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Feminine Soundscapes Paesaggi Sonori Al Femminile

Edited by Pamela Parenti, Ellen Patat, Daniela Bombara



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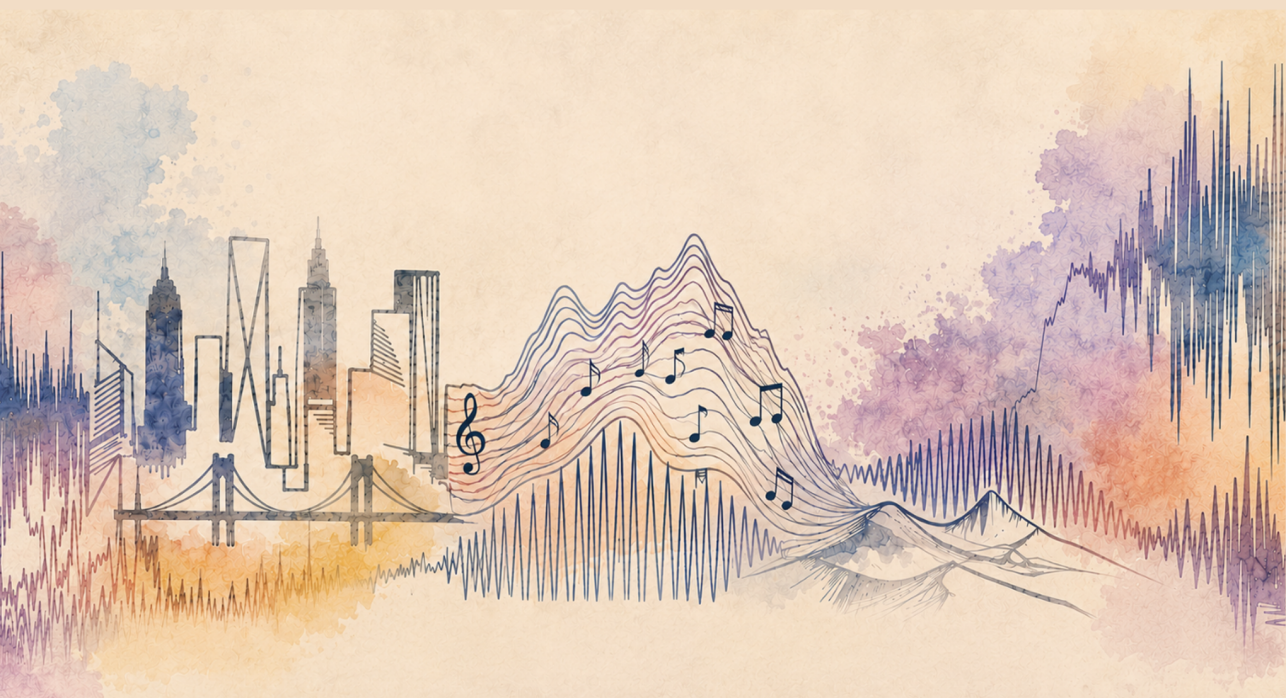
Suoni. Journal on Soundscapes and Musico-Literary Studies is an international peer-reviewed journal devoted to the interdisciplinary and comparative study of soundscapes across literary, performative, visual, and media contexts, and to the relations between music, literature, and other extraliterary practices.

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Editors' Note

Suoni. Journal on Soundscapes and Musico-Literary Studies invites us to reconsider sound not merely as an object of perception, but as a mode of cultural knowledge. Every society organises its auditory world through systems of meaning that extend far beyond the physical phenomenon of sound itself. Voices, silences, noises, music, echoes, rhythms, and acoustic environments all participate in the production of memory, identity, emotions and power relations. Listening, in this sense, is never passive. It is a cultural practice through which individuals and communities interpret, negotiate, inhabit, and give meaning to the world.

Despite the remarkable development of both Soundscape Studies and Musico-Literary Studies over the past several decades, these traditions have for the most part evolved along parallel trajectories. It is worth recalling, however, that their origins reveal a much closer entanglement between musical thought, environmental sound, and practices of listening. When John Cage staged *4'33"* in 1952, allowing the sounds of the listening space to become the composition, and later, in *Variations VII* (1966), used telephones, microphones, radios, and other sources to capture and broadcast environmental and human sounds in real time, he brought into sharp focus a growing interest in the complexity of aural phenomena and in the interaction between musical and non-musical elements. This perspective had already been explored in Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète*, notably in *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948), one of the earliest works based on sounds drawn from the real world; his first theoretical text, *À la recherche d'une musique concrète*, followed in 1952. These developments preceded and helped contextualize the *World Soundscape Project*, founded by R. Murray Schafer in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which conceived the soundscape "as a macrocosmic musical composition" (Schafer 1973: 30). Schafer's approach, strongly shaped by musical categories in *The Tuning of the World* (1977), has attracted criticism for assigning normative value to harmony and consequently tending to interpret urban noise as a form of acoustic degradation (Arkette 2004: 159-168; Kelman 2010: 212-234; LaBelle 2015: 200-201). Music thus functions both as an experience and as an interpretive model for organising and evaluating sound. Truax subsequently situated speech, music, and soundscape within a continuum of acoustic communication, as forms of "organized sound" (1984: 43), while emphasizing perception and signification within the acoustic community. Sterne (2013: 181-193) further identifies Cage and Schaeffer as key precedents for Schafer's planetary conception of sound.

Soundscape Studies has been approached chiefly from anthropological, ecological, social, and historical perspectives, from Feld's acoustemology (1996) or the sounded anthropology of Samuels et al. (2010), to the historical-sociological research of Smith (2001) and Thompson (2002), and, more recently, to Krause's bioacoustic studies (2013). At the same time, scholarly attention to the relationship between sound and literature has increasingly developed and become systematised, particularly since the turn of the twenty-first century, leading to the recognition of the centrality of the literary and extraliterary texts as active sites for the reworking and reconfiguration of sonic data according to cultural and social needs. This approach gave rise to precise modes of listening that may be understood as cultural devices of phonic invention (Halliday 2013; Napolin 2020; Snaith 2020; Groth & Murphet 2024; Elhariry & Yamaguchi 2025).

Musico-Literary Studies, by contrast, have historically pursued a comparatist approach, analysing the interaction between two systems of communication that are already internally organised in their own right. A different critical discourse has thus developed, from Brown's pioneering comparative work (1948), which helped establish the early groundwork for comparing these two modern arts, to later theoretical accounts of inter-artistic boundaries (Scher 1984). Musico-literary criticism was subsequently reframed within the broader paradigm of intermediality, which offered a more systematic account of the relations between

musical and literary texts and a precise typology of the ways in which music may be evoked, represented, or structurally reproduced within literature (Wolf 2002).

The differentiation between environmental sound and musical event nevertheless remains undeniable, as Truax (1984: 45–47) observed: environmental sound acquires meaning through communal perception and interpretation, whereas language and music possess autonomous signification. Yet this distinction risks bifurcating the field and obscuring the place of music within environmental sound studies.

In *Music, Place and Identity in Italian Urban Soundscapes* (2023), Piperno, Caputo, and Senici ask where music resides within the broader soundscape (2), arguing that both are “social and cultural locators” (5–6), while musical events retain specificity through works, performances, and reception. Rostagno’s (2023: 15–23) reworking of the concept of “phonosphere” integrates historical-musicological and urban-sound approaches, framing a dynamic, socially constructed auditory space shaped by perceptual, affective, narrative, and power relations. Piperno (2025) further emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between musical discourse and urban soundscape and advocates a more central role for music.

The sustained theoretical integration of these two fields, however, remains comparatively limited, particularly in the Italian critical landscape, and this separation has produced an important conceptual consequence: music has at times been treated as a specialised object detached from broader auditory environments, while literary soundscapes have frequently been approached as repositories of environmental sounds in which music occupies only a marginal position.

Suoni seeks to explore the productive possibilities that emerge when these traditions are considered in relation to one another. For *Suoni*, a soundscape is not simply the totality of sounds inhabiting a given environment, but the culturally mediated organisation, perception, representation, and interpretation of auditory experience. Whether this experience is represented in literature, embodied in performance, recorded by media, or encountered in everyday life, it reveals how societies systematise relationships between subjects, spaces, and forms of listening.

This journal is the direct expression of this vision, combined with a commitment to high scholarly standards in exploring everything that grants listening to interpretive primacy. The critical literature, spanning from the seminal Western history of the senses to the vibrant field of Anglo-American Sound Studies, offers rich theoretical frameworks and productive points of departure for challenging the traditional ocularcentrism of literary criticism (Ong 1982; Jay 1993; Sterne 2003). Sound does not connect texts solely through sonic echoes; it forges an epistemological network of meanings. It can participate also in the reproduction of asymmetrical gender relations, operating as a form of symbolic violence exercised below the threshold of consciousness (Bourdieu 1998; Ehrick 2015). Elsewhere, it charts the long transition from oral to written culture amid the growing regulation of sounds by state and church institutions (Gutten 2000), shaping individual and collective identities across lines of rank, gender, and origin (Garrioch 2003). Furthermore, it marks local identity, authority, and resistance—as Corbin’s (1994) history of bells in rural France demonstrates—while tracing the shifting boundary between ‘sound’ and ‘noise’ as an index of modern class anxiety and the bourgeois fear of the crowd (Bailey 1996). Ultimately, what we consciously hear—and how we interpret it—is always historically and culturally determined (Smith 1999).

Our ambition is to establish *Suoni* as an international forum where scholars working across disciplines engage in sustained dialogue around the auditory dimensions of culture. We welcome contributions that explore not only how texts represent sound, but also how listening itself shapes cultural production, historical experience, artistic creation, and human understanding. It is our hope that the perspectives gathered across these volumes will offer a wide range of approaches and tools for examining, through comparative and transdisciplinary lenses, how literary and artistic products render the complexity of the sonic world both in the spaces inhabited by characters and within the diverse realities, historical and imagined, in which they act.

We express our sincere gratitude to Il Sileno, in particular Francesco De Pascale. This new editorial venture would not have been possible without their support and their commitment to fostering innovative, transdisciplinary research in the field of sound and literary studies.

Daniela Bombara & Ellen Patat

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