

Foreword

Sonic Abundance

Episode 0: Foreword

Hosted/ Authored by Harley Ferris

Duration: 10:02

HARLEY: Let's take a moment to situate ourselves—

[meditation bell (craigmaloney)]

not as readers, but as listeners. Because this collection is going to ask you to do something that might feel familiar, and also maybe slightly different at the same time. It asks you to listen, fully, with your whole self.

[static fades in (luciolepri)]

To notice what's happening in the sound, and what's happening in you as you hear it.

[static pans to right channel]

To pay attention to how your listening shifts as you move through these episodes.

[static morphs into horses galloping (PWLPL)]

And that's really where this project begins.

[galloping quickly pans left and stops]

Welcome to *Sonic Abundance*.

[pensive electronic theme music fades in ("Podcastbeat," Brooks)]

This collection grows out of Cynthia Selfe's 2009 article, "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning." If you're in rhetoric and composition, you probably already know that piece—or at least you've felt its effects. In it, Selfe asked our field to take sound seriously.

[music fades out]

To recognize that composing has always involved more than alphabetic text, even if our disciplinary habits haven't always reflected that. She pointed to what was already happening—

[electric piano accompanies text]

in classrooms, in communities, in students' practices—and asked us to pay attention. For many of us now immersed in sound studies, that moment mattered in ways that were both intellectual and personal. It gave language to something we had been circling around, and it made it easier to keep going. To try things. To take risks. To do work that, when we started, still needed some explanation. Her article offered a kind of permission—scholarly, pedagogical,

creative permission—to take seriously the role of sound in our work. And for those of us who encountered Cindy Selfe not only through her writing but also as a colleague, a mentor, a presence in the field, that sense of permission extended beyond the page. For us, the contributors to this collection, this project is an acknowledgement of that beginning of our work in sound. We hope it extends to you a similar kind of imagination, a similar kind of permission to think expansively—abundantly—about sound and soundwriting.

[electric piano ends]

When some of us first started doing this work, we spent a lot of time justifying why it belonged. We pointed to Selfe’s article, and other foundational related work in multimodality and sound studies. We collaborated to make the case, over and over, that sound mattered for rhetoric and composition.

[crowd talking slowly fades in and grows (Garuda1982)]

Fortunately, it’s not the same conversation anymore. Now there’s a real body of work here. Conferences, publications, courses, communities... A sense that this is something the field recognizes, even as it’s still evolving. *Sonic Abundance* comes out of that shift. The title is meant to capture that feeling—expansion, multiplicity, the sense that there are more ways to work with sound than any one project could fully represent. So what you’ll hear across these episodes is a range of approaches. Different methods, different genres, different ways of thinking with sound. They don’t line up into a single model,

[crowd talking ends abruptly]

and they’re not meant to.

That’s also why this project takes the form of a podcast.

[AM radio tuning fades in (Dnab55)]

Partly, yes, because podcasts are accessible, familiar, and convenient to listen to. But more importantly, the form lets these pieces operate in the ways they’re designed to. Across these episodes, the sound—not just the words—is doing scholarly work. You’ll hear voices layered together, sometimes reinforcing each other, sometimes pulling in different directions. You’ll hear environmental audio that situates you in place,

[radio tuning morphs into subway arriving (aisselles)]

music that shifts tone, moments where repetition or distortion create emphasis that not only exists without explanation but resists it.

[subway arrives with squealing brakes and air hissing, then fully stops]

The episodic structure also matters. Each episode can stand on its own,

[piano accompanies text]

offering a distinct approach to soundwriting. But taken together, they form a collection that you can move through over time in your own way—returning, re-visiting, re-listening. That temporality, that possibility of repetition and change in listening, is part of the scholarly work this collection performs.

So before we move into the episodes themselves, I want to say just a bit more about listening.

Across this collection, listening is treated as something you do—not something that just happens. It’s interpretive. It’s shaped by your experiences, your expectations, your disciplinary training. And if you’re anything like me, you might find that your attention moves around a bit.

You might start by following the words, tracking the argument or throughline. Then suddenly you’re noticing background sound, or rhythm, or the way two voices overlap. Or you realize you’ve missed something because your ear went somewhere else. That’s okay. That’s actually part of what these pieces are doing. So as you listen, you might observe things like: where your attention goes, and when it shifts; how sound is layered or interrupted; what silence is doing in a given moment; how voices relate to each other or their environments. There isn’t a single right way to hear these pieces. But there is value in noticing how you’re hearing them.

[piano accompaniment ends]

The collection is organized in three parts. The first part orients us—how to approach this work, how to listen, how to compose with sound in a deliberate way.

[electric piano signals the start of describing each episode with a single note in a major scale]

Crystal VanKooten’s opening episode revisits “The Movement of Air” and situates it within the broader development of sound studies in rhetoric and composition, offering both a traditional and a sonic literature review.

Abigail Lambke turns our attention explicitly to listening itself, arguing that listening is not simply a natural ability but is a teachable, theorized practice—one that is central to rhetorical work, and deeply connected to questions of identity, ethics, and power.

In episode 3, Steven Hammer extends this conversation into method, exploring field recording, attention, and the politics of listening technologies. In his work, sound becomes not only a way of representing experience, but a way of studying movement, liminality, and the material conditions of everyday life.

Together, these episodes ask: what does it mean to do this work, and how do we begin?

The second section moves into case studies, showing what happens when these approaches are applied in different contexts.

Steph Parker's episode brings together oral histories, personal narration, and environmental sound to examine Japanese American incarceration in the Jim Crow South, showing how voice and sound carry histories that are both archival and embodied.

Earl Brooks, working with student-generated audio, explores the stakes of sonic rhetoric in contexts of racial injustice and environmental crisis, foregrounding sound as a site of power, vulnerability, and resistance.

Kyle Stedman's audio drama reconstructs a family archive through voice actors, sound effects, and careful sequencing, offering a speculative, affective engagement with history that invites listeners to experience the past in new ways.

In episode 7, Jennifer Buckner turns to remix and heteroglossia, layering voices across time and media to demonstrate how soundwriting can bring multiple perspectives into dynamic, often dissonant, conversation.

[electric piano replays the major scale]

Across these case studies, sound is doing complex rhetorical work—shaping interpretation, generating affect, and expanding what scholarly argument can look, or rather, sound like.

[electric piano plays final note, an octave above the initial note in the scale]

And the final contribution turns back on the collection itself, listening again and reflecting on what's happening across these episodes. Crystal Van Kooten and I listen closely to specific moments and reflect on the compositional choices at work—how sound is layered, how voices interact, how meaning is shaped through sonic design. Presented as a conversation,

[electric piano accompanies text]

our closing episode models a way of engaging with sonic scholarship that is dialogic, responsive, and attuned to the nuances of sound as a scholarly, but also very human, way of meaning-making. Our unrehearsed discussion and authentic reactions to these clips likewise highlight how differently each individual receives and interprets sound. So, once again, I encourage you to attend to your listening, to pay attention to what you pay attention to.

[electric piano ends, pensive electronic theme music fades in ("Podcastbeat," Brooks)]

So we hope you enjoy this set of experiments—different ways of working with sound, of meaning-making, of thinking through composition in a medium that unfolds over time. Taken together, these episodes mark one more moment in an ongoing conversation. One that certainly stretches back before Selfe's article and has continued to grow in the years since. If anything, we hope this collection invites you to listen a little more closely.

And maybe to try something of your own.

Let's begin.

[*music fades out*]

[*End of Transcript*]

References

Selfe, Cynthia. L. (2009). The movement of air, the breath of meaning: Aurality and multimodal composing. *College Composition and Communication*, 60(4), 616–663.

Theme music, “Podcastbeat,” performed by Earl Brooks.

Musical accompaniment (noted in transcript as “electric piano” and “piano”) performed by Harley Ferris.

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