

A SINISTER RESONANCE

Searching for a way to describe *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad wrote that it was “a sinister resonance” and “continued vibration.” These sound figures are ethnocentric, drawn from his vexed memories of music in the Congo, but they are also generative, demanding that literary theorists take seriously a sonic substratum of writing and reading. This talk addresses “sinister resonance” as a profound challenge to the transcendental signifier that supports modernist theories of language and telecommunication: the voice. At the same time, “sinister resonance” names the sensorial contact that makes literary history and comparative study possible. To demonstrate this possibility, the talk describes how Conrad’s novel resonates with the writing and listening practices of W.E.B. Du Bois, who was also confronting a transatlantic nexus of sound, language, and racial consciousness. The sinister resonance does not denote a literary or cultural history in the traditional sense. While it transmits, it does not “communicate”; it wounds and participates in ongoing colonial linguistic extraction, from the phonograph to the cell phone.

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is a scholar, musician, and radio producer. She works across sound, modernism, memory studies, digital humanities, film and media, race, gender and sexuality, narrative and novel theory, and psychoanalysis. Julie Beth Napolin is the co-President of the William Faulkner Society, a member of the editorial board of *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, and a member of the MLA Sound Forum executive committee. Her essays on sound in the work of Joseph Conrad have been awarded the Bruce Harkness Prize (2013) and the J.H. Stape Conradiana Prize (2020). She completed a PhD in Rhetoric at UC Berkeley and authored *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form* (Fordham UP, 2020).

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