Bearing Witness to Violence Through Noise

A Critical Exploration of Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck's Affective Curriculum

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ATTEMPTING TO DESCRIBE the work of Rudolf Eb.er, a sound/performance artist who also performs under the stage name Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck, can often feel more like relaying the plot of an arthouse horror film than describing music. The sound collages that comprise albums like *Runzelstock & Gurgelstirn* (Eb.er, 2005) and *Extreme Rituals* (Eb.er, 2012), for instance, pair long stretches of silence with overwhelmingly loud and stressful recordings of dogs barking, bells ringing, objects being slapped, engines revving, and people screaming. These recordings produce a challenging and disconcerting experience for the listener, as Eb.er repeatedly pierces the tension-filled calm with sharp, unsettling noises. Live performances further heighten the experience to one of outright terror. One piece called, "Konzert for Piano and Shotgun," for example, involves Eb.er "[sitting] at a piano and playing stark dissonant chords while sobbing his own name" (Daniel, 2003, p. 21) before pointing a shotgun at the audience, firing a blank, and returning to the overtly theatrical piano performance. Other concerts have involved multiple collaborators vomiting on stage, live birds being placed inside of the artist's mouth, the use of animal carcasses as both props and musical instruments, and more (Kemp, 2010). Watching Eb.er's performances or listening to his albums can invoke feelings of trepidation, disgust, intrigue, and transcendence simultaneously, leaving the audience feeling "shaken and re-energised, yet more baffled and hooked than ever" (Daniel, 2003, p. 21).

Beyond a mere empty gesture of shock value or transgression for the sake of provocation alone, Kemp (2010) argues that "Eb.er insists that we engage with the content and context that he presents to us. His uncomfortable and unquestionably effective … works are alive and vital, showing what is there in all of its ostensibly hideous and valid truth" (p. 67). The confrontation at the heart of Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck does not merely come from a performer antagonizing an audience but through the audience's own confrontation with a difficult truth about the social world (assuming the performance or recording is effective enough to achieve its intended end). The political thematics of Eb.er's work, like those of other artistic artifacts within similar genres, then

emerge through the generation of affect rather than a clearly stated meaning by the artist (Jones, 2016; Woods, 2021, 2023). However, the artistic potential of Eb.er's approach does not resolve the problematics associated with forcing audiences to witness violent acts. As I have argued previously in relation to noise music, a highly abrasive and dissonant subgenre of experimental music, the haphazard use of violent and fascist lyrics and imagery within this "extreme music" genre can reinforce all forms of oppression (sexism, racism, etc.) despite the artist's intent to challenge the ideologies behind dominant social institutions (Woods, 2018, 2023). Although Eb.er rejects the common categorization of his work into this genre (Kemp, 2010), these critiques of noise music still raise questions about the role of witnessing both within Eb.er's work and at a broader scale. What cultural politics emerge when witnessing the transgressive practices of Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck? And what, exactly, are audiences witnessing at all?

Placing this provocation into conversation with the theme of this special issue, I use this paper to explore the complicated nature of "earwitnessing," or the act of bearing witness through sound alone. Beyond Schafer's (1977) original notion of earwitnessing, one that centered the process of "writing about sounds directly experienced and intimately known" (p. 6), the expanded conception of the term I explore here draws affective entanglements wherein people hear that which lies past the auditory field (Brownell et al., 2018; Gershon, 2013b; Wargo, 2018). Divorced from its visual or material source, I argue that this expanded form of earwitnessing holds a unique politics that call on the listener as witness to attend to the relations around them because of sound's positioning as an affective technology, or a tool that individuals or groups can use to intentionally construct specific affective relations with and between listeners and other resonating bodies (Gallagher, 2016; Gershon 2013b; Wozolek, 2022). To do so, I begin with an exploration of the pedagogical potential of earwitnessing through noise, relying on Thompson's (2017) affective definition of the term, in relation to the role of affect within education. I then turn towards writings on the potential (and political shortcomings) of bearing witness as a form of pedagogy to propose that noise can center relationality itself, thus creating space for listeners and learners to critically reimagine how they relate to one another and the social world. Finally, I ground this theoretical exploration within a critical analysis of the album, *Runzelstock & Gurgelstirn* by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck, arguing that Eb.er's use of increasingly theatrical field recordings draws the listener into a witnessing of the relation of violence itself. The album, therefore, illustrates how noise can embody the curricular potential of earwitnessing as a tool for attending to and reckoning with affective relations that undergird violence, despite reproducing other forms of violence simultaneously.

The Affective Curriculum of Noise

Although multiple definitions of the term exist, I draw on Thompson's (2017) notion of noise as a means to connect the ethical dimensions of sound and witnessing, both of which remain intertwined with affect (Gallagher, 2011; Shannon, 2020; Wozolek, 2020; Zembylas, 2006). To arrive at her definition, Thompson (2017) conceptualizes noise through Spinoza's (1996) notion of affect and its two key components: affectus (a body's ability to affect or be affected) and affectio (one body affecting or leaving a trace on another). Simultaneously invoking Serres's (2007) definition of the parasite, Thompson contends that sound (or any other non-anthropocentric body) takes on the characteristic of noise when it not only allows the milieu to act on the relationship between affecting and affected bodies but reorients or reconfigures that relationship, revealing the

milieu as a (formerly) unheard or unseen body in relation to others. A door unexpectedly slamming in the middle of a conversation, for instance, exemplifies a noise because it reorients the relationship between speaker, listener, and the building where the conversation takes place. Rather than only serving as the milieu for two relating bodies, the building affects the two inhabitants by ending the conversation through the sound of the slamming door, thus reconfiguring the relationship between all three. From this constellation of texts, Thompson (2017) proposes an essentialized definition of noise: "if noise is what noise does, then the … question 'What is noise?' might be answered rather simply: 'an affective relation'" (p. 51). Rather than defining noise through its material characteristics (in the context of sound, this could include qualities like volume, pitch, dissonance, timbre, etc.) or the perception of the listener, Thompson argues that the ontological nature of noise rests solely on its capacity to affect and whether or not it fulfills that capacity. How, what, and the extent to which noise affects depends on the noise, the bodies it affects, and the set of relations noise acts on and through which it travels. Yet the core remains the same, with any and all noises embodying a realignment of affective relations, recognized and experienced as difference or change.

Importantly, Thompson (2017) positions this definition of noise as one that encompasses (but also challenges) the broadly held idea in sound studies that noise represents an unwanted sound, that one person's noise may be a welcomed sound for another (Abramo, 2014; Gershon, 2017; Russo & Warner, 2004). While the perception of a particular sound as unwelcome or painful may allude to its categorization as noise, its noisiness comes from the affective disturbance produced by this encounter. Sounds thus take on and shed the character of noise in different contexts because affectus differs from body to body, with some being capable of receiving an affective trace where others may not. The use of popular music in sonic torture (Cusick, 2020) provides an example. The newly formed traumatic relationship with pop music, the creation of psychic scars on the unconsenting listener, and the embodiment of oppression in the relationship between the torturer and the tortured contextually position this music as noise, not because the listener does not want to hear it. Through this framing, Thompson also argues that noise carries with it a relational and situated ethics, one reliant on the nature of the trace left by affecting bodies. According to the author, "the affective relation between entities is understood to be good or bad from the perspective of the affected body and in relation to an increase or diminishment in power" (Thompson, 2017, p. 117). This framing positions noise as potentially both liberatory and damaging: a blast of loud music can allow subjugated communities to reclaim public space, but the noise from sonic weaponry can also further oppress those same civilians. Untangling the politics and ethics of noise, like all sound, involves tracing the relation between sounding and hearing bodies, mapping affective relationships and how they change through their encounters with noise (Gallagher, 2011; Gershon 2011, 2013a).

In a parallel project to the one proposed by Thompson, curriculum studies scholars have begun to trace the role of affect within learning contexts. Taking a broad and encompassing perspective, Zembylas (2016) highlights three key contributions from the affective turn to education research: breaking down the emotion/reason dichotomy, foregrounding the politics of affect within the classroom, and both revealing and strengthening the intersections of the psychic and the social. In identifying the entangled affective relationships inherent to learning (between affect and reason, the individual and the social milieu), Zembylas amplifies the embodied, relational, situated, and affective nature of learning. Additionally, by highlighting the ethico-political element of affective relationships between human (students, teachers, etc.) and non-

human bodies (schools, curricula, etc.) in learning contexts, Zembylas provides a tool for tracing the non-anthropocentric ethics articulated by Thompson (2017).

Focusing on the ethics of affect, scholars show that attending to the affective economies (Ahmed, 2004) of education can serve as a basis for enacting critical and liberatory pedagogies. In this sense, the foundation for an ethical approach to education lies in the process of pathologizing the violence of the everyday described by Wozolek (2020). Tracing, challenging, and reworking relationships between bodies and the milieu serves as the curriculum for a socially oriented learning process, with educators guiding students through a process of recognizing their own position within affective economies before defining and undertaking strategies to challenge this affective network. Turning towards anti-racist pedagogies specifically, Zembylas (2015) contends that "an anti-racist struggle in schools needs to pay attention to the affective mobilization of race and racism and seek to create pedagogical spaces and practices that free students and teachers from affective investments in racial oppressions" (p. 147). Understood in this way, an anti-racist pedagogy involves, first, revealing the affective economies that define both race and racial oppression and, second, reimagining these relations. Positioning race as an affective technology creates the possibility for this kind of anti-racist action.

Zembylas (2015) illustrates this affective conception of anti-racist pedagogy in the following vignette from a professional development experience at a school in Cyprus:

> [The teachers] began
> to share their own feelings about immigration in general, migrant children and their families in Cyprus, and their everyday interactions with migrant children in their own school. One teacher admitted in front of all of her colleagues that she could not hug Turkish-speaking students because they reminded her of the Turkish troops occupying her house in north Cyprus. [But] the teacher admitted that she might have been unfair to Turkish-speaking students, because these children had not harmed her in any way. The meeting ended after a long and emotional silence and everyone departed without saying much. The following day, the teacher … hugged each and every one—including her Turkish-speaking students—and apologized to them (in tears) for not doing this before. (Zembylas, 2015, p. 156)

Placing this example in conversation with Wozolek's (2020) exploration of everyday violence, the decision not to hug her students contributes to the violence and further racialization directed at these students. But after locating and defining this affective practice of racialization, the teacher can begin to embody an anti-racist stance with her students. Whether this particular choice leads to the kinds of systemic change demanded of anti-racist action remains to be seen, but it still speaks to the value of engaging racialization through an affective lens.

Returning to Thompson's (2017) contention that noise, by definition, disrupts affective relations, I propose that noise represents a potentially liberatory technology within education because of its ability to reimagine oppressive forms of affect (Woods, 2020). Although liberation through noise remains far from universal, since the trace left by noise can just as easily reinscribe oppression as it would catalyze a liberatory future (Thompson, 2017), all systems (including the systems of affective relations that define learning and racialization) cannot change without some form of a noisy disturbance to invoke that change (Davies, 2014). In turn, challenging sociopolitical systems through education requires some form of noise to serve as a catalyst. While this contention does not necessarily have to invoke the sonic, noise as a type of sound can enact

this liberatory reimagining of affective relations. In both formal (Brownell, 2019; Gallagher, 2011; Gershon, 2013a; Wozolek, 2022, 2023) and informal (Gershon, 2013b; Woods & Jones, 2022; Wargo, 2018) learning contexts, research has shown that sonic noise challenges hierarchical power and allows for a reimagining of the affective relations between participants that define learning ecologies. To this end, noise can challenge the policing of bodies through sound (Gallagher, 2011) and produce an ethical reimagining of affective relations both in and outside of the classroom, even if only momentarily.

The Ethics of Bearing Witness Through Noise

Thinking beyond the bounds of noise, sound is ontologically relational and differential, a medium through which bodies can affect and be affected and exists as both material and immaterial simultaneously (Ceccheto, 2013; Gallagher, 2016; Gershon, 2013b). Sound, in so much as it is detected, exists as an embodiment of difference, a manifestation of change on both physical and theoretical levels (Evens, 2005). In other words: when we hear sound, we hear difference. Framing sound (a category that includes sonic noise) in this way creates a theoretical alignment with Oliver's (2001) dual understanding of witnessing: "*eyewitness* testimony based on first-hand knowledge, on the one hand, and *bearing witness* to something beyond recognition that can't be seen, on the other" (p. 16). Oliver's definitions invoke both a relational practice (someone has to witness someone or something else) and a differential phenomenon (the experience of change or difference beyond the aesthetic). The literature surrounding earwitnessing also aligns with these two distinct kinds of witnessing. While Schafer's (1977) original definition and its uptake in criminal justice scholarship (Cantone, 2010; McGorey & McMahon, 2017) center the testimony and description of sounds heard, others position earwitnessing as a process of attuning to relations that audibly materialize (Abramo, 2014; Brownell et al., 2018). Wargo (2018) describes this expanded definition of earwitnessing as "becoming-in-resonance-with phenomena, a simultaneous thinking/living/becoming with that requires reciprocity and active engagement with time/space/matter/bodies" (p. 384), amplifying not only the affective economies of others but also the listener's place within those economies. Sound then provides a medium for bearing witness because of its ability to amplify more-than-representational forms of affect and the unseen ethical dimensions of cultural (and curricular) politics (Aoki, 1991; Fiebig, 2015; Truman & Shannon, 2018). Earwitnessing, therefore, has the potential to enact a relational ethics that centers difference beyond mere recognition.

Turning towards the pedagogical potential of earwitnessing, Zembylas (2006) argues that the ethical use of witnessing within an educational praxis invokes Oliver's (2001) critique of recognition by identifying and attending to the embedded affective politics of learning ecologies. This possibility emerges because of the intertwined and embodied nature of both affect and learning: "students' and teachers' bodies may be understood as the plane of immanence for any pedagogy; without affects, there is no pedagogy" (Zembylas, 2006, p. 312). From here, Zembylas (2006) recognizes the practice of bearing witness as a pedagogical act within ethical education initiatives because of its affective potential to help learners "not only becom[e] aware of victimization and its consequences but … tak[e] response-ability to become a transformative agent of awareness and reception of Others' trauma" (Zembylas, 2006, p. 313). To this end, bearing witness to forms of violence that exist beyond the aesthetic invokes a need to attend to the extant interrelations of affective economies (Wozolek, 2020). Witnessing, therefore, aligns with noise,

since the process of reimagining affective relationships sits at the foundation of both terms. Zembylas (2006) furthers this connection when describing the role of invoking crisis within pedagogies, stating that "crisis is essential in order for bearing witness to occur" and "that teaching should provoke a crisis and strong emotional responses in students" (p. 320), revealing the role that noise can play within pedagogical enactments of witnessing. Bearing witness emerges as a pedagogical act when affective relations sit at the center of that practice, revealing existing affective entanglements and providing the dialogic structures needed to embody new ways of affectively relating to each other (Zembylas, 2006). Noise, as described here, provides one tool for engaging new (and potentially liberatory) affects.

With this expanded and pedagogical understanding of bearing witness in mind, the potential of earwitnessing can begin to take shape. Sound provides an opportunity to recognize current affective economies, recognize previously unrecognized affective relations, and create space to both imagine and work towards new relational systems (Cecchetto, 2013; Truman & Shannon, 2018). The recognition of recorded sound as both a chronicle of a moment in time and an unveiling of the cultural milieu (Fiebig, 2015; Love, 2016), for instance, creates an opportunity to enact the type of witnessing described by education scholars who explore the intersection of witnessing and liberation (Giroux, 2012; hooks, 2003; Wilcox, 2021). If the potency of witnessing as a mode of learning involves attuning to the oppression of others in a way that demands action, then sound as the medium of earwitnessing provides a unique opportunity to bear witness beyond a textual or visual representation of injustice due to its affective nature. This potential emerges because, as Gershon (2017) argues, "sound is not more truthful than text; it can do things that text cannot" (p. 142). One of those things involves reimagining the affective economies of both formal and informal learning. Sound as a form of affect embedded with socially-constructed meaning produces its own educational system as it circulates between bodies, a system that institutional forms of education police as a means to enforce pedagogical control (Gallagher, 2016; Gershon, 2011, 2017; Verstraete & Hoegaerts, 2017; Wozolek, 2020). But sound (and, more specifically, noise) routinely undermines that control, with othered and oppressed students asserting their humanity and agency through sounding processes (Brownell, 2019; Gallagher, 2011; Wozolek, 2023). In turn, sound provides a tool for reimagining affective relations towards a liberatory end if those listening bear witness to sound on its own terms.

Through this affective framing, the politics of earwitnessing begin to materialize (even if they remain contextually defined). As Freire (1970) asserts, the core pedagogical value of witnessing involves a recognition of difference with and acceptance of the Other on their terms, through an a priori acceptance of their humanity. Sound, as a medium in itself, provides the tools for that relation to emerge outside of the kinds of affect produced by both text and visuality (Gershon, 2017). Thinking through issues of racial oppression (and employing the act of witnessing as a means towards challenging racialization), Stoever (2016) acknowledges as much when she says that sound is "a critical modality through which subjects (re) produce, apprehend, and resist imposed racial identities and structures of racial violence" (p. 4). The reproduction described here happens through the imposition of the listening ear, a socially constructed way of hearing the world as racialized (Stoever, 2016). Through this construction, the listening ear disciplines certain actions, bodies, and sounds through the sonic production of race. Sound as a modality for resisting racial oppression and racialization as a whole then inherently challenges this listening ear, inviting a listening constructed outside of this socialized form of hearing and on the terms of sound itself. Earwitnessing demands the same approach to listening, to both hear sound

outside of the affective economies that define the listening ear and further the need to construct spaces where this kind of listening can occur.

Yet scholars have also critiqued the practice of bearing witness. According to Hartman (1997), bearing witness to violence from an outside perspective (specifically, a white witnessing of anti-Black violence) reinscribes power relations and the witness's position as separated from violence without posing a challenge to the act being witnessed. But this reproduction of harm and oppression does not only come from the political failure of witnessing. For Sharpe (2010), the reinscription of violence through witnessing emerges from "an appalled fascination with subjugation, captivity, and torture" (p. 120) rather than an earnest intent to disrupt systems or individual acts of oppression. Bedecarré (2022) locates this fascination within the witness as the focus on their own painful realizations of complicity and grappling with Black violence by picturing themselves in the place of the Black body. This aligns with other critiques of witnessing that reinscribe the subjecthood of the witness while relegating the Other to further subjugation (Farley, 1997; Wilderson, 2020). Understood and enacted in this way, the process of bearing witness further reinscribes the violence of the current condition and indeed does harm. But bearing witness, as a pedagogical act, does not necessarily need to produce this end if it attends to a reimaging of violent affective economies. An example of this exists within Greenbaum's (2001) exploration of teaching about the Holocaust through the lens of bearing witness. Rather than using this process to relegate this atrocity to the past, Greenbaum shows how bearing witness can attend to and reimagine affective relations. In line with Zembylas's (2020) push for an anti-complicity pedagogy of witnessing, Greenbaum's (2001) approach to this topic involves a positioning of oneself within an affective relation to the Holocaust and grappling with that positioning, understanding and challenging oneself to face affects such as "the pleasure of being a voyeur of violence" (p. 9) amongst other ongoing relations.

To this end, bearing witness does not involve only being an eyewitness to the violent trace left on the body of the Other but bearing witness to the violent affective relations that define those bodies. It is within this assertion that the power of earwitnessing as a pedagogical technology holds so much potential because listening to sound involves attending to and hearing sonic affect (Aoki, 1991; Erickson, 2004; Gallagher, 2016; Gershon, 2011, 2017; Wozolek, 2022). Although Stoever (2016) argues that social institutions construct certain forms of hearing, this process of policing via the listening ear does not have to undermine the act of attending to the sonification of affect if that listening can happen on its own terms. Earwitnessing remains susceptible to the same ethical issues present in witnessing through visuality and text, but the foregrounding of affect through sound still produces a significant amount of pedagogical potential. To further explore this potential, I return now to Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck to illustrate this argument.

Earwitnessing Amid Runzelstock & Gurgelstirn

In the opening moments of *Runzelstock & Gurgelstirn*, an album by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstøck (Eb.er, 2005), the artist constructs and then almost immediately eviscerates a sense of tranquility. A recording of a small bell, the kind that might hang above a door or sit on the handlebars of a bike, welcomes the listener into the sonic landscape before a throbbing bass drum shatters the original inviting feeling. As the drum pounds over and over again, Eb.er layers a recording of someone crying (or maybe screaming?) and what sounds like someone getting hit with a paddle over the rhythmic foundation. But this jarring moment stops almost as soon as it

begins, and the central collage aesthetic of the album takes over. The sounds of audio tape being pulled in reverse through a machine, dogs barking, and the bells and cries/screams from the opening moments of the album cut in and out and mingle with less recognizable squeals, drones, and short rhythmic loops. And then, suddenly, the collage disappears, leaving the screams, paddle sounds, barks, and bell behind. For minutes, the only sounds that emerge from the speakers seem to come from a recording of someone being repeatedly beaten and a dog aggressively barking at the ringing bell.

Listening to this first passage of the album is such a jarring and, frankly, traumatizing experience. Hearing these violent sounds feels so painful and terrifying, raising deeply troubling questions about how Eb.er made the album. Is this actually the sound of someone being beaten? Is it against their will? And if so, does that make the listener complicit in that violence? As those questions begin to swirl, a new soundscape emerges in the form of a fast-paced drum and bass beat mixed with the sounds of a crowd. But on closer listen, the crowd is actually an illusion: what originally feels like a field recording of a packed public space is actually primarily constructed from the now familiar screams and barks manipulated and layered back on top of each other. Eb.er heightens this sudden sense of artifice by dissolving the electronic drum beat into a tape warble, making it sound like the beat was playing on a cassette player the whole time and the tape had suddenly melted. A fast-paced rhythmic loop, one that could almost keep up with a machine gun, abruptly breaks through the silence as the screams, barks, paddles, and bells return. But the timing feels off. Nothing seems to line up and the same recorded segment of a single scream clearly repeats itself again and again.

Flipping the record, the B-Side undermines the authenticity behind the recordings even further. After a passage of insect sounds and some more barking (this time over a lower pitched bell), two measures of a waltz played on an unknown stringed instrument repeat themselves as someone mumbles an indecipherable text and someone else starts shouting. The machine-gun-like rhythmic sample cuts in and out, but an overwhelming sense of melodrama permeates from this part of the composition. It just kind of sounds silly but also seems to nod towards the artificial sense of extremity within the noise music genre Eb.er both finds himself in and rejects (Kemp, 2010). The strings fade away, and the bell returns but slowly transforms into the sound of a phone ringing. The screams have evolved as well, this time sounding less like a pained cry and more like a dull, forced, and overly theatrical laugh. The drumbeat, violent slaps, and dog barks do appear again at times but only sporadically and only for fractions of a second. At this point, Eb.er has completely undermined any semblance of the recordings being anything other than a staged recreation, a set of performative sonic artifacts that at best resemble violence. This theatricality continues until the final moments of the album, as what sounds like a distorted drumbeat drowns out another, much more real sounding recording of a crowd screaming. And without warning, all sound suddenly stops as the needle reaches the inner groove.

To further analyze this album, I propose a listening of *Runzelstøck & Gurgelstirn* through what I describe as an aesthetic pedagogy, an affective opening created by an aesthetic object (such as a painting, performance, or album) to reimagine the social relations that define the micro-community interacting with the work (Woods, 2021). Within this listening, Eb.er plays with the notion of earwitnessing, inviting the audience to bear witness to the sounds of violence before pulling a musical sleight of hand and revealing the artifice that produced these sounds. The gesture, therefore, creates a certain affective relation between the listener and the sound maker before the notion of artifice produced through these recordings reorients that affect. The gesture then embodies Thompson's (2017) notion of noise, drawing the listener's attention away from the

person creating the sound towards the musical milieu (a shift illustrated especially clearly by the routine use of tape sounds and microphone distortion). In turn, the aesthetic pedagogy of the album rests on the nature of earwitnessing. Rather than approaching the recording of the person screaming as a text in itself, an approach that would invoke Oliver's (2001) notion of an eyewitness and Schafer's (1977) original conception of the term, Eb.er forces the listener to bear witness to what exists beyond the recording in terms of the affective relationships between these sounds and the audience. Instead of earwitnessing a violent act, the album invites the audience to bear witness to the relation of violence itself. In doing so, the album provides an opportunity to engage in the pedagogical potential of bearing witness described by Zembylas (2006) by centering the affective economy that produces violence within the broader milieu. This occurs by shifting the focus of witnessing away from a specific subject and towards the set of affective relations that create violence, in alignment with Greenbaum's (2001) approach to engaging witnessing as a pedagogical technology.

Eb.er's invocation of earwitnessing on the album, therefore, sidesteps some of the critiques of bearing witness posed by others. By positioning violence as an affective relation at the center of what is being witnessed, the listener cannot subjugate the victims of violence in the same way as one does when they visually witness violent acts (and specifically acts of Black violence) (Hartman, 1997; Love, 2016). However, examining the album through the lens of earwitnessing produces other critiques. Specifically, the album reproduces the decontextualization of violence that often occurs within the context of noise music (Woods, 2018; 2019). Instead of creating an opportunity for the listener to center themselves when witnessing violent acts, a crucial issue within contemporary forms of witnessing described by Bedecarré (2022), the album centers violence as an affective relation by erasing this subject entirely. The theme of violence flows throughout this album, but the victims of that violence seem buried in the mix at best. Although this seems to be the point of the album, highlighting the structural practice of reproducing and articulating violence beyond the violent act itself, it fails to consider that witnessing should always serve those being witnessed on their terms (Freire, 1970; hooks 2003). While revealing the affective relations that connect these bodies, the album also hides the bodies that receive the traces of violence. This in turn undermines the album's ability to reframe affective economies, an ability that serves as the ethical foundation of earwitnessing within educational praxes.

Conclusion

Much like Thompson's (2017) assertion that the politics of noise remain undetermined (with an ethical potential that evolves in relation to its context), *Runzelstock & Gurgelstirn* reveals the complicated ethics of earwitnessing. While the album creates an aesthetic pedagogy that allows for a witnessing of the affect of violence itself, producing an opportunity to attend to and reimagine the affective economy that produces that violence, the album simultaneously undermines this potential by sonically erasing the presence of those subjugated by that violence. But rather than attempt to resolve this critique, I propose that this album speaks to the potential of sound within pedagogical acts of witnessing to engage affective economies beyond the aesthetic. Outside of this specific set of recordings, earwitnessing can both attend to the forms of affect that define the violent milieu that surrounds us while also drawing us into new affective relations between ourselves and others. Sound (when framed as an affective, differential, and medial phenomenon) then represents a powerful technology within the liberatory praxes forwarded by those advocating

for witnessing within processes of learning. Although this advocacy does not represent an uncritical acceptance of earwitnessing in all cases, it does forward the value of a particular kind of listening, one that goes further than merely recognizing sound and embraces a hearing of relational difference behind an aesthetic veil.

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