked at, Black flânerie is also about listening and the impossibility of escaping the White gaze.

Dissonance versus rhythm

When in Brussels, Julius finds himself completely alone in the Notre Dame de la Chapelle, and his first impression is that of "total silence," but as soon as his ears adjust to the quiet of the environment, he hears what he identifies as a typically ornamental Baroque piece (137). However, he notices that there are "distinct fugitive notes" and "a dissonance in the sound of the organ music," turning the piece into "something else," reminding him of Peter Maxwell Davies's "O God Abufe" (138). "It was such a low volume," Julius observes, "that even as I heard the distinctly unsettling half step of a tritone repeated in the music, the melody itself was difficult to catch hold of" (138). When Julius realizes that the music is not live, but recorded, he detects

> the source of the fracture in the sound: a small yellow vacuum cleaner. The high-pitched hum from the machine had risen and mixed with the recorded organ music to create *diabolus in musica*. The woman who was cleaning did not look up from her

> work. . . . [She] continued her work, fully absorbed, and the organ piece wove around the single, wavering hum of the vacuum cleaner. (138)

When Julius realizes that the source of the "fractured, scattered feeling" is the overlay of organ music and the hum of the vacuum cleaner, he describes the resultant music in terms of *diabolus* (138). The tritone (nicknamed the *diabolus*), an interval of three whole tones (an augmented fourth or a diminished fifth), was regarded as too dissonant and prohibited in Medieval music and subsequently celebrated by Romantic composers and jazz musicians as a source of tension ("*Tritone*"). The "hum" of the vacuum cleaner is an echo of the gendered racialization of labor under White supremacy, and as such it is indexed to invisible, obscure, and disposable peoples. The humming rattles the European rules of tonality as well as Julius's hearing, who confesses that the resultant "sonic fugue"[7] escapes categorization, signifying the hyphenated and troubled being of the Black refugee/migrant/settler in neocolonial Belgium (5). Black noise becomes essential to the fugal composition, as the organ music weaves into what Glissant might call the "apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise," dissolving the distinction between art and life, music and noise, labor and expression (124). This "'ongoingly' reconfigured and reconfiguring, shifting and reshifting, bent and bending" (Moten, *In the Break* 60) acoustic produces forbidden and disturbing sound effects—just like the *diabolus* did in its day. As the fiendish, fugal, fugitive notes spoil and stain the perfectly pure harmonies of Western music, noise thickens into tritonic and transubstantial music, seething with the tension between civilization and blackness. Asserting its secret adjacency to White institutionality, the noise renders the White vicar's footfall "soundless" (140). Contrary to the alienating effect of the White flâneur's gaze, Julius's exposure to Black noisemaking makes possible a form of relationality that is not based on the grammar of humanism,

recognition, and rights. As he passes the noisemaker before heading out, "he nod[s] to her" (140).

Under the spell of this Afro-sonic event, Julius continues his musings, noting that before his arrival, he would have assumed that he could read her nationality from the physiognomy of her face, because he had thought all Africans in Brussels were Congolese, but Black performative practices at a night club dispel confidence in himself as a "detective" of urban life (Benjamin 442). As he is drinking and watching the young Africans at the club, "all dressed up, fashionable, flirting with each other," he assumes that they are all Congolese (139). Once he realizes that "[e]veryone [i]s Rwandan," he has the sense that the space "suddenly become[s] heavy with all the stories these people [a]re carrying" (139). As Julius's gaze traps these young Rwandans in the narrative of victimology, he makes their traumatic past present, imprisoning them in their psychic traumas. Their absorption in American hip-hop, however, supplants his libidinal investment in Black suffering; he concedes that the young Rwandans are "like young people everywhere" (139). He spends the evening alone at his table, refusing to participate and lose himself in the "choreosonic" community threaded together by the rhythmic intensities of hip-hop.[8] Although he does not join in, the collective, rhythmic, embodied, improvisational forms of Black sociality, the "inscrutable and unremarkable innocence on view," as he terms it, enable him to interrogate the racial schemas he has internalized: his liberal over-identification with Rwandans, on the one hand, and their dismissal as killers who "learned how to look innocent," on the other (139). For, as his "visualsonic" memory of the hip-hop party is interwoven with that of the woman's labor in the church, Julius speculates that "she [the African noisemaker in the church], too, might be here in Belgium as an act of forgetting . . . . And perhaps her escape was not from anything she had done, but from what she had seen" (140). In spite of his alienation, his acoustic immersion in hip-hop collapses the divide between him and young Rwandans, inviting Julius

to imagine a diasporic identity structured around the common desire to escape and forget. Julius's absorption in *diabolus*, "the woman who continued her work, fully absorbed," and in the young men, who were "obviously absorbed in the moving bodies of the beautiful young women," connect the African diaspora—exemplified in Julius, the African woman in the church, and the Rwandan youth—to what he terms "act[s] of forgetting" (139, 140). Such choreosonic practices allow, to use Christina Sharpe's formulation, a "memory for forgetting," which unites the diaspora in ways of listening to the fugal musics, noises, and silences of colonialism's wake (11).

The triangulation of *diabolus*, hip-hop, and the African woman's silence creates a sonic opportunity for Julius to hear her and her history anew—from a Black perspective. Julius affirms her unknowability and the "opaqueness" of her quotidian performance, admitting that he will never know her "secrets," for "she possessed her secrets fully" (140). Rather than ventriloquizing her or imposing on her the western requirements of "transparency," he affirms her noisemaking and silence as forms of opaqueness, a felt presence of "the irreducible density of the other" (Glissant 133). As soon as he thinks about her unknowability in terms of subjectivity, however, he cannot resist the grammar of the Human. He claims that she withholds her secrets "as did those women that Vermeer painted in this same gray, lowland light; like theirs, her silence seemed absolute" (140). Through this comparison, Julius subjects her to "hallucinatory whitening," symptomatic of the impossibility of representing blackness outside the visual schema predicated on the exclusion of the Black body from the grammar of the Human (Fanon 100). Whereas the sonic has the capacity to imagine the unthought position of the Black woman and, therefore, to suspend the racializing assemblage of the human, the visual schema reiterates the antagonism between the human and blackness. Because of this link between the sonic, imagination, and relationality, Black flânerie is first and foremost a listening, and not a visual, practice.

Fugal, fantastic, and flat voices: Underground versus aboveground

Alluding to his breakup, Julius claims that he had not been able to make sense of his partner's grievances or relate them to his life. In the aftermath, however, he wonders "whether there was something [he] had missed, some part of the failure for which [he] might be held responsible" (70). In the wake of such speculations, Julius encounters the Haitian shoe shiner Pierre "in the underground catacombs of Penn Station" (70). In spite of his dislike of the hierarchical nature of the shoeshine business, Julius acquiesces to the man's wish to polish his boots, who, in his own account, is a refugee from the Haitian revolution (1791-1804), a formerly enslaved man who purchases his sister's and wife's freedom before seeking his own. According to Pierre's monologue, he survived New York's yellow fever outbreak (1795-1804) and with his wife established a school for free Blacks on Canal Street:

> I came here from Haiti, when things got bad there, when so many people were killed, blacks, whites. . . . We heard reports of how bad things were, how many people had been executed by Boukman and his army. . . . Through the good graces of Mrs. Bérard, I took the trade of hairdressing, . . . and received money for my work. . . . In this way, I earned enough to purchase freedom for my sister Rosalie. . . . After a while, I had enough money even for my own freedom . . . (71-73)

Hidden away in the realistic portrayal of the narrative present, this fantastic underground-world has not been referred to in criticism. Julius does not betray any signs that there is anything uncanny about this encounter with a 220-year-old Haitian American in Penn Station; he lets the man finish the shine, offering absolutely no response to him and never referring to him again. Julius's "deliberate refusal to be interpellated by tropes of racial solidarity"

(Chude-Sokei 66) is nothing out of the ordinary, but with a character otherwise so attuned to the ghosts of slavery and empire, his silence creates a meaningful pause, a fantastic crack into which the man's self-annihilating utterance disappears. Julius's silences speak as loudly as his words, and I read his silence here as being sonically constituted, a sonic trace of his incapacity to engage enfleshed memories. The narration also casts Pierre's fugitive, underground existence as a challenge to the state-sanctioned killing of Black people, revealing the complex and multidirectional possibilities of Afro-diasporic (non)being.

Though Julius notes that Pierre speaks in a French Caribbean accent, his speech is not marked by the morphosyntactic, phonological characteristics of creole English, and it is formally indistinguishable from the narrator's own language. Like most speeches in the novel, it is not even marked by quotation marks or dashes. As noted by Pieter Vermeulen, "the lack of distinction between free indirect speech, interior monologue, and reported speech robs these [conjured] voices of their dialogic, agonistic, or contrapuntal potential" (48). In spite of the novel's investment in acoustics, the forms of remembrance vernacularity engenders are strangely muted; the hyperaurality of creole is alienated from its logocentric transcription as discourse. This silencing of vernacular voices creates the condition of possibility for Julius's occult self-invention and his evasion of Black suffering in what Christina Sharpe terms the "wake."[9] In contrast to his surrender to the "trance" of Mahler, for example, he fails to open himself up to the underground rhythms and voices of Black social life (17).

The reign of the fantastic continues aboveground, where Julius stumbles into the ongoing and multiple present of slavery's wake. Entangled in the double-time of the Iraqi war and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,[10] Julius goes on to narrate, in his generic, flat, affectless tone, what Toni Morrison might call his "rememory" of the bloodiest race riot in American history, or as critics have read it, his postmemory of the enlarged photographs of lynchings he had seen in Harlem (18):

> As I came to Ninth Avenue, there was a silent commotion . . . where I saw pamphlets opposing the war fluttering in the wind like a flock taking sudden flight. I had the impression of a crowd dispersing, the height of their activity just past. . . . This afternoon, during which I flitted in and out of myself, when time became elastic and voices cut out of the past into the present, the heart of the city was gripped by what seemed to be a commotion from an earlier time. I feared being caught up in what, it seemed to me, were draft riots. . . . There was some kind of scuffle two hundred yards down the street, again strangely noiseless, and a huddled knot of men opened up to reveal two brawlers being separated and pulled away from their fight. What I saw next gave me a fright: in the farther distance, beyond the listless crowd, the body of a lynched man dangled from a tree. The figure was slender, dressed from head to toe in black, reflecting no light. It soon resolved itself, however, into a less ominous thing: dark canvas sheeting on a construction scaffold, twirling in the wind. (74-75)

With traffic noise between 75 and 80 decibels on any given day (Wellington), the "commotion" and the "scuffle" on 33rd and Ninth appear to be "silent" and "strangely noiseless" (74, 75). The "silent commotion" (74) involves Julius in what he sees: "it pulls the seen towards [him] as it grasps [him] by [his] ears" (Voegelin 11). Silencing the soundscape of the race riot complicates the sonic color line which, according to sound studies scholar Jennifer Lynn Stoever, amplified sounds deemed "white," and silenced, suppressed, or toned down those deemed "black" (235). However, Julius's fear of being annihilated by the race riots has the effect of not only drowning out the hearty cheers of lynch mobs but also the cries of their victims. His impression of the dispersing mob and the hanged man is accompanied by listening to what might be termed pure silence. "To experience pure silence," sound studies

scholar Brandon LaBelle suggests, "would be to reach the edges of perception" (*Acoustic Territories* 79). The opaque figure "reflecting no light" (75) insists on the right to disappearance (see Keeling, "Looking for M—") and obscurity (Glissant 2). By slowing down and stretching time, the "phonic materiality" (Moten, *In the Break* 197) of silence generates a space for expanded listening, where the lower and darker frequencies of Black sociality, irrevocably and improbably entombed by official history, can be heard echoing in the fantastic silence of the sidewalk. For the Black flâneur, silence and noise alike function as the grounds for embodied and racialized histories. However, the embodied nature of this knowledge and the racialization of the body effects his relationship to city crowds. Rather than seeking refuge, he cannot help guarding and distancing himself from crowds bent on the destruction of his Black body.

Aquatic echoes versus Afro-diasporic echoes of "brotherhood"

While Paris becomes a landscape for the White flâneur, Julius turns to the dark seascape to ruminate over the odd ejection of water from the isle: "This strangest of islands . . . from which water had been banished. . . . Everything was built up, in concrete and stone" (54). During the day, city "traffic makes the river . . . inaudible" (3), but standing on the promenade in the evening, he notes that, "[a]ll was quiet" (54). As he walks along the promenade, "evanescent, all encompassing, dreamlike, alien" elements (Helmreich 154), sounds impossible to hear in the "incessant loudness" of the streets, move to the foreground of the soundscape (6):

> Out, ahead of [him], in the Hudson, there was just the faintest echo of the old whaling ships, the whales, and the generations of New Yorkers who had come here to the

> promenade to watch wealth and sorrow flow into the city or simply to see the light play on the water. Each one of those past moments was present now as a trace. (54)

In the quiet, he can hear a soft echo, that is, "the repetition of a sound caused by reflection of sound waves" (*"soft echo"*). As a result of its ephemeral and otherworldly qualities, it is not clear whether the echo of the whalers, the whales, and the generations of New Yorkers "really sounds" or whether it is what Julius hears, for the boundary between audition and the sonic imagination becomes blurry; it is entirely possible that the vague echoes (he imagines) he hears "are not there at all, but who can tell" (Voegelin 85). What matters is that the sensation of the sonic underwater life-world carries him into the world of his own audition and the palimpsest history of New York.

Connecting the past with the present, the aquatic echo performs a critique of American progress narratives, supplementing such narratives with the legacy of settler colonialism and slavery. As sound studies scholar Michael Veal claims, the echo, a form of sonic mimicry, "is closely associated with the cognitive function of memory and the evocation of the chronological past" (455-56). Making each one of those hitherto unconscious "past moments" conscious and "present now as a trace" (54), the echo acts as a mnemic trace (*Erinnerungspur*) from which the anamnesis of the vanquished and the historically repressed flows freely. The echo "create[s] a relational space . . . , a geography of intimacy," binding Julius to the Lenape peoples, the settlers, the whales, and the arrivants—the living cargo brought into the port of New York (LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* xvii). The flâneur's activity of listening to the "breathing of the water" (55) uncovers the carnage of history: the palimpsest site of the city, "written, erased, rewritten" (58-9), among them, indigenous genocide and land dispossession: "What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble?" (59) The "ululations of the water" (55) create a particularly emotional and fluid sonic ecology,

vibrating at the "universal" frequencies of White ethnic and non-White, human and animal suffering.[11] However, this urban palimpsest, which fails to insist on the specificity of antiblack and indigenous erasure, risks equating these distinct forms of domination and, most problematically from the perspective of Black Studies, thinking of slavery as one form of oppression among others (see, for instance, Sexton 47-48).

Encompassing the "murmurs" of the black water, the Black flâneur's palimpsest vision of Manhattan prompts the possibility of acknowledging his diasporic affiliations (55). Through the sound of the water current, the iconic image of White America, the Statue of Liberty, is transformed into "a fluorescent green fleck against the sky," a specter of the accumulated violences of Middle Passage (54). Julius, who rarely acknowledges the presence of Black diasporic subjects, suddenly affirms their claims of "brotherhood." He observes that "[Ellis Island] had been built too late for those early Africans—who weren't immigrants in any case—and it had been closed too soon to mean anything to later Africans like Kenneth [the Barbadian guard], or the [nameless] cabdriver, or me [Julius]" (54-55). Having dispelled the notion that America is a nation of immigrants, he goes on to expound his idea that "Ellis Island was a symbol mostly for European refugees, for "Blacks, 'we blacks,' had known rougher points of entry" (55). Julius can finally admit that "this . . . was what the cabdriver had meant. This was the acknowledgment he wanted . . . from every "brother" he met" (55). Julius's use of scare quotes around the term "brother" is a form of linguistic performance, in which he echoes this multi-voiced term—in dialogue with African American, African, and other diasporic voices[12]—back to his interlocutors.[13] By figuring his ambivalent relationship to (male) speakers of urban vernaculars, his mimicry articulates a dialectic of identification and separation characteristic of the flâneur's identity. As we hear the word "brother" again and again, we apprehend it as a performative speech act which articulates Julius's fraught relationality with Black "people who tried to lay claims on [him]" (40). For instance, after the

hermetically sealed-away and profoundly silent world of John Brewster's portraits, he forgets "how to speak" and therefore fails to greet the African cabdriver, who is offended by Julian's belated verbal signaling of diasporic allegiance: "So, how are you doing, my brother?" (40). The cabdriver, desirous of acknowledgment from his brother, "Hey, I'm African just like you, why you do this?" drives Julius to the wrong address (40). In Brussels, Julius addresses Farouq as "[his] brother," wondering whether what he terms as his "aggressive familiarity" had not struck a "false note" (101, 102). As discussed later, the Black American poet's performance and interpellation of Julius as a "brother" irks him to the point that he makes "a mental note to avoid that particular post office in the future" (186-87, 188). Before he is mugged, he acknowledges that the quick gesture of solidarity exchanged between himself and the young Black men is based on "[their] being brothers" (212). The echo of "brother" is thus a sound that can be heard expanding across the acoustic space of the narrative as a "proliferating multiplication," negating the idea of an a priori relationship to blackness, reshaping and refiguring it through a constellation of performative gestures (LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* 40). For the echo, to quote from LaBelle again, "disorients the origin, supplanting [it] with an array of projections and propagations" (*Acoustic Territories* 40). Continuing to think through Moten's notion of blackness as "an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line" (*In the Break* 1) and Sharpe's concept of anagrammatical blackness (75-77), we arrive at the echo of / in brotherhood as affirmed and negated through the alienated figure of the Black flâneur. That is, "brotherhood" reverberates in the afterlives of slavery, an infinitely multiplying sounding that is always already a re-sounding, a reconstruction and a refiguration of the original sound without any possibility of return or retrieval. Although Julius cannot break out of the alienation and individualism of the Parisian flâneur, his auditory relationship to blackness orients him toward connective possibilities.

Elite versus vernacular

In stark contrast to the White flâneur, Julius's sonic orientation connects him to passersby and patients on an affective and vibratory level. As V., Julius's patient and an indigenous scholar whose scholarship on American settler colonialism takes a toll on her mental health, had once said to him, "It's a difficult thing to live in a country that has erased your past" (27). For Julius to hear V.'s suffering, he has to lay down his logocentric weapons and cerebral posturing—without capturing, classifying, or reducing her distress to analysis—and engage in what he calls a "compassionate practice" (204), one which requires the labor of listening to and witnessing the other. According to the way in which he describes one of their sessions, he communes with the vibrational frequency occasioned by her voice, and honors the material suffering which breaks her speech: "She fell silent, and the sensation created by her words—I remember experiencing it as a subtle shift in the air pressure of the room—deepened in the silence, so that all we could hear was the going and coming outside my office door" (27). Julius senses the sound created by her words in the form of vibrations. For, as LaBelle explains, the intimate bond between sound and vibration forms "a partnership that extends the air-borne wave to the material world, as frictions and tactile feeling" (*Acoustic Territories* 133-34). The sensation of sound as vibration intensifies the silence, enfolding their bodies in an expanded field of tactile and affective energy. As noted by sociolinguists, rather than stopping it, silence can function to keep dialogue open. Their communication verges on silence on one side and the frequencies of the disappeared on the other. The indigenous scholar and the recent immigrant of color practice commonality on the vibratory level and rest in the silence of what Glissant calls nonhistory.

However, Julius's listening practice does not extend to the recitation by the postal worker, the African American poet-activist Terrence McKinney, who claims him as a "brother" (186). Seemingly acquiescent to Terrence's wish to connect, as a matter of fact,

Julius vows to keep clear of that particular post office. Even though the narrative robs all voices of their contrapuntal potential, Farouq and Khalil,[14] for example, are represented more authentically and sympathetically than the Black American street poet and his "freedom dreams":

> We are the ones who received the boot. We, who are used for loot, trampled underfoot. Unconquered. We, who carry the crosses. Yes, see? Our kith and our kin used like packhorses. We of the countless horrific losses, assailed by the forces, robbed of choices, silenced voices. And still unconquered. You feel me? For four hundred and fifty years. Five centuries of tears, aeons of fears. Yet still we remain, we remain, we remain the unconquered. (187)

His jam is represented as having an "already-read," parochial, and naïve quality; instead of vernacular expression exceeding its content, Black radicalism is reduced to a clichéd catalogue of grievances. Julius's sympathies do not extend to this poor Black man who is so different from the figure of the flâneur; he does not practice listening in relationship to Terrence's styling of vernacular rhythms and rhymes. Rooted in the racial calculus of auditory distribution, Julius contains the decolonial potential of Terrence's poetic practice, placing it outside the intelligible and recognizable forms of poetry. Julius is unable to recognize popular, nonbourgeois expressions of Black masculinity, ordinary Harlemites' forms of struggle and survival as they are inevitably shaped by class and gender and sexuality. To be moved by Terrence's rhythms, Julius would have to give up or at least shift the flâneur's elitist orientation and acknowledge an experience that he does not know and prefers not to know. As opposed to the psychiatric space transfigured by Mahler's harmonies or V.'s profound silence, the post office in Harlem does not become a space of enunciation because

the ensemblic possibilities opened up by the poet's vernacular rhymes are dismissed by the Black flâneur.

Wailing, humming, and creaking: Distress signal versus noise

To illuminate the spatial and sonic constrictions placed around Black flânerie, Cole juxtaposes the Mahlerian vibrations with the siren from an ambulance (252). Julius's disorientation after the joy of the Ninth is profound; he accidentally uses the emergency exit, locking himself out of the emblem of Western civilization: the "all-White space" of Carnegie Hall (252). This "situation of unimprovable comedy" (255) provides yet another instance of the contrapuntal nature of Black flânerie. The White flâneur's slow, idle, roaming movement through space is uncontested; no space is denied him. The Black flâneur's right to movement, however, is fraught. The counterpoint between Julius's immersion in the symphony's climax and his subjection to the carnival of Black life, that is, "life drawn out of its *usual* rut . . . life turned upside down" (Bakhtin 129), dissolves the distinctions between art and life, hypervisibility and in/visibility, tragedy and comedy, music and noise, spectacle and subjection. Already, we may posit that Cole transposes all that is excised from Western music and White flânerie to this grotesque situation involving the confinement of the Black body and its exposure to the storm brewing outside. Having been expulsed from White institutionality through the emergency exit, he is standing on the fire escape when the "wailing" of an ambulance reaches him from below, "stretching out as it headed down toward Times Square's neon inferno" (256). Suppressed by the acoustic design of Carnegie Hall, the screaming siren grabs Julius's attention shifting his listening practice toward the sonic dimensions of everyday life. The "wailing" that "accompanies entrance into and expulsion from sociality" dumps Julius from the ecstasies of Mahler into the ongoing state of emergency that the ambulance's siren evokes (Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness" 746). The high-

pitched warning signal makes him realize that Black flânerie is always already imperiled; he desires a state of emergence while simultaneously aware of his imprisonment in Black modes of emergency.

While the siren relates Black flânerie to a state of emergency, the ongoing flow and ebb of the "hum" downtown teaches Julian that emergency is not the exception but the rule. As Julius shifts his "oppositional gaze" from the high-rises in the Financial District to the unacknowledged African Burial Ground located there, he explains that "the land had been built over" and only a tiny spot set aside to commemorate the enslaved and free Blacks interred into the earth: "most of the burial ground was now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government" (220). Drawing out "an acoustical flux [which] teems with energy, frictions, and noises to form a sonorous fabric" (LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* 92), the quotidian and ongoing hum of the sidewalk steeps him in "the echo across centuries, of slavery in New York" (221). Closely associated with counter-memory, the hum of neoliberal commerce and necropolitical governance "lend[s] dynamic appeal to the historical imagination to not only fixate on archival pages, but to supplement such reading with a sense for what is buried within" (LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* 108). The hum of slavery's "forgotten" violences explodes the Benjaminian vector of homogenous, empty time and ensconces Julius in what Achille Mbembe terms the "time of entanglement." That is, a nonlinear "*interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones" (16). As Julius bends down on the grassy plot near the monument, "[he] lift[s] a stone from the grass and, as [he] d[oes] so, a pain sho[ots] through the back of [his] left hand" (222). When the pain materializes as a physical and tactile sensation, the hum envelopes his body in a field of diasporic suffering in which he relives the torment of enslaved people.[15] His communion with the descendants of

slaves is not an elective form of affiliation; he cannot go in and out of relationality, as his fancy pleases. The Black flâneur is not afforded the luxury of the dialectic of spleen, alienation, and intoxication; the continuous hum of slavery's "as yet unresolved unfolding" batters and breaks him (Sharpe 13-14).

Creaking downtown versus in Chinatown

Surrounded by islands of super or advanced gentrification, lower income people are displaced or excluded from living in the neighborhoods near Battery Park. Consequently, the young children in the playground are beneficiaries of privilege: "The park brimmed over with the noise of children too young for school. . . . The creak-creak of the swings was a signal, I thought, there to remind the children that they were having fun; if there were no creak, they would be confused" (Cole 162). Although the creak is an integral part of their enjoyment, these very privileged children do not pay attention to or hear the "creak." But Julius, who hears the "creak-creak" of the swings, associates it, besides their enjoyment, with slavery and its displacement from the history and geography of downtown Manhattan: "This had been a busy mercantile part of the city in the middle of the nineteenth century. Trading in slaves had become a capital offense in the United States in 1820, but New York long remained the most important port for the building, outfitting, insuring, and launching of slavers' ships" (162-63). The creak of swings thus acts as the sonic trigger for his exposé of the historical and ongoing entwinement of the spatialized violence of racial capitalism and systemic forms of exploitation and expendability underpinning the "development" of this part of the city. By using ordinary sound to unearth the racial calculus, Cole is suggesting that if one retunes or amplifies this noise well enough to hear it, it may assist one in also hearing the buried archives of slavery and racialized dispossession. The reader is invited to think about the normalization and the resultant unconsciousness of dominant sensory (including auditory) and

breathing patterns; the chokehold murder of Eric Garner on Staten Island demonstrates the processes of hyper-gentrification, encompassing the displacement and destruction of lower-income people of color, racist surveillance and policing, and the racial distribution of the heard: who is heard and what is done about it. During his assault, eleven times Eric Garner cried, "I can't breathe." The failure to hear him demonstrates the sonic color of the twenty-first century, wherein Black voices, sounds, and noises go unheard, that is, refuse to be heard, by the White listening ear. This incident connects to what the Caribbean air-conditioning specialist, who is carrying out temperature checks on the subway cars, says to Julian, no one heeds the temperature or the ventilation unless it is uncomfortable, adding with a laugh, "you don't ever notice your oxygen until it's gone" (230). That is, following Black Studies scholar Saidiya Hartman's directive, what if noise (rather than the shocking spectacle) serves as an index of the disavowal of extreme violence as its normative condition and the refusal of that disavowal. Because noise, by definition, disrupts capture, possession, and enjoyment, and is resistant to the repressive effects of the libidinal economy of identification; once captured or enjoyed, it is no longer noise. Thus, noise allows a sonically mediated relationality with the archives and the afterlives of slavery. More specifically, Julius's acoustic practice is a call to listen to the creaks of slavery in/with our sonic imaginations[16]: the chains of enslaved people and the slave ship's "timbers creaking" (Rediker 2), Linda's "creaking shoes" which "grated harshly on [Mrs. Flint's] refined nerves" (Jacobs 19), or Ethel hearing her father going up the creaking stairs to rape Jasmine (Whitehead 192). Re-tuning the noise and re-attuning the reader to the noise, one can reorder what Jacques Rancière would call the sonic distribution of the heard. In fact, as we saw earlier, when describing the phantasmagoria of the race riots, Julius drained the soundscape of lynching so as to protect himself from the shock of its sonic and verbal violence. The Black flâneur's alienated gaze fell on the city's murderous mob and its victims, with his profound ambivalence evident in the fantastic silence and silencing of that

scene. In this scene, however, Julius's ear is open to the noise: by superimposing the sound of the swinging noose onto the familiar scene of the swinging children, he accesses something different from what the city crowd discerns. Following Christina Sharpe's account of the long durée of oxygen, the creaks and other noises are echoes of captured and displaced African Americans.

Whereas the creaking swings summon the traces of those captured and displaced by White supremacy, the "ceiling fans creaking overhead" in the Chinese shop sound out the long durée of racial capitalism (191). Because of its fundamentally elusive and opaque nature, the creaking noise refuses to open itself up to Julius, therefore delivering him over to his own being. Though bored, he cannot free himself from this "quiet, mote-filled" shop, "in which only the ceiling fans were audible" (191). He is equally captivated by the old woman's "hermetic air" who, absorbed in her reading, seems as inaccessible to Julius as Brewster's portraits of Deaf people had been: "visible from without, but impossible to enter" (37). Opening himself up to closedness, the shop's wood-paneled walls, which "disclosed nothing of our century," make Julius feel as if the woman "hadn't been disturbed since horses drank water from the troughs outside" and "as if [he] had stumbled into a kink in time and place, that [he] could easily have been in any one of the many countries to which Chinese merchants had traveled and, for as long as trade had been global, set up their goods for sale" (190, 191). In contrast to Battery Park and the Financial District, the "eerie calm of the shop" (191), which is the "microcosm of Chinatown itself" (190), reflects the perseverance of Manhattan's Chinatown as the center of working-class Chinese life, labor, and culture. As the creaking fans connect past and present, recent immigrants and settlers of color, a metamorphic and multiplicitous geography of transnational capitalism emerges—Julius migrates to an elsewhere and elsewhen, catapulted to the Nigeria of his shadowy boyhood.

While the creaks deliver him over to the fantastic stillness and sameness of US empire and financial capital, the melancholia and mourning induced by the Chinese marching band ruptures the confines of the real, hurling him into the realm of the fantastic. As Julius gives himself over to the music, he describes it as a "chromatic, blues-inflected figure that must have had its first life in a mission hymn [or] a dirge" (192). Conjured up by this dirge, the "tempest heard from far away" marks the increasing gentrification of Chinatown in the wake of 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2008: the displacement of working-class Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans, and of their family businesses (192). In spite of the song's elusiveness, the marching band's "totalizing, sonic collectivity" (LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories* 109) reminds him so much of his experience at the Nigerian Military School that he "trembled as the throaty chorus of brass instruments spilled into that space, as the tuba ambled across the lower notes, and as the whole sound came into the shop like shafts of interrupted light" (192). The marching band's momentum occupies the space of the shop and imbues it with possibility, transporting Julius to a form of "disciplinary power" that no longer coerces his body and voice into a militaristic collective. His musical-cellular memory of singing in a chorus is, however, able to stitch together—from the past and the present, the proximate and the remote, the original and the reflection—a migratory sonic geography. As the sound drifts away from Julius it is already moving somewhere else: with "almost imperceptible slowness, the music began to fall in volume as the band marched farther and farther into the noise of the city" (192). The itinerant and temporary nature of this sonic arrangement of music, city, and the flâneur's body, fragments the imaginary coherence of the visual world: it calls forth the mirrored wall of a stately old house reflecting a "world doubled in on itself" in which Julius "could no longer tell where the tangible universe ended and the reflected one began" (192). The collusion of the aural with the visual, of the mournful melody with the mirrored wall, functions as a heterotopia: making the self and the place Julius

occupies both absolutely real and unreal, locating him in the interstices of multiple geographies and histories (Foucault 4). As he is inhabiting what we might call a double consciousness and is tussling with the problem of doubling, he posits that doubling, disjunction, and disorientation characterize Black im/migrant life: "to be alive . . . [is] to be both original and reflection" (192). In contrast, death is a form of severance from the chasms of that life: "to be dead [is] to be split off, to be reflection alone" (192). The Black flâneur inhabits a domain between life and death, where he cannot be sure whether he is alive or dead, real or unreal, here or there. Julius is somehow already dead, for his is the flâneur's alienated position. As the ephemeral nature of the funereal music vexes the line that divides the realm of the real from the fantastic, the living from the dying, he is, nonetheless, standing in the hold of multiple imperial epochs and settlements, "in all kinds of sorrow" (192). The structurally mandated constrictions placed around Black urban life hinder this psychiatry resident's capacity to feel; the dirge sounds the dying note of his own sorrow that he cannot feel and cannot release. For a psychiatrist who boasts of his "sympathetic ear" (9) and his mastery of "the art of listening" (70), it seems shocking that it is not entirely clear whether Julius even hears Moji, an old Nigerian acquaintance, who claims that he had raped her at a party in Nigeria and was acting like he "knew nothing about it, had even forgotten her" (244). Rather than listening to and acknowledging her experience, he makes absolutely no response to the victim/survivor*, hiding his memory of the sexual assault beneath the perambulating gaze and ear of the flâneur who remains "utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man" (Benjamin 420). Covered thus in a cloak of unreachability, his "entire being [is] caught up in a blind spot" (256).[17]

Notes

[1] Cole is the author of *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007), whose narrator is very similar to Julius; an essay collection, *Known and Strange Things* (2016); and a photographic diary, *Blind Spot* (2017), mapping his travels to cities around the world.

[2] Teju Cole [@_tejucole], Instagram post, 15 April 2018, retrieved from URL. Cole has since deleted this post and many others.

[3] The term *acousmatique* was first used by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer. Subsequently, Michael Chion has referred to the acousmatic voice in reference to the use of off-screen sound in film. More recently, the term has been used in sound studies by, for example, Mladen Dolar and Brandon LaBelle.

[4] By *economies of dispossession* I mean "those multiple and intertwined genealogies of racialized property, subjection, and expropriation through which capitalism and colonialism take shape historically and change over time" (Byrd et al. 2).

[5] For an insightful discussion, see Kara Keeling's "'In the Interval.'"

[6] The discourse on silence is profoundly influenced by John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), "the silent piece," which introduced silence into the concert hall (see Voegelin 80-81). *Doctor Faustus*, published in 1947, was heavily influenced by Theodor Adorno and Arnold Schönberg; like Cole's emphasis on the silence between the music and the applause, the description of the ending of Adrian Leverkühn's *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* invites the reader to listen to the silence in the wake of the musical score:

> One instrumental group after another steps back, and what remains as the work fades away is the high G of a cello, the final word, the final sound, floating off, slowly vanishing in a *pianissimo fermata*. Then nothing more. Silence and night. But the tone,

> which is no more, for which, as it hangs there vibrating in the silence, only the soul still listens, and which was the dying note of sorrow–is no longer that, its meaning changes, it stands as a light in the night. (Mann 515)

[7] Taking up Julius's idea of "sonic fugue" (5), Vermeulen diagnoses Julius as a *fugueur*, a "mad traveler" unable to stay at rest. As a medical term fugue can be seen as the equivalent of drapetomania, a diagnosis used to explain the "madness" of "the Negro race" when enslaved people tried to flee (Hacking 57). I also believe his dissociative state and selective amnesia, or willful forgetfulness, of the rape to be significant, but still read his relationship to the cityscape in terms of *flânerie*.

[8] Ashon Crawley's term, "choreosonic," emphasizes that sound and movement are always co-constituted.

[9] According to Sharpe, "to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (13-14). In order to think about Black non/being in the wake, she works through multiple meanings of wakes—a watch or vigil, grief, celebration and memory, the track left by a ship in the water, "wokeness" or a form of consciousness.

[10] The exact death toll of the Draft riots remains unknown. According to James McPherson (399), eleven Black men were hanged over five days, but many historians point out the impossibility of determining how many bodies the mobs disappeared in the water (Man 375).

[11] Due to length constraints, I cannot discuss how, as a result of his listening to the water, his Greek American patient's "plaintive voice" emerges out of its "murmurs" (55); M.'s dramatic monologue about infidelity is disalienating for Julius, making him feel an "unexpected pang of [his] own, a sudden urgency and sorrow" (56).

[12] As noted by Blessing Datiri, "Nigerian men routinely call one another 'brother,' more colloquially 'broad' or 'boda.' Towards the late 2000s, with the increasing appeal of African American music, they tend to use 'bros' (or 'bro,' less frequently)" (email communication). Nonetheless, in tandem with the emphasis on the importance of the spatial distribution of linguistic practices in recent sociolinguistic theory, I argue that the meaning of and the practice of using "brother" should be understood in relation to space, broader sociocultural practices, semiotics and semantics. That is, the practice of Nigerian men calling one another "brother" would be re-localized, re-signified, and re-accentuated when used to signify and negotiate diasporic affiliations in the US.

[13] My understanding of the echo in terms of linguistic performance and mimicry is inspired by Brandon LaBelle. See "Towards the work of Acoustic Justice." 21 January 2020, CEU, Budapest. Lecture.

[14] In my graduate seminar, students from North Africa and the Middle East commented that Cole's representation of Khalil and Farouq reflects the way that Arabs talk politics. Even though Julius dismisses Farouq's and Khalil's radicalism as a politics of "rage and rhetoric," their attention to the role of race in the postcolonial metropolis and settlement powerfully affect his understanding of the racialization of urban experience and US empire (107).

[15] While the remnants of mangled bodies in the burial ground take Julius behind the veil, Cole takes care to trouble the logic of corporeal fungibility to "highlight the dangers of a too-easy intimacy, the consideration of the self that occurs at the expense of the slave's suffering, and the violence of identification" (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 20). Namely, the pain Julius feels is *not* necessarily the pain of enslaved people, as it may be the consequence of his recent assault. In a contrapuntal move, the mutual gesture of "solidarity" exchanged between Julius and the young men devolves into a story of Julius's being mugged—that he

should become the victim of what he calls "violence for sport" shocks him to the core and makes him vulnerable as it confounds his stratagems to intellectualize or sublate the blows (212, 216). Rather than laying his hands on a straight "line that connected [him] to [his] own part in these stories," foregrounding the conditions of what Édouard Glissant calls "clarity and transparency," the flare-up of pain embeds him in a form of relating that foregrounds ambiguity, opacity, and thickness (59).

[16] In the absence of archival sound, Mark M. Smith claims that we should base our study of sounds on written documents.

[17] Julius relates the problem of the mind's opacity to his own experience as it pertains to the rape charges, claiming that each person must assume that "the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him" (243). Although he appears to be satisfied that he is not a rapist, he concedes that Moji's is not a poorly imagined, symptomatic narrative: "She had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy" (244). In reading their interaction as evidence of Julius's "selfish normality" and "ordinary solipsism" that is "an obstacle to understanding other people, even as it enables liberal journeys of comprehension," James Wood gaslights the survivor's narrative, apparently unconcerned about its ethical and political implications.

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