

Introduction | The Sound of Resistance

In 2009, the Eurozone threatened an already reeling world economy. In the heart of the throng protesting at Syntagma Square in Athens was a sensory inundation of Greek fervor and conviction. The rhythmic chanting of two slogans in unison, each set to the traditional Greek rhythm of *dekapentasyllavos*, was like a pulsating drumbeat echoing off the buildings, a tangible reminder of shared Greek identity and centuries of cultural heritage. In this cacophony, the meaning behind the chants became an audible roar of demand. The resonating sounds carried an imperative force, echoing through the winding city streets, amplifying the collective will of the Greek people against their perceived oppression. The voices crescendoed and then faded, while the moments of silence held a palpable tension, almost like a deep breath before the next surge of verbal outcry. An undertone of grit and desperation imbued the chants with raw intensity, underscoring the seriousness of the protesters' demands. In the labyrinthine heart of old Athens, every concrete wall vibrated with the impassioned cries of the protesters, elevating the event to a visceral experience that resonated in the witnesses' core.

The protests arose in response to Greece's rising deficit. As one of the European Union member countries that had adopted the euro, Greece had stopped receiving foreign investment, causing their deficits to soar. Countries might ordinarily devalue their currency to remediate this problem, but the transnational nature of the euro put this option outside their control. As the unequal accumulation of debt threatened to tank the euro, the European Union acted swiftly with nongovernmental actors, such as the International Monetary Fund, to design a plan to balance Greece's debt-to-income ratio. Yet soon after, the 2009 Greece national elections brought the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) to power on the promise of extending social benefits. The PASOK was almost immediately forced to implement a strict austerity program, widely

blamed on the German government for refusing to lend Greece more money. The vice president, Theodoros Pangalos, warned that tanks would be required to secure banks if austerity measures were not passed. This reminded several Greeks of the military dictatorship known as “the Colonel’s Junta,” which ruled from 1967 to 1974. On May 2, 2010, Greece officially adopted an economic adjustment program, which enacted an austerity package that significantly curtailed social service programs.

The subsequent cuts and a 27 percent unemployment rate spawned public resistance, such as protests outside the Greek parliament in Syntagma Square on June 28 and 29, 2011. One of the primary protest chants called out the vice president of the PASOK: “Παλιοφασίστα Πάγκαλε μας απειλεις με βία μαζί με την απόλυση και την ανεργία” (“Dirty fascist Pangalos, you threaten us with violence along with dismissal and unemployment”). Another said, “Η Χούντα δεν τελείωσε το ’73 εμείς θα την κηδέψουμε σε τούτη την πλατεία” (“The Junta did not end in ’73. We are going to bury it in this square”).¹ These slogans, which were also painted on walls, expressed the view that the government no longer represented the will of the people.

The Syntagma Square protest provides a representative anecdote for what I call a “sound tactic,” which is the sound (adjective) use of sound (noun) in the act of demanding. The protesters at Syntagma Square were not making a request; by the time a group uses a sound tactic, all other communication channels have been exhausted, leaving the group no option but to insist on the legitimacy of its rights. Sound tactics attempt to constitute a group opposing a powerful institution obligated to enact their demands but that cannot be trusted to do so without public pressure. In this case, the protesters used sound to remind audiences of the relationship between the people and the government. The Greek people voted for leaders based on their promises and believed those leaders had a moral duty to deliver. The sentiment of this moral duty existed as a kind of ineffable feeling. This would be sound because it satisfies the necessary conditions—chief among them being that it rendered the nature of the demand audible; if an interlocutor cannot hear, you cannot create an obligation. But since there is no way the members of parliament could reasonably deny hearing them, it made an intersubjective relationship between them, which allowed for local normative roles and responsibilities so meta-deliberation could occur. The sounds marked a crucial distinction about what it means to be Greek, including questions of who is owed what and what it means to be democratic. These questions are visceral; they escape full capture in any textual representation.

We need additional context to understand how the Greek protest chants functioned as robust demands. In their analysis of this protest, Dimitris Serafis, E. Dimitris Kitis, and Argiris Archakis note that both slogans are “constituted by two iambic 15-meter parts (*dekapentasyllavos*),” which is “a general feature of many protest slogans, resonating with Greece’s traditional demotic (popular) songs sung (and danced) in chorus at family, community and cultural events.”² Nina Topintzi and Stefano Versace further explain that *dekapentasyllavos* spans “several centuries and poetic genres, including folk songs, medieval and early modern vernacular poetry, as well as much learned Byzantine writing in the ceremonial and exegetical traditions.”³ For those who grew up in Greece, this meter is familiar, as it has been carried across time through the oral tradition. The *dekapentasyllavos* interpolates an audience through a shared sense of time and place in Greek culture as a sound tactic. It conjures feelings of a Greek identity that rejects foreign rule. To be Greek involves commitments to the shared language, land, religion, and food, as well as some shared values, all woven through the *dekapentasyllavos*.

The sound speaks to the immediate presence of the specifically Greek people and the strength of their convictions; it was proof that they had managed to come together, seizing the window of time to enact their rights. The dense city center of Athens provided the ideal acoustics to amplify this feeling. The force of the protest reverberated off buildings and spread across the streets. People came out, chanted, and protested the cuts for two days. At times, friction erupted into moments of violence as police and citizens clashed in the streets. As an old city that emerged in the times of an oral society and became increasingly dense, the walls of the Plaka provided ideal spaces to write the lyrics so anyone could come to participate and join the assemblage of bodies. The hard concrete wall invited waveforms to vibrate and propagate across a downtown metroplex, and the labyrinthine structure enabled the reverberations to grow and amplify. The concrete obscured the source of any individual sound, creating an affect of *the Greek people* demanding to be heard. The sounds of the protesters—a unified, sensory collective—represented a presence that demanded accountability from the people in parliament. The event exerted its presence in news cycles for the broader international community, thus participating in a more expansive political spectacle.

The protest merged form and content because the ability of sound to gather audiences under a collective identity was integral to the protesters’ argument. Their overall argument was straightforward:

1. Greek people are entitled to their social benefits.
2. If the state was cutting its social benefits, then it was fascist because it no longer represented their will.

But the function of the chants was less to generate reasoned dialogue about this stated proposition and more to constitute the Greek people as a collective presence. The government could not be trusted to make the right choice, so they must be forced to concede to the people's will. The Greek people, warranted from *dekapentasyllavos*, felt they must demonstrate how significantly the PASOK violated procedure. The PASOK promised to represent the people, and they broke that promise. The very people they voted for betrayed them, so any process for remediation would be called into question. This underwrote the substance of the protesters' claim that "right makes might"—the idea that the person making the demand occupies the moral high ground on an issue. Thus, an ideal moral tension emerged: any attempt by the PASOK to disrupt the protesters' voices with force only served to cede more of the moral high ground to the protesters.

Ultimately, the Greek parliament passed the austerity measures, and more instability followed. The textual slogans persisted on the walls as a reminder and future invocation. This performative sound tactic redesigned the communication environment and changed people's relationship with the Greek parliament. There were debates about what it meant to be Greek, who qualified for benefits, and the duty of the government. This mode of address created a set of relationships that distributed responsibilities and obligations between parliament and the people. Long after the Syntagma Square protest ended, the tactics that animated them persisted.

A *dekapentasyllavos* provides a classic example of a topos, a commonplace from which one draws arguments in rhetorical invention. The Greek chant provides an index of public feelings from which others might draw when advocating in public. Yet this topos is unique in how sound draws attention to temporal dimensions and things like rhythm, reverberation, and velocity. Unlike other topoi, the experience moves along a logic of intensity, in which the audience experiences how near the Greek people were based on the experience in time. For the Greek people, a mixture of all three dimensions gave *dekapentasyllavos* its unique character; the rhythm of the chant imbued it with meaning, the reverberation from the acropolis ensured the people felt more salient than before, and the quickness from which it emerged drove home the urgency of their plight. For spectators worldwide, the presence of the Greek people was felt

in the rhymes of a *dekapentasyllavos* as it echoed off the dense urban acropolis, was transduced into newspaper headlines, and flickered across the public screen as a short segment on news networks.⁴

However, these tactics do not owe allegiance to any specific ideological stance but instead offer topoi to propel a variety of reasons. This principle is echoed in the notion that the misuse of valuable assets, including the power of speech, can lead to harm. Just as Aristotle suggests in his treatise on rhetoric, complemented by an emphasis on wisdom, the effective use of such assets requires ethical judgment. For instance, the *dekapentasyllavos* became a rallying cry for the far-right extremist group Golden Dawn to cast out immigrants. Here the power of speech, a fundamentally valuable asset, was employed not with wisdom and ethical consideration but as a tool for division. For Golden Dawn, this expression of what it means to be Greek became a way to sonically define us (the Greeks) against them (the immigrants). This example starkly illustrates how, when used correctly, assets like speech can bring immense benefits, yet when misused, they can cause significant damage. The ethical dimension of using such powerful tools underscores the necessity of integrating wisdom into our discourse, aiming to harness the potential of our assets for constructive rather than destructive ends.

This book is about the sounds made by those seeking change, how those people make a decision that is itself sound, and the possibilities that sounds offer us in our drive to hold those in power accountable. We live in an era marked by an increasing number of diverse social movements, all utilizing sound tactics to voice their demands. This intriguing use of sound ranges across the social and political spectrum, from the activities driven by President Trump's followers to the impassioned calls for justice and equality by Black Lives Matter activists. This spans the globe and goes beyond the confines of the nation-state and its citizens to implicate the flows of global capitalism and transnational networks. Understanding these sound tactics and their implications is not only fascinating but essential if we are to comprehend the underlying dynamics that shape our world today. The way we understand social movements as presences that manifest in everyday life provides an essential way to negotiate everyday politics. In this book, I delve into these phenomena, elucidating the profound ways sound is employed to convey and amplify demands and structure conversation, argument, and deliberation within these movements. This analysis offers invaluable insights into how movements use sound to engage with institutions, construct shared identities, and negotiate the public screen. But to understand

how sound can be deployed tactically, we must first understand the rhetoric of sound.

Under What Conditions Can Sound Be Rhetorical?

The word “sound” in *Sound Tactics* serves a dual function. As a social practice, a sound tactic involves an agent using sound to pressure an addressee to accede. Additionally, the tactic must be intentional and morally grounded. In the complete sense, a sound tactic results from an agent under constraint using sound (adjective) judgment to implement sound (noun) to realize a goal. Sound tactics are not strictly instrumental—sometimes they work, sometimes they do not—but since the nature of the demand is moral, they prompt a moral debate that can lead to recurring social movements. A social movement here can beget policy change, cultural categories, reevaluation of values, or other just social change. My gambit is that those sound tactics exert force to constrain the available moves that populate an argumentative ecology that enables and constrains a rich set of deliberative possibilities.

The first definition of sound is a noun that can be heard and felt. Such a definition places sound firmly in the realm of the phenomenological. There is no universal definition of sound but rather a culturally contingent understanding; one person might consider something noise, while another group might find it rich with meaning. This understanding of sound comes from a tradition of media theory that I discuss in the next section. Suffice it to say that this tradition recognizes that sound is a “durational” object that bundles together many sensations into a whole. Sounds can come from everywhere; we are immersed in them throughout our day.

There are several ways of defining “tactics,” but something that unifies them is an emphasis on intention. Yet a more substantial discussion of a tactic comes from teasing out the difference between a strategy and a tactic. In his treatise on the practice of everyday life, Michel de Certeau distinguishes a strategy from a tactic by orienting them along the lines of unequal power relations between agents and institutions. While a strategy comes from a place of “will and power,” the tactic “has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.”⁵ In other words, tactics invoke a power relationship where the agent does not occupy a place of power and must “constantly manipulate

events to turn them into ‘opportunities.’”⁶ So, when the agent undertakes their goal, they undertake significant risk because they already operate at a power deficit. If your opponent has more power, you look for ways to harness that power to your advantage.

The practical judgment these agents use to turn events into opportunities raises a second definition of sound, an adjective: “showing or based on good judgment,” which comes from the rhetorical tradition of exercising reason. It describes how an agent might audit their potential options when deciding how they want to advance an argument. While rhetoric and argument can be conflated, they are not the same. An argument can be considered an inferential relationship between a claim and data. Rhetoric, on the other hand, describes an inquiry into the available means of persuasive options. As a specific method, rhetoric audits the underlying contingent conditions to identify how agents might leverage familiar tropes to reach practical goals. Critical to this perspective is an agent with the capacity to make choices. While it is impossible to generate predictive claims, this method notes similarities that yield better choices. The rhetorical approach to argumentation produces *topoi* (or places), which helps us think about responses for generic situations.

Sounds

If sound tactics are how agents leverage sound against institutions, then “sound” as a noun provides the qualitative experience to underwrite a tactic. The concept of a “sound object” stakes out particular ground in definitional debates in sound studies. My definition of sound comes from a tradition of experimental music (*musique concrete*) that diverged from *hearing* sound simply as the indicator of something else; for example, “What’s that?” “That’s the sound of a door.” Instead, this tradition seeks to experiment with bracketing the origins of a sound to consider the experience itself. For instance, we do not hear street noise in the chant of the opening anecdote but an attribution to the Greek people themselves. The specific site of the sound allows us to listen to *the Greek people* standing up and demanding change. Crucially, this provides the capacity to build indexical relationships between sign and signified.

From this tradition, sounds are not static entities. They index multiple dimensions (e.g., vibrations, electromagnetic waves, verbal inputs) to create a sensory experience holistically and link them to ideological structures. This process enlists

public categories to help make sense of vibrations as narrative wholes. For instance, consider when a foley artist (the person who creates nonmusical sounds for movies) decides how to craft the sound for a scene. They must draw from publicly available resources, such as cultural assumptions and iconic sonic representations (synecdoche, perhaps). If someone wanted to place a podcast scene in a harbor—and get the audience to accept that it is a harbor—they might select a sample of “/foghorn/,” a sound that culturally signals “we’re in a harbor now.” The association of foghorns and harbors is not the domain of the private individual but the product of general, contingent rhetorical categories. The capacity for hearing what feels like foghorns comes from public resources that associate foghorns, harbors, and expectations of the deep, resonant tones that associate the two. These ideas go beyond foghorns, moving up the ladder of abstraction to encompass the style of events, periods, and moods. Sound can provide a register to operate on feelings. Many sounds seem to help the public recognize an emergency (siren), cue a period of history (harpichord), or modulate collective mood (the orchestral swell in a movie).

Tia DeNora’s research extensively explores how sound can “get into action” of everyday life. For DeNora, sound provides an essential set of preexisting social resources that agents rely on to guide social interaction and define the contours of the agency.⁷ She argues that sound functions as an ideological apparatus, effectively ordering the social. Through extensive interviews with participants about their music consumption habits, she concludes that as auditors move through space, “the audio-environment is thus part of what actors refer to in their reflexive monitoring of situations; it is one of the things that actors may consider to determine what is, should or could be going on.”⁸ Sound configures an embedded and embodied environment that agents rely on to make decisions on how to comport themselves, attune their energy, and dictate conduct. Unsurprisingly, it is strategically employed in places from the restaurant that plays the most incredible music to brand itself hip to an airplane that selects instrumentals to welcome passengers and soothe anxieties.

Take one of DeNora’s interview subjects, Jennifer, a young woman who wanted to organize a party into a more mature event.⁹ The party, we are told, is not like the other ones Jennifer experienced with loud music, cheap beer, and snacks; this one featured pretty music in different languages, mixed drinks, and desserts. Critical to setting the right tone for this party was her choice of contemporary “music in other languages,” which exhibited social capital that was

meaningful to her guests, “commensurate with their values of glamour, relaxed pace, sophistication, and romance.”¹⁰ Listening to music in other languages suggested a worldliness that set the tone for the event. For uncertain party guests, the materiality of the contemporary music also determined their conduct. For listeners, the notes conjured images of faraway lands they might one day visit and a sense of refined class characteristics that signify world travelers. If you are supposed to act like a worldly traveler, then the energy of the composition, coupled with sensations of worldliness, invites polite conversation and regulated conduct. An attendee dancing might seem a significant norm violation in such a setting, perhaps even drawing scorn. Music brings together materially produced vibrations with culturally acquired cachet. Form and content inseparably contextualize how to act.

Jennifer’s musical ambience is simple enough, but the question of governing large-scale social spaces becomes much more difficult. Here, in the cacophonous environment of the public screen, any intentionally planned sonic act must compete with the noises of everyday life. Publics comprise distributed, vibrating assemblages vying for dominance across different times and spaces. These assemblages are linked to disparate horizontal, transitional networks that disseminate constantly. More so than ever, humans absorb sounds from an enormous arena of unknown sources. What Jennifer experiences is emblematic of how we engage media generally and what is called “the acousmatic situation” in our media environment. Combined with the proliferative condition of sound reproduction and recording, it highlights how contemporary technology constantly dislocates, relocates, and colocates sounds and bodies within temporary aural configurations. Even if listeners cannot identify a sound’s source, it has an infinitely reproducible set of indexical experiences.

Sound Bodies

In today’s age, the indeterminacy of sonic sources often prompts us to engage in imaginative supplementation; we attribute transcendental qualities or an active role to the origin of the sound. This disconnection between sound and its source generates a sense of tension and intrigue as listeners are left to visualize the unseen source. Though this concept may seem abstract, it’s deeply intertwined with everyday experiences. Consider watching a movie with a voice-over. As we

hear a voice, we instinctively visualize its corresponding body. Even if we lack knowledge of the speaker's physical appearance, our minds automatically populate the void with a physical form.

When faced with sounds whose sources are not visually apparent, such as the vague roar of a crowd, we instinctively fill the void with attributes born from our imagination. This type of unseen source—a presence to which we attribute sound—is what Brian Kane, in his book *Sight Unseen*, calls the “sonic body” (or a body that makes sound). The term “body” here evokes the presence we attribute to human agents. These agents are not limited to physical visibility and occupy a realm where the auditory can evoke the presence of the supernatural, from ghosts to deities. Their characteristics—shape, size, and presence—are subject to our imagination, often assuming an omnipresent or even panoptic nature, leaving us to wonder about their distance, magnitude, and the extent of their presence. The sound body is our imaginative response to auditory cues, painting vivid, often meaningful narratives when the source remains unseen or unknown.

Kane discusses an intriguing phenomenon occurring near Moodus, a quaint village in East Haddam, Connecticut, famous for its mysterious underground rumblings and tremors. The name “Moodus” originates from “Machemoodus,” a term from the indigenous Wangunk people meaning “Place of Noises.” The noises, initially believed to be caused by volcanic activity and subterranean vibrations, remain unverified and open to interpretation due to their unseen sources. Kane explores a spectrum of explanations, from spiritual and religious beliefs to natural scientific phenomena like seismic activity, gas dynamics, electricity, chemical reactions, magma movement, and geological shifts. Each theory reflects the cultural lens through which it is viewed, with Native Americans interpreting the sounds as the voices of gods, while European settlers pondered a mix of natural and supernatural explanations. The enigmatic nature of these sounds and their unclear origins encourage the imaginative construction of agents, whether they be spirits, gods, or natural forces.

I need to be clear: the experience of sound bodies is not the metaphysics of presence that Jacques Derrida warns about. But the creation of sound reproduction technologies can be used to structure unique relationships of absence and presence. Derrida explains that there isn't a singular, unmediated route to experience the “true reality” that preexisted language. He argues that the notion of having a direct, more authentic access to experience is false. Every method of

experiencing life is an intricate organization of absence and presence, or spacing, of durational intervals. But these different organizations are always already culturally determined. In other words, in a unit of experience there are always complex cultural codes of signification that enable some things to appear salient and meaningful and others not. Although the modes may change, the influence of culture does not.

Instead of a metaphysics the experience of listening to acousmatic sound creates the feeling of sound intersects with what Joshua Gunn calls “presence affects.”¹¹ He argues that presence affects emerge through the body’s keeping track of cultural experience (the body keeps score) and how it draws from those embodied memories to interpret the present. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, Gunn writes, “Taking into account the Afterwards [*sic*] of understanding, it may be that what we mean by ‘presence’ is simply another word for affect, an experience of body-in-feeling before the fixity of representation. Presence.”¹² When we feel a presence, that is the product of us making meaning out of an event that has passed. This relies on rhetorical categories that provide internal durational spacing. In other words, we know how we feel about something only after the event happens and we can attribute causality and cut out an agent, starting a chain of events.

Gunn’s analysis of Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) serves as a compelling justification for the nuanced existence of presence affects where recordings purportedly capture voices of the deceased. EVP showcases how sound, especially recorded sound, can evoke a profound sense of presence from what is fundamentally an absence—the voices of the dead. When examining the rhetorical process, he found EVP relied on a complex procedure that involved priming, attribution, expert testimony, and audio to create sonic bodies. Yet there is affectivity that accompanies it, the designation of presence that endows it with significant rhetorical power. Through EVP, listeners report experiencing a range of emotional responses, from comfort and nostalgia to unease and fear, triggered by the apparent return of a voice from the past. These responses underscore the capacity of sound to store and mobilize past experiences in ways that are felt in the present. The very act of playing back EVP recordings manifests how sound can structure unique relationships of absence and presence, demonstrating that presence is not solely a matter of physical or temporal immediacy but deeply imbued with memory, emotion, and the ineffable.

As I will explain more in the second chapter, the acousmatic situation gives a generalizable presupposition that we never know the exact origin of a sound. When streams of broadcasts are grounded in signals like television, radio, podcast, and streaming, this provides a way to make sense of the infinitely reproduced world. We can never know the origin of the source because defining any one cause is an arbitrary cut. Yet as different causes come together, listeners are invited to speculate and imagine the origin—the body that causes the sounds (or the sound body)—that operates as a presence behind the public screen.

Although the sound body is unbounded, it conveys the immediacy, proximity, and urgency typically associated with a physical presence. The ascription of agency means these bodies can have intention, make demands, undertake responsibility, and confer burdens. Sound bodies can help us understand our digital environment, where the agency is distributed across various devices. These elusive entities possess seemingly divine powers, occupying all-seeing vantage points without being seen. Despite remaining unseen, sound bodies wield extraordinary power and exist beyond the public's gaze, exhibiting omnipresent, panoptic abilities. Some of the ways they may have impact include the immersive capacities and proximity of an experience. The larger-than-life entities can be on the periphery of everyday life or at other times intimately in the center.

Like the social movements I discuss in this book, sound bodies are unrestricted to individuals. As social movement studies aptly demonstrate, agents are not sole speakers but can include collectivities, assemblages, and other formations. This means that social movements are far more than just the product of a person but involve constitutive elements. Michael C. McGee demonstrates that social movement is *rhetorical all the way down*. Instead of focusing on a preexisting leader addressing a predefined audience using rhetoric as a tool to bring about an end, the entire process is understood as rhetorical. In a world where sound bodies create an unseen agent, unconstrained by physical limits, we see an interesting parallel with the abstract nature of social movements. Like sound bodies, social movements—the “agents” in this context—are more than their physical, visible components, such as protest marches or dynamic speakers. They exist beyond the individuals that make them up, constituting collective identities and causes that solely their visual aspects can't define. Therefore, sound bodies challenge our conventional understanding of agency, pushing us to consider how agency exceeds physical visibility and recognize the transcendent qualities of sound in a social movement's abstract collective identity. Using sound bodies to understand social movements gives an analytic language

to describe how these agents gain a presence with the potential to exist anywhere and everywhere.

The sound body provides a way to register political agents outside the sight of the public screen or the public square. Consider the context of our opening Greek anecdote where agency, size, and feeling of the protest were attributed to cacophonous sound rather than just images flickering across the screen and graffiti on the wall. Each place provides a coordinate of everyday life that constellates the sensual salience of the event. In other words, *the tactic creates the conditions for how a sound body is felt*. This is a dynamic relationship that changes over time as each tactic might be deployed. There is an intimacy between the different demands and the presence that exerts their force through each tactic. Diverse media assemblages carry this presence across networks. For some, the Greek people are felt immediately as they move through Athens; for others, their presence reverberates through transnational media networks as part of the nightly news, muting its impact. In this book, I explore how these sounds and their associated feelings might add up to some broader set of tools for social movements and their implications for sound studies, rhetoric, and argumentation.

In the chapters ahead, the sound tactics I examine create imaginative conditions for the auditor to constitute the source of the sound; in other words, a physical sound chosen with appropriate contextual judgment can build the structure of feelings for a listener to identify an agent. The sound thus participates in constructing a collective speaker, allowing social movements to define the value and normative terrain of their demand. As I will demonstrate, whether it is the institution of the school, the family, or the government listening to the demand matters, as this impacts the moral terms of the discussion. The constraint of being a specific agent helps define the institutions' obligations, allowing the sound body to identify when they have exhausted all the normal means of seeking justice. Agents can use sound to shift the imagined body to a space beyond the perception of everyday life, enabling them to be everywhere and nowhere. It gives them extra power as they create a narrative tension with the substance of their claim that "right makes might."

Sound Reasoning

The practice of making an argument involves the social act of offering a premise and a conclusion. Several relationships between an audience and a speaker can

constitute an argument encounter, from increasing someone's adherence to a set of beliefs to surmounting another's reasonable doubt. But what makes an argument sound rather than just valid? The term *validity* comes from logic, which involves abstracting symbols away from the social and making a mathematical determination of whether the conclusion is entailed in the premises.¹³ While validity can be assessed through the form of an argument, soundness is a different kind of property. Soundness is a holistic assessment of whether an argument is good or good *for something*: soundness represents a pragmatic judgment about whether an argument holds together. Therefore, there is an inevitable social component to soundness. This social component can be considered in different ways.

One way we can judge an argument is through its function to regulate disagreements; this view is characteristic of the "dialectical" approach associated with the Amsterdam School of Argumentation.¹⁴ Dialectical schools of thought assume that people enter into dialogue to exchange arguments and resolve their differences of opinion. This picture of social life shows that people can come together as neutral, deliberating subjects and persuading one another through objective, rational reasoning. If someone interrupts or exits this process, that person would be considered unreasonable. The underwriting assumption is that people naturally want to cooperate, and questions of power and privilege will not intervene in how arguments are heard. In this analysis, we can figure out what a North Star might be and use it to determine the best judgments, providing a framework for decision-making.

Yet this account, despite its attractions, is only abstractly social and doesn't apply to many contexts.¹⁵ Argumentation is an emergent, self-regulating activity where people will debate what counts as a good argument, assert their definition of what should be in a proposal, and even challenge who counts as an expert.¹⁶ We do, of course, have discourses, codified over diachronic time, that situate the synchronic exchanges. A fuller account would situate arguers in an institutional, social, and political context (this was, in part, the project of rhetoric in the late twentieth century). The holistic judgment of soundness then references the multiple commitments of the social worlds in which argument happens. The debate that happens occurs within a broader ecological set of discourses that adds a public and institutional dimension to the dialogic structures—it's not just that this person I'm talking to has a burden of rejoinder; it's also that those large institutions, in the right setting, may as well.

This is all to say that arguments do not happen *ex nihilo*, and arguers do not operate in a vacuum; their place within a social infrastructure recognizes

implicitly that they operate within a chain of other commitments. This position recognizes that people live within intersubjective agreements that exert influence on how people act. These are generated from several commitments in formal places like the institutional structures that guide our social lives and informal areas like agreements during interactions. *Sound* as an adjective includes people making decisions by surveying the local normative terrain while attending to the shifting circumstances; it is a pragmatic, phronetic perspective that explores the banal practices that ordinary people use to self-regulate their disagreements. Indeed, in everyday conversation, simple speech acts such as accusing, proposing, and demanding all modify a chain of commitments that draw from local normative expectations. Making a sound argument is about developing a prudent practice that aligns the means of persuasion with the responsibilities of operating within a set of local commitments. When an agent acts, groups become constituted, obligations are met, and risks are distributed.

For arguers to display good judgment, their intent matters. After all, for it to be wise, it must be purposeful. In making an argument, a speaker is responsible for advancing a position they believe they can defend—something they can act on—and inviting the listener to trust them. As a social act, arguing generates a set of duties and responsibilities that create conditions for judgments, and judgment, perhaps most importantly, asks how to *situate* something in a constantly shifting social and institutional landscape. The critical first step is to determine how different claims can be rendered into other value priorities in a contrasting agonistic field to enable politics to happen in the first place. When the Greek citizens showed up to demand change, their intent was transparent. They conjured the public memory of the Junta of 1973 and constituted the Greek people *within that framework* to clearly define the affective stakes for the terrain of the deliberation. The narrative tension for the government was placing them between the people and the global financial system; memories of past use of government force provided additional context, further constraining the options for how parliament might respond.

Good judgment is an area of virtue in a world of constrained agency that allows agents to navigate toward an ostensibly virtuous goal in a social arena composed of shifting forces that link culture, power, markets, and governments. We live in a world of flickering devices, TikTok, vibes, and distractions. It is sometimes hard to believe that we all occupy the same time space. This may be because manifold time spaces proliferate, fragmenting, sphering, and propagating distinct worlds and experiences. This worldview assumes that communication does not start with

dialogue—two people coming together in debate and deliberation—instead, an idea comes from the speaker (in some cases both the person and the device), out into the air, and lands on any vast number of listeners. In a world of mass-mediated dissemination, the speaker and listener can quickly become disassociated and unable to cocreate operational norms. Ultimately, a group's agency emerges under those moments of constraint when it can tactically make a demand.

I claim that sound and soundness are two sides of a rhetorical coin. Sound (the adjective) attends to how an agent attunes their commitments and obligations in each situation, and sound (the noun) is how that agent communicates them. We must gather the attention to make the demand and consider how making new reasons apparent might create opportunities for new loci of conversations. So, when we think about soundness, the larger question comes from how we judge the choices, given the constrained menu of options. Just like there are only so many ways sound, as a noun, can be made, there are only so many paths available to an actor, given the local constraints. Soundness involves a capacity for practical judgment, or “*phronesis*,” but it is perhaps more accurate to say that soundness requires *phronesis* (like formal proof requires reason). *Phronesis* has a long cultural history stretching from the Sophists to the Aristotelians, through Rome and the Renaissance, and even to now.

Amid this backdrop of digital fragmentation, protesters adeptly navigate through the clutter using the very mechanisms that disperse attention to concentrate focus. The acousmatic nature of their tactics—where the source of a message or sound is unseen—plays into their hands, allowing them to craft and project powerful identities and messages without a centralized point of origin. This approach capitalizes on the digital era's essence, where voices can emerge from anywhere, anytime, resonating across the globe without a fixed location. In leveraging the acousmatic situation, protesters exploit the fragmented digital landscape to create omnipresent narratives. These narratives can surface on various platforms simultaneously, creating a sense of ubiquity and immediacy. The obscured origins of these messages make them more intriguing and compelling, prompting audiences to engage more deeply as they try to piece together the source and the full story.

Tactical Demands

Speaking in public provides an ordinary means of organizing how we think about everyday life; it illustrates how we undertake responsibilities, confer obligations,

and make commitments.¹⁷ In her essay on how speech acts structure the prospect for argumentation, Jean Goodwin demonstrates the potential of the practice of someone offering a plan to change the plans. In such a case, Goodwin explains, the speech promises to meet a “substantial burden of proof” required to alter the status quo; this normative obligation confers a cue upon the listener that they can reasonably accept claims made by the speaker and assume that “her proposal could withstand critical scrutiny.”¹⁸ The proposal establishes a communication environment that helps define the roles of the speaker and audience, the substance of the discussion, and the rules for the conversation. She contrasts this to gossiping sharply, when “a speaker expressly waives a commitment to veracity and even sincerity,” which organizes an entirely different social interaction.¹⁹ Conversation types impose certain norms that help generate expectations, burdens, and relations between speakers. Critical in gossip, proposing, and other similar conversation types, the speaker must be conspicuous with intent. The speech act designs the communicative environment only when the addressee knows the type of speech act in which they are participating.

Like a proposal, a demand is a speech act that prefigures a communicative environment. A demand involves an intention to influence an addressee to accede by arguing, in effect, that in this case “right makes might.” Justness becomes a powerful mechanism of pressure. Requesting, in contrast, includes the opportunity for the institution to decline.²⁰ A demand underscores the feeling that the speaker does not trust the addressee to do the right thing. The transgressing of some norm licenses an audience to infer that the speaker would not undertake such a significant risk without first trying the proper channels.²¹ This constrains the number of available social moves afforded to the addressees. Yet these social obligations can be easily evaded depending on the different contexts in which demands are made and how much force these obligations have. In the proper context, a demand can be leveraged to compel someone with more power to change.

The demanding process produces an agonism requiring groups to identify themselves in opposition. It involves hailing an institution and calling that institution, as a subject, into being. This process creates a relationship whereby the value divide between the agent and the institution animates the claims (of the demand), compelling the addressee to accede. The size of the embodied risk undertaken by the agent making the demand underwrites the force of the obligation it imposes on both actors. In other words, the greater the norm violation, the more credibility the audience can give the demand because they can be

licensed to infer that the speaker would not take such a chance without good reason. The result is a high-stakes risk that trades in reputations and resentments. The highly charged feeling around such demands gives them moral force to propel new arguments elsewhere. Often the discourse itself can be about values. The organization of the demand acts on different value hierarchies of what is right, which then animate discussions about what to do. A demand's efficacy depends on the context in which it can be sustained, dismissed, or cause a backlash. But under the right conditions, a demand can be leveraged to give rights, increase wages, prevent death, or topple regimes.

The process of making a demand involves an agent rendering their intent audible. In other words, they literally have to tell us what they want. Only in making the intention transparent and impossible to ignore does it generate the sort of obligations that the agent undertakes while also conferring obligations onto another. While making the intention clear, the agent must satisfy two conditions for an act to be considered a demand: the first is procedural, and the second is substantive.²²

First, a demand assumes that a procedural condition is met. The demand, as opposed to a request, comes from the speaker's decision to act outside of norms when making the intent to influence an institution audible. The procedural assumption is that the agent has tried every reasonable action to resolve the disagreement before stepping outside the bounds of decorum. The audible norm violation demonstrates that normal channels have failed, and the audience is licensed to infer that the institutional system cannot be trusted to fix the problem itself. Moreover, the agent making such a scene suggests that the institution cannot be trusted to do the right thing. Of course, the inverse of this indicates that if the demander has not made reasonable attempts to resolve the issue within the appropriate channels (the first condition), then they can face significant criticism, leading to the common refrain that "they should have just followed the rules and it would have been fixed." When an agent takes the risk to assert that the procedural condition has been met and traditional channels have failed, then the audible violations of decorum lay the foundation for their demand; these violations of decency come in many forms, some more overt than others, and the events critiqued in this book demonstrate a variety of such violations.

The second component that must be fulfilled is that a demand assumes a moral substance condition is met. This can be thought of as an argument that one is occupying the moral high ground, or to use the shorthand that I will apply throughout this book, that "right makes might." In their excellent analysis

of the demand, Beth Innocenti and Nichole Kathol write that when groups protest institutions, the argument hinges on the claim that the institutions have failed to live up to their duty. To make this point clear, the agent bringing forward the demand must make their claim audible.

The acknowledgment of the demand thus creates an intersubjective situation that begins an agonistic political environment. When the agent is recognized, a series of intersubjective norms emerge. Significantly, Innocenti and Kathol write that “bringing to bear the norm of ‘right makes might’ constrains addressees from exercising institution or coercive power because doing so would put them at risk of criticism for using strong-arm tactics or abusing their position of authority and for failing to see the rightness of the speaker’s position.”²³ The exercising of the argument hinges on occupying the moral high ground. The most successful demanding strategies often involve the loudest displays that invoke outstanding norm violations and, thus, an undertaking of significant risk by the agents. The greater the institutional backlash, the stronger the demand is perceived by onlooking spectators. The substance of the demand licenses an audience to infer that the institution will change its behavior to no longer be in the wrong.

Of course, we must be clear eyed in recognizing that these obligations will only sometimes secure responses by compulsion. What counts, then, as a successful demand is the communication environment; the ultimate goal is to create the position for the communication conditions to change. Sometimes the discussion that results from demands causes the addressee to accede, leading to material change. Other times, the subsequent discourse compels the larger public to become involved, a second mechanism for creating change. There might be debates around the valuation of the demand itself. When new value hierarchies are uncovered, the ensuing discourse around them can lead to a transvaluation of values. Regardless of the outcome, the demand’s efficacy concerns the different communication environments it underwrites. These discourses are hardly binary, but we must account for the situational nuance that emerges from the different tactics and the nuanced discussion that then appears in how they sustain discourse and deliberation.

Did the Greek people display good judgment when they demanded more from their government? Were the tactics sound? These questions concern the sort of conditions that the protests created for deliberation and debate. Since the original discussion that followed the protest raised issues from and around neoliberal capitalism, the state’s role, elected officials’ obligations, and the

shifting geopolitical map, the constitutive fallout from the protests suggests a productive impact. The people had no other means to express their concerns. In an era of hyper-capitalism and the public screen, they needed to make a sound that spoke to and of themselves. The resulting deliberation contributed to the development of new concepts, the redistribution of sentiments, and the emergence of new entities. The sound nature of the controversy speaks to its salience and its ebb and flow over time.

So, if a demand demonstrates a violation of norms and evidence that right makes might, sounds are designed to amplify those feelings. Sound as a noun provides the substance for those very feelings, giving unique resources to contribute to that claim, tying intent to the reason for the protest. The ways those feelings reverberate have qualitative differences. A sound tactic attends to how the *immediate*, *intense*, and *immersive* resources for sound enable obligations to feel urgent, salient, and compelling. As I will discuss in the following chapter, each of these different features of what I will call a waveform helps uncover the unique warrant structures that aid social movements along these temporal registers. The experience of creating and listening to sound tactics produced by sound bodies adds to the claim's justification. Each chapter in this book explores how these tactics happen within the context of different institutions, each one setting the stage from which the agents must deploy their tactics and simultaneously defining the stakes of how sound might be considered, well, sound.

Book Preview

Like any other speech act, a sound tactic is seen as a stand-alone event and part of a web of interactions, each with its consequences and responses. Each act creates ripples that shape the ongoing discourse, providing a stage for continuous negotiation, understanding, and sometimes misunderstanding, all of which are integral to the human social fabric. The metaphor of the conversation as the primary problematic in making sense of the social comes from speech teachers. *Speech teachers* describes a specific group of people with a deep commitment to the teaching of public speaking that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Their core belief was that a conversation was the primary metaphor for discourse and could be applied widely. This idea has remained influential and provides a framework for understanding speech as an exchange of ideas and a dynamic interaction that structures our social and civic life. A demand is not

simply made and received; it is performed, interpreted, and responded to within a complex conversational space. Creating a demand can subtly reshape this space, influencing the trajectory of the discourse and affecting the relationships between the participants.

The practice of speech instruction emerged as something wholly different from other subjects in the university—organized in everyday life and articulated somewhere between sound and the civic. The second chapter will tell the story of renegade speech teachers who drew heavily on Greco-Roman history, specifically Aristotle, to teach burgeoning urban populations how to navigate complex relationships (such as how individuals could coexist in shared time and space while pursuing their visions of a good life) and acquire new skills necessary for changing job markets. Critical here is a story of democracy that orients our understanding of rhetoric as a matter of practical instruction. These teachers saw their role in a new educational system that moved from making elites run society to giving everyday citizens skills to self-govern.²⁴

Speech teachers embody democratic pragmatism, as demonstrated by James Albert Winans in his 1915 work *Public Speaking*. Winans championed fostering students' critical thinking and deep comprehension rather than encouraging simple information memorization. His goal was for students to actively understand and engage in the present moment with the audience, moving beyond passive rule absorption. While rhetoric in the field of speech might have started as interest in the experience of the presence between the audience and the speaker required to cultivate this capacity, the arrival of the text shifts the problem from fleeting feelings to abstract spatial relations. To help get a richer understanding of sound that allows me to apply it in the context of civic action and social currency, I advocate for a return to presence.

To fully explain the implications of sound bodies on the civic, in the next chapter I outline a transdisciplinary exchange borrowing from sound studies. Acousmatics is an essential concept in sound studies, as it highlights sound's crucial role in shaping our perception and understanding of the world. In the acousmatic situation, the focus is placed on the sound itself, divorced from its source but leaving a lingering itch to discover an origin; there is a metaphysical desire to endow something with agency. Acousmatics is a valuable tool for exploring the relationship between sound, technology, and culture and examining how sound conveys meaning and shapes our world experience. The acousmatic situation of a listener unable to ever know the source provides a helpful

axiom for understanding the digital world where data and information are often abstracted and impossible to trace. I seek to use this understanding of sound to illuminate an understanding of speech in the contemporary civic sphere.

As I argue more in the next chapter, the Pythagorean curtain (or the acoustics situation) becomes crucial in examining the mechanics of speech and sound. This concept emphasizes the spaces between source, cause, and effect that facilitate sound reproduction. Rather than residing in a single instrument or entity, the object of study becomes situated in these interstitial spaces within the public domain where cause and effect are rendered knowable. While a waveform obscures our ability to definitively know a source, the Pythagorean curtain accounts for how movements can extend their presence across vast temporal and spatial expanses. People might not visually comprehend these movements, but they can sense their causes and attribute origins, highlighting the influential role of unseen forces in our societal understanding.

At the same time, a waveform is a technique of abstraction to think about how each of these tactics might be conceptualized in time; as I will discuss more in the next chapter, a critical part of this abstraction is that it tempers sound that desires to be universalized, providing a contingent metaphor to understand events. The possibilities afforded by the waveform are explored thoroughly in chapter 2. These waveforms can always be missed, of course, in the cacophonous public screen and thus require a specific audience to be recognized. I divide *topoi* into three interrelated temporal registers: immediacy, intensity, and immersion. Immediacy deals with how quickly a sound starts and stops, offering places to modify urgency; intensity, meanwhile, comes as a sound dissipates and a choice to make new sound comes, pressuring the listener toward action; finally, immersion is about how sound vibrations fill a space, providing a sense of proximity. The language of the waveform then structures the rest of the book; each chapter spends time attending to one potential resource. In each chapter, the duration of the sonic experience provides a resource for feeling. Since this is about tactics, the groups wielding them come from a weaker position, using sound to leverage institutions. Those feelings help them constitute their force, be recognized, and, finally, compel engagement.

Chapter 3 starts with student advocacy after a school shooting on February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. These students needed to act quickly, and their concern is the sonorous resource of immediacy. They were worried that another school shooting was imminent and sought to keep

the American public's attention while they had it. The students subsequently intersected with a vast infrastructure of nonprofits, celebrities, and resources that enabled them to quickly mobilize and produce the March for Our Lives event. The urgency of stopping gun violence looms large. It is perhaps best represented in X González's concluding speech at the March for Our Lives rally, which used the temporal proprieties of sound to create what I call a "cut-out," building up anticipation and then violating it with four minutes and twenty-two seconds of silence. The expectation violation was not just an attention-getter; it was designed to show the audience what it felt like to be in the school when the shooting occurred. The tactic represented what it felt like to be there in the moment. The extreme pain of remaining silent in a setting usually filled with noise underscores the sense that children cannot be forced to sit in this situation any longer.

This chapter adds to the conversation on sound tactics by demonstrating that the waveform extends beyond the moment in "the blink of an ear"; for example, a particular moment of González standing in the middle of the cut-out proliferates across platforms. The tension cuts across and brings the audience and the sound body together in a moment of vulnerability. The tactic created a relationship between the kids, who have been forced to sit in pain, and the adults entrusted to protect them but who have failed to do so. Right after González's speech, the image of them standing in the cut-out propagated throughout the public; the enthymeme of the silence enabled their argument to shape the continued discourse on guns—just as the rhetorical text has vast flexibility in contemporary rhetoric, the metaphor of the waveform also gives us an extended purchase to understand social movements because it comes in different shapes, sizes, and timescales. In this case, the immediacy of the movement is captured in the waveform of X González's speech, tying their demand to end gun violence with the immediate sounds (or lack thereof) of the moment. The urgency that builds, only to evaporate, perhaps gives us a way to think about how some of these tactics might operate.

Yet only some social movements are given access to the media resources that March for Our Lives received. Other groups must find innovative ways to generate momentum and pressure an institution to act. Intensity provides a way to generate force because every listener must choose to discern a signal from noise. Speakers can be tactical in their local environment to make an interlocutor confront them. Chapter 4 attends to another social movement, HU Resist, which started at Howard University shortly after the inauguration of Donald J. Trump.

This collective coalesced around the concern that Howard was serving the federal government at the expense of Black liberation. Like many nascent social movements, this group of students initially found it challenging to constitute itself as a relevant agent capable of making demands.

HU Resist elevated their campaign through the art of the heckle, drawing on a legacy of resourcefulness born from necessity. Faced with barriers to traditional forms of advocacy and planning, they adeptly navigated their constraints, seeking opportunities hidden within their immediate circumstances. Through improvisation, HU Resist crafted a series of innovative tactics, turning the university's environment into a stage for their protest. This strategic use of heckling—turning every interaction into a chance to press their demands—forced the administration into a dialogue they would have otherwise avoided. The narrative of this chapter traces how HU Resist harnessed this improvisation to fuel their cause, employing a variety of methods over eighteen months to amplify their message and shift the collective perception of what was possible, anchoring their intensity in the creativity and persistence of their heckling.

HU Resist succeeded because of the gumption that drove them to improvise and change their tactics over time. While they might have started with just a few people and fewer resources, their capacity to innovate across several waveforms enabled the group to grow, change, and adapt. HU Resist's ability to improvise and heckle the financial aid scandal helped them articulate their demand with the song "Bitch Better Have My Money," which ultimately compelled one of the most significant public concessions from the administration. The virality of their dance, coupled with the occupation of administration space, placed pressure on the administration to make a choice: adhere to their demands or risk looking more corrupt. The pressure translates to the university having to choose between forcibly removing the students or conceding to what the students demanded.

Chapter 5 focuses on how the intensity of students can change into the immersive power of the people. When the Québec government, responding to student protests, imposed the controversial Bill 78, which precluded public gatherings and stipulated government approval for all demonstrations, the people demanded their freedoms back. Every night, people emerged to bang their pots and pans; in doing so, they would tap into the social imaginary of the *charivari*—a transnational idea of the people—holding a liberal democratic government accountable. The extraordinary step of the masses coming out at eight o'clock every night for several months created the identity of a people committed to a liberal check on the

institution of the government. If the government is meant to serve the people, then this repeated action suggests that the government has failed.

This chapter highlights the resource of immersion to show how demand might go from a small student protest to an all-encompassing “the people.” Sound operates as a critical resource linking the audible intent to a feeling of salience that underwrites the force of the appeal. The people were *everywhere*, coming out nightly and saturating the streets and social media feeds. This demonstration often included musicking, a sound tactic inviting anyone in the community to grab what they wanted to use to participate in the music-making. It became a nightly party that brought people into the streets, including populations that ordinarily would not be part of a protest, such as children, older people, and people with disabilities. The practice of musicking was accompanied by social media posts that broadcast the nightly demonstrations outside the traditional coverage, giving anyone who tuned in an imaginary association through the sound. The loud and immersive sound hailed auditors, emplacing them in a new democratic space. The Casseroles (as they came to be known due to their use of pots and pans) used the physical realities of the streets to create an immersive sound, letting the banging bounce off walls and echo across town; at the same time, they tapped into the environment of the news media to create sound waves that would reverberate across town and immerse the entire citizenship in the struggle. The spatiality of the people’s musicking gave presence to the feeling of democracy. Ultimately, their demands structured public deliberation about the proper limits of government control.

In the book’s conclusion, I again consider sound as an adjective by exploring an *unsound* tactic. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, Canadian truckers organized the “Canadian Trucker Freedom Convoy” in January 2021, which involved hundreds of trucks driving to Ottawa to protest the vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers and other COVID-19 measures. But when the truckers switched the demand from revoking a narrow law to dissolving the entire Canadian government, this fluctuation raised questions about the tactic’s soundness. As a matter of phronesis, this radical departure from the local normative grounds raised questions about who was behind the sounds, making it impossible for the people to settle on an author of the demands. Just as fear and concern crop up around things that go bump in the night, the shifting questions around the original cause sowed concern around their tactic. When the audience cannot definitively imagine the source of the presence, the uncertainty sows doubt and raises new issues of trust, fueling disagreement.

Now that we have previewed the book's central themes, we turn to chapter 2, where we delve deeper into sound's potential as a resource for moving the social. In doing so, we explore how sound might provide the very stuff of the political. The chapter takes a rhetorical approach to understanding sound and its potential opportunities, recognizing the contingent nature of an answer that always leaves room for the political without abstracting away from the lived realities of any participants. In this chapter, I am interested in discerning how listening can underwrite choices and obligations. I determine the ways it might be used to hold those in power accountable and explore how the principles that support sound can be wielded tactically by those with less ability to satisfy procedure and demonstrate the substance of their demand. Let us turn to the sound formations of waveforms.