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Épilogue à « Vous êtes dans un lieu hors du monde... » : la musique dans les centres de détention de la « guerre contre la terreur »

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Épilogue à « Vous êtes dans un lieu hors du monde... » : la musique dans les centres de détention de la « guerre contre la terreur »

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Inédit. L'auteur a écrit ce texte pour accompagner la traduction de son article « “You are in a place that is out of the world...”: Music in the Detention Camps of the “Global War on Terror” ».

- 1 The six years since this article was first published have seen a slow increase in public knowledge of the United States' acoustical practices during the so-called “war on terror.” My own research expanded to include the first-person accounts of several more released detainees, whose imprisonment in the CIA's “dark prison,” in Kandahar and Guantánamo included both “interrogational” and “terroristic” torture.¹ In addition, two important academic initiatives have helped to contextualize acoustical torture. First, Steve Goodman's 2010 book *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear* provocatively links the often individually-targeted acoustical violence of US detention and interrogation with the more widely-experienced sonic violences of late capitalism's owners towards consumers, and of the same system's abjected populations toward their oppressors.² Under the leadership of Professor Morag J. Grant and Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow Anna Papaeti, the Junior Free Floater Research Group on “Music, Conflict and the State” at the University of Goettingen hosted two international conferences that put scholars of

acoustical torture's long history in productive dialogue with human rights activists, documentary film makers, and therapists who specialize in the treatment of torture victims.³ In addition, various media efforts have sought to raise public awareness. One notable effort has been the online protest known as *zeroDb*, a set of silent videos by musicians that was launched by the human rights organization Reprieve in 2010.⁴ Another was Tristan Chytroschek and Susanne Merten's 2011 award-winning film *Musik als Waffe* (in English, *Songs of War*), which probes several aspects of the practice by following composer Christopher Cerf's quest to learn how his music for the children's television program *Sesame Street* came to be used to torture United States' detainee, a quest that includes interviews with Moazzem Begg, Donald Vance, and a former interrogator who subjects Cerf to a sample of "the music program" onscreen.⁵ A third was the excellent 2012 radio documentary "Torture by Music," produced by Katie Green for BBC4.⁶

- 2 Research into the use of sound, whether musical or not, to cause physical or mental harm to imprisoned people continues to provoke two categories of questions--about politics that primarily concern citizens of the United States, and about the musical and acoustical cultures in which acoustical torture is conceivable.
- 3 Citizens of the United States ask ourselves whether we think the often-extreme manipulations of prisoners' acoustical relations with the world constitute "torture;" whether, and under what circumstances, we could assent to such manipulations, alone or in tandem with sleep deprivation, extremes of heat and cold, temporal disorientation, "gender coercion," the "standard operating procedures" described in my article; whether these procedures persist despite presidential directives to the contrary, having returned to the "dark side" of clandestine intelligence services; and what the consequences to our nation's moral integrity, reputation and future prisoners of war of our failure to prosecute those who authorized such procedures might be.
- 4 The available polling data suggests that a small majority of Americans have long reported their approval of "noise bombs" (and "stress positions") as an interrogation technique, while disapproving of waterboarding, gender humiliation, sleep deprivation and extremes of hot and cold.⁷ According to a 2012 poll, 41% of American approved generally of torturing "terrorist" suspects, and specifically supported some previously disparaged techniques.⁸ Historian Alfred McCoy and legal scholar Joseph Margulies each argue that the shift in public opinion springs partly from President Obama's decision not to prosecute those who had authorized torture, partly from popular media representations of interrogation and torture that stage but do not resolve narratively the moral questions, and partly from news media's airing of unapologetic defenses for torture that go un rebutted.⁹
- 5 Public opinion resonates with both the official position of the United States government and its rumored clandestine practices. Despite its apparently broad sweep, President Barack Obama's 2009 Executive Order prohibiting "harsh interrogation" left two notable exceptions: it does not apply to "facilities used only to hold people on a short-term, transitory basis," and it seems to apply only to uniformed military personnel and employees of the Central Intelligence Agency.¹⁰ These exceptions probably account for the internationally circulating reports that the United States has continued to use "harsh interrogation" in Afghanistan and aboard US navy ships, as well as to allow other countries' security forces to conduct such interrogations on the United States' behalf. Moreover, the *New York Times* reported in March 2013 that the officially prohibited

interrogation practices consisted of "nudity, cold, sleep deprivation, stress positions, wall-slammings and waterboarding."¹¹ Absent from this list is "the music program," which Vance's experience shows to have been intrinsic to detention practice more than to interrogation, along with such sensory, psychological and spiritual disruptions to subjectivity as hooding, manipulation of darkness and light, "gender coercion," and interference with prisoners' prayer. All qualify as psychological abuse treatment under the terms of the United Nations' Convention Against Torture, and therefore fall into the category of actions to which the United States reserved its right when it ratified the Convention.

- 6 Meanwhile, the study of acoustical torture has intersected with a rising academic interest in the relationship of musical culture to war. A number of new monographs allow a more historically grounded discussion of the ways that acoustical and musical cultures have interacted with military objectives.¹² Much more provocatively, however, exposing the phenomenon of acoustical torture has raised new questions about the inter-relationships of music, non-musical sounds, and human-centered ecologies, as these can be co-constitutive of subjectivity, culture, and relationships of power. Both military sources and released prisoners attribute the most profound effects of "the music program" during the "war on terror" to the acoustical properties of sound more than to the aesthetic or cultural meanings associated with musical style. In several interviews available on YouTube, Ruhai Ahmed has eloquently described his changing perception of the sounds with which he was tortured: at first intelligible to his perceptual faculties as music, these sounds came to seem like noise-- "banging, metal on metal."¹³ Another released prisoner (whom I do not have permission to name) told me privately that his acoustical torture was "like being beaten with a hammer. Dinh, dinh, dinh, dinh. When it stops it's like a beating has stopped."¹⁴ These men's accounts complicate my 2008 argument about the cultural and psychological violence "the music program" wrought, and challenge music scholars to retheorize our object of study so as to include consideration of music as acoustical energy capable of delivering beatings (or, presumably, caresses) that are simultaneous with cultural, spiritual or emotional meanings. Such retheorizing will, I think, is necessary to address fully a two-sided question that my 2008 article left unanswered. "How has the weaponization of sound and music affected the apparently civilian musical and acoustical practices [that] we think we know? How have apparently civilian musical and acoustical practices affected music's and sound's weaponization?"¹⁵

NOTES

1. CUSICK, Suzanne G., "Toward an Acoustemology of Detention in the 'Global War on Terror'," in BORN, Georgina (ed.), *Music, Sound and Space: Transformation of Public and Private Experience*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 275-291.
2. GOODMAN, Steve, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010.
3. An online report on the first conference is at <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/198674.html>. Some of the main results of the research project and selected papers from the second conference have been published as special issues of *the world of music (new series)* 2.1 (2013) and *Torture* 23.2

(2013), <http://www.irct.org/media-and-resources/library/torture-journal.aspx> (all accessed 22 January 2014).

4. <http://www.reprive.org.uk/events/zerodB/>, accessed 22 January 2014.

5. For journalist Andy Worthington's review and summary of the public conversation on music as torture, see <http://www.andyworthington.co.uk/2012/06/04/video-songs-of-war->, accessed 22 January 2014.

6. The 25-minute documentary aired in North America on 17 March 2012, and remains available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ph36x>, accessed 22 January 2012.

7. GRONKE, Paul, REJALI, Darius, et al., "U.S. Public Opinions on Torture, 2001-2009," in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 43/3, 2010, p. 437-444.

8. ZEGART, Amy, "Torture Creep," *foreignpolicy.com*, 25 September 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/25/torture_creep?wp_login_redirect=0, and *idem*, "Controversy Dims as Public Opinion Shifts," *New York Times*, January 7, 2013, both accessed 2 February 2014.

9. MCCOY, Alfred, *Torture and Impunity: The U.S. Doctrine of Coercive Interrogation*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012; MARGULIES, Joseph, *What Changed When Everything Changed: 9/11 and the Making of National Identity*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013.

10. Executive Order 13491, 22 January 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/EnsuringLawfulInterrogations, accessed 24 January 2014.

11. SHANE, Scott, "C.I.A.'s History Poses Hurdles for an Obama Nominee," 6 March 2013, accessed 2 February 2014.

12. Besides Goodman's *Sonic Warfare*, cited above, see BAADE, Christina, *Victory Through Harmony: the BBC and Popular Music in World War II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; BAUER, Julianne, *Musik in Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen*, Berlin, Metropol, 2009; DAUGHTRY, J. Martin, *The Amplitude of Violence: Listening Through a War and Its Aftermath*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming); FAUSER, Annegret, *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; HERBERT, Trevor and BARLOW, Hellen, *Music and the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; SPROUT, Leslie A., *The Musical Legacy of Wartime France*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013; TOMPKINS, Dave, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip-Hop. The Machine Speaks*, Brooklyn, Melville Press, 2010.

13. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn6xQPvsjJk>, 8:22-8:50, accessed July 2, 2013.

14. Interview with the author, 3 August 2009.

15. For public discussion of my most recent effort to grapple with this question, see the website of Harvard University's 2013 Sawyer Seminar, "Hearing Modernity," <http://hearingmodernity.org/>, "Sound in Torture & Surveillance, 11_18_13 audio." The intermedia paper under discussion is posted at the Seminar's website, which is (unfortunately) password protected.

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