Chapter 7: Noise

James G. Mansell

We know it when we hear it. Noise is the 'splinter in your ear,' a sound that doesn't belong.[1] Despite the extensive attention that it has received following the turn to sound in the humanities, noise has nevertheless remained the slipperiest of critical terms. It is the limit and political economy of music as well as a component of everyday soundscapes.[2] It is linguistic and philosophical meaningless and what the 'signal' isn't.[3] As Marie Thompson puts it, 'noise is a "noisy" concept: it is messy, complex, fleeting, fuzzy-edged and, at times, infuriating'. Noise is said to be 'stubbornly resistant to theorization' because definitions of what it is vary so widely, even, and perhaps especially, in colloquial use.[4]

This chapter argues that the question of what noise is should interest us more than it frustrates us. Its slipperiness, while frustrating to theorists, can provide the starting point for a revealing, sonically-attuned, cultural history. It is precisely the openness of the category of noise to interpretation and change that makes it so revealing. Understanding what noise is, and how this comes to be so, helps us to understand sound's presence and activeness in social relations. Rather than ask what noise is, as a universal category, we might instead begin by asking: how do we come to know what noise sounds like? In turn, we might then ask, what role does that coming to know play in producing the cultures that hold us in place as subjects? This chapter takes up these questions in relation to moments in cultural history from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, a period associated with a rising tide of everyday noise brought about by continuing industrialisation, urbanisation and technological revolution.[5] It considers, in particular, the role that writers and writing play in the shifting meanings and ideological power of noise. The chapter is intended as a contribution to ongoing discussions about what Philipp Schweighauser has called 'literary

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acoustics' and argues in favour of a historical-contextual approach to analysing literature's place in auditory culture.[6]

Literature allows us to hear through the ears of the writer. It can give us unique insight into what a given time and place sounded like. Historian Mark M. Smith argues that written evidence, such as literature, is better even than a sound recording, since 'printed evidence offers a far more robust way to access the ways sounds and silences were understood in the past'. Smith explains that writers use the printed word to 'convey and even reproduce' sounds in a way that captures both the acoustic properties of sound as well as its meaning to those who heard it.[7] This has been an important insight for the practice of historical sound studies, but my interest here is in the opposite direction of travel. My contention is that writers and writing play a role not only in capturing and commenting upon our cultures of hearing, but also in shaping them.

Interesting work has been done to account for the presence of everyday noise in literature. Josh Epstein's work on music, noise and modernism, for example, shows how modernist writers engaged with the problematic boundary between music and noise in the age of Stravinsky and Antheil, and in turn how they thought about the border between art and everyday life in modernity. Ultimately, the focus in Epstein's study, and in other similar scholarly works, is on what noise does within the textual forms of modernist writing. Epstein takes the acoustics of noise beyond the text to be self-evidently 'the affective shocks of industrialization, urbanization, warfare, publicity, and mechanical reproducibility.'[8] However, the noisy sounds which Epstein takes as a given were shaped in definitional terms in no small degree by the writer's 'listening ear,' to borrow Jennifer Lynn Stoever's useful concept.[9] Writers have a role to play in naming and shaping noise as a recognisable category of sound.

Schweighauser's approach comes somewhat closer to what I have in mind. He argues that literature is 'not solely a privileged site for the representation of the noises of our acoustic world but is itself a discourse that generates noise within the channels of cultural communication.'[10] For Schweighauser, modernist writing, in particular, listens to, amplifies and refuses to discipline the noises of the modern world, and in doing so itself becomes noise to the signal of capitalist communication (Schweighauser draws here on Claude Shannon's communications theory of noise and signal and on William Paulson's notion of literature as the 'noise of culture').[11] Schweighauser argues that noisy modernist literature, such as the work of Dos Passos, stands in contrast to the capitalist rational-scientific quest to control unwanted sound. 'In accepting noise as one of the constitutive factors of their literary practice,' modernist writers, according to Schweighauser, 'seek to retain something of the alterity and ineffability of the noises they represent.' They in turn 'align themselves with an aesthetics of negativity which ultimately eludes our cognitive and representational grasp.' Schweighauser views this Adornian aesthetics of literary refusal, what he describes as writing's 'refusal to offer up its objects of representation to the reader's ready consumption,' as being at 'the heart of all literary experience'.[12] I do not wish to deny the critical potential of noise in the sense that Schweighauser advances it. A range of noise theorists persuasively argue for the politically resistive potential of noisy art, music, and literature.[13] However, I am not convinced that we should view the literary experience as *essentially* resistive where noise, and acoustics in general, are concerned. This chapter looks, and listens, beyond the modernist text for insight into how writing and writers have involved themselves in the social shaping of noise. It does so with particular reference to writers' involvement in anti-noise discourses and campaigning for the purpose of demonstrating literature's involvement in the shaping of hegemonic power. This necessarily involves emphasising the work of anti-noise writers at the

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expense of those, such as Virginia Woolf, who challenged the negative categorisation of noise.

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Although we might know it when we hear it, the category of noise is not intrinsically connected to particular kinds of sound. Turning a sound into a noise is the product of a good deal of cultural work. This work is most evident in the efforts of noise abatement campaign groups who spearhead the call for legal definition and control of noise, but these groups typically represent wider auditory-social forces at play around them. This campaigning includes the active participation of writers. Key moments in the control of noise in Britain – the 1864 Street Music Act, the 1939 model bylaw on noise, and the 1960 Noise Abatement Act – were each accompanied by organised campaigns against specific kinds of everyday sound. In each case, writers and their writing were closely associated with the shaping of these campaigns and the attempt to define certain kinds of sound as noise. Charles Dickens was a prominent leader of the anti-street music movement in the 1850s and 1860s. Dystopian writers H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley supported the Anti-Noise League's crusade against new technological sounds in the 1930s. The poet Sir John Betjeman was associated with the Noise Abatement Society's defence of rural peace and quiet in the 1950s and 1960s. As noise abatement increasingly became a matter of public health in the early twentieth century, doctors quoted from fictional descriptions of noise to help them explain the threat that it posed to the human body. This medical-literary nexus was particularly prominent in early twentieth-century France, where literary and medical texts on noise were strongly inter-textual.[14]

John M. Picker identifies the power of writers and writing to shape noise in his influential book on Victorian literary acoustics, *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003).[15] He shows that in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s, street music, particularly that produced by German and Italian itinerant barrel organists, became a topic of strident complaint among London's

professional middle-class ‘brain-workers’, especially those who conducted their work at home, such as writers. In their quest to protect the quiet conditions necessary for their work, they ‘waged a battle to impose the quiet tenor of interior middle-class domesticity upon the rowdy terrain outside.’[16] Picker argues that anti-noise advocacy directed specifically at foreign street musicians allowed writers, including Dickens and Thomas Carlyle, to make sense of their class identity within the nation. Picker notes that a new ‘loose federation’ of professionals, including writers, but also mathematicians and scientists, was ‘just coming into its own’ and though ‘increasing in numbers,’ it was still ‘struggling for respect and recognition’ as an equal to the established professions of law and medicine.[17] The campaign to silence street musicians allowed these new urban, middle-class professionals to stake their auditory territory in the city and the nation. They asserted their right to quiet over the nuisance of the street musicians whose sound was described, via letter writing, cartoons and, in the end, an Act of Parliament, as an intrusion on the auditory space of the civilized hearer and of the acoustic nation as a whole. Picker uses the anti-noise campaigning of writers like Dickens to reinterpret Victorian literature and concludes, importantly, that ‘What can loosely be considered the anti-street music movement represents a critical aspect of the context in which much if not most of the major artwork and literature of the period developed.’[18] Picker’s work shows that writers and their writing not only reflect the acoustic worlds they represent, but actively involve themselves in shaping them.

Dickens and Carlyle’s campaign to rid the streets of barrel organs represents a clear example of the kind of cultural work that goes into turning a sound into a noise and of how writers become involved in this process. Not everyone disliked the sound of the barrel organs, and indeed many wrote fondly of them, sometimes as a direct reaction to the scorn poured on them by Dickens and others. Picker cites several writers who came to the barrel organists’ defence. Such writers, including the clergyman and essayist, H. R. Haweis, countered the

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categorisation of barrel organs as noise, and noted that they provided welcome musical accompaniment to working-class street life.[19] Aimée Boutin identifies a similar process at work on the streets of nineteenth-century Paris, where the street cries of peddlers became the target of middle-class anti-noise campaigning. While the '*cris de Paris*' were to some writers a scourge on the sonic life of the city, they were to others a romantic reminder of the old Paris.[20] Boutin points to this dynamic as a fundamental source of inspiration for Baudelaire and other modernist poets' engagement with the acoustics and politics of urban space.

Why have writers been such prominent members of noise abatement campaigns or otherwise involved themselves in the cultural work of shaping noise? Part of the explanation lies in Picker's insight that since the middle of the nineteenth century writers have staked their claim to social space, and social recognition, by defending the quiet auditory terrain they hear as necessary for reading and writing, as in the well-documented cases of Marcel Proust and Thomas Carlyle who created soundproofed work spaces for themselves. In the nineteenth century, the~~ir~~ auditory priorities of writers aligned with a wider growing middle-class demand for quiet and thus took on the shape of a normative auditory culture. Writers, though, are also involved in the social dynamics of noise precisely because noise must be created and 'dramatised' as noise, to use Karin Bijsterveld's terminology.[21] Leaders of noise abatement movements have sought out the collaboration of writers because they know that writers have the power to shape our perception of the world. The doctor, Thomas Horder, who led the Anti-Noise League in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s, made H. G. Wells the star of the organisation's high-profile conference at London's Science Museum in 1935, noting that writers are part of the 'intelligent section' of society who know what acoustic civilization means and how to protect it.[22] He might just as easily have said that writers know a noise when they hear one, and can help the rest of us catch up.

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In situating writers as important mediators of the category of noise, my intention here is to add weight to Brian Kane's defence of the auditory culture approach to sound studies. Kane notes the rise of an ontological and affective paradigm in the study of sound which, in some of its variants, claims that sound is involved in human affairs not primarily via its connection to systems of meaning and culture, but thanks to its power to impact directly upon our bodily and pre-cognitive states, what Steve Goodman calls the 'politics of frequency'.[23] Kane argues that Goodman's approach 'directly challenges the relevance of research into auditory culture, audile techniques, and the technological mediation of sound in favour of universals concerning the nature of sound, the body, and media.'[24] The ontological approach would also suggest a limited role for literary description of noise in the politics of hearing and listening. Kane, though, criticises Goodman's ontological approach to sound and claims that auditory culture methods have always sought to balance the affective and discursive presence of sound in society: 'Studies in auditory culture are not simply studies in "representation" or "signification" without consideration of the body,' he argues. 'Rather, scholars in auditory culture seek to demonstrate the successions and relays between cognition and affect, or, speaking broadly, between the mind and the body.' He goes on to describe the social shaping of sound as a process in which hearers are trained to encounter sounds in certain ways. He describes hearing as a cultural skill which, once learned, is 'offloaded onto the body'.[25] Kane's theory of sonic training is a useful one, offering a framework for understanding how the cultural choice to label a sound as noise becomes an acoustic truth, experienced as such, once established, as affective bodily response.

Sound is, of course, affective. It is used in notable instances, such as the high frequency 'mosquito' deterrent device used to disperse groups of young people, for its material power to impact bodies. However, the affective power of sound also makes it an attractive target for ideological investment. When we hear a noise we are affected, but that

affect is mixed with social meaning produced by the cultural work that goes on around and through sound, including the categorisation of sound as noise. The noisiness of noise resides neither entirely in the sonic object, nor entirely in cultural meaning, but rather in what might be called the sonic encounter between hearer and heard. If we know a noise when we hear one, then that is because we have become attuned to a way of hearing some sounds as noise. The sonic encounter, which is both a bodily and a cultural experience, is where sound becomes socially active. It draws us in to hearing communities of those who hear like us, making those communities all the more real because they *feel* true. Goodman notes that sound can be weaponised in warfare, but, recognising this, as I show elsewhere, British authorities during the Second World War made it a priority of home front propaganda to manage the encounter between civilians and bombing noise, entraining a stoical, critical and managed listening encounter with blitz sounds to counter the auditory-affective power of aerial bombardment and to produce a wartime community of listeners.[26] Here, bomb noise was situated as a source of, rather than a drain on, civilian morale. Noise was useful, in this context, as a source of national community building.

We are trained, in Kane's sense, to hear noise as noise, for good or for ill, and when we do, that encounter comes bundled with social effects as well as affects. The noise of the factory, to add a further example, has been situated as a mark of civilizational decline, as in the work of the British Anti-Noise League, and as the soundtrack of proletarian heroism, as in the USSR in the 1920s and early 1930s. There are all kinds of sources of this noise training. In the 1930s, the Anti-Noise League sought to spread the values of 'acoustic civilization' by producing posters, staging exhibitions and making radio broadcasts. Psychological self-help writers were close allies, giving advice to the 'nervous' about how to manage their hearing of unhealthy noise.[27] In the case of the USSR, films, such as Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (1931) were used to present industrial noise as a healthy, productive, source of class unity. Yet

writers of fiction stand out as leaders of the noise-shaping agenda, aware of the role that they might play in producing the encounter between hearers and sounds. Their literary works 'train' hearers in Kane's sense.

The French novelist Georges Duhamel is a good case in point. He was a leading supporter of the French anti-noise movement spearheaded in the 1930s by the Touring-Club de France.[28] He not only worked in support of the noise abatement agenda, suggesting, for example, the creation of national quiet parks where mechanical sounds would be prohibited, but also attempted to produce sound as noise through his written works. In order for noise to be successfully abated, writers like Duhamel knew that it needed to be actively produced as a stable and immediately understandable sonic category. A text such as his *Scènes de la vie future*, first published in 1931 and translated into English as *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future*, offers an insight into the role that writers play in situating sound as noise.[29] It also serves as a case study in how we might come to think about writing's role in producing the sonic encounter, as I have outlined it above. *America the Menace* is an exercise in travel writing in which the narrator gives his first-hand impressions of life in the United States of America. American culture is situated as a threat to European civilization in the book, as it is in a number of Duhamel's other works. Sound plays a central role in the book's description of American life. This is established in the opening pages, which describe the journey by ship from France across the Atlantic Ocean. The passage from European to American civilization is marked by sound. As the ship leaves European waters, 'scraps of "Carmen" and the eructations of a gentleman who was reading a lecture' were still audible on the radio. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, only 'the crackling conversation of the ships' could be heard. As the ship approached American shores, however, 'plaintive, almost furious nereal melodies' could finally be heard on the ship's radio. ''They are hymns,' said the officer, 'sung by Negro choruses. There's never anything else but them or jazz. Every hour

now you will be more and more aware of America.'[30] America's difference is established first through sound and the contrast with European civilization is underscored via identification of racial as well as sonic difference.

It is, though, technology, rather than race, that forms the primary focus of Duhamel's distaste for American culture in *America the Menace*. In the preface to the book he draws a sharp distinction between moral and technological civilization: 'I persist in regarding as a phenomenon of capital importance what may be called a divorce that in many minds has taken place between the concept of an essentially moral civilization, fit, according to Humboldt, to 'make people more human,' and the concept of another civilization that is predominantly mechanical'.[31] As such, Duhamel's writing fits within a prominent strand of technophobia at work within the intellectual history of the twentieth century. This technophobia took multiple forms, but in Duhamel's case it is evident that he saw, and heard, new technology as a threat to the place of writing and the writer in 'moral civilization'. The quiet spaces of contemplation needed for reading and writing were threatened by the new noisy world of motor traffic, radio, gramophone, and the talkies. Christopher Todd confirms that Duhamel worried that radio and cinema generated unthinking crowd behaviour rather than properly individual, thinking, subjects: 'He saw machine-generated culture as appealing essentially to the gregarious spirit, whereas the book was the friend of solitude and allowed the reader to reflect and even reappraise.'[32] Todd suggests that Duhamel's critique of new media technologies was at least in part a defence of writing and the writer, and, as in the case of Dickens, it becomes clear that anti-noise advocacy was part of this defence of literature and its creators for Duhamel.

In *America the Menace*, noise covers some considerable auditory terrain. It is associated with technology, such as motor traffic, but also with the 'easy' culture which Duhamel associates with technological mediation, and which he presents as consumed

without thought, and produced without consideration. Describing Chicago, the book's narrator draws a sharp distinction between the silence of Lake Michigan and the noise of the city beside it. 'You are astonished to find so much noise and activity on the edge of nothing,' the narrator observes.[33] It is the sound of motor traffic that draws his attention – the 'roar of the streets' – which is dominated only by a steamboat, 'a clattering storm of sound.'[34] Elsewhere, he describes 'the raucous outcry of wrathful expostulations of ten thousand automobiles quarrelling for precedence.'[35] In contrast, the lake is described as 'an abyss of silence, an infinity of cotton-wool in which the noise of the demoniac city was lost.'[36] At a brief moment of respite from the traffic noise, the narrator notices that 'little waves were slapping' on the lake. 'The water was dirty,' writes Duhamel, 'but still it was water; that is, something simple and natural. The murmur of it was closer to my soul that night than all the clamour of the life of man.'[37] Here, as elsewhere in the book, noise is situated as bad because it is unnatural, standing in contrast to a good, natural acoustic world.

The presentation of the unnatural sounds of motor traffic helps to frame other kinds of noisy sounds as equally unnatural. Popular and mediated music, as well as mediated sound in general, are included within the same category of noise as motor traffic. Upon arrival in the United States, an early scene-setting experience for Duhamel's narrator is attending a movie theatre to see a film, with sound. It is indeed the film's soundtrack which horrifies the narrator the most, more so even than the 'famous, and hideous, pictures on the walls,' which give the building 'the luxury of some big, bourgeois brothel'.[38] Duhamel describes the music on the soundtrack as 'canned…from the slaughter-house of music, as the breakfast sausage comes from the slaughter-house of swine.' He describes this recorded music as producing in the narrator an uncritical and passive 'hearing' rather an engaged and critical 'listening'. 'Listen, listen!' the narrator insists to himself as he closes his eyes to block out the screen. He heard, 'a sort of soft dough of music, nameless and tasteless.' But, still, the theatre refuses to

allow him to think: 'there was too much noise, too much movement.' Contrasting it with true art, including live symphonic music, which requires intellectual reflection and produces self-improvement, Duhamel describes sound cinema as 'this terrible machine, so elaborately dazzling, with its luxury, its music, its human voice, this machine for stupefying and destroying the mind'. Duhamel situated sound cinema both as noisy, and as a poor relation to literature, claiming that it is 'a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety.' [39]

Duhamel was not alone in attempting to situate sound cinema as noise in the 1930s. Aldous Huxley was another writer who viewed noisy mass entertainment as a threat to the quietude of reading and writing. He described an early experience of sound cinema as appalling noise: 'The flesh crept as the loud speaker poured out the sodden words, the greasy sagging melody. I felt ashamed of myself for listening to such things, for even being a member of the species to which such things are addressed. I comforted myself a little with the reflection that a species which has allowed all its instincts and emotions to degenerate and putrefy in such a way must be near either its violent conclusion or its no less violent transformation.'[40] Huxley wrote elsewhere that 'the aim and end of all amusement is to kill thought; therefore, noise is an essential part of amusement.'[41] Duhamel and Huxley's attempts to cast sound cinema as noise are especially interesting precisely because they failed in wider cultural terms. Unlike the sound of motor traffic, which was successfully transformed into noise in the inter-war period, sound cinema, as well as radio, were in the end heard as sound rather than noise, despite some writers' attempts to include them in the latter category (such as Huxley, who called radio 'pre-fabricated din').[42]

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Duhamel thought of noise in the same way as Huxley: it was auditory stimulation which, in one way or another, produced collective, uncritical, selfhood rather than detached, rational individuality. His writing situated mechanical sounds, such as the motor car and the

cinema loudspeaker, as sources of noise, but noise as a category in his writing also takes on social significance. Frequently throughout *America the Menace* noisiness is connected to the unfamiliar music of African Americans, especially jazz, but more noticeable still is the way in which women's voices are included in the roster of sounds which stifle thought and rational selfhood. When the narrator of *America the Menace* attends a sports stadium to watch a game of American football, he is appalled at the sound of the crowd: he asks whether they had really come to watch the game, before suggesting instead, 'Did you not come, O Crowd, rather to get drunk on yourselves, on your own voice, on your own noise; to feel yourselves numerous and full of strength, to be charged with one another's emanations, and to taste the mysterious pleasure of the herd, the hive, and the ant-hill?' In the voices of the crowd, however, some stand out as particularly noisy. He describes 'powdered and rouged girl students' with 'bosoms, still as immature as apples in July' who 'sent forth shrill penetrating cries that seemed to have a tonic influence on the nerves of the competitors.' The worst of these young women was the one 'With a megaphone in her hand, and with her skirts flying in the wind'. She 'screamed, flounced about, gave play to leg and haunch, and provided a suggestive and furious *dance du ventre*, like the dances of the prostitutes in the Mediterranean parts.' With her megaphone, she would encourage her 'aviary' to 'a fresh burst of shrill screaming.'[43] Here, and elsewhere, Duhamel connects noise with feminine and feminising sound. The dangerous, corrupting sexuality of the women Duhamel describes is connected to the easy, intoxicating effects of their noise. At the end of his description of sound cinema earlier in the book, he gendered the movie theatre loudspeaker female, calling it 'a harlot' which 'strives to gratify us to the limit'.[44]

In contrast, quietness and silence are gendered male in *America the Menace*. The value of quiet natural sound, such as the water sounds in Chicago, are closely connected with the natural state of quiet, thoughtful, (male) contemplation. In one chapter of the book, the

narrator returns to his hotel late one night and begins to reflect on his experience of being in the American city. 'Was I exhausted?,' he asks. 'Certainly! I was drunk with noise, with delirious lights, with brazen odors, and with humanity gone crazy.'[45] Having resolved to prove 'at least to myself, that I had not been absorbed,' the narrator 'sought the innermost sanctuary of my soul, and questioned the shades of my ancestors.' Then, at night, he dreamt of 'an oasis' where he visited a college in which 'A young man' was 'among his books,' an ethnographic museum, a 'haven of peace,' where among the exhibits, 'Superb and silent warriors were smoking pipes,' and, finally, a library, where a male a guide 'spoke in a hushed voice like a priest at an altar.'[46] Duhamel's narrator concludes that in contrast to the noise and intoxication of American life, 'the supreme luxury is silence, fresh air, real music, intellectual liberty, and the habit of joyous living,' all of which were still to be found in France, but which would only persist there if the dangerous, noisy, example of America was actively avoided.[47] Duhamel gendered civilization, and silence, as male, and aligned noise with women and femininity.[48] His production of noise thus contributed to social as well as sonic formation.

The gendering of noise in literature had effects beyond the text in the 1930s. As consensus was built within the kinds of noise abatement movements supported by Duhamel about what counted as noise, literary organisation of noise became social organisation of sound. The sounds cast as noise by 1930s noise abatement groups were frequently those associated with female labour, both in the office, such as typewriting, and in the home, such as vacuum cleaning. This is evident in adverts for 'silenced' typewriters and vacuum cleaners, included for example at the 1935 Science Museum noise abatement exhibition, which presented the female users of such objects as noisy alongside the technologies they operated.[49] Literature, in other words, had a role to play in generating noise outside of itself. The sonic encounter which doctors and writers attempted to produce through their noise

abatement campaigns in the 1930s was bound up with a social ordering of class and gender relations in which quiet, male, European, intellectual culture was situated as a norm against which other sounds were judged.

Literary involvement in the social activity of noise is not limited to the immediate circulation context of any given text, either. Literature's role in the ideological work of making noise is to be found further afield, too. R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977) has been the most influential exposition on noise and why we should control it.[50] The book has shaped social movements in sonic ecology, soundscape design, and has, in no small measure, driven the agenda of academic studies in the culture of sound. Schafer argueds that modern society wasis in the grip of a lo-fi noise crisis. He argueds that in pre-industrial societies, communities knew what to listen to in their hi-fi sound environments, where acoustic signals were clear and background noise was minimal. In modern societies, however, we can no longer distinguish between signal and noise. Important, health-giving sounds, especially natural sounds, which are crucial for our mental and physical wellbeing, as well as those sounds needed for community cohesion, are drowned out and distorted by the constant hum, crackle and crash of industrial and electronic noise. 'Schizophonia,' or mental disturbance brought about by hearing sounds separated from their sources, is but one consequence of this noise crisis.

The crucial evidence offered by Schafer for this historical transformation from hi-fi to lo-fi soundscapes is the 'earwitness' testimony to be found in literature. Schafer writes that 'It is a special talent of novelists like Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy and Thomas Mann to have captured the soundscapes of their own places and times, and such descriptions constitute the best guide available in the reconstruction of soundscapes past.'[51] Schafer turns to Dickens for evidence that it took until the later period of the industrial revolution for people to eventually understand the negative effects of noise in everyday life. Writers like Dickens, with their

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unique perceptive skills, were the among the first to note these negative effects, according to Schafer: 'The only people to criticise the "prodigious noise" of machinery were the writers, figures like Dickens and Zola'. Schafer goes on to cite a passage from Dickens's *Hard Times*, contrasting human and machine sounds: 'Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he worked.'[52]

In Schafer's account of noise, literature becomes an objective source of knowledge about changing soundscapes and growing dissatisfaction with noise in the age of industrial and electronic revolutions. Citations are not made in passing, either. Schafer's team at the World Soundscape Project built a huge repository of literary 'earwitness' evidence. Statistical conclusions are drawn from a 1000-strong card index, such as that there was a marked 'decline in the number of times quiet and silence are evoked in literary descriptions' over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 'Of all descriptions in our file for the decades 1810-30, 19% mention quiet or silence, by 1870-90 mentions had dropped to 14%, and by 1940-60 to 9%.'[53] Ultimately, what this literary evidence points to, for Schafer, is the truth of modern noise, that it kills thought: 'the noise of the machine became "a narcotic to the brain," and listlessness increased in modern life.' Bemoaning his own office, Schafer writes of the telephone's power to 'interrupt thought' and of radio as a medium that 'does not rest. It does not breathe. It has become a sound wall' producing 'audioanalgesia' or sound as 'painkiller,' a 'distraction to dispel distractions'. 'Moozak,' another sound wall to be found in shopping centres and factories, reduces 'a sacred art' (music) to 'a slobber': 'Moozak is music that is not to be listened to.'[54]

Schafer takes noise in literature, produced as we have seen for particular social and ideological purposes, and reproduces it as the universal truth of acoustics. In Schafer's writings we find an extension of the technophobia of early twentieth-century thought ~~and a~~

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~~distinctive ideological framing of noise as threat to middle-class peace and quiet repackaged~~ refracted through the prism of acoustic ecology and repackaged as advice for ~~today's~~ soundscape designers. Marie Thompson describes Schafer's definition of noise as belonging within a 'conservative politics of silence' in which natural sounds are valued above all, and in which the preferences and prejudices of a socially-specific listening ear are reproduced.[55] The evidence which Schafer finds in literature forms the basis for the following question which he poses to soundscape planners: 'Which sounds do we want to preserve, encourage, multiply?' One decided, he says, 'the boring or destructive sounds will become conspicuous enough and we will know why we must eliminate them.'[56] But, as I hope I have shown here, when the sonic is planned, so too is the social. Asking which sounds we want to hear is also to ask what kinds of people we do and don't wish to encounter, who has full and who has partial or no access at all to the public realm of audibility.

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Commented [SA15]: Also worth stressing the environmental element of his work and acoustic ecology more generally? I would situate him quite differently from the 1930s noise abaters in this regard

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[9] The 'listening ear' is a term used by Jennifer Lynn Stoever to describe 'normative listening practices'. See Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p.13.
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[12] Schweighauser, *The Noises of American Literature*, p.197.
[13] For an interesting discussion of these issues, see Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound*.
[14] For a fuller overview of the connection between fiction and medicine in 1930s anti-noise campaigns, see James G. Mansell, 'Neurasthenia, Civilization, and the Sounds of Modern Life: Narratives of Nervous Illness in the Interwar Campaign Against Noise,', in Daniel Morat, ed., *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-century Europe*, ed. by Daniel Morat (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), pp. 278-304.
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[18] Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p.42.
[19] H. R. Haweis quoted in Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes*, p.77.
[20] Aimée Boutin, *City of Noise: Sound and Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
[21] Karin Bijsterveld emphasises the need to dramatize noise as a social problem in *Mechanical Sound* and in Karin Bijsterveld, ed., *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013).
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[45] Duhamel, *America the Menace*, p.186.
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