

the playing of a recording, is always “live” at the point of hearing. Sounding has to be embodied as an event in a particular time and place, as distinct from being “frozen” as a text or image whose embodiment is less immediate. This is the point that Jacques Attali famously makes: “... the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.”⁵

In this book I offer you, as the sonic body of the reader, an invitation, simply put – to become a listener. Only then can you venture inside the sonic body, or rather some of these multiple sonic bodies. *Sonic Bodies* is a journey into sound. My entire approach and orientation is one of thinking *through* sound. This is sound *qua* sound, that is, auditory vibrations. This is distinct and different from how certain sounds are taken to indicate objects or events. Thinking through sound is also distinct and different from our habitual thinking through images, or, it is important to note, music. Indeed, it also has to be distinguished from thinking *about* anything. Sound can indeed be an object of thought, as gained research attention with the Canadian work in sonic environments and *soundscape*s in the 1970s.⁶ Instead, thinking through sound is a *way* of thinking, a process of knowledge, and a gnosis.⁷ Thinking through sounding brings to the fore the value of auditory propagation as a mechanical process, as a model of a way of understanding that avoids being entirely bound up with language, notation and representation.

Sounding is a dynamic patterning propagated through a medium. Though it cannot be expressed outside its embodiment in such a medium, it is in itself entirely immaterial and insubstantial. Sounding is a transitory event in time, rather than an often more permanent mark on a visual surface. Such events are entirely distinctive, unique and unrepeatable. Sounding has direct sensorial effects and affects, as with smells, tastes and gestures, in addition to how it is purposed as a medium for encoding meaning, as with phonetics. This intrinsic meaning of sounding is often independent of conscious attention, as with the prosody of the actual utterance, that is, tone of voice. Thus the idea of sounding serves to draw attention to a rather different object of enquiry than the conventional ones of text or image. In practice it is not object at all, but a process or event, not a coded representation but medium, not a thought but a feeling – often independent of conscious reflection.

In these ways, *Sonic Bodies* mounts an auditory investigation, rather than only an investigation of audition. To do this, sounding is considered *mechanically* – as auditory propagation and specific sensory modality of audition, distinct from, yet integrated with, the other senses. It is also considered *practically* – as the basis for the techniques and traditions of a particular popular auditory culture of the Jamaican Reggae dancehall session. Drawing on such embodied ways of knowing grounds the investigation with the material of

numerous examples. Finally, sounding is considered *theoretically* – as a dynamic model for both raising questions about the world – as distinct from the way the trope of the visual image is often used to settle them – and understanding itself – as is developed with the idea of sound judgement in the conclusion.

If thinking were only a matter of ideas, that is, an activity of a mind that could be isolated from its body, then the model, metaphor or medium of thinking would not be quite so important. On the other hand, if thinking is more than this, as is argued throughout *Sonic Bodies*, then important implications follow. Furthermore, if what is called thinking has its origins in the kinds of processes, practices and potentialities that only our embodiment affords, then the metaphor is not to be dismissed as a crutch, but is the actual limb of thought.⁸ Like any language, sound embodies its own unique sensitivities, nuances and idiomatic forms of expression that inevitably get lost in translation. The auditory vocabulary carries values and associations: we “sound someone out,” for instance, or have “sound judgement,” as is discussed in the conclusion. Thinking through sound is thus a matter of working through the *medium* of sound as thought. We work *through* something to find out more, or “to work it out.” This can mean “taking it in,” or letting it “sink in,” that is, absorbing, assimilating, incorporating, or even ingesting something, so that we become part of it and it becomes part of us. So the passage of working *through* indicates the crossing of a threshold. With sound, this can be the traditional barrier between thinking and doing, or interior and exterior worlds, or mind and body, for instance.

What sound offers is a dynamic model of thinking. This can only be expressed through corporeal practices of thought, rather than the more commonplace discursive line of thought. Indeed, such a tissue of thinking lends itself to diagrammatic expression, as with the numerous triangulations throughout *Sonic Bodies*. These are, of course, expressed in a visual medium, but without being tied to this form representation as such.⁹ Thinking through sound concerns vibrations specifically, as against the more commonplace visual preoccupation with words or representational images. It draws on a repertoire of metaphors, analogies and models that are distinct and different from those of representation, discourse and inscription. Light and visual processes are often used in expression of the immateriality of mental images. By contrast, sounding, though emphasising relationships, also insists that we do not forget that auditory processes always require expression through a particular material medium, such as air or water. *Sonic Bodies* proposes auditory propagation itself, that is, the periodic movement of vibrations through a medium, as a suitable model for sociocultural as well as corporeal and material processes. These vibrations have to be considered together with the techniques and the instruments required to make them. As with sounding itself, sonic bodies are