Organizational Soundscapes and the Sonicity of Voices: The Power of the 'Sounds' that Carry 'Words'

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ABSTRACT   Organizations are soundscapes – they resonate with sounds and particularly the sounds of voices. Somehow however voice sonics, that is the sounds of voices and not the words carried on those sounds, have escaped attention in management studies. This absence of analysis is peculiar given voice sonics' undoubted influence on management (they may or may not signal authority), careers (voice quality can help or hinder progression) and on the general day-to-day functioning of organizations. This paper addresses this absence: It introduces sonicity and explores its powerful absent presence. In developing a feminist theory of sonicity's performative power, we demonstrate the value of including sonicity in management research. To do this, we devise a strategy of researching from the body and use a case study of feminine voice sonics. Our theoretical location is the works of feminist theorists Jessica Benjamin and Judith Butler, into which we insert sonicity. This explains the millennia-long silencing of feminine sonicity in the public realm and implications of its un-silencing in contemporary, non-binary organizational soundscapes. Sonicity takes us ultimately to a contribution to feminist care ethics: the power-to-care. Having demonstrated the insights that a focus on sonicity can bring, we recommend sonicity studies that explore not only other subordinated voice sonics but also dominant or aggressive sonicities.

Keywords: Care, imagination, Jessica Benjamin, Judith Butler, Organizational Soundscapes, Power-to-Care, Sonicity of voices, Sonics, Voices

PREAMBLE

This paper should be read aloud. It concerns voice sonics, that is the sounds of voices, the carriers of word but not the words themselves. If we could read it to you, you would hear female voices that have struggled to be heard over louder male voices. Many years ago, for example, one author was advised by interview

panellists about exercises to strengthen her voice (practising speaking through a mouth full of pebbles). Those experiences alerted us to how organizations reverberate with sonicity, and to how our offices have echoed with the sonics that carried the ideas we now commit to the screen and to paper. These bearers of these written words, screen or paper, are bereft of the sonics on which our discussions were carried. All journal articles, and this one is no exception, require silent acts of reading, but we interrupt those silences at judicious points by inviting you, the reader, to become a listener via *links to recorded sonics whose sibilance may, perhaps, slip into the paper and disrupt its silence.*

INTRODUCTION

Organizations reverberate with voice sonics, that is, the *sounds* of voices, the carrier of words but not the words themselves, the 'acoustic emission that emits from ear to ear' (Cavarero, 2005, p. viii). Voice sonics, or sonicity, are parts of organizational soundscapes: the hubbub in dining spaces or the hush of offices whose erstwhile occupants now work at home. Sonicity is to the human as water is to the proverbial fish – immersed in it, it escapes our attention. Immaterial, voice sonics are carried on the air and are as elusive as air, a transportation vehicle that is ignored in favour of its cargo, the spoken word. Many academic hours are devoted to studying those aural representations but voice sonics are subsumed beneath the visual and the verbal (LaBelle, 2020). The words spoken are recorded in transcripts, manuscripts, books and papers, but sonicity, the instrument that carried those words, is stripped out, tuned out and discarded.

However, sonicity percolates throughout organizational being, a powerful absence–presence that, as this paper argues, has performative effects. Other disciplines have established projects for researching sonicity, but organizational voice sonics are largely unexplored. The first whisperings of interest are found in Patterson and Larsen's (2019) advocacy of sonics as 'site for analysis, aesthetic engagement and theoretical development' (p. 108) that promotes a 'way of knowing that is more than representational, affective and embodied' (p. 118). Depicting a focus on sonicity as part of a cultural turn that embraces sensory experiences including smell, touch and taste, they argue that sonicity encourages engagement with the aesthetic, social, cultural, historical and political conditions of organizational life.

Describing this as a 'sonic turn' is, however, premature: their literature review, like ours, found numerous discussions across the social sciences but little substantive exploration in management and organization studies (MOS). There is a single exception: Nair, Haque and Sauerwald (2022) show sonics' potential for malign influence in that 'vocal masculinity', or deep male voices, favourably bias directors' perceptions of leadership qualities. This paper builds on that very thin base. It aims to establish sonicity as an area that requires attention in MOS because organizational soundscapes are abuzz with politics and power, with capacities to oppress but also to foster flourishing (Kanngieser, 2012). That is, we introduce a phenomenon that does not merely add to established bodies of literature but offers what Alvesson and Sandberg (2023) advocate: a more innovative, imaginative, exciting and perhaps even impactful area of study.

Specifically, we aim to develop a theory of organizational voice sonics and their agentive capacity for producing effects. We do this through tracing changes in organizational soundscapes occasioned by the influx of women in the past 40 years

into previously masculine managerial and professional spaces. Emboldened by Prothero's (2024) recent call to action to dismantle patriarchal systems that thrive in business schools and academia more generally, we adopt a feminist stance to explore sonicity's contribution to the gendered politics of contemporary organizational soundscapes.

In what follows, we firstly explore how organizational soundscapes have changed in the past 40 years and then discuss theories of sonicity that have evolved in other disciplines, before outlining the strategy we use for building a theory of gendered organizational soundscapes and introducing the feminist theorists, Judith Butler and Jessica Benjamin, whose work inspires our analysis. We describe how, through 'researching from the body', we birthed the three propositions that are the building blocks of our theory of organizational sonicity. We then develop those propositions, inviting readers to engage their imaginations and return with us to Ancient Greece and to the crib. Our adventure in sonicity leads to a theory of how non-binary[1] organizational soundscapes bring a necessary power to care ethics, what we call 'the power-to-care'. Our focus is on gendered voice sonics, but we anticipate this study will open pathways for exploring sonicity's contribution to class, race, ethnicity, sex, gender and organizational othering more generally.

But first, an excursion into the not-long-ago past in which we find the rationale for our venture in sonicity.

Why This Study? Why Now?

The answer to these questions is to be found in recent history, because it is only in the past few decades that professional and managerial spaces – offices, boardrooms, lecture theatres, newsrooms, etc. – have resonated with feminine as well as masculine voices. Generations of women have worked in manual jobs, of course, but their voice sonics did not penetrate very far, if at all, into offices and seats of organizational power. Similarly excluded were female white-collar workers who, until just two generations ago, were largely confined to lowly ranked jobs in typing pools or other junior administrative roles (Ford et al., 2020). Professional and managerial offices and board rooms were occupied by men. Of course, women had moved into 'masculine' organizational spaces during the World War II, but their occupation was largely transitory (Milkman, 1987; Summerfield, 2013), and war's end saw them return to the kitchen sink. The expunging of women from 'masculine' organizational space after 1945 is seen most viscerally in war-time photos of women working in the emergent field of computing: after the war, female 'computers' were air-brushed out of photos and images of male 'computers' super-imposed in their place (Tassabehji et al., 2021).

It is hard today to imagine the soundscapes of 20th-century female white-collar workspaces that were, almost by definition, powerless places. Through the links below, it is possible to travel through time and join our mothers and grandmothers (and for some of us our younger selves) immersed in the soundscapes of the main office space – the typing pool – into which they/we were allowed before the last quarter of the century. Note the noisiness of manual typewriters and other precursors to word processors; hear the subordination of feminine sonicity to a mechanical cacophony.

Imagine sitting in those typing pools, so enmeshed in noise that normal conversation was difficult.

https://oztypewriter.blogspot.com/2014/04/10-funny-and-fascinating-old-typewriter.html

(Please scroll down to Typing to music, Budapest, Hungary, 1937)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F43S6DSTZMU

Women sat in serried rows, heads bowed over keyboards, the only sounds made were those of the noisy machines they operated. Typists were cyborgs, a melding of machine/woman (Muhr and Rehn, 2015) that equated 'woman' with 'noise'. Noise interfered with speech's intelligibility, as the history of the architectonics of open-plan offices shows Bruyninck (2023). An undifferentiated mass of sound, noise inhibits meaning-making (Brooks, 2020). Women's talk, when not drowned by machines, was defined as 'gossip' – light, trivial, subjective and interactive, a subjugated discourse of the outsider that constituted knowledge on the margins (Adkins, 2002). At the centre, masculine sonicity carried speech believed to be objective, authoritative (Tannen, 1991) and rational; feminine sonicity was 'noise' that carried no meaning.

Something quite remarkable then occurred: Although many occupations and professions remain highly gendered (Halford, 2018), and discrimination and inequalities prove resilient (Fotaki and Harding, 2017), there has, nevertheless, been an influx of women into the previously male-dominated organizational spaces reserved for managers and professional staff (Roantree and Vira, n.d.). Many (not all) organizational soundscapes thus now reverberate with both masculine and feminine (and other) meaning-carrying sonics. Where feminine sonics had carried noise, ambiguous sounds that were not only unintelligible but also interfered with intelligibility, now they carry meaning. Feminine sonics may still be associated culturally with inferiority, as, for example, in students' evaluations of female lecturers (Aragon et al., 2023), but the growing presence of female commentators, politicians (including presidents and prime ministers) and leaders of major national and global organizations increasingly interferes with the equation that feminine sonics are weak sonics, ergo females must be weak.

But feminists are warning of a backlash, of right-wing projects to reinstate patriarchy (Butler, 2023, see also Cabezas, 2022; Mejstrik and Handl, 2021[2]; Sanders and Jenkins, 2022). If so, then voice sonics, that are inherently political (Vallee, 2017a) because they are implicated in deciding who or what is heard, are fundamental to resistance to the restoration of patriarchy. Hence, this article's concerns with feminine sonicity and why it is important to ensure it (our voices) can continue to reverberate throughout managerial and professional organizational soundscapes.

Overall, our aims derive from Kanngieser's (2012) efforts to imagine 'an acoustic politics of the [organizational] voice'. We align ourselves with her desire for 'a new imagination of the voice, its sonorities and resonances, its disharmonies, cracks and silences' (2012, p. 240), because of the importance of sonicity in the constitution of (political and organizational) power and (managerial) processes of othering. We paraphrase her aims (2012, p. 337) when we write that we wish 'to develop an acoustic politics and reciprocal ethics of work whereby voice sonics offer ways of engaging in, and elaborating upon, contemporary organizational soundscapes'. But to do that we first need to explore this thing, 'sonicity'.

SONICITY AND VOICE SONICS

Sonicity, as defined above, is the carrier of speech but not speech itself. It is both body and sound, internal but also external, unique to an individual but also socio-cultural (Harkness, 2015). Voice sonics not only carry words but convey inarticulate meaning that is implicated in power, resistance, gender, embodiment, careers, working relationships, day-to-day organizational functioning – the list goes on. Pervasive and ubiquitous, sonicity's sociocultural influence penetrates organizations and identities (Harkness, 2015). However, sonicity eludes definition.

It is the sound of a voice but not the words spoken by that voice (Valee, 2017a). Sonicity is elusive: Vallee (2020) reaches for metaphor in an attempt to encapsulate sonicity's evanescence: It is an imaginary organ, that is, a part of the body that is not material, that is real but not actual. Mazzei (2016, p. 154) also uses metaphor: Sonicity is a surface on which words are recorded; it lies somewhere between the semiotic and the material, an in-between space where words prove inadequate. As such, 'vocality cannot be fully contained within the economy of signification. Rather, voice functions as a medium of intelligible speech but as material object also transgresses its boundaries' (Schlichter, 2011, p. 39).

Sonicity's relationship to the body, implied in Schlichter's (2011) attempt at definition, at first sight appears to help in its clarification. It is 'a bodily act that requires the larynx, mouth, tongue, lips and lungs (Butler, 2004, p. 172), and is breath from the body's interior that is propelled into the external world (Cusick, 1999, quoted in Schlichter, 2011, p. 34). However, as soon as meaning is in our grasp it slips away, perhaps because deeper thought shows sonicity is at the junction between organic life and symbolic worlds (Mitra and Watts, 2002) and is the axis on which social bonds turn (Dolar, 2006, p. 14). In Dolar's (2006, p. 13) poetic description that emphasises sonicity's elusive materiality: 'words fill us when we are faced with the infinite shades of the voice, which infinitely exceed meaning. It is not that our vocabulary is scanty and its deficiency should be remedied: faced with the voice, words structurally fail' (Dolar, 2006, p. 13).

Although themselves beyond definition, voice sonics identify speakers in their uniqueness, even though how people are identified by their voices is, literally, ineffable. Nevertheless, voice sonics convey understanding; they classify, organize and assist recognition of speakers. Subjects' sonicity '"edges" itself into representational frameworks' (Vallee, 2017b, p. 87). That is, the voice is intertwined with subjectivity and with power; speakers' voices influence their reception: Is this speaker important, powerful, authoritative or ignorant, weak, unimportant (Vallee, 2017a)? Some voice sonics are thus excluded from places of power (Brooks, 2020).

More specifically, in Western cultures since Ancient Greece, the voice's sonicity has been understood to reflect speakers' health, strength, vitality and power: weakness in the voice signals weakness in the speaker (Vallee, 2020). Film directors know this: They choose actors with deep voices to signify authority and power (Mitchell, 2020[3]). Political advisers do too: it is 30 years since Margaret Thatcher, the UK's first female prime minister, was trained to deepen her voice to convey an impression of masculine strength (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28_0gXLKLbk). Voice coaches ask leaders if their voice conveys 'the

authority, motivation and dynamism you need'[4], and advise that 'resonant' voices, those that are not 'thin and dull', have 'power to engage, influence and inspire'[5]. Indeed, it is now possible to have 'voice lifts' that rectify the ossifying of vocal cords that make speakers seem weak. Subjective impressions have material outcomes: CEOs with deep, masculine voices lead more successful organizations and earn higher incomes than those with less resonant voice sonics (Mayew et al., 2013).

This takes us to gender and to othering because, although sonicity carries (is the medium for) speech, it also communicates in very different ways from the words it carries. That is, powerful voices are masculine voices. The resonant voice of authority is deep and, ideally, free of any accent other than that of the economic 'elite'. It follows that voice sonics that are non-normative, such as feminine sonicity that tends to be lighter and less resonant than its masculine counterpart, or sonics that resonate with class, race, ethnicity, illness and sexualities, do not carry authority. Those whose voice sonics lack that resonance are judged as lacking, as deficient, unsuitable for leadership. These are sonicity's sociocultural, material effects, the 'public disclosure of the body's place in the social world' (Vallee, 2020, p. 28). Furthermore, women's voices are associated with likeability and men's with competence (Nass, in Kanngieser, 2012, p. 343), and so voice sonics inhere in the performative constitution of gender. This turns on its head the conventional understanding that voice sonics are a biologically fixed expression of gender; rather they are a 'culturally framed physical accomplishment (Schlichter, 2011, p. 43) anchored not only to biology and the body's materiality but also to norms that saturate the voice (Harkness, 2015), confirming speakers in their gendered identities.

In summary, voice sonics have agency. They are imbricated within the constructions of identities, genders, hierarchies, the familiar and the strange. Deep, cultured masculine voice sonics privilege those whose words are carried on such sonicity, and lighter, feminine but not always female voices, as well as other 'non-normative' voice sonics, 'other' speakers.

Sonicity thus has implications for understanding organizations and management. In what follows we develop a theory of how organizational soundscapes are constituted through voice sonics' inflections within intertwinings of the social, the oral and the aural. We use the case study of gendered voice sonics. Our feminist focus largely excludes racialized, classed and many other voice sonics: that is work for the future. Our task at hand is to introduce sonicity and organizational soundscapes to MOS and demonstrate its potential for instigating new and important insights. We delay discussing our theoretical location (in Butler's and Benjamin's work) until we have explored the paradoxes of discussing sound through the silent medium of the written word, and our resolution to those paradoxes – 'researching from the body'.

PARADOXES: SONICITY, LINEARITY'S SILENCE, MATERIALITIES AND IMMATERIALITIES

It is somewhat ironic that a study of voice sonics is offered in a format, the written word, that is, by definition, silent. We therefore interrupt the written word at various points with invitations to listen to recordings that illustrate our arguments (as we did above). Some readers may find these interruptions intrusive: If so, please ignore them.

A further challenge arises from the necessity of exploring sonicity through the medium of a written, sound-free text: Sounds are diffractive, inter-weaving, interrupting, squashing, eruptive, musical, discordant, rarely singular. Our arguments are similar – they interlap, inter-weave, diverge, converge. But the necessary organization of words according to the rules of grammar discriminates against imbrication, squashes nuances, subordinates ideas that diffract within and through and off each other into multitude directions, and flattens sense-making. We therefore force our composition into a series of linear propositions. These are *not* designed to establish cause–effect relationships but rather to develop original assumptions and arguments that together build theory (Cornellisen, 2017). We temper silent linearity somewhat by asking readers to engage their imaginations as they read, and through the imagination to allow sonicity's immateriality to become consciously apprehended and viscerally felt.

We generate the propositions through appropriating the works of two feminist theorists, Jessica Benjamin and Judith Butler. But why Benjamin and Butler, neither of whom have specifically explored sonicity and why the specific aspects of their work that provide our propositional cases? We did not choose them willy-nilly. We were guided by the understanding that sonicity concerns bodies' materialities; therefore, its study requires subordinating the intellect and listening to flesh. Feminist explorations of flesh (e.g., Harding et al., 2021) provide a receptive theoretical location for exploring voice sonics, and the feminist movement of writing from the body (Fotaki et al., 2014; Gilmore et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2014) opens the door to researching from the body. These feminist approaches require fealty to feminist theory. That is why we turn to these two feminist theorists, whose ideas have always resonated with us in deep, indescribable ways. In the past, we have found their work especially fecund for understanding organizations. These feminist approaches require fealty to feminist theory turn to these two feminist theorists whose thought has long called to us in ways we cannot fathom but that we have previously found particularly fecund for thinking through organizations. We experimented with inserting voice sonics into various aspects of their works, through engaging in what Sætre and van de Ven (2021) call 'disciplined imagination' or thought experiments. That is, we took various aspects of the works of these two thinkers and explored which were or were not enhanced if we heard their arguments as if they were voiced dramas. These visceral acts of imagination – researching from the body – led both to ways of thinking through sonicity and the gleaning of new insights even from works that have been much trawled. We were able to draw sometimes on others' imagination of sonicity, as, for example, in a film of a book, *The Story of O*, that Benjamin uses to expound her ideas. This article is thus a composition written within, through and from bodies whose flesh and sonicity are inseparable, involving exercises in imagination that generated the three propositions we outline below.

What follows perforce takes the form of a linear assemblage of those theoretical building blocks. The first proposition is that feminine voice sonics are associated with care but have been silenced in the public realm since Ancient Greece; nevertheless, they resonate in the psyche so have always been present. The second is that masculine sonicity, dominant on the public stage, is equated with strength, virility and rationality. Thirty years ago perhaps our theorizing would have stopped there, with explanations of sonicity's contribution to inequalities, but women's influx into the professions and management has changed organizational soundscapes that now resonate with

women's as well as men's voices, albeit that feminine sonics remain often subordinated to masculine sonicity. These non-binary soundscapes lead to the third proposition, which is that the legitimisation of feminine sonicity constitutes new organizational relationships in which care, ethics and morals (may) become normative. Read diffractively, in and through each other, these propositions lead to a theory of sonicity's performative power in constituting what we call 'power-to-care'. We conclude with a warning about the need to be alert to contemporary politics that would eradicate the power to care. Throughout we use 'feminine' and 'masculine' and not 'female' and 'male' to untie sonicity from gendered bodies.

We next briefly explore relevant aspects of the works of Benjamin and Butler, before developing the propositions.

THEORETICAL INSPIRERS: JESSICA BENJAMIN AND JUDITH BUTLER

Benjamin and Butler share an interest in Hegelian recognition theory in which the 'I' emerges through interactions with an other. Benjamin, whose work has been commented on favourably by Butler (2000a), is less well known in MOS (although see Ford et al., 2023; Gilmore and Harding, 2022; Tyler, 2019; Tyler, 2020), but Butler's work has proved so inspirational in MOS that it is impossible to do justice to its influence in the space available (a review paper is merited). A book-length treatise exploring Butler-inspired analyses in MOS (Tyler, 2019) testifies to its depth and reach, perhaps because of its capacity to 'spark something precious, something resonant' (Kenny, 2021, p. 1665). We draw primarily on these two theorists' shared psychoanalytical interest in individuation in early infancy and the vital importance of recognition for subjectivity and identity.

Butler's perspective on the subject's emergence can be encapsulated in two statements. The first emphasizes language and incorporates recognition. That is, 'We have a primary dependence upon language because it is through language that we are constituted. Language, and the address of the Other, is what makes us recognisable, and therefore gives us both identity and a place in the community' (1997, p. 5). The second implicates sonicity. Butler (2015) emphasizes the inescapable role of sentience in subject formation: 'there are enigmatic messages that are relayed at the early stages of infancy and … they become installed as primary signifiers that launch the life of desire'. That is, being 'touched or handled or addressed as an infant awakens the senses, paving the way for a sentient apprehension of the world' (Butler, 2015, p. 8)'.

Benjamin's (1988) approach to infants' individuation, meanwhile, uses the terms 'mother' and 'father'. Acknowledging the plasticity of these gendered positions, she positions mother figures as source of goodness and care, father figures as the principle of individuation. In lengthy discussions of the emergence of the subject-to-be, she scatters references that define femininity as concerned with nurturance, dependence, inner space (p. 162), emotional attunement, shared states of mind, empathy, intersubjective experiences of recognition and the emotional elements of appreciating, caring for, touching and responding to an other (p. 177). At the same time, she describes how young infants come to equate masculinity with power, freedom and independence and how the subject is pulled throughout life by the contradictory needs for closeness and independence.

That is, Benjamin (1988) lists the gendered norms that Butler (1997) argues instruct subjects in ways of being and becoming gendered. Benjamin warns against too-easy assumptions of male dominance and female subordination: Desires to dominate and be dominated are aspects of the psyche, and everyone can move between positions of submission and domination.

In our imaginary experiments that helped us make material the ineffable – sonicity that carries words but cannot be reduced to words – we found ourselves drawn to the myths and stories that inform these remarkable theorists' ideas, notably *The Story of O* (Benjamin, 2018) and the ancient Greek tragedies *The Antigone* (Butler, 1997) and *The Eumenides* (Butler, 2023). They opened our ears to the value of thought experiments in generating propositions. We turn next to that process of giving birth to propositions, before calling Benjamin and Butler to our aid.

BIRTHING THE PROPOSITIONS

How can sonicity be studied – that is the dilemma? A traditional empirical study is unviable not only because methods for researching organizational sonicity are in their infancy (Daza and Gershon, 2015), but also because sonics are ephemeral: They disappear in the act of resonating, and even if recorded they occupy 'an imaginative space between the no-longer and the not-yet – … an oscillation – as the present-past-becoming-future' that emphasizes 'the slipperiness of the now' (Vallee, 2023).

Furthermore, voice sonics are unrepresentable (Hasumi, 2009), lacking language for capturing what Voegelin (2016, p. 61) calls the 'ephemeral and invisible materiality' of sonics. She recommends listeners 'seek words from the darkness of sound to perform a language that can access and communicate the philosophical, social, political and aesthetic complexity' (Voegelin, 2016, p. 68). We follow Voice Studies scholars in advocating use of the imagination (Vallee, 2017a) to travel into 'the darkness of sound'. Referencing T.S.Eliot's 'auditory imagination' and C.Wright Mills' 'sociological imagination', Sterne (2012, p. 5) inserts the term 'sonic imagination' into his foundational text. By this he means 'a deliberately synaesthetic neologism – it is about sound but occupies an ambiguous position between sound culture and a space of contemplation outside it' where imaginations 'fashion some new intellectual facility to make sense of some part of the sonic world'. 'Sonic imagination', in our borrowing, births propositions through experiments in which imagination becomes 'performative: it improvises within constraints to produce something new' (Balsamo, 2011, in Sterne, 2012, p. 6). Although 'imagination' is impossible to taxonomize (its definitions range across so much space they cannot be neatly corralled), its contribution to knowledge, often through the generation of mental images, is widely accepted by scientists and philosophers, as in the example of thought experiments (Liao and Gendler, 2020).

Imagination, thus licensed, becomes a fruitful methodology for exploring the immaterial materiality of sonics; it facilitates reaching towards understandings that cannot be captured in language (Sheppard, 1991). Through that licence we read Butler's and Benjamin's works to identify aspects that lent themselves to transformation into micro-dramas involving voice sonics. *The Story of O*, *The Antigone* and *The Eumenides* lent

themselves to translation into imaginary micro-dramas that enable understanding of the power and powerlessness of gendered voice sonics.

So, in what follows we aim to engage the imagination of reading/listening subjects to feel, sense and imagine their way to understanding sonicity. To facilitate this, we begin each of the following sections with a film clip, apologizing in advance for the violence encapsulated within some of them. We invite readers to draw on familiar skills of interpreting films, television dramas or novels – we learn in childhood to use the imagination to help understand and interpret stories set out in front of us (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2008; Nabi and Green, 2015). When, for example, we ask you to follow Antigone into the tomb in which she is to be inhumed, we ask you to imagine Ancient Greece and the horror of walking from bright sunshine into that dark, cold cave, lit only by a candle, that you are never to leave. Your imagination may have provoked visceral responses if you followed the links above to the typing pools familiar to our grandmothers, where machinery's sounds were so loud that normal conversation[6] became impossible. Throughout it is not the words spoken in these clips but the sonicity that carries them that should stimulate the imagination, that is, sounds from which words have been mentally scrubbed away, leaving the imagination to work through affect, the senses and other ways of knowing that exceed language.

The propositions that emerged through our enfleshed experiments with sonic imaginaries explore the following. The first, the millennia-long absence from public spaces, or so it seemed, of a feminine sonicity that resonates with care; the second, masculine sonicities' resonance with care's antithesis – power and rationality; and finally, the productive energy of changes in organizational soundscapes as women entered management and the professions in sufficient numbers for feminine sonicity to reverberate.

> *Proposition 1:* Feminine sonicity's banishment from the public stage can be traced to Ancient Greece, but that banishment was never fully accomplished because feminine voice sonics are embedded in the psyche where they resonate with non-verbalized intimations of care.

Our experiments in sonic imagination resonated with Butler's *Antigone's Claim* (1997) and Benjamin's *Bonds of Love* (1988) from which we derive Proposition 1. Butler's analysis of the Ancient Greek tragedy, *The Antigone*, inspired our interpretation of the tragedy as a memorialisation of the banishment of feminine sonicity from public spaces. Like Butler, we follow in the footsteps of generations of thinkers, from Hegel to Heidegger and not least, of course, Freud, who looked to Ancient Greece to help the European mind explain itself to itself (Steiner, 1984). One of three plays in Sophocles' *Oedipus Trilogy*[7], *The Antigone* recounts Antigone's fate as a child of the incestuous marriage between Oedipus and his (and her) mother, Jocasta. Their parents dead, her two brothers slay each other. Their uncle, Creon, now king, decrees that one brother, Polyneices, must not be buried. Antigone refuses to obey, twice sets out to scatter earth over his carcass, is discovered and arrested. She defends herself but is condemned by Creon to the slow death of entombment in a cave. Inhumed, she hangs herself.

Our first insertion of sonicity into the silence of the written paper is here, at a link that takes us to the point in the drama where Antigone anticipates her entrance to the cave.

She speaks to the Chorus, whose role in this particular Greek tragedy has been much debated: Does it function as the ideal spectator that guides the audiences' responses (Hester, 1971) or should it be regarded as another actor (Weiner, 1980)? For our purposes it is both spectator and actor: it invites us to climb onto the stage so that we, the reader, become part of the drama, and at the same time, it acts as masculine sonicity bent on silencing its feminine counterpart. We ask readers to become hearers through listening to a recording in which the actor Juliet Stephenson plays Antigone. Stephenson's trained voice is carried on resonant sonics that, imagination suggests, differ markedly from the young girl (aged 15 or less) Antigone would have been, but in this scene we hear/see dramatized the banishment of feminine sonicity from public space.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3IvLhIbHZY&list=PL_XBVoluOA3kEzYeiQkc2gsJBbDM-Et-W&index=7 (BBC, 1986).

History resonates with that voice and its silencing. Butler's (2000b) reading of the tragedy is influential among feminist organization theorists such as Contu (2023) and Kenny and Fanchini (2023) who find inspiration in Butler's reading for enhancing understanding of, respectively, leadership and whistle-blowing. Butler (2000b) used *The Antigone* to interrogate limitations on kinship in heteronormative cultures. We are intrigued by Butler's close reading of Antigone's mode of speech but will replicate our original thought experiment and insert sonics into that reading, identifying thereby an alternative symbolism of Antigone's entombment, that is, the millennia-long stifling of feminine voice sonics.

We start with Butler's observation that Antigone's insistence on speaking to King Creon in public breaks laws and transgresses norms that, in Ancient Greece, confined women to the home's private spaces. Antigone refuses to deny her actions or to inhabit the place of the subordinated female, thus disturbing and confounding the limits of gender: 'In speaking to him, she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned' (Butler, 2000b, p. 10). Antigone appropriates 'the rhetoric of agency' from the King and asserts sovereignty (p. 11), acting thus 'in ways that are called manly' (p. 11). King Creon, the Chorus and messengers all describe Antigone as 'manly', a specific type of manliness: She 'appears to assume the form of a certain masculine sovereignty, a manhood that cannot be shared' (p. 9).

We now re-enact our original exercise in sonic imagination, also borrowing, albeit ludically and simplistically, from Butler's (1997) development of Althusser's theory of interpellation. We use Althusser's device of a police officer standing on a pedestal and calling out 'hey you there' to passers-by who, in turning in response, recognize themselves, in this example, as criminals (who feel guilty). Recognition is fundamental to identity: Without identity one is abjected, placed outside society. The police officer therefore offers the passer-by an identity, that of a criminal. In this Butlerian reading, the theory of interpellation is understood as a theory of linguistic performativity. The act of being named (a speech act) initiates the process of subject formation, as one becomes a subject by aligning with the norms embedded in the name they are called. We reverse the analogy: Our interest is in the police officer standing on the pedestal. S/he is also interpellated through that call, as an upholder of the law rather than a criminal, one whose voice must be obeyed because it is the voice of the law. But what if the act of hailing does not persuade the passer-by to turn? What if it is unheard? Doesn't the identity of the police officer collapse if her voice evokes no turn, no response?

We ask Antigone to step onto that pedestal and call 'hey you there' to passers-by: will they turn in response? Note the long-standing understanding that feminine voices lack authority (Schlichter, 2011). Butler argues that Antigone's symbolic positions confound gender: she speaks from the positions of female and male, sovereign and governed. Who then speaks from our imaginary pedestal: what sort of person is this? The introduction of voice sonics brings power into that complex gendered position: Would an audience hearing a command carried upon the medium of light, weak sonics[8] actually turn? Turning would entail their emergence as subjects of Antigone as king, as law-maker, dismantling norms and laws that excluded female actors from the public realm, disallowing female speakers from being recognized as persons with authority. For Butler, the turn in response to Antigone's imaginary hail would be barred because females could not occupy positions of authority so had no powers of interpellation. Her words, carried upon feminine sonics, are impotent. We find in Ancient Greece, first, that the feminine voice lacks power.

Now imagine Antigone, inhumed, standing on the police officer's pedestal and shouting 'hey you there' to King Creon, her murderer. Within the stone walls of her tomb, the sound of her voice is smothered, un-hearable. Creon's sentencing of Antigone to the slow death of entombment is foundational to Western culture. Contemporary feminist scholars bring new interpretations unseen by long lines of male philosophers, as in Butler's reading. From our position in the Chorus of feminists, we hear a foundational order: It is not enough that feminine sonics lack power; they must be silenced. Our reading of *The Antigone* via Butler and (briefly) Althusser is therefore of a tragedy that articulates the founding story of sonicity, powerless feminine voice sonics must be silenced. Organizations enacted this rule as they emerged during the Industrial Revolution and grew thereafter; only lately is it challenged.

But something else nestles in *The Oedipus Trilogy*. Butler argues Antigone confounds the norms that govern her gender; we note that she also upholds the gendered norms of loving, caring and nurturing (Benjamin, 1988). Antigone and her sister Ismene had earlier accompanied Oedipus into exile, caring for him when few others would, and Antigone's attempt to care for her brother Polyneices' carcass led to her death sentence. In our reading, the violence of the Oedipus complex, with its drive to kill the father and possess the mother, is matched by an equally compelling compulsion towards compassion, care and nurturance, perhaps an Antigone complex.

We now call Benjamin to our aid. Her analysis of the individuation of the gendered I, we suggest, countermands that Sophoclean silencing of feminine sonics. We insert voice sonics into Benjamin's analysis of infants with their caretakers. It is many months after birth that infants recognize *words*, but babies in utero recognize their mother's (Hepper et al., 1992; Kisilevsky et al., 2003) but not their father's (Decasper and Prescott, 1984) voices, or rather their voice sonics. Babies also recognize their primary caregiver's face within the first week of life but do not seem to become aware of the sex of those caregivers until around 18–24 months (Fast, 1990). That is, infants recognize sonics before they can distinguish words or sense themselves as individuated beings. If so, caring (usually feminine) voice sonics permeate the psyche of the infant from long before it is individuated and aware of itself as an 'I'.

Psychoanalytical theory's primary thesis is that experiences in infants' first months reverberate in the unconscious throughout life. If so, throughout the decades when women were barred from management and the professions, those who strutted on that organizational stage would have carried within themselves unconsciously remembered sonics. Feminine sonicity, although not allowed into such spaces, nevertheless must still have resonated, carried within the unconscious of masculine participants, unheard but nevertheless heard.

This proposition is the first building block of a theory of the performative power of gendered organizational soundscapes. In short, feminine voice sonics resonate with intimations of care. Excluded from public space for millennia, they nevertheless circulated on the organizational stage, carried in the psyches of its occupants. Next, Proposition 2 will explore masculine sonicity and its long dominance in organizational soundscapes.

> *Proposition 2:* The equation of masculine sonicity with power and authority is similarly embedded in the psyche, but these are the sonics of *rationality and the antithesis of care*. Masculine organizational soundscapes therefore subordinate care and emotion to the pursuit of profit, efficiency and effectiveness.

We noted above the widespread and very long-standing assumptions about the gendering of sonicity: masculine voice sonics symbolize power and authority and feminine sonicity care and nurture. Our second proposition explores how masculine voice sonics echo with rationality and the pursuit of profit, efficiency and effectiveness, silencing any ethos of care. We develop this proposition by drawing primarily from Benjamin's work, calling Butler to our assistance at relevant points. We flash forward from Ancient Greek tragedy to 20th-century popular culture, using upper class English masculine sonics as our focus.

The inspiration underpinning this Proposition is Benjamin's (1988) analysis of *The Story of* O, an award-winning French novel that will, for some, make unpleasant reading. Benjamin's arguments facilitate exploration of how masculine voice sonics become equated with power, control and domination, and thus with rationality. The novel's author, Anne Desclos, originally writing under the pseudonym of Pauline Reage (1965), delivered an erotic, sado-masochistic account of a Parisian photographer, O, who is subjected to ritual sexual violation by her lover, René, his brother, Sir Stephen, and anonymous 'elite' men. Benjamin (1988) uses this distressing tale to explore the interwoven relationship between dependency, domination, the need for recognition and its roots in infancy.

The novel was made into a film, released in 1975, that received contradictory reviews from feminist authors. Some interpreted it as a symptom of patriarchal oppression, others as a critique of patriarchy (Musser, 2015). For our purposes, the actors' voices in the film illuminate sonicity as it was interpreted just as feminist political pressure alongside legislation in the United States and United Kingdom were enabling the entry of women into management and the professions. Films, like artistic artefacts more generally, articulate the cultural unconscious, that is, the composite stories, norms and knowledges through which peoples understand themselves (see, e.g. Silverman, 2008). The film's cultural

imaginary includes deeply embedded assumptions about voice sonicity; its trailer, easily available online[9], encapsulates those assumptions. The film starred Corrine Cléry as O, Udo Kier as René and Anthony Steel as Sir Stephen. We use the film's trailer as a vehicle for inserting sonicity into Benjamin's arguments, thus bringing sonicity to Benjamin's analysis and Benjamin's analysis to sonicity. We analyse the trailer below, but listening to it will bring sonicity into the otherwise barren space, sonically speaking, of this written text. Beware: The trailer may for some be uncomfortable viewing because it concerns the sexual exploitation of women by men.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdrh0ZPAtqE

(Youtube, accessed on 26th July 2023).

We begin with Anthony Steel, who plays Sir Stephen. Steel was a well-known British actor described as 'a glorious throwback to the Golden Age of Empire, the perfect imperial actor, born out of his time, blue-eyed, square-jawed, clean-cut'[10]. Note the film-makers' very interesting choice of this actor to play Sir Stephen. The equation of masculine sonics with power is not peculiar to any one culture nor, indeed, to capitalism; it appears to be almost-universal – it exists in hunter-gatherer communities (e.g., Aung and Puts, 2020). But the makers of *The Story of O* chose an actor whose voice sonics resonate not only with masculine but also with global power. This is a sonicity that demands obedience. The character's speech is carried on the resonant, deep sonics of an upper class product of an expensive education[11],[12]. Those sonics symbolize the power and authority of an Empire[13] that enslaved and killed millions, and the supposed superiority of those people whose bodies materialize that aural emanation. British monarchs spoke with that voice, as do graduates of the small number of expensive private schools that produce the governors of major public and private sector organizations in the United Kingdom. Taught how to articulate their consonants and vowels on resonant voice sonics, private school graduates glide on sonicity into senior roles in politics[14], civil service, business, the arts, industry and the media[15] (see, e.g., Overton, 2021). Those sonics ascribe speakers with social power (Coupland and Bishop, 2007; Donnelly, Gamsu and Baratta, 2022).

Similar associations are seen in Hollywood's 'Golden Age' when female actors were largely silenced (although see O'Meara, 2016, for a critique), and heroes had (and still have) deep, masculine voices that signal status and formidability (Aung and Puts, 2020)[16]. Resonant masculine sonicity persuades audiences to concur, albeit without conscious awareness, with millennia of associations between strength of voice and strength of character, sustained and perpetuated throughout cultural imaginaries.

In workplaces, men continue to be over-represented in senior positions. Few have light or weak voices; those who do are ridiculed, believed to be stupid (see the example of British football star, David Beckham [Davies, 2021]). Resonant, deep and powerful voice sonics are implicated in the performative constitution of leaders and managers.

Only Sir Stephen's voice is heard in the trailer. A Google search failed to identify any recordings of Corinne Clery's (O's) voice. In the trailer for O and other available images, she is reduced to an objectified, desiring, speechless, passive body. Kier, as René, is similarly silent/silenced. Described when the film was released as 'the most beautiful man in the world'[17] the camera focuses on his androgynous beauty: His voice is not heard. Recordings elsewhere reveal a light voice that carries well. It is not a powerful voice. The

film-makers, in choosing an actor with what could be regarded as feminine voice sonics, imply that René too was a pawn of Sir Stephen. There is in the film trailer little that distinguishes O from René – both are beautiful but silent young people, to be looked at but not listened to. It is Sir Stephen's voice sonics that vivify this story of seduction, control and dominance.

To understand this sonicity's power, we again ask Althusser's symbolical police officer for assistance, but now put O, Rene and Sir Stephen onto the pedestal.

O, we have seen, like the inhumed Antigone, cannot speak. Powerless, she cannot articulate the interpellative hail. René's is not a voice of authority; it is unlikely to persuade passers-by to turn towards that sonic sound calling 'Hey you there'. Anthony Steel as Sir Stephen is very different. His voice's sonicity resonates through the trailer, imputing an agentic voice capable of domination and control. Such sonics vibrate with power over others, authoritative tones that successive generations have learned, Pavlovian-like, to turn towards. Mature, experienced, authoritative, powerful, these sonics brook of no resistance to the shouted 'hey you there'.

Our imaginary Althusserian experiment complete, we return to Benjamin (1988) for interpretation, exploring how voice sonics resonate in the psyche. Recall that new-born babies float on seas of sensation (Josephine Klein, 1987), including those emanating from voice sonics. One learns, from very early infancy, that sonic sounds emanating from what are eventually identifiable as 'other people' have power over the emergent subject (Benjamin, 1988). Infants, through the senses, become aware that some voices are softer, perhaps gentle and caring, others deeper and more resonant. Benjamin argues (1988, p. 103) that the latter tend to be those of paternal figures who represent the 'exciting, outside', the former maternal figures representing 'holding, caring', an imaginary still embedded in culture even as women's roles have changed. The deeper sonicity of the paternal figure's voice becomes equated with freedom and power (Benjamin, 1988).

That is, if Benjamin's thesis is correct, infants emerge into language with an inchoate knowledge that masculine sonicity represents power and authority, feminine sonicity care and nurturing; deeper voices represent 'freedom' and lighter voices 'dependency'. Born into a sonic always-already there, embedded in our unconscious in earliest infancy is an understanding that deeper (masculine) sonicity represents freedom and domination (Benjamin, 1988). Reverberating in the unconscious throughout life and influencing conscious thought and action are both feminine sonicity's equation with care and nurture but also masculine sonicity's symbolisation of power and control.

This is a power and control that cannot be separated from the dominance of rationality in Western thought. Rationality was fundamental to the work of Max Weber, long-regarded as birth parent of sociology. For Weber, rationality was foundational to capitalist organizations, notably because of the efficiency brought about by the formal rationality of bureaucratic processes whose aim was the calculation of precision and efficiency in resolving problems (see the discussion in Kalberg, 1980). All emotion and subjectivity is expunged from bureaucratic/organizational rationality. Foucault located rationality in the conceptualisation of the modern individual that is understood to be an autonomous, objective, individualistic and calculating subject that dominates models of management and organization (see Townley, 2002, 2008; Townlee et al., 2003). The apparent gender neutrality of long-standing theories of modernity as the episteme of rationality has been

widely challenged by feminist researchers who show that rationality and masculinity are inseparably intertwined. That is, rationality is gendered in its core assumptions, in which a 'hidden masculinity' is the inheritance of centuries of the equation of rationality with modernity and thus of masculinity with modernity (see, for example, Ross-Smith and Kornberger, 2004).

In summary, Proposition 2 posits that the soundscapes of organizations' powerful spaces – occupied by managers, owners and the professions – have for centuries resonated with masculine sonicities that convey the dominance of rationality's means-ends focus. They determine the subordination of any considerations other than those of productivity or profit. Proposition 1 shows that feminine voice sonics, in conveying care and nurture, contradict that ethos. This illuminates sonicity's implications in the gendering of organizations (Acker, 1990); masculine organizational soundscapes not only rendered feminine sonicity out of place, but refused to equate feminine sonicity with rationality.

Thirty years ago our arguments would stop here, with conclusions regarding sonicity's influence on continuing organizational inequalities. While not abjuring that conclusion, there have since been major changes in organizational soundscapes as women entered into management and the professions in large numbers. Proposition 3 explores the implications of new, non-binary organizational soundscapes engendered by the influx of feminine sonicity into previously masculine soundscapes.

> *Proposition 3:* Non-binary gendered organizational soundscapes constitute new caring, ethical and moral organizational relationships that must be rigorously guarded.

Propositions 1 and 2 established a binary divide between masculine and feminine sonicity: masculine voice sonics resonate with power, authority, rationality and modernity; feminine voice sonics whisper with care and nurture but were not allowed into dominant organizational spaces whose soundscapes resonated with masculine voice sonics. In the last 40 years, those masculine spaces have been penetrated by feminine sonicity. Proposition 3 posits the implications of non-binary soundscapes where masculine and feminine sonicities mingle. Following Benjamin, we suggest non-binary soundscapes may performatively constitute caring and nurturing spaces that, following Butler, are neither mild nor placid but have the power to roar. We thus posit an ethics of 'power-to-care'.

To illustrate this theme, we use an excerpt from Donizetti's opera, *La Fille de Regiment*, allowing the power of music to invoke imaginative engagement. This opera, set in wartime and with the chorus dressed as soldiers, seems to contradict our arguments about the equation of feminine sonics with care, but note how the female singer seeks to bring care and reconciliation into spaces recently torn apart by war (Rostock, 2009). She exemplifies Benjamin's (2021) advocacy of collective compassion and of putting right a world that has been divided between the powerful and the helpless, where trauma can be acknowledged and a caring society built upon the ashes of the old.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBykMJ8quaA

Recall that recognition is vital to self-hood; without recognition there can be no subject, no 'I' or 'me', Benjamin's evolving body of work identifies three types of recognition, Oneness, Twoness and the Third. We posit that each has distinct 'regimes of

aurality' (Roshanak Kheshti, cited in LaBelle, 2020, p. 550) or given orders of hearing, that may actively constitute new norms of day-to-day organizational life. That is, sonicity is performative.

Oneness – the solo ego seeking to dominate and expunge all others – maps onto dominant, masculine organizational soundscapes that flourished for centuries, and that we encountered in Proposition 2. Dominant here is the familiar individualist of Enlightenment thought that has been actively nurtured by Western neo-liberal cultures. It occupies spaces in which the singular ego battles for domination and the security of its own continued existence. Oneness implies norms of (masculine) dominance and control (Benjamin, 2006, 2018; Frosh, 2011) because Western modes of thought equated voice to reason, power and authority and dispossessed woman of voice (Schlichter, 2011). The dominant 'master' walked corridors and sat at desks requiring that feminine sonicity be literally unheard.

Twoness – two egos battling each other while at the same time seeking that rapprochement necessary for recognition – maps on to the conditions in which feminine sonicity enters organizational soundscapes, following legal and political changes that opened doors to women's entry into management and the professions, challenging the millennia-long silencing of women set out in Proposition 1. Long-lasting and ongoing struggles ensued as the masculine ego jealously guarded its space, reluctant to cede the power of the traditional norms within which it had flourished. This is a position that emphasizes us against them; us above them; do-er and done to; perpetrator and victim; violator and violated; master and slave, powerful leader and helpless follower (Benjamin, 2018). It describes that agonistic struggle between masculine and feminine sonicity as females entered into professional and managerial roles in large numbers from the 1980s, claiming knowledge and skills that were previously men's jealously guarded possession (Williams, 2023), and meeting resentment from men who feared exclusion from 'their' territories (Ford et al., 2020).

Feminist sonicity theory takes us beyond Propositions 1 and 2, and Oneness and Twoness, into Proposition 3 and Benjamin's Third. Feminist sonicity theory indicates the performative effect of changing organizational soundscapes influenced by a 'feminist phonocentrism' (Schlichter, 2011, p. 37) in which feminine sonicity demands to be heard. Feminist phonocentrism seeks to overcome patriarchal misrepresentations of female bodies and feminine voice sonics. Its struggles evoke new concepts of 'the feminine' (Schlichter, 2011), made possible through regimes of aurality that invoke ways of listening (LaBelle, 2020) and forms of understanding that exceed words (Halstead and LaBelle, 2013), in which masculinity's desire to submerge her sonicity beneath his own is overcome (Benjamin, 1988, 1995, 1998, 2018). More prosaically, over time feminine voice sonics have become familiar rather than strange, and associated with professionalism, authority and power as well as care and nurture. This unties concepts of 'the woman' from historical assumptions of women's place. The implications of gendered sonicity's dismantling of struggles for dominance of masculine over feminine are set out in Benjamin's concept of Thirdness.

The Third, or the moral Third, posits the possibilities of existence where antipathy is replaced by mutual care. It concerns both ethics and care, and it is where Benjamin propels us into a future of relational organizational experiences within organizational

soundscapes that now resonate with feminine and masculine sonicity. Previous regimes of Oneness and Twoness do not disappear, but the space of the moral Third engenders surrender and letting go of the absolute position of self-assertion and its replacement by co-creation (Benjamin, 2006, 2018).

The moral Third introduces an ethical dimension that guides relationships of recognition (Benjamin, 2018, p. 51). It is the relational position of acknowledgment and repair and refers to a shared desire to put right what is wrong, to correct violations and acknowledge injury. It involves collective togetherness that transforms fear into compassion, grief and care (Benjamin, 2021, p. 410), Sonicity's capacity for affective knowing – the voice can orientate itself towards the invisible (Vallee, 2017b) or what resonates in the other's voice – suggests reciprocity and contemporary soundscapes that reverberate with feminine sonics' generosity and care and masculine sonics' authority and power.

We perhaps see this in the marked turn in organizations to corporate social responsibility and care for the environment (Wickert, 2021; Windsor, 2006), and equality, diversity and inclusion policies that indicate a strategy of better treatment of staff. While these and similar strategies may be pursued for cynical reasons (Rhodes, 2022; Roberson et al., 2024) and correlation between the emergence of non-binary soundscapes and ethical organizational practices need not imply causation; nevertheless, new discourses are circulating in organizations and change is palpable. That is why Benjamin's work leads us to propose, in this third proposition, that non-binary organizational soundscapes, reverberating with care and ethics as well as power and rationality, may performatively constitute ethical, caring and moral organizational practices in which the division between rationality and care collapses – in Benjamin's terms, the Third. It suggests reasons to be optimistic about organizational futures in which non-binary soundscapes provoke ethics and care and the capacity for introducing, developing and nurturing them.

But this paper was motivated, in part, by a desire to offer resistance to resurgent right-wing political desires to confine women, again, to the domestic sphere and restore organizational soundscapes to their original, unitary masculine voices, thus returning feminine sonicity to the walled-up silence of the cave. We write in uncertain political times when resurgent right-wing populism threatens to destroy many achievements of the last half-century, as the rich take an ever-increasing share of wealth, rendering such countries as the US and UK poor countries with some very rich corners (Burn-Murdoch, 2022). A project to reinstate patriarchy (Butler, 2024) seems to be well under way. We return to Butler to explore ways in which feminine voice sonics provide a ground on which to resist such politics – feminine sonics are not weak but have the power to resonate with fury: They form part of the resistance to such retrogressive politics and practices.

We start with Butler's (2023) recent question: What sort of institutions are women now occupying? This resonates with the theory we are advancing of the potential of voice sonics to change organizations, but warns against blithe assumptions that the social advances of the last half-century will continue. We began our theory-building with Butler's interpretation of *The Antigone*, and now turn for inspiration to their interpretation (2023) of another Ancient Greek text, *The Oresteia*. This is the third play in Aeschylus' trilogy, *The Eumenides*, generally regarded as establishing the principles of legal systems. It describes the goddess Athena's development of a method for determining Orestes' guilt

for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, after she had murdered his father, Agamemnon. Butler's focus is on The Furies, who sought to avenge Clytemnestra's murder but were persuaded with remarkable speed to give up that desire and instead live and work under the nascent system of law.

We could not find any representations of the voices of The Furies on-line but perhaps found their present-day equivalents: films of women marching and protesting. The following link captures this. It is a report of International Women's Day 2023, in which the power of women's voices raised in political anger are clearly heard.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjTdX6ezeiE

With the voices of women's protest reverberating, we turn to Butler's analysis of the Furies' curiously swift transformation from goddesses of vengeance into *the Eumenides* ('The Kindly Ones'), and the play's lesson that rage is illegitimate. But fury, Butler argues, is sometimes required. It intertwines with the affects provoked by injustice – grief, violence and rage – and empowers resistance. Perhaps, Butler reasons, *the Eumenides* continues to speak to us because it says rage should not always be domesticated; it can sometimes be the correct response. Rage 'carries with it an argument, a luminosity, that should not be too quickly shut down in the name of civility, certainly not before it is heard and understood. It speaks to justice beyond the unjust law; it speaks to the demand to live, opposing that life-negating deployment of law' (Butler, 2023, p. 16). Fury therefore has purpose; it carries histories and demands. Its foreclosure perpetuates rage, repeating the violence that caused the fury.

In this Butler takes forward long-standing arguments in feminist theory of the need for rage and its power. Jane Marcus (1988) framed anger as a 'primary source of creative energy', underscoring rage's generative potential. A recent special edition of the journal *Signs* (Kaplan et al., 2021) updates those arguments, situating rage as a legitimate and cogent response to the injustices of marginalized voices' historical struggles. Nowhere is the productive energy of rage perhaps better expressed than in black feminist theory, notably in the foundational work of Audre Lorde (1981) for whom feminist rage has a dual role: It is both burden and power. Anger, Lorde showed, has transformative potential if channelled effectively; it is a resource for confronting personal and systemic oppressions. Lorde's call to listen to the rage of black women *necessarily* continues to reverberate.

Productive rage sent us back to Antigone, who we had left, above, inhumed in a cave. We argued that that tragedy memorialized the foundational cornerstone of a belief, deeply embedded until recently, that women's voices did not belong in public space. Reading *The Antigone* through Butler's, Lorde's and other feminists' advocacy of fury's purpose provokes another thought about Antigone – before she hung herself in that exit-less cave she too must have been furious. Her fury then had no effect; it too was walled up with her. We and the women who now pour into previously masculine organizational domains released her voice; we also should release Antigone's fury against over-arching unfairness and cruelty. The sonics of rage carry wordless words – sounds of grief and pain and deep, deep hurt but also sheer, unadulterated determination to refuse the insult and pain that has been hurled. Here fury and care can merge. Rage is provoked by the opposite of care, by another's desire to impose pain or eradicate something or someone deeply treasured but, as feminist theory argues,

rage can be positive, can be productive, can challenge political (and organizational) excesses.

In other words, feminine sonicity resonates with care but an inescapable aspect of care is the desire to protect the cared for, and sometimes protection requires fury. Care and fury are thus intertwined, with fury perhaps dormant until called upon.

These propositions drawn together produce a theory that non-binary soundscapes evoke both care and the power to implement care, that is, power-to-care, as we now explore.

DISCUSSION: NON-BINARY GENDERED ORGANIZATIONAL SOUNDSCAPES AND THEIR PROMISE OF ETHICS – A THEORY OF THE POWER-TO-CARE

This paper has developed three propositions that congregate into a theory of non-binary organizational soundscapes in which the long dominance of masculine voice sonics on public and organizational stages has been challenged by the relatively recent, mass influx of feminine voice sonics. Feminine sonicity, the carrier of words but not the words themselves, now carries meaning rather than 'noise', and the meaning it carries is of care, in contrast with masculine sonicity's rationality. Non-binary soundscapes thus resonate with both rationality and care, with the latter not implying weakness but the potentially productive power of fury. Sonicity, this suggests, has performative power, notably in this case study of gendered sonics the legitimisation of discourses of care. Sonicity thus has implications for feminist organizational care ethics.

In drawing on Butler's (1997, 2000a, 2015) and Benjamin's (2006, 2018, 2021) developments in theories of recognition, our propositions in many ways resemble the flourishing debates on feminist ethics, and particularly feminist care ethics, in MOS. Just like Benjamin's the Third, these emphasize the grounding of ethics in inter-subjective encounters that are temporal, spatial and embodied (Hancock, 2008), relational and reciprocal (Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020), that transcend subject–object relations (Kenny and Fotaki, 2015) and are other-focused. The primary responsibility is to ethics rather than profit, and to compassion rather than control (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Bodies align with others' emotional experiences (McCarthy and Glozer, 2022) and power relations are symmetrical. Participants recognize each other's vulnerability and act not out of duty or rational principles (Thanem and Wallenburg, 2015) but from a desire to care (Johansson and Wickstrom, 2022). Feminist ethicists refuse to be defined through the masculine (hence eschewing masculine ethics' emphasis on duty or principles) (Pullen and Vachhani, 2021). The focus is upon locating the self at 'a site of ethical practice based on relationality, intercorporeality and care' (Pullen and Vachhani, 2021, p. 233).

Taken together, Butler's, Benjamin's and MOS's feminist ethicists annual historical assumptions about care as rationality's inferior, weak other. They do not reverse the traditional dichotomy of rationality/male/good and care/female/weak but introduce a new sensibility. That is, it 'revise[s], reformulate[s], or rethink[s] traditional ethics' (Pullen and

Vachhani, 2021, p. 235): what was traditionally regarded as 'women's (moral) experience' (ibid) becomes generalized as *all* moral experience. This does not of course mean that traditional duty ethics have disappeared: in voice sonics' terms, hearing involves both experiencing sound and the invocation of auditory and imaginative calls that operate in concert (Vallee, 2017b), and so organizational soundscapes will resonate with the moral experience of care but within a struggle with rationality and means-end calculations. The question then follows: How is it possible to translate the desire for caring ethical relationships into practice, given the dominant organizational focus upon profit-making and efficiency, to which care ethics may be subordinated?

Voice sonics offers an answer: It introduces the possibility of embedding embodied, relational ethics through power. That is, sonics possess 'agency' (LaBelle, 2020, p. 21), by which is meant a political power that interrupts dominant power with an acoustics of social becoming founded in ethics. This political power, LaBelle (2020) argues, lies in sonicity's 'inserting into the sphere of dominant power an acoustics of social becoming and according to the rhythms and resonance that listening and being heard evoke' (op cit). Voice sonics thus facilitate what Benjamin (2006, 2018) advocates for political activism: not reversing those power relations one wishes to oppose but instead a mutual recognition of each other's humanity and of the political and ethical potential in organizational scenes of recognition. And remember the Furies: feminine sonicity can roar.

So, if we introduce sonicity to Pullen and Vachhani's (2021) rather wonderful demonstration of how former New Zealand prime minister, Jacintha Ardern, exemplifies the intercorporeal, relational feminist agency and ethics they advocate, that is, if we bring the embodied Ardern into the discussion, then it is notable that her voice sonics, inescapably part of the materiality of the person 'Ardern', resonate with *power*. Power here is the ability to ensure ethical desires can be fulfilled. If so, then Ardern possessed what we will call 'power-to-care' – the power to go beyond plans and dreams and to make care an organizational reality. It could be argued that few females have the power of the State behind them, and organizations remain dominated in the senior, power-holding ranks by masculine sonicity. However, if feminine sonicity is changing organizational soundscapes, it is not only because of the relatively small numbers of women who rise to senior positions but because of the power of the mass, the numerous bearers of feminine sonicity who now occupy junior and middle managerial and professional posts.

That is, organizations today employ many women who have the lesser power of their managerial or professional position. It may be a power that stretches only as far as contributing to satisfactory working lives for nearby colleagues (something within our power in our own academic organizations); it may be small power, localized power, power that is not overt but breaks through the interstices between organizational rules and how they are put into practice, but it is power nonetheless. It resonates with the potential for grassroots feminist resistance similar to that Vachhani and Pullen (2019; see also Vachhani, 2020) identified in the Everyday Sexism project. That is, if sonicity resonates with care *and* power, and indeed with rationality, if it can roar, as we have suggested, then it empowers parties with the power-to-care – the capacity to resist oppressive rules and practise embodied ethics at the local or micro level.

Sonicity, in short, is performative. It has constitutive effects that are not discursive but carry meaning that, insinuated into everyday organizational practices like whispers

carried upon the wind, wreathe their way into meaning, affect, thought and desire. For millennia, those whispers have been borne upon a sonicity that brooked no opposition to the equation of power with masculinity, but now those assumptions are being challenged and undermined in ways that, because of sonicity's mode of influence, are barely available to conscious awareness but, nevertheless, are powerful.

In summary, the application of voice sonics in a case study of gendered sonics demonstrates the intellectual and empirical utility of recognizing and interrogating sonicity's role in organizational life. It has led us, in our demonstrational study, to a theory of how the development of non-binary organizational soundscapes may resonate with a power-to-care, that is, a desire for a relational, embodied ethics of care that can be propelled through the power of being part of an organization, no matter how lowly one's position. Many organizations, built on rationality, the pursuit of profit and efficiency and hierarchical divisions into 'top' and 'bottom', are stuck in relationships that threaten to destroy one or both parties. The influx of feminine voice sonics offers hope of an ethics enabled by a desire to care and the power to enact that desire: the power-to-care.

CONCLUSION: SONICITY'S VALUE FOR MANAGEMENT THEORY

This paper aims to introduce sonicity to MOS and demonstrate its potential through a case study of gendered voice sonics. If we were asked the 'so what' question, that is, why is this important for MOS, we would answer that meaning lies not only in language but in the timbre of voices, in sonicity. People are prejudged, categorized and heard through the prism of sonics; their words can be distorted by their transport mechanisms. But, further, sonicity is performative: It can *do* things because of its subtle influence on thought and action. We have argued that the emergence of non-binary organizational soundscapes in the last 40 years introduced a sonics that murmurs with the power-to-care, an ethical stance that need not necessarily be aligned solely with female-speaking-subjects because its influence can imbibe fellow occupants of organizational soundscapes with its ethos. Furthermore, feminine sonicity also has the power to roar – this is not a weak, fragile sonicity but one that carries potential for resistance. Sonicity's performative power constitutes care as an increasingly legitimate and necessary aspect of organizational practices.

Sonicity in this case study contributes new insights to feminist management studies but has implications for organizational soundscapes more generally. Voice sonics are active contributors to the constitution of the everyday worlds of organizations, their norms and culture, to 'what everyone thinks around here', and to what is deemed legitimate or what should be expelled or banished. Sonicity is *political*. Long unheard, voice sonics have never been silent. There is a need now to study sonics that are classed, racialized, educationally varied, sonics that carry the voices of those whose first language is not that of the place where they live and work, sonics that emanate from LGBT++ bodies and bodies that have disabilities including alternative forms of hearing. There are also sonics that do not resonate with care but with power and oppression, with badness and with evil, with desires for control and domination. Organizations and their management are

soundscapes where the unheard sounds of sonicity influence *how* organization is 'done'. Through becoming alert to sonicity, through exploring its unheard influence, better understanding of organizations and their management, and of the people who work together 'in' them, becomes possible.

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NOTES

[1] By 'non-binary' we mean soundscapes not rigidly divided into 'masculine' and 'feminine' but a melding of numerous possibilities.
[2] Available at https://cz.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Current%20Populism%20in%20Europe_FINAL_ONLINE_V2.pdf.
[3] Downloaded from https://screenrant.com/bass-baritone-actors-with-deep-voices/ (accessed 14 June 2021).
[4] http://www.louisecollinsvoice.com (accessed 14 June 2021).
[5] https://www.powerfulexecutivevoice.com/voice-resonance/, downloaded 14 June 2021.
[6] The deafening noise did not, of course, prevent people from communicating—they developed strategies such as lip-reading or other alternative forms of communications. We are grateful to a reviewer of this paper for alerting us to this point, that returns agency to the women who worked those noisy machines.
[7] We use the version introduced by Knox and translated by Fagles (1982).
[8] The section from the BBC production of *The Antigone* we have drawn on features Juliet Stephenson, whose drama-trained voice resonates in ways that the teenage Antigone's would not have done.
[9] https://mubi.com/films/the-story-of-o/trailer.
[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Steel_(actor) (accessed 15 June 2021).
[11] Trailer of the film on its first release in the UK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gdrh0ZPAtqE.
[12] See https://www.quora.com/Does-every-country-have-its-own-version-of-a-posh-and-common-accent for a general discussion about distinctions between classed accents across many countries.
[13] Listen, for example, to Anthony Steel in 'Where no vultures fly', a clip that requires analysis through a postcolonial lens: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1GQ1CMBNoE.
[14] Here is an example of a British prime minister whose voice exemplifies these arguments. Some people may wish that this came with a health warning. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlJIwTd9fqI.
[15] It is possible to hire voice artists with 'posh English accents' that have 'become synonymous with prestige and refined mannerisms' to enhance audiovisual productions. See https://golocalise.com/blog/leveraging-the-posh-accent-in-audiovisual-productions, downloaded 26th July 2023.
[16] Research into voice *pitch* suggests that an equation of deeper voices with power exists in many cultures, from hunter-gatherers to Wall Street. See, for example, Aung and Puts (2020).
[17] https://www.nowness.com/story/udo-kier-solace, (accessed 15 June 2021).

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