

## **Sounding Off On Sound**

By Michael LeVan

*To sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself: it is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself.*

—Jean-Luc Nancy (8)

At the beginning of William Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, young Quentin Compson, about to leave Mississippi to attend Harvard University, is summoned to the house of old Miss Coldfield. The novel opens with Quentin enshrouded by sounds: of the dusty old room where the meeting takes place, of the slow rhythms of September beating outside (and upon) the windows, of an importunate ghost of a tale yet to be told because it is told too often, and finally of Miss Coldfield herself, as the zero point of the sonorous encounter—at once emitting and absorbing, summoning and dispersing, saturating and resonating. "Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish," the Quentin-narrator tells us (8). It would be everywhere and then gone. Everywhere and gone at the same time. Everywhere and gone in the same time: in sonorous time.

Sonorous time has a strange presence of ebbs and flows. It evades capture and exceeds duration. It lingers past time as much as it snatches time back (not ceasing but vanishing—not ceasing, but vanishing). As Jean-Luc Nancy explains, the presence of sonorous time "is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is time that opens up, that is hollowed out" (13). Sonorous time surrounds and engulfs while slipping away unnoticed. We are, of

course, dispatched in this world in sonorous time. Whether we hear or not is not the issue. Rather, we are part of the vibrations. Our Being is becoming, a matter of speeds and intensities. We are sonic bodies borne of vibrations and cast in rhythms.

It is in this spirit that I introduce this special issue of *Liminalities*, “On Sound.” The radical saturation of sonic environments in and for performance is so great in our mundane affairs (not to mention our specialized ones) that it is surely taken for granted most of the time. In all its myriad definitions, though, performance embraces sound. Performance is of sound, in sound, in spite of sound, for sound, by sound, through sound, around sound, after sound, and until sound. In this sense, the contributions in this issue may only stir the surface of sound, but they sound nonetheless, and resoundingly so. All of the pieces herein enact complex encounters with sonorous time: strange tempos, slanted rhythms, and surrounding resonances. Feel a listen; catch a wave.

### **Works Cited**

- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage, 1972 [1936].  
Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Trans, Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham UP, 2007.