

# The Cultural Capital of Sound: *Québécois*'s Acoustic Hybridity

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“With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men.”

—Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*

“He sang all night under the moon  
For dreamers yet to love, who might  
Find his lyrics some star-dark night  
And be themselves singer or sung.”

—George Elliott Clarke, *Whylah Falls*

Cultural community has long been conceptualized territorially—it has conventionally been figured as a cartographic phenomenon, and its cohesiveness has been read as a function of temporal coincidence in visuospatial proximity. However, in an increasingly globalized world marked by multidirectional mass migration and diasporic displacement, by “flows and interactivity” (Canclini 39) and attendant hybridizations, culture is increasingly difficult to locate (van der Veer 91). Postcolonial scholars have responded widely to this dislocation of culture from cartography;<sup>1</sup> Homi Bhabha supplants territoriality with liminality, theorizing the “in-between space” as register of cultural performance and noting that “[i]t is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). Ulfried Reichardt, on the other hand, treats the “temporalization” of culture, framing hybridity as “a verb, a process, a dynamic structure which implies exchange as well as change” (19). Reichardt later suggests, however, that cultural temporalization can serve to “specify . . . hybridity’s *static location*” (20, emphasis added) at particular historical moments. Both she and Bhabha, therefore, ultimately invoke *visuospatial* metaphors.

Conversely, in arguing for the “deterritorialization” of culture, Nikos Papastergiadis’ *The Turbulence of Migration* articulates the need for an epistemic deviation from such metaphors. As contemporary cultural communities are “spread across considerable distances, and redefined through [multidirectional processes of] exchange,” they can no longer, Papastergiadis suggests, be “mapped in bounded space” (116). In other words, culture always already

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<sup>1</sup> My definition of “culture” is closest to the sentiment of Arjun Appadurai, as articulated in *Modernity at Large*; that is, it incorporates the sense that “culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena [and practices], a dimension that attends to . . . difference” (12-13). This notion detaches ‘culture’ from discourses of racial essentialism and situates it, instead, in “a realm of . . . contrasts and comparisons” (12).

transgresses territorial borders and must, therefore, be disengaged from cartographic impulse. Given this theoretical imperative, *auditory* space—that which “has no boundaries in the visual sense . . . [t]he universe is [its] potential map” (McLuhan 68)—presents a more productive means of thinking about cultural collectives. Indeed, cultural identifications and disarticulations are particularly resonant in music and oral discourse—in multilingualisms, creole dialects, linguistic lilt, and “vari-directional, double-voiced” speech acts infused with “the intentions of other speakers” (Bakhtin 195)—even though they might no longer be coherently locatable in visual space. George Elliott Clarke’s *Québécois* foregrounds this very sentiment, as its four protagonists, Laxmi, Ovide, Colette, and Malcolm, negotiate cultural community in sonic space, staging border-crossings acoustically. Further, these cross-cultural auralities are overlaid on a discursive background of Québec nationalism—a dialogue between federal and provincial interlocutors that is often enacted at the expense of the cultural Other, or “third man.” In *Québécois*, however, “a different kind of dialogue occurs *because* of the ‘noise’” (Lionnet 23); Clarke’s “Québécois(e) acoustic” exceeds the bilingual, and approximates the multicultural. As Ajay Heble’s Postlude to Clarke’s libretto suggests, *Québécois* “sound[s] a more inclusive vision of community-building and intellectual stock-taking for the new millennium” (101).

## I

The term “deterritorialization,” in its earliest manifestations, connoted the physical and psychic *unheimlichkeit* of “the thinker” (Heidegger 188). Most notably, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* (1991) figures the philosopher as exile—one for whom the “fatherland [is] unknown, lost, or forgotten” (69) and the return home repeatedly deferred. Deleuze and Guattari link migrancy and *thought*, thereby framing the migrant as a “conceptual persona” (61) rather than a material reality; in so doing, however, they gesture towards the incommensurability of visuospatial discourse and “planetary” subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, their work parallels, rhetorically, “the territory” and “deterritorialization” to “finite melodic compounds” and “the great infinite plane of composition” (185). They invoke, in other words, idioms of sound theory in treating transiency and exile. These tropes are also reiterated throughout the work of Arjun Appadurai and Néstor García Canclini, both of whom situate deterritorialization as a widespread symptom of globalization. Appadurai identifies “a new order of instability in the production of modern [identities]” (4), thereby foregrounding the emergence of the “deterritorialized subject.” Canclini, on the other hand, figures explicitly the “deterritorialization

<sup>2</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) for a comprehensive treatment of “planetary.” In short, Spivak proposes “the planet to overwrite the globe” (72), thereby re-thinking globalization in terms of cultural and academic networks, rather than deferring to discussions of political economy.

of practices” (47) as a function of mass media messages and migratory movement. Though neither Appadurai nor Canclini overtly theorize sonic space, their analyses attend to cross-cultural *musical* exchange at length; they discuss, by turns, the global proliferation of rap music (Appadurai 7), the mass distribution of regional folk musics via contemporary communication technologies (Canclini 41), and the emergence of tango as hybrid acoustic product (Canclini 45). Moreover, Canclini’s text is resonant with musical metaphor; he asserts, for example, that hybridization can be “exhausted as a scene of equalized World Music,” yet concomitantly pregnant with “unforeseen unplugged improvisations” (49). Discourses of “deterritorialization,” therefore, have been consistently underwritten with aural subtext.

Nikos Papastergiadis’ *The Turbulence of Migration* is likewise informed by auditory phenomena; in arguing that cultural identifications transgress territorial borders, this text articulates *explicitly* the entropic exhaustion of visuospatial discourse, and treats “crossover music” as a register in which “[d]iasporic . . . inflections” are inscribed (116).<sup>3</sup> Papastergiadis suggests that, given global flows of population and product, cultural communities can no longer be grounded in geographical loci. He argues, moreover, that “[e]ven the most intimate personal relationships routinely involve negotiation across vast distances and the juxtaposition of unrelated concepts” (120). Although Papastergiadis insists that the dislocation of culture from cartography highlights “the homeland’s” ambivalence, and emphasizes “the need for re-imagining the possibilities of belonging” (117), his reader is left wondering what form this critical venture might take. Despite this seeming oversight, hybrid *sound* remains a recurrent preoccupation of *The Turbulence of Migration*—the text attends at length, for example, to the development of Bhangra music in Britain, treating this genre as a viable “hybrid representation . . . of cultural identity;” that is, as fluid acoustic discourse, globally consumed, always vacillating between diasporic metropolitan sound and Punjabi tradition (116). Papastergiadis himself, therefore, contributes to a “re-imagining” of cultural community; he consistently supplants vision with audition, and sound theory seems his text’s political unconscious.

Taken together, these theories of deterritorialization evidence the capacity of planetarity to confound cultural connections to *place*. Further, they rehearse the epistemological impoverishment of “the visual” and turn concomitantly towards audition—a theoretical inversion indicating, I argue, that cultural community might be negotiated in acoustic space. In other words, as Philip Bohlman asserts, music “re-defines . . . places of return and reinscribes placelessness onto the map of modernity” (669). I do recognize, however, that sound is embedded in cultural, political, and physical contexts; I intend

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<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of intercultural acoustic exchange, see Annie E. Coombes and Avtar Brah’s *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*. Coombes and Brah suggest, here, that “recent work on the music industry . . . argues that music is one of the more productive sites for hybrid interactions which could be described as both cultural exchange *and* commodification without being reduced to either one or the other” (1).

neither to dismiss the deployment of sound in socially specific sites, nor to suggest that sound is somehow inherently emancipatory. My argument is, rather, that the *potential* unboundedness of the soundscape, given the confines of “territory,” figures sonic space as a medium in which culture might be located (and perpetually re/located). Indeed, Marshall McLuhan’s theories of aurality offer a productive alternative, here, to the myopic scope of the visuospatial: “[w]hereas the eyes are bounded, directed, and limited to considerably less than half the visible world at any given moment, the ears are all encompassing, constantly alert to any sound originating in their boundless sphere” (68-9). A number of contemporary theorists reiterate McLuhan’s sentiments; Douglas Kahn, for example, asserts that there is no visual corollary to voice, as eyes depend on external sources of light to constitute space, while vocal utterance can be “heard internally and at a distance and can fill its own space” (28). Sound, in other words, consistently elides strategies of containment and transgresses bounds of visual space (Bull and Back 8)—as does culture, it exceeds the confines of cartography.

Sound, furthermore, is linked to power and politics; social codes are often sonically structured. Indeed, as Jacques Attali argues, the world “is not legible, but audible” (3). Attali implicates noise in both dominant disciplinary discourse—that which seeks to mold “subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (Foucault 138)—as well as in counter-discursive measure:

When power wants to make people *forget*, music is ritual *sacrifice*, the scapegoat; when it wants them to *believe*, music is enactment, *representation*; when it wants to *silence* them, it is reproduced, normalized, repetition. Thus [music] heralds the subversion of both the existing code and the power in the making, well before the latter is in place. (20) <sup>4</sup>

History, that is to say, can be *heard*, as intersubjective relationships and economic dynamics are audibly inscribed (Attali 5); noise serves as both disciplinary tool and medium of transgression.<sup>5</sup> Notably, for postcolonial purposes, Trinh T. Minh-ha has long voiced similar sentiments. Treating language in relation to postcolonial femininity, Trinh locates “history” in oral storytelling, thereby deconstructing the privilege of text as cultural signifier and framing speech as “the materialization, externalization, and internalization of the vibrations of forces” (127).<sup>6</sup> These observations about the acoustics of cultural code—delivered from disparate critical perspectives—can, moreover,

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<sup>4</sup> For a productive discussion of the discursive weight of sound, see Anne Carson’s *Glass, Irony, and God*. Carson provides, here, an historical accounting of the disciplinary gendering of noise—a series of bureaucratic manoeuvres reiterating the logic of the Lacanian Symbolic Order, and framing Woman’s sound as monstrous.

<sup>5</sup> By way of example, one might oppose, here, the effects of standardized Muzak—according to Attali, the “security system of the 1970s” (8)—to the subversive agency of African-American “slave hollers.”

<sup>6</sup> This summary hardly does Trinh’s work justice; see especially *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) and *When the Moon Waxes Red* (1991) for her contributions to the subject.

be productively supplemented by Roland Barthes' theories of "aural ethics." Barthes foregrounds the active component of aurality; he argues, with regard to dialogic speaker/listener relationships, that "I am listening" also means "listen to me" (246), and details that such "psychoanalytic listening" entails recognition of, and responsibility to, the desire of the Other (252). Ultimately, this suggests that social structure can not only be deployed and detected sonically, but can, in fact, be effectively *communicated*. Such oral/aural reciprocity yields positive implications for the acoustic negotiation of cultural (and cross-cultural) community.

Indeed, a handful of theorists have explored, at least provisionally, the connections between sound and cultural collective that I interrogate here. Michael Bull and Les Back, for example, note that "multiple registers can co-exist simultaneously" in auditory space; they suggest, consequently, that thinking through sound seems a means of examining "issues of inclusion, coexistence, and multiculturalism" (15). However, they preface this point with the proviso, "But there are no guarantees" (15), and withhold further comment on this "multicultural soundscape." Similarly, Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, a study of the ways in which speech and writing structure consciousness, intimates that orality fashions community. Ong notes that "[b]ecause . . . the spoken word . . . manifests human beings to one another as conscious interiors, . . . [it] forms [them] into close-knit groups" (74), yet he, too, leaves this argument in embryo. These theoretical gestures towards the psychic significance of auditory environment do, nonetheless, seem to be a stepping stone towards what I am proposing: the "deterritorialization" of culture, and its re-conceptualization in acoustic space. Further, psychological study of cognition and audition indicates that this discursive shift is, indeed, a productive one; by way of example, Paul Carter's recent article, "Ambiguous Traces: Mishearing and Auditory Space," cites the testimony of a new arrival at the Australian post-war Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre, who, throughout his early days in his new country, found his "ears getting used to the sounds about . . . Cattle mooing, dogs barking, sheep, bees, birds, well THEY were "talking" as in Europ[e]. It lifted [his] morale" (qtd. in Carter, online). Carter thereby contends that acoustic coincidence can provide solace for the migrant. One can, it seems, locate oneself as part of a cultural community in acoustic space; "home," here, is sonically situated in the face of geographical displacements.

Another concrete example of this theoretical framework in practice appears in Gloria Anzaldúa's oft-cited *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*—a text in which Anzaldúa treats her own position as a Chicana, a member of a border culture that is neither American nor quite Mexican. As this neither/nor liminality indicates, her community is not cohesively attached to nation space. In the absence of visuospatial belonging, Anzaldúa frames *language* as homeland (55); her sense of community stems from exchanges in Chicano Spanish, an interrelated series of hybrid oral dialects very rarely committed to paper. Moreover, Anzaldúa treats Chicano folk musics as "cultural

myth-makers,” confessing that she “[cannot] stop her feet from thumping to [this] music, [cannot] stop humming the words, [and cannot] hide from [her]self the exhilaration [she] fe[els] when [she] hear[s] it” (61). Once again, attachments to space and place are subordinated to acoustic dimensions of cultural belonging.

## II

George Elliott Clarke’s *Québécoisité* responds to the sentiment that “[a]ll music, any organization of sounds is . . . a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community” (Attali 6).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, *Québécoisité* stands as sonic space in which cultural affiliations and transgressions are staged via the hybrid aesthetics of jazz opera; Clarke’s four protagonists, Laxmi Bharati, Ovide Rimbaud, Colette Chan, and Malcolm States, sing, in other words, of “the perils and possibilities of loving across racial and cultural lines” (*Québécoisité* bookjacket).<sup>8</sup> Québec City, here, serves as backdrop for cross-cultural romance; Ovide and Laxmi, a Haitian man of black-white ancestry and young woman of Indian descent, “spat outside Québec’s parliament” (66), while the melodies of Colette and Malcolm, of Chinese origin and African American/Mi’kmaq Nova Scotian heritage respectively, commingle amidst lovemaking “[a]u Château Frontenac” (44). Clarke’s aesthetic project, then, assumes a pressing political purpose—while it broadens the cultural scope of contemporary Canadian opera, it also emerges as counter-discourse to the xenophobia sometimes latent in Québec nationalist sentiment. Indeed, Clarke suggests, in his “Liberalism and its Discontents: Reading Black and White in Contemporary Québécois Texts,” that Canadian intellectuals—both federalists and Québec sovereigntists – consistently invoke black/white racial metaphor to dramatize English/French relations (168). Pierre Vallières’ 1971 manifesto, *White Niggers of America*, for example, asserts that

[i]n Quebec [sic] the French Canadians are not subject to [the] irrational racism that has done so much wrong to the workers, white and black, of the United States. They can take no credit for that, since in Quebec there is no “black problem.” The liberation struggle launched by the American blacks nevertheless arouses growing interest among the French-Canadian population, for the workers of Quebec are aware of their condition as niggers, exploited men, second-class citizens. (21)

Clarke argues, in both his literary and critical work, that such tropes betray a “pugnacious and repugnant ethnocentrism” (“Liberalism” 177), while masking the multicultural nature of contemporary Québec; indeed, as *Québécoisité*’s Malcolm sings, “Québécois claim they’re ‘white niggers of America,’ / *Peut-être*, but I’m the Negro *nègre* of Québec!” (69). *Québécoisité* thus expands the “vistas of what it means to

<sup>7</sup> It must be noted, of course, that *Québécoisité* is a collaborative composition, with libretto by George Elliott Clarke and score by D.D. Jackson. For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the work as Clarke’s, but Jackson’s name is implied, too, throughout.

<sup>8</sup> Given that Clarke has been critiqued for essentializing Black Canadian belonging—Rinaldo Walcott, for example, argues that Clarke’s concept of African-Canadianité is tainted by nativism (14)—a look to *Québécoisité*’s hybrid aesthetics offers a more redemptive constructivist reading of Clarke’s critical work.

be [both] Québécois(e)” and Canadian (Clarke, CBC interview), as it “sounds” the presence of deterritorialized diasporic subjectivity. In other words, it provides space-specific political commentary, but documents the difficulties, for marginal figures, of negotiating belonging in this (or any) space.<sup>9</sup>

Further, Clarke’s political project in sonic form—his attempt to sound a hybrid Québécois(e) acoustic contravening xenophobic provincial ideologies—parallels the trajectory of Michel Serres’ theories of “dialogue.” Serres, too, frames discursive exchange orally/aurally; he suggests that “communication is a sort of game played by two interlocutors considered as united against the phenomena of interference and confusion,” and that successful dialogue involves the exclusion of the “third man” (*Philosophy and Science* 66-7). He frames this abject Other, by turns, as “demon,” “prosopopeia of noise,” (*Philosophy and Science* 67), “Harlequin,” (*Troubadour* 6), and “parasite” (*Troubadour* 44). Serres implies, however, that the parasite’s interventions are productive—a source, that is to say, of both “cacophon[y]” and improvisational “jamming” (*Philosophy and Science* 66).<sup>10</sup> *Québécoisité* reiterates this sentiment precisely, for it responds to French/English and federal/provincial debates surrounding Québec separatism that habitually exclude cultural Others (Jacques Parizeau’s vilification of “ethnic voters” comes to mind here); as Laxmi sings, “[A]ll Québécois must be white / Or [cannot] be Québécois, at least not quite” (67). Clarke counters these exclusions, inscribing a “Québécois(e) acoustic” that always already exceeds the bilingual. *Québécoisité*, that is to say, thinks sonically of cultural community, and is informed, therefore, by a variety of vocal lilt and cultural traditions; as Clarke notes in his Prelude to the opera’s libretto, “[the listener’s] ears must accept African strings, Asian brass, European percussion, [and] Aboriginal vocals” throughout (12). This acoustic hybridity reflects, moreover, the critical sentiments of Attali and Trinh, as it suggests that noise can be organized to social and political effect. If dominant discourses are audibly inscribed—if “sound matter [is] the herald of society” (Attali 5) (and one thinks, again, of Parizeau)—then acoustic space seems an appropriate medium for Clarke’s counter-discursive intervention.

As *Québécoisité* is, itself, a jazz opera, or generic blend, it stages border-crossings by its very definition. Opera, located historically as an aesthetic of European elite, is tempered, here, with “counter-cultural” musical modes. *Québécoisité* deploys, in particular, the “democratizing impulses of improvisational jazz” (D.D. Jackson, CBC

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in a globalized world marked by diasporic displacement, Clarke’s band of migrants and exiles might meet just as easily in London, Mumbai, or Sydney. This, again, suggests why *sound* remains central to *Québécoisité*—as contemporary culture is not transparently tied to visual space, Clarke’s characters must forge cross-cultural community acoustically.

<sup>10</sup> Françoise Lionnet also takes up this argument in her *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*—in discussing the autobiographies of Condé, Cardinal, Humbert, Augustine, Hurston, and Angelou, she suggests that these texts exist “thanks to interferences between contradictory strategies, not in spite of them,” and thereby re-values the “unfiltered, mumbled, ‘demonic’ mother tongue” (23).

interview).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, jazz, a form that originated in the United States around 1900, born of “ragtime and the blues . . . both in origin black musical idioms” (Townsend 3), has long contested the racially-inflected currency of “high culture.”<sup>12</sup> Anxieties about the political purchase of jazz have been made perpetually manifest in *genetic* accounts of African-American aesthetic; the “self-conscious aspects of black cultural production” (Porter xvii) are often occluded. Jazz, for example, was (in)famously maligned by Theodor Adorno as “naturally” fraught with “ideologies of primitivism and return to nature, with which it glorifies the musical underworld” (280) —a sentiment reiterating the logic of colonial racial “taxonomies” and historical synonymies of hybridity and miscegenation (Young 8; Papastergiadis 168). Notably, jazz, in its emphasis on improvisation (Murray 111), sonic individualism (Townsend 27), and interaction among audience and performer (Levine 433), is a fluid, participatory aesthetic that elides many Classical prohibitions; indeed, “the essence of jazz is the process of change itself” (DeVeaux 486). This is precisely the sentiment to which *Québécoisité* responds; in blending counter-discursive jazz motif with dominant operatic tradition, it ‘sounds’ the way to political inclusivity. Indeed, Clarke’s characters connect *sonically* — Malcolm and Colette, for example, fall in love while playing a piano duet (28-9). They counterpose their “parasitic” acoustic community to dichotomous provincial and federal dialogue: “If only English weren’t such anguish! / If only French were not so *gauche* . . . In *Franglais*[, therefore]—as in *joual*—my name’s Colette” (25).

Clarke’s soundscape, however, exceeds even the acoustic scope of this opera/jazz hybrid, as each of his characters voices distinct musical traditions. Laxmi’s solos resonate with the tonal shifts, arpeggios, and trills of ghazals and Punjabi folk songs, and Malcolm’s melodies incorporate African-American acoustics, fusing twelve-bar blues formations with elements of jazz, soul, and gospel. Ovide opens the opera with a round of scat singing—a technique pioneered by jazz greats Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway that hearkens, structurally, back to African-American field hollers (Floyd 117) —and then tempers jazz and blues riffs with pop sensibility, while Colette’s voice lends itself to experimental, avant-garde jazz motifs.<sup>13</sup> Notably, in Colette’s

<sup>11</sup> For further information on opera’s origins, and on “decoding” its musical messages, see Arjan van Baest’s *A Semiotics of Opera* (Delft: Eburon, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Though jazz is not, itself, a homogenous style, and has been variously produced over a wide range of times and places, there remain a number of common features that distinguish jazz from other musical modes (Townsend 2). Further, empirical evidence suggests that “there is indeed a distinct [albeit diverse] set of musical qualities which are [to some degree] an expression of the collective cultural values of peoples of African descent” (Wilson 83). I use the term “jazz” with these recognitions in mind. For a more comprehensive account of the politics and aesthetics of jazz, see Peter Townsend’s *Jazz in American Culture*, Eric Porter’s *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, and Robert O’Meally’s *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*.

<sup>13</sup> It has been noted that, throughout *Québécoisité*, women are asked predominantly to assume the burden of “acoustic ethnicity.” This observation, along with with the opera’s tendencies to fetishize the feminine and prescribe compulsory



case, *Québécoisité* foregoes stereotypical Orientalist formulations, and focuses, instead, on the counter-cultural currency of jazz in Communist China, where it was subject to official disapproval and labelled a “decadent foreign artform” (Rea, online): “A Communist comrade warned us / worshipping Freedom could be fatal, / so my Lincoln-minded parents, two pros adoring forbidden Ellington, / fled [to Canada] with all their hidden Ellington” (Clarke 26). While Clarke’s two pairings—Laxmi and Ovide, Colette and Malcolm—date, part ways, reconcile, and marry over the course of the opera’s three acts, their interactions allow for the synchrony and synthesis of these diverse sonic styles. The first time, for example, that the two duos appear in quartet, meeting apropos at the aptly-named La Révolution Tranquille, a performance of the Malcolm States Quartet ensues. This performance borrows melodically from African-American spirituals and lyrically from blues precedent, and is followed by improvisatory rhyming couplets adhering loosely to the ghazal’s metric requirements (Avachat, online), then by dialogic riffs on the “multiculti-Aboriginal-Semitic-Afro-Asian-Caucasian” origins of jazz aesthetics (36) and, finally, by a lyrical piano interlude. This scene is a cultural “callaloo confection” (Clarke 11); moreover, as diasporic dislocation yields ambivalent relationships to *place*, it foregrounds acoustic efforts to negotiate cultural affiliation.<sup>14</sup> (This exchange is situated, notably, in a nightclub owned by migrants, a space in which a “shrine to Chinese ancestors and deities” is juxtaposed with “1960s-era posters of . . . Martin Luther King, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Ho Chi Minh, René Lévesque, Fidel Castro, . . . Buffy Saint-Marie, . . . Leonard Cohen, . . . Ravi Shankar, [etc]” [23], and thus a space in which culture transgresses “the territory.”) Like Anzaldúa, then, Clarke’s characters respond to the psychodynamics of audition; even while they are visually “othered” in Canadian space, they manage to feel at home—however provisionally—by participating in particular kinds of sonic syncretism.

Instrumentally, too, *Québécoisité* stages acoustic hybridity, harmonizing a wide variety of cultural sonorities, and sounding, once again, Québec’s heterogeneity. Clarke’s libretto, along with D.D. Jackson’s score, dictates particular sets of instrumental interminglings

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heterosexuality, certainly warrants further thought, though I am unable to discuss these issues at length here. I would point out, however, that *Québécoisité* was penned with a particular cast in mind (Kiran Ahluwalia as Laxmi, Dean Bowman as Malcolm, Yoon Choi as Colette, and Haydain Neale as Ovide), and its roles were scored to reflect the sonic strengths of these performers. Since Ahluwalia typically records classical Indian songs, while Neale is a pop singer (formerly of *Jacksoul*), this might account, on a pragmatic level, for the foregrounding of Punjabi tradition and relative scarcity of Haitian musical material.

<sup>14</sup> *Québécoisité* is, as this reference suggests, also a *visually* rich performance; Clarke’s stage directions call for elaborate sets, props, and costuming, and there is, of course, dialogue between acoustic and visual elements throughout. In performance, though, these posters and other visual icons play a sensory second fiddle to the opera’s sounds, as they are not often readily accessible to all audience members. Further, Clarke’s sets are generally chosen either for their Canadian political resonance (the Château Frontenac), or their seeming liminality (a dark, dank jazz club); ultimately, then, the opera’s cultural syncretism is negotiated primarily in an acoustic register.

as counterpoint to the opera's vocal exchanges. After the two couples marry in the opera's final act, for example, and exit together on Vespa scooters, "church bells, horns, sitar, Chinese violin (p'i-p'a), harmonium, harp, tabla, and thumb piano commix" (92). Such auditory multiculturalism, asserted "before the gleaming Le Château Frontenac" (91), responds to the habitual exclusion of citizens of colour from provincial dialogue; as Laxmi sings, "'*La peau brune, mais le coeur québécois*'? / Tell that to the 'pure laine' Québécois!" (66). Further, Clarke draws lexically, throughout *Québécoisité*, upon English, French, Italian (26), African-American vernacular (31), Latin (41), Hindi (42), Yiddish (46), German (52), Algonquin (67), and Gaelic (88), and this linguistic creolization affords his libretto a rhythmic lyricism that far exceeds the bilingual: "Impure houri, of impudent pudenda, / Imprudently satisfy hetaerae agenda" (66). In his Prelude to *Québécoisité*, Clarke suggests that his stanzas are "sculpted of the aggravated *gravitas* of Miles Davis's trumpet, the salacious solace of James Brown's howls, the fearless *laissez-faire* of Oscar Peterson's piano, and the oceanic *négritude* of Portia White's contralto" (11). Similarly, his poems in *Whylah Falls* are self-professedly indebted to the musical "tints" of gospel, blues, and jazz (WF 157); even in textual form, that is to say, his vibrant verse echoes diverse musics.

While Clarke often celebrates creolization and cross-cultural exchange, he also sounds the *difficulties* of such exchange. Indeed, he himself has noted that, throughout *Québécoisité*, "race" both divides and unifies (CBC interview). Malcolm's musical stylings, for example, are eventually unwelcome at *La Révolution Tranquille*, the night club at which he was once a regular performer—a function of the disapproval of Colette's parents, the club owners, who dream of "golden, Chinese grandchildren," and condemn their daughter's "lavish Love" (70). Malcolm's response to this sentiment—"Loving you is like, like, Heaven and a lynching! / Pops abandoned Tennessee to flee such flinching!" (70)—articulates the latent dangers of border-crossing, and suggests that cultural syncretism is frequently fraught with social, political, and economic inequalities (Coombes and Brah 1). Even *Québécoisité*'s rather festive conclusion is of cautious tenor; though the two couples wed, no parents are present, and Clarke's characters are left professing that "states, parents, gods, / must have no say: / Love is a tyrannical democracy" (92). Clarke suggests, moreover, that these reconciliations may be merely provisional; in interview, he offers "[no] promise[s] these [marriages] will work out" (CBC interview). Consequently, the sonic hybridity *Québécoisité* foregrounds is not unadulteratedly positive; harmony, here, is often offset by acoustic clash. The seventh scene of Canto II, marking Malcolm and Colette's break-up, for example, is highly discordant; its "funk groove" (D.D. Jackson, CBC interview) is punctuated by screams, howls, irregular rhythms, and interruptions of melodic arc, while Malcolm's lines—"Pops . . . motorcycled to Nova Scotia, / Affianced, married, an Afro-Mi'kmaq madonna"—and Colette's cries—"Must I just destroy my parents' hearts?" (70)—are obscured by lyrical overlap. *Québécoisité* asserts, therefore, that in negotiating "fusion sound cultures" (Seidler

407), disparate traditions are often dissonant. This ambivalence reflects Clarke's inbuilt recognition of the contemporary critical view that "celebratory aspects of hybridity criticism . . . have a tendency to occlude [loss], and thus to hinder the cultural work of hybridity" (Isernhagen 44). Indeed, *Québécois* stages, instead, hybridity's "interrogative effects," as it locates, to borrow a phrase from Ien Ang, a "fundamental *uneasiness* in our global condition of togetherness-in-difference" (198; 200).

*Québécois* reiterates the sonic sentiments of Michel Serres, who identifies his "third man" or "half-breed" with the figure of the musical troubadour—one whose sound is composed of "pieces or instruments . . . combined, sometimes harmonized, often quarrelsome, always plaintive, hurly-burly, charivari, atonal acouphenics from which, on rare occasions, the streaming Aphrodites of musical inspiration—or a pure cry of pain—emerge" (*Troubadour* 148-9). *Québécois* sounds both cultural affiliations and antagonisms; in so doing, it recognizes that contemporary cultural community exceeds the confines of "bounded space" (Papastergiadis 116). It effects, therefore, an epistemic deviation from visuospatial rhetoric, and situates cultural collectivity in sonic space—a sphere "without fixed boundaries" (McLuhan 67). Moreover, *Québécois* pursues a particular political project: in staging cross-cultural romance with Québec City as backdrop, and thereby articulating a "hybrid acoustic," it contravenes the xenophobia frequently underscoring discourses of Québec nationalism and asserts the presence, both provincially and nationally, of diasporic subjectivity. Ultimately, by sounding auditory multiculturalism, *Québécois* champions ideological inclusivity; as Clarke himself remarks, this production professes that "Québec belongs to everyone, including citizens of colour" (CBC interview).

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