

A Soundwriting Conversation

Sonic Abundance

Episode 8: A Soundwriting Conversation

Hosted/ Authored by Harley Ferris and Crystal VanKooten

Duration: 46:10

[music begins, steady drum beats and rhythmic clapping on the song's beat, and computerized keyboard melody and chords ("Pumped," Mahar)]

CRYSTAL: Hi, this is Crystal VanKooten again. Welcome to our final episode. I hope you've enjoyed all these wonderful sound writing episodes and different ways of thinking about writing and sound and rhetoric. And we're going to conclude the podcast series with a conversation between myself and my friend and colleague Harley Ferris. So hi Harley.

HARLEY: Hi Crystal, hi everybody.

CRYSTAL: Harley is a friend of mine from Computers and Writing, but also a fellow sound writer and audio rhetorician. I don't know if you call yourself that.

HARLEY: I should start, I think I have maybe used sonic rhetorician.

[music ends ("Pumped," Mahar)]

CRYSTAL: Oh, sonic rhetorician, that is good. But we have listened to all the episodes in our series, and we have a lot to say about them.

HARLEY: Way more than we could possibly fit into a single episode. So we have just selected a specific excerpt or two from each one. Crystal took three of them; I took three of them. And we haven't told each other ahead of time why we've chosen these things nor have we discussed them, so that we can kind of in real time respond to what we're hearing. We'll try to frame that, these things in context of what we're hearing from a sound craft, sound composing standpoint, and try to make connections throughout with Cindy Selfe's article and other scholarship in the field.

CRYSTAL: And one of the things we wanted to do in this final episode also is have a more conversational feel if you would. So there's been lots of sound essays in our series, composed sound, music, sound effects, interviews, lots of different ways that you can use sound. And another of those ways is sort of the conversational podcast genre. We do a lot of conversations at conferences and with colleagues at our own institutions, but we really found value in having a conversation with each other about these wonderful pieces.

HARLEY: Very much so.

CRYSTAL: I have to shout out the Sound School podcast by Rob Rosenthal that's on transom.org. If you have not listened to Sound School, listeners, let me talk right to you: go listen to it. I use it when I teach podcasting. But

when Harley and I were thinking about how to have a conversation about these episodes for this podcast, I just kept thinking about Sound School. So Rosenthal, the host, will do these mini rhetorical analyses of different podcasts, although he doesn't, he's not a rhetorician, so he doesn't call them rhetorical analyses, but that's what he does. He takes podcasts, new podcasts, podcasts you know, podcasts you've never heard of, and plays a clip and just picks it apart and talks about it. And so I was like, oh Harley, we should do that. But I learn so much from it, and I learn about awesome podcasts that I would never know about otherwise listening to that. So if you haven't listened to Sound School, I encourage you to do it.

HARLEY: We also want this to really be an encouragement to you, whether you're using sound already or not in your teaching and scholarship and your own personal work, we want you to do more of it.

HARLEY: The episodes themselves, we are sure, have already been inspiring, but as we talk about these, we hope that elucidates some of the technical moves that these, that these composers have made. But also the ways that they really enhance meaning making.

[music begins, steady drum beats and rhythmic clapping on the song's beat, and computerized keyboard melody and chords ("Pumped," Mahar)]

CRYSTAL: For sure.

HARLEY: Well let's get to it.

CRYSTAL: OK, so I'll start. Maybe I'll start with Steven Hammer.

HARLEY: Excellent.

CRYSTAL: Steven Hammer's episode is called Ear Training, and he takes us on several trips actually, really tuning into listening to what, all the sounds that are around, and what he was hearing. But then also the different ways that you can listen through microphones to different kinds of sounds. So I have an example to play you, and then we can discuss.

HARLEY: Excellent.

[Steven Hammer's voice is overlapped with several other voices speaking in a different language. A door closes.]

STEVEN: We might also look to Katherine Hayles' work in attention as a way to think about the accessibility of aural and visual composition and reception. In her 2007 work "Deep and Hyper Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," she argues that modes requiring deep attention (for instance, the novel), are relatively new for humans, and were developed by those with material privilege.

CRYSTAL: Ok, so that is example number one of something I want to talk about that Hammer did.

CRYSTAL: Here's the second.

[Steven Hammer's voice is overlapped with screeching and abrasive static noises, a voice on a loud speaker that repeats, and a high pitched whine that grows louder and then fades. Static noises get louder.]

STEVEN: I've done a lot of work with electromagnetic frequencies, especially as inspired by the work of Christina Kubisch. In my travels recording all of these subway trains and stations, I began using a device that listens to these frequencies alongside my binaural technique. As you might imagine, the infrastructure of electric trains and stations was intensely legible to this tool...

CRYSTAL: Alright, there you go. So tell me what, what did you notice?

HARLEY: Hearing all those other voices, hearing different languages. Something is living in the sound that gets flattened out in print. Or you know, in, in a 2D visual medium. It animates these other characters. Something I've always done when I'm, when I was, ever since I was a child is, for instance, we go to a restaurant as a family. And I would be standing in the front lobby with my parents waiting for our table, and I'd look at all the other people who were arriving at the same time and just kind of be, I would just kind of marvel at the fact that all of these other families decided to go to this exact same restaurant on the exact same day at the exact same time that we did. And that they're coming from places that I have no idea where they're coming from. But just for this moment, we're all here together. And I really feel that in these clips when we hear just the sounds of being out in public. And all of these other bodies, all of these other lives.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, I love that. I picked the clip because when I originally listened to the episode, I was going back and forth between listening to Steven talk, and then listening to all the things that you're talking about, like the live people around. And I even thought to myself, wait, why is that so loud? Hammer should have turned that down! Or something. And that was my initial thought. But then when I re-listened, and I thought, you know, I think it, it's on purpose. And that's kind of the experience of traveling in a place like that or being in a public place like that, is your attention gets taken over there, and maybe that's, I was a little initially like, no, I'm supposed to be listening in an academic way to this narration, but now you know, but now my ears are going over here. My ears are going here, and that's why I picked the other, also, because of that [eeeeee]. I couldn't stop paying attention to it. And so I wondered, did you have a similar experience? Like could you listen to both at the same time? Did you go from one to the other? How did you listen?

HARLEY: Yeah. There was a moment of frustration when I was, I missed the, I missed a word or the second-half of a word that Steven was saying because of that other voice.

CRYSTAL: Yes.

HARLEY: And you know, I was, to maybe to think about Stuart Hall's representation theory, the first component of that is that all media is constructed. So those sounds, we have no ability to manipulate those things in real time other than to put something else louder in our ears like headphones or whatever, or to leave. Because as R. Murray Shafer says, we have no ear lids, right? We can't just turn away sonically like I can close my eyes.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, and I loved that that noise that I found initially annoying was over the part about Katherine Hayles and attention, right?

HARLEY: Right, right.

CRYSTAL: So it was, it was sort of enacting the argument, you know, that we've been trained to pay attention in certain ways. And now I'm actively frustrated that I'm not able to, I think I'm not able to pay attention in the ways that I've been trained to pay attention to someone who's speaking to me about, you know, this academic concept. But I loved how it challenged me to listen differently, and then when I listened again with those thoughts in mind, to listen to each track, and come in and out of the narration, and that's fine!

HARLEY: Yeah, yeah. So something you just said I find intriguing. You said "the way that you were trained to listen," and also academically, right? And given where we are in our academic careers, the training kind of occurred kind of together and on our own with our circle of people who are really interested in sound. We weren't taught necessarily in grad school by our faculty, here's how you listen to things. Because as we're talking, as these other authors are pointing out in these podcast episodes, this is a thing we have to learn, that we have to practice, and that we need to recognize all of the layers of cultural, social, and maybe disciplinary forces that cause us to think there is a way we need to or should or ought to listen.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. I think I was thinking in part of maybe classroom experiences with students when they are always saying, "you can't hear the words," or, you know, the words seem to take precedent when you're layering sounds together no matter what. And sometimes that's, you do want the words to be the thing or the thing that's carrying the meaning in the moment. But I was challenged to think of the meaning of Hammer's piece in different ways by listening to different tracks in different ways, I guess, if that makes sense.

HARLEY: Absolutely, right. I mean, what prompts us to listen in different ways? Or at least to challenge your question, the right, quote, right way to listen to something?

HARLEY: So I want to follow Hammer's example then with this other piece from Abigail Lambke's Listen All Around episode. And this one, she's really returning to thinking about the role of listening, which is something, a really important reminder right? We're making sound to be heard. I really love the way that this episode reminds us about the social nature of listening, sound, communication, that we often forget when we're thinking of ourselves as simply

the writer. Because you know, the solitary nature of sitting in a chair by ourselves and writing, of course we know that academic writing, for instance, we always talk about it as the conversation. But I think it really comes clear in the way that Abigail talks about listening. Let me just share this piece and then I'll get your response to it.

CRYSTAL: OK.

ABIGAIL: But the way that hooks listened to the interchange was not the way others did. She explains hearing and reacting to their reactions.

HOOKS: And then I was so stunned when I kept hearing from people, ohh you know, she really lost it. And I, and I thought, kept thinking, ohh if this was Charlie Rose, if this was any number of, of white men who would just boldly speak their truths. She didn't raise her voice in any way, there was for me no sense of aggression. So that one, but once again, she was turned into the angry black woman, not the insightful brilliant black woman who just threw down in such a way that it created a sense of awe.

[audience laughs and claps]

And so that then gave me pause in thinking about, on one hand, has there been a shift or are we still pushing against a certain characterization of the black female voice?

HARLEY: So this is bell hooks talking about an experience of watching someone on television be interpreted widely by the general audience as an angry black woman. Whereas she is a black woman herself and didn't see that at all, and just noticed the different ways that this woman's voice was interpreted and therefore her character, her identity, her personality.

CRYSTAL: I love how that clip, is is it a live conference or something like that?

HARLEY: Yeah, a live recorded conversation, yeah.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. I like how you could hear the audience there for a minute sort of react and rumble and laugh. That reminds me of the point, I guess, being made: that the way you listen and what you hear is interpreted. You know, and so you're in a crowd you sort of can listen and play off other people's responses and noises and body language and all of that stuff. So I was just quickly reminded of that when they said, when they started laughing. But yeah, how listening, I think we said this before, but it's, sometimes we just say listen, but there's lots of different ways you can listen, and lots of different things you can take away when you listen.

HARLEY: Right. Exactly. And something that bell hooks says elsewhere in this segment is that we are not passive containers as we listen but we are interpreters, and we're always interpreting this through our individual perspectives and experiences but also our cultural, social, and professional experiences as well. So as you mentioned the way I ought to listen to something, right? It's

also, it's not just our position, but it's who we're with and it's what time we're in, and what format, what venue, and all of these things. So to be a thoughtful listener, right, I think is really what Abigail is, is pushing here. And she talks about, you know, being all ears, that we listen with our whole bodies. Two things really struck me. One is that, as you've probably been here too, in a room with Cindy Selfe, when she asks us to listen to something. She has said, put your hands over your eyes, open your mouth...

[*Crystal laughs*]

HARLEY: ...and let it resonate in your head, right? So like, she's actually got a method for being a better listener, with her body.

CRYSTAL: She's all in.

HARLEY: With her body. She's all ears, right? So Lamke uses the idea of listening with the whole being, and that's got me thinking, what is the difference between a being listener and a doing listener? Very much like Krista Radcliffe, like how do I reserve judgment? How do I listen to comprehend, listen to understand, listen to empathize, in the same way that as I write, I shouldn't be focusing on, hey, I know this thing, and I'm gonna say it. But like, I want you to understand this thing, so I will frame this in the right way for my audience, right? Which is, which is our primary tenet of rhetorical theory.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, and how much with listening, you might not know yet how to listen in that way. So we need, we need voices like bell hooks' voice telling us when we've misinterpreted and how to be maybe open when listening, to learn and not come to a conclusion so quickly, I think, especially for white folks, but how we can do that and listen to others and learn from them, I think that's really important.

CRYSTAL: Our discussion of Lamke's use of hooks reminds me a little bit of a couple of the moves that Earl Brooks and his students made in their Irvington flood podcast, so let's move to that one and discuss a little bit about what we're hearing here. All right, so here's a clip from their podcast.

STUDENT NARRATOR: As explained by pastor michael in local communities having supportive groups such as the church are extremely important in gaining trust and providing the proper aid to let community in need.

MARTIN: One, people in the community like, they're listening to you, Reverend. Okay, all right. Two, you got a place to meet. Three, you've done something for the community that elected officials know need to get done and know that they should be a part of.

[*music begins*]

STUDENT NARRATOR: As previously mentioned, the storms that flooded Irvington were the same ones that flooded Ellicott City in 2016 and 2018, the latter of which receiving local and national news coverage and ample govern-

ment support. However, that level of attention was not given to surrounding neighborhoods, including Irvington.

MARTIN: I know one thing, that Television Hill is what's called the area where most of the local stations are here in Baltimore and they're in the city of Baltimore. Ellicott City is in Howard County, right?

CRYSTAL: Alright, I'll stop it there.

HARLEY: Alright.

CRYSTAL: What do you think?

HARLEY: There's a lot in there.

CRYSTAL: Yeah.

HARLEY: If, if I were to put it under one key term of what struck me in that first, that brief listen is tone. Beginning with the, the music, a little bit more somber, moody, kind of conveys a sense of the gravity of this. Really thoughtful choices that juxtapose nicely with, I think, the message that they're conveying in there. But beyond the music, the voices, right, and we have more scripted narration to us the listener with the free speaking off the cuff or extemporaneous voice of the pastor he's interviewing. And the vernacular that the pastor is using, the way, how expressive he is. Another case where so much would be lost if we just flattened this out into print, you know, just a perfect example of why we need to hear people's voices, not just their words.

CRYSTAL: Yes. I love the pastor's voice also which is part of the reason I picked this clip. But I also feel that the editing done by the students really opens up the listening to the pastor, at least for me. So the musical choices that you commented on, I agree, I noticed the music throughout this whole podcast, that there's lots of different kinds of music, and that it's carefully selected for a tone, a moment, for the theme or the topic of that particular place that it's in. They bring you into a mindset to hear then the voice that comes next in a certain way and to receive it a little bit differently than you would if you were just hearing the voice. So I really like that. I also liked the construction of this part in that it went from interviewer, and students and Brooks, to the, to interviewee, back to the interviewer, back to the interviewee, and it wasn't just the straight up recording of the interview, you know. It was edited, you know, the narration was recorded perhaps at a different time, and was bringing us along in the story, and helping us to listen to the voice. So I thought that was really well done.

HARLEY: Yeah, and I think a very good reminder too again of representation theory, the construction of media, and the agency that we have as composers. And I guess maybe to just like briefly use this as a moment to, a moment of exhortation, to encourage folks who are getting into soundwriting and composing with sound, to learn those tools to learn the craft. Because of how much more we get to share when we do this. Certainly, as people get started, it's wonderful to just hit record and start, right? And to just, to have something, even if it's

unedited, to begin to learn how to make sound, make meaning from sound. But to your point of this carefully, thoughtfully chosen set of sounds and the way that they're assembled, is in itself, I mean, that is composing every bit as much as writing the script was.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, love it. All right, do you want to share the next one?

HARLEY: Sure, yeah, and this is a really excellent dovetail with Jennifer Buckner's work. So Jennifer's episode Tracking Heteroglossia does a lot of what we've been talking about so far. And we've danced around Bakhtin without saying his name.

CRYSTAL: That was on purpose.

HARLEY: Yeah, that little purple book, right? So, but the idea of the heteroglossia runs throughout all of this in the making of sound and also in the interpretation of sound, right? The ways that our words always come from other people's mouths. That's true in our speaking, but as hooks reminded us, that our interpretations are also shaped by our individual and shared experiences. So Jennifer looks at some interesting things in her episode as she shares with us some of the work students have done in remix. Specifically, this Trump trap remix where they don't just take these sound bites that existed, but that they remixed them in and reassemble them in service of a rhetorical gesture. And so I want to play this little clip here that I think signifies some of that, and then we'll unpack it a little bit more together.

CRYSTAL: Great.

JENNIFER: Abby's Trump Trap Mix reflects the contradictions she witnessed during the 2016 presidential campaign, sampling from primary sources to bring dissonant voices in dialogue with one another. Voices that didn't talk with each other in *real* time but now volley between the music of rappers associated with the campaign to Trump to an enthusiastic supporter at a rally. And this sampling functions as a piece that, well it, exceeds genre. I mean, is it argument? Or sonic poetry? Or does its place with respect to genre even matter? Let's listen to a little bit more.

[*twilight zone theme song intro*] This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the twilight zone.

DONALD: Are you running? Are you not running? [*in the background cheers, laughter*] I am officially running [*voice is distorted*] for President of the United States.

[*opening music of L'il Wayne's "A Milli" plays in the backdrop, percussive beat and repetition of 'a milli'*]

DONALD: I'm really I'm really I'm really I'm really I'm I'm really rich.

CRYSTAL: I love it.

HARLEY: Yeah right. It's when somebody would, if you know, do you ask me what's my affective response to that, boy, I have a lot of things going on. But what, what did you think about that, or feel?

CRYSTAL: Yeah. I'm really interested in the, in the remix from the student. I'm glad we got to hear some of it. I want to hear more. I wrote down a couple of things while you were replaying that, so I wrote down distortion, volleying, sampling, repeating, and dissonance, which are all things that the student author is playing with, doing, maybe not even playing with, doing very purposefully. These are things that, you know, can you imagine distortion in your academic writing? Can you imagine what dissonance would look like in your academic writing? Maybe that's one that we've explored a little bit more, but some of these are sort of on the edge of what's acceptable, or what we do in our academic writing, or what we are familiar with maybe. And they live in these other spaces that are genre pushing spaces, like Buckner says. So is it rap? Is it music that samples? Is it citation, academic citation, or is it, you know, it's all of these? And it sort of sits in the center and is a little bit of each. I love it when students use distortion in their sound compositions. I always love it, because it's always, it always makes you stop and pause, you hear it, it's like making a commentary in a split second that you don't have to make in words. Usually you're sort of saying that this is not what it is, *[laughs]*

HARLEY: right, right.

CRYSTAL: And it's right away, you get it right away, whether they slow it down, whether they make it sound high or low. I always in, when I'm teaching, and we're doing sonic editing, audio editing, I'm always saying, try distorting it, try slowing it down, and students seem reluctant to do those things maybe because they think they're weird. But they're so powerful when they're done well. So I I really like that.

HARLEY: Yeah I'm glad you said that because, it's again, to go back to how I, how we should listen to a thing. I spend a lot of time trying to get clean recordings and encouraging other people to get clean recordings, and certainly distortion could be added later right? Something that also, as we talk about distortion, slowing down, manipulation essentially of audio, I'm thinking about when we teach students to use sources effectively in their writing, one of the things we talk about is making sure we maintain the integrity of the original source, right? That we're representing the quote effectively, accurately, responsibly. And so here, we are now also praising these students for manipulating these voices, right? What's the affective response to hearing a voice slowed down or to chop it up so it says really, I'm really rich, really, really, really, you know. He didn't say that, but the student is making him say that because on some level, he is saying that.

CRYSTAL: I also think repetition is under discussed perhaps, or maybe under

theorized a little bit in our field. There's so many different ways you can use repetition, but here it, you know, it brings your attention to the thing. If you don't catch it the first time, it's coming back around. It gets more ridiculous and more funny the more times it comes. I definitely think for soundwriters, exploring when to repeat, when you want to maybe jog your listeners memory of something that came before, or when to repeat directly after something, kind of like the remixer does here, it's an interesting question.

HARLEY: Absolutely. And I think it also again, if we think about an affordance of sound, the rhythm of repetition.

CRYSTAL: Yes.

HARLEY: Ultimately creates a beat, which is a tempo, right? And so we can be pulled in those directions too.

CRYSTAL: It's like a little earworm.

HARLEY: Yeah, well, and to remember the physiology of sound. We know from biological research that our heart rate will adjust to accommodate the tempo of music we listen to, so that's yet another thing that, that we can pay attention to as we, as we compose with sound.

CRYSTAL: Awesome, alright, I've got one more for you.

HARLEY: OK.

CRYSTAL: Are you ready? This one is different.

HARLEY: Yes.

CRYSTAL: OK, so I'd like to play you a clip from Kyle's D. Stedman's "I'd like to be there with you to enjoy them."

[rain and thunder (daveincamas, 2007b; matucha, 2012)]

AUDUBON: Audubon Stedman. 1913. Brown's Island. March 26th: Raining. River rising rapidly. Fastened boards on fences and hauled all the loose gates onto higher ground. March 27th: Cleared out cellar and hauled fence posts onto higher ground. March 28th: River came to a stand at daylight this morning, after rising to a state of [...] just 1 ½ inches higher than 1907. Took nearly all our fences away. Lost three nights sleep this week—one, shipping calves, and two watching river.

[rain fades out, replaced by outdoor sounds of crickets and birds (BenDrain, 2019)]

AUDUBON: March 29th: [*cheerfully*] Clear. River falling fast.

CRYSTAL: OK, so that's my first clip, and I have a second one I'd like us to discuss too, but maybe we can just pause here for a second and discuss the first one because the two clips I picked have different effects that I wanted to talk about. What did you hear in that one?

HARLEY: So it's, this is the only one that had that hired actors right? Kyle had other people read

CRYSTAL: yeah

HARLEY: these journal entries. In literature, we've had stories like Dracula where it's all journal entries, you know, voice memos and things like that. So we've learned a little bit how to make meaning from these kinds of things. But by specifically sticking with these journal entries and not getting the narration in between them, to tell us how to interpret those, we have a lot more agency as listeners to assemble the meaning here. And the cues of the sound effects, and the music, and such.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. I love the sound effects that Stedman uses.

HARLEY: Yeah.

CRYSTAL: I think he's a master at bringing the sound in, setting the scene with the sound, but then the rain. I don't know! I just remembered this rain part [*laughs*], and remembered it feeling like I was watching the floodwaters rise. And when I went back to listen, I just noticed the very careful placement and selection of water noises. You know, it's kind of like, OK, rain, you put in the rain noise. It's almost like too on the nose, but the way that it's done, with flowing water noises versus thunder noises. There's several levels and layers of water noises here. And if you go back and listen, the way that they come in early to lead you into this section, fade out late and to go into the new section when a new sound comes in, and we just got a few seconds of like the birds chirping, crickets type of sound. But just throughout Stedman's piece, I feel like the sounds are just perfect.

HARLEY: I mean two things strike me. One is I remember an interview with Trent Reznor talking about the difference between making songs as a, as an artist, and composing for film. And he said, yeah, the thing about writing for film is that you have to, you have to write in such a way that it can disappear. That if the people hear the soundtrack, then they're not seeing the film. And so the way that that Kyle was able to layer these things in that make it feel like a world, and those sound effects, rather than necessarily just music, the sound of rain, and thunder, the sound of birds - these connect with humans, I think, on a pre-communicative, primal level. It's a, it's a great way to think about tone and mood that goes beyond just simply music, but also into tapping into the affordance of our human design.

CRYSTAL: Yes, for sure. All right, I have one more clip for you from Kyle's piece.

HARLEY: I'm ready.

CRYSTAL: Are you ready?

HARLEY: Yes.

CRYSTAL: Here we go.

[gentle piano (Quadrado, 2021a)]

CHET: July 4th: I'm getting so I feel a bit of an appetite once in a while, but it isn't very strong. I can just imagine those little green onions you've been getting from the garden now, together with new-potatoes and various other things; and I'd like to be with you to enjoy them. I guess Audie's suggestion that we cripples all come home together and raise butter and eggs, is just about the best solution for our family problem: we don't seem to be able to accomplish very much separately, any more.

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. July 18th: Waldo & Family came last evening. Cultivated corn in p.m. Telegram came from Bushnell at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, that Chet had died to-day. *[brief pause in piano music. Piano music continues.]* Went to Toronto and sent return dispatch to have Chet's remains shipped to George S. Paisley, Toronto undertaker.

July 23rd: Chet's remains arrived at Toronto today from Fort Bayard, New Mexico. No 24-hour advance notice as promised by the authorities at Fort Bayard. [...] Sent dispatches to Faber, Blanche, Annie, Charlie Stewart and Sam Shields. Sed and wife came this morning. We went to Toronto, and selected a better coffin for Chet.

[piano fades out]

CRYSTAL: Alright.

HARLEY: Mmm. Heavy.

CRYSTAL: Yeah.

HARLEY: This takes me back to the presentation, which might be cheating a little bit.

CRYSTAL: Ah.

HARLEY: But something that, that Kyle said as he was describing the way that he encountered these different diaries, and knowing some of the timelines and things. He said something really chilling and beautiful, which was, I knew that Chet was going to die, but Chet didn't know that yet. Right. I guess maybe if we think about it from a soundcraft standpoint of what's going on here with the composing, is sequence really matters, right? And the juxtaposition, not necessarily as layers, but as in sequence of going from those, that final diary entry into Autobon's. Really, really powerful. Again, music super well chosen. Voice, well delivered. But I think, again, Kyle's choice to sequence these as he did, very, very powerful.

CRYSTAL: I must comment on the music here, because like you say, it is like the sound effects that we talked about before, I think just very well selected. I was trying to think about why it works to be, maybe, such a guide through this emotional, heavy passage where Chet passes. And I was very emotional

listening to this, you know, Stedman's ancestors passing, and I'm crying! So I was trying to think about, like, what is the music doing and how is it doing it? And so it's a very simple piano song, and there's a lot you could say about the piano. I talk with students about that sometime, you know, what kind of instrumentation, instrument do you want to have here, and why? What cultural connotations does that instrument have? There's a lot you could analyze there. Also, there's the very simple, like ascending melody, notes of the piano Dun Dun Dun Dun Dun, and again the repetition. So there was a lot of the same note on the piano that sort of mirrors in some ways the sameness of Chet's illness, and you sort of anticipate what's coming next as the, as the melody ascends. And then I was also struck by just the briefest moment of silence

HARLEY: yeah.

CRYSTAL: when Chet passes, and Audubon says that he did. And I was thinking for myself as a sound writer, I would be inclined to pause longer there maybe,

HARLEY: mmm-hmmm

CRYSTAL: like, now he's passed, and this is sad,

HARLEY: yeah

CRYSTAL: and let's pause a minute and have some silence. But it's the *briefest* of pauses, and then it continues on to like the funeral arrangements and things like that with the same piano music that sort of takes you with it. As a listener, you're in the scene, you know, this is the scene, and then the music finally concludes and you know the scene has moved on, even though, you know, the scene is created and sort of knit together by that piano music and its two speakers.

HARLEY: Yeah, and I think that's a great reminder of a few things, to think maybe about time. The the value of pacing, the value, the incredible sonic value of silence. But also, the time that Kyle put into this, right? And again, remember something Cindy Selfe would always say, is that digital work takes way more time than traditional academic work. There's a lot more that goes into this, but the, the result is, especially in this case, very much worth it.

CRYSTAL: Awesome. We should do this more often.

HARLEY: It is so fun! I know right? Every time we get back to like, ohh, yeah, I really like creating things, and just talking with someone

CRYSTAL: Talking about it, yeah.

HARLEY: Well, sticking with the emotional component of this, albeit slightly different one, I think this is a nice way to look at another author who used sound to kind of unpack her family history, is to look at Stephanie Parker's piece. So Parker titled her episode "Japanese American incarceration in the Jim Crow South." All right. I'm going to start right here.

GRACE: We were able to get passes to go out. My mother used to take me. She took me out to a hick town called McGehee.

INTERVIEWER: And what was that like?

GRACE: Well, I mean, just to get out and go and see stores and walk around freely, it was an experience. It was kind of fun, she said, "You don't have to go to school tomorrow, I'll take you out to McGehee." I guess she needed the company, so she took me, and just going shopping. But the stores are so small, and nothing special, but for us, it was a thrill to get out and go to real stores, 'cause we never got to see real stores.

INTERVIEWER: How were you treated by the people in the town?

GRACE: They weren't very nice. They weren't very nice. That's when we began to feel the difference. They, I don't remember too many incidents, but I know they weren't very friendly. But we also didn't know where to go in the bus, because the colored in the rear, they always have a sign, "colored in the rear." And the bus driver, we don't know what to do, he looked at us and he says, "You stay in front." Oh, so we found out we're not colored, so we stay in the front. So we get in the station and the restrooms are "colored" and "white." So we decided we'll go to the "white" section since the bus driver told us not to go in the back. But that's when we first learned about segregation. We never had that here. So it's kind of sad, you know, we had to learn all those things. Because we were in the South, too. [...] They didn't know what we were, we were kind of in between.

HARLEY: So what, what did you hear in there?

CRYSTAL: I love the voices. I love how, I was thinking while I was listening, we've heard so many voices in these episodes, and they're all different.

HARLEY: Yeah.

CRYSTAL: You know, and used differently, I guess is what I mean. Of course they're different voices, but like, this one is clearly a field recording, you can hear the voice, but also shuffling and some, you know, just noises of the person being interviewed, which sort of puts you in a different listening space. You're picturing them there together. You know, we commented before on a previous clip that they didn't include the direct interview questions, and here Parker does, but you know, there's obviously reasons to do it both, different ways. And here I love how it puts you in the, sort of in the interview scene. You can hear them, and then you're learning about this layered racial moment as a narrative, as a story, you get to hear it being told.

HARLEY: Yeah absolutely. I think the, to draw on the idea of a oral history, and that this is a scenario where I think you get a lot of rich things from just hitting record, forgetting about the tape recorder, and going. Asking that question, how were you treated? And hearing Grace pounce on the answer, right, almost cutting her off: not very well. We were not treated very well,

you know. So the, the certainty of the answer that was so present and right there, and then describing kind of the bemusement of, well, what are we? At least what are we in their eyes, we're, and to say we're kind of in between, you know. Parker unpacks that a little bit more, too. It's Grace's laugh that, that really draws my attention in this scene, because it's not a comical memory. She wouldn't have laughed in the moment of that, but I think about the ways that laughter sort of sometimes betrays confusion, uncertainty, I don't know what to do, so I'm going to laugh because I'm uncomfortable, or in retrospect it's comical because we see how ridiculous it was. So that laughter is just so very human and signifies this, this kind of bewilderment of like, how do you not know I'm just a person?

CRYSTAL: Your point about laughing makes me think about transcription, and how we would write “laughs” or something for that. And it's so much, or maybe we'd add a word to that, you know, “laughs uncomfortably” or laughs in a certain manner. But like, it communicates so much through a split second laugh that we could interpret, and then the limitations of linguistic words to communicate the same.

HARLEY: Absolutely yeah. Sean Zdenek's work on rhetorical captioning comes to mind, and from an accessibility point, right, I know you and I are both committed to always providing captions or transcripts, but we have so many choices in there as we try to most accurately and perhaps often rhetorically convey, kind of, you know, is it a laugh, is it a chuckle, is it a snicker, right? What's the, what's the right,

CRYSTAL: the meaning.

HARLEY: what's the right verb? And then do we add an adverb on there to make sure that it's, that it's heard? Which just demonstrates further that these modes are kind of irreplaceable.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. And one of the affordances of sound in this particular case anyway would be quickness. You communicate a lot through the laugh very quickly.

HARLEY: Yeah

CRYSTAL: Maybe a drawback of words is that it would take much longer to explain that, right? I don't know if that's a drawback, it's just different.

HARLEY: And well, you know, to go back to Gunther Kress and gains and losses, there's no right and wrong here, it's just we gain some things and we lose some things. So the beauty of multiple modes.

CRYSTAL: Yeah. Alright. Have we done it?

HARLEY: I think we did the thing!

CRYSTAL: Do you want to say maybe what Cindy Selfe's article from 09 means to you, or how you remember it a little bit? Because we've been talking

a lot about, we used the article as the reason we wanted to do these presentations at Cs 15 years later. But then now podcast episodes. Just her encouragement through that article, but through her scholarship, and just being as a person, welcoming, but not even welcoming, demanding that sound be taken into the writing and rhetoric fold.

HARLEY: Yeah.

CRYSTAL: Encouraging these kinds of sound composition that we've been talking about, sound writing, that these are rhetorical, complicated moves that we need to be allowing students to do, but doing ourselves as scholars. I just remember being wildly liberated after reading the article in 09, like oh my goodness, I love music, and music can be part of what I'm doing? Like this is,

HARLEY: yeah

CRYSTAL: awesome and wonderful!

[*Crystal and Harley laugh*]

HARLEY: May 2011, Computers in Writing Ann Arbor. I met you. I met Kyle, Steven, Bump Halbritter,

CRYSTAL: yeah

HARLEY: and Cindy, all at that same conference.

CRYSTAL: oh wow.

HARLEY: I'd gone there with Ryan Truman. Truman and I walked up to the, to the registration table, and the very first person that I met was Cindy Selfe. And she asked me, what are you interested in? What do you want to get out of this? and what are you looking at in your school? I said I have no idea. I just know ...

CRYSTAL: [*laughs*] Good for you!

HARLEY: I just know that I am really interested in digital stuff, multimodality. Every time I would move past her in the hall or see her at lunch, she would say, Harley, what you find? Did you find it yet? So I went to your panel with Bump, and I went to Kyle's panel, and Steven did a noise performance there.

CRYSTAL: Yeah.

HARLEY: Right? Byron Hawk was there, and it just blew me away that sound is a thing that we could study. And so I had lunch with Cindy the last day, and I said, hey, I found the thing: sound. She told me about the archive, the digital archive of literacy narratives, and then she emailed me a ton of literacy narratives of musicians. Never told me that this article existed, that she'd written two years earlier

CRYSTAL: [*laughs*] Of course not.

HARLEY: in her usual humble self. And so that was the, as soon as I got home, I found the article and read that. And that this article gave me permission to, if nothing else, right, it took me a long time to figure out how to justify to my faculty and to other folks in the field why looking at sound in this way absolutely belonged in our field. But if nothing else, I had Cindy's article. I've shared this article with every single course that I can share it in, with everyone that it makes sense to, whether I'm teaching about podcasting or digital media composition, undergraduates, graduate students alike, because of the permission that it gave me as a composer, to then give to my students, as composers. So 15 years later, this article is still a living, breathing dynamic thing that is giving me increasing, or continues to give me permission as a, as a composer, a communicator, and a human being.

CRYSTAL: I feel the same. Yeah, I use the article just as the foundation for a lot of the digital writing courses that I've taught, and it gave me so much joy, as I talked about in episode 1, just to have students remix pieces of the article through our little activity. To hear their voices and my voice saying stuff that Cindy said in her voice, and still, still relevant, still exciting today to hear what students can make, to hear what scholars can make.

[music begins, steady drum beats and rhythmic clapping on the song's beat, and computerized keyboard melody and chords ("Pumped," Mahar)]

And I want to, we want to exhort you all out there to make stuff with audio! Because there's a lot of cool stuff being done, as you can hear in the series, but there's a lot more we can do. So let's do it!

HARLEY: That feels like a nice ending.

CRYSTAL: *[laughing]* Is that a conclusion?

HARLEY: So thank you very much for listening to

CRYSTAL: yes

HARLEY: these, these episodes, and to our musings here at the end. Just to echo Crystal, go play. Have fun.

CRYSTAL: Yes, experiment. Write with sound! *[laughs]*

[music ends ("Pumped," Mahar)]

[End of Transcript]

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