Article

The Resonate Prison: Earwitnessing the Panacoustic Affect

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Abstract

Panacoustic surveillance can be low-intensity and mundane, but when taken to its extreme, it is coordinated with physical violence to create an atmosphere of hallucinatory fear. Our entry point into this problem is through a case study of the Saydnaya torture prison in Syria, a terrifying and opaque architecture of power. This short paper draws from the *earwitness* art and human rights activism of Lawrence Abu Hamdan concerning Saydnaya in collaboration with Amnesty International: from our analysis of the prison, we extrapolate lessons of panacoustic technologies more broadly, which are not necessarily or immediately violent but nonetheless disempower subjects by constraining their behaviors and rendering walls indefensibly porous. In developing a nascent theory of panacoustic surveillance, this paper makes two distinct contributions to surveillance studies. First, it puts sound and surveillance studies scholars into dialogue to echo Hamdam's argument that walls do not represent an absolute barrier but a corporeal medium by which power and knowledge can permeate and reflect as vibration. Second, our discussion articulates a politics of transparency and accountability that helps rethink notions of actuarial surveillance as not only a form of top-down statistical and biopolitical monitoring and governance but also as a means of developing panacoustic audits that seek to hold governments and other human rights abusers to account.

Introduction

In the introduction to his short documentary film *Walled Unwalled*,¹ Lawrence Abu Hamdan (2018) notes that "the East German Republic... perfected the acoustics of incarceration, building a prison where the walls were used as weapons; creating prisoners who see nothing but hear everything, who were both completely confined and yet totally exposed." This is but a segue, however, to Hamdan's main focus: Syria's notorious Saydnaya prison (Wainwright 2016; Millar 2018), whose "earwitnesses" (former incarcerated people) contributed to his recent solo exhibition at Rotterdam's Witte de Witte Centre (Witte de Witte Centre n.d.). The art installation was produced in collaboration with Amnesty International's forensic architecture project entitled "Saydnaya: Inside a Syrian Torture Prison." Visitors are introduced to the exhibition by a multimedia website that reads in part: "The prison is a black hole of which no recent images exist" (Amnesty International n.d.b.).

Unlike Bentham's panopticon prison, Saydnaya could never be defined as *transparent*. Rather, as Hamdam (2018) details, the prison is a site of unrelenting violence and torture, where prisoners are secluded in holding cells and blindfolded when moved by guards through the prison. But, like the panopticon, Hamdam's (2018) project also maintains that the institutional architecture and carceral practices of the Saydnaya prison are designed to literally amplify the goals of the institution, in short, to terrorize and dehumanize its prisoners through sound. Hamdan the artist thus posits the prison as a medium that resonates horrific sounds through

¹ The video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY4jU85o8pE>.

its walls and prisoners. Hamdan the “private ear,” however, also harnesses such violent reverberations—through interviews with earwitnesses—in an effort to document the experiences of the mediating human rights abuses from Saydnaya.

Drawing upon Hamdan’s earwitness art and human rights activism, as presented in his recent solo exhibition at Rotterdam’s Witte de Witte Centre, this short paper develops some early thoughts on a theory of panacoustic surveillance, in short, a sound-based form of violence and power that is—like Foucault’s panoptic subjects—internalized by incarcerated people in Saydnaya. Hamdan’s earwitnessing project thus serves to narrativize and make transparent the stories of prisoners’ panacoustic experiences of Saydnaya’s violence and terror. The prison is, in other words, made transparent by remediating the sonic vibrations from the prison through the words and acoustic performances of the surviving incarcerated people.

In contemporary life, panacoustic surveillance is ubiquitous: on the rooftops of city centres (Merill 2017), on public transit (Zetter 2012), in homes (Neville 2020), workplaces (Weiner 2018), places of leisure (Perez 2018), and prison environments (Završnik 2019; Lacey et al. 2020). As a result, the walls of acoustic enclosures are being broken down everywhere. Further, with the convergence of commercial and state technologies, any boundary demarcating monitoring and surveillance is utterly blurred (Andrejevic 2019), a development that results in a #TechToPrisonPipeline (Coalition for Critical Technology 2020) that passes through public and private spaces. For instance, in 2017, a subpoena was issued to Amazon demanding information collected from a first-degree murder suspect’s smart speaker device in the United States (McLaughlin 2017). Thus, the domestication of panacoustic technology helps dissolve a defensive function of walls protecting citizens while expanding the purview of law enforcement and incarceration regimes.

In developing a nascent theory of panacoustic surveillance, this paper makes two distinct contributions to surveillance studies. First, it puts sound and surveillance studies scholars into dialogue to argue that carceral and institutional walls more broadly serve to mediate the terror and violence of the prison through vibration and resonance. Motivated in part by the need to conceptualize the surveillance possibilities of emergent voice and sound activated technologies such as Amazon’s Alexa or Apple’s Siri, and compellingly framed by Hamdan’s (2018) art and human rights project in collaboration with Amnesty International, the resonant wall forces us to rethink theories of panoptic power as canonically articulated by Bentham and Foucault.

At the center of this argument is the need to posit not only the mediated effect of sound but also the design of the panacoustic architectures of which the wall is one seemingly divisional element. Yet, as we will argue, the wall should not be restricted to its divisional properties, separating and isolating prisoners. Rather, we contend, via Hamdan (2018), that walls are permeable to sound and vibration and, thus, constitute a corporeal medium of violence and terror. Second, our discussion of panacoustic surveillance also seeks to articulate a politics of accountability. In so doing, we finish the paper by rethinking the theory of actuarial surveillance (Phillips 2011) as not only a form of top-down statistical and biopolitical monitoring and governance but also as a means of developing panacoustic audits that seek to hold governments and other human rights abusers to account. As a panacoustic worker, we argue that Hamdan’s (2018) private ear practices serve as the basis for justice, redress, and accountability.

This paper is importantly not an effort at rehashing debates over the optical bias of surveillance. Rather this paper should be read in the context of the dramatic resurgence of acoustic surveillance produced by “eavesmining platforms” (Neville 2020), facilitated by smart speakers, voice assistants, and various always-on microphones and sensors that have the capability of capturing the sonic landscape of our lives, environments, bodies, voices, breaths, heartbeats, and, by extension, our latent or explicit behaviors, emotions, and moods. In developing our discussion of panacoustic surveillance, the ultimate goal of this paper is to explore how institutional vibrations, while seeming latent, can later serve as instruments of social justice, accountability, and resistance.

The Sounds of Surveillance

The coupling of sound and/as violence is hardly new to surveillance studies, particularly as manifested in discussions of security and the weaponization of policing. An interdisciplinary branch of surveillance studies has explored the nexus of surveillance, acoustics, and power. Most significantly, Steve Goodman's *Sonic Warfare* (2009: 187) explores how "audition is policed and mobilized" not only through surveillance but through violence. His literature review of Ernst Junger, Marshall McLuhan, Paul Virilio, and Friedrich Kittler develops a broad conception of war as an ontological condition. Goodman (2009: 33) writes: "For all of these writers, the concept of war becomes an attempt to describe a low-intensity warfare that reconstitutes the most mundane aspects of everyday existence through psychosocial torque and sensory overload." Thus, sonic warfare exceeds the battlefield and the physical confrontations between nation-states. In the contemporary context of a perpetual "war on terror," this conceptualization of war as an ontological condition does not require a stretch of the imagination. Indeed, the war on terror affects the nature of reality, being, and becoming by its dissemination of violence and its propagation of surveillance across the globe. Further, as the war on terror operates in the background of everyday life, surveillance and other forms of sonic warfare are not always dramatic and physically violent but are often low-intensity, mundane, and invisible.

Goodman's (2009) work on auditory violence highlights the variegated application of weaponized vibration. For instance, he outlines some of the tactics used by the US Army's Twenty-Third Special Troops during World War II. This division, dubbed the "Ghost Army," sought to instill terror in the enemy through the "generation and distribution of sounds" that simulate the "sonic experience of the battlefield" (Goodman 2009: 41). Thus, sound was deployed as a mechanism of deception, fooling the ear to provoke fear, confusion, and, potentially, submission. Conversely, vibration is often deployed in sonic warfare as a form of nonlethal violence. In particular, sound has been used in open public spaces as a form of crowd control such as the "vortex ring generator" that forced rioters, looters, and protesters to disperse by unleashing a series of concussive pulses within a low frequency range (Goodman 2009: 109). Once again, the central affect in this form of sonic warfare is fear. Goodman (2009: 110, emphasis added) discusses Elias Canetti's (1962) argument from *Crowds and Power*, explaining that "the affect of fear, particularly of being *touched by the unknown*, forms a basic logic of population physics." Thus, sonic warfare can exploit a basic survival instinct to duck for cover, run away, and disperse.

We are also compelled to revisit canonical theories of surveillance to appreciate that there is more to the panopticon prison than an *all-seeing machine* and walls separating and isolating prisoners. In his chapter "Discipline and Listen," for example, Szendy (2016) revisits a footnote from *Discipline and Punish* where Foucault (1977) writes: "In his first version of the Panopticon, Bentham had also imagined an acoustic surveillance, operated by means of pipes leading from the cells to the central tower. In the Postscript, he abandoned the idea, perhaps because he could not introduce into it the principle of dissymmetry and prevent the prisoners from hearing the inspector as well as the inspector hearing them" (qtd. in Szendy 2016: 21). Szendy (2016: 19–22) remarks that Foucault overlooks the fact that these steel pipes between the tower and cells were envisaged primarily as a means of communication between the different orders whereby the voice of the monitor—the voice of authority—would serve as a constant *assurance* of the fact of surveillance for the prisoners. Thus, the panacoustic dimensions of Bentham's (2011) design discussed in the tenth and twenty-first letters of his *Panopticon Writings* articulates a possible implementation of *walls as a medium of communication* within a greater model of power. This marks the beginning of our dive into the soundscape of the prison apparatus, where we adopt a position of imaginary listening within the panopticon—putting an ear against a metaphoric wall—to overhear the resonant violence of physical space with carceral bodies.

Foucault's (1977) reading of Bentham's panopticon outlines a specific diagram of power that privileges the visual register, or, better: *imagines a persistent and ubiquitous form of visual monitoring*. What Foucault overlooks then is how the incarcerated subject of surveillance is also disciplined and terrorized by the acoustic architecture and soundscape of the prison. Confined to their individual cells, prisoners of the panopticon would have undoubtedly been assaulted by the auditory signatures and material effects of

incarceration. Consider the various acoustic traces of prison life that embody the signature sounds of incarceration such as the jangling of cell keys, the opening and closing of cell doors, the footsteps and language of guards, and, most gravely, the sounds of physical violence (Rice 2016). Further, the suffering, sickness, and despair of prisoners—heard as screaming, coughing, wheezing, crying, and other anguished voicings—articulate material effects of incarceration that would resound throughout the building’s rotunda design. Thus, although the panopticon was envisaged as a disciplinary architecture of visual surveillance, the building’s design would also forcefully vibrate with violence and terror.

In the case of the panopticon, sonic violence is largely a by-product of its acoustic architecture and disciplinary environment. The four “walls” of the prisoner’s cell, which are unequally (im)permeable due to the inward facing cell door, mediate the auditory signs and material effects of incarceration throughout the open and caged areas of the prison. This paradoxical exposure and enclosure by walls is integral to the subjectivity of a surveillant form of violence, a subjectivity in which the prisoner cannot escape from surveillance nor the vibrational assault of sound.

The prison’s panacoustic architecture thus functions as an apparatus of affect, audition, bodies, resonate space, and vibrational walls. As the physical space of the prison resonates with sound, sympathetic vibrations occur between the architectural walls and the “walls” of carceral bodies. Indeed, the vibration of literal prison walls inscribes itself on the flesh and bones of the prisoner. This reality of sonic exposure effectively transforms the prison environment into a collective affective sensorium where prisoners can feel and be touched by the guards and by one another through the vibration of walls. As Brian Massumi (2002: 14) explains:

It is best to think of it [the affective sensorium] as a resonance, or interference pattern. An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonance is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its complex patterning. The patterning is not at a distance from itself. It is immediately its own event. Although it is complex, it is not composed of parts. It is composed of the event that it is, which is unitary. It is a complex dynamic unity. The interference pattern arises where the sound wave intersects with itself. The bouncing back and forth multiplies the sound’s movement without cutting it.... Resonation can be seen as converting distance, or extension, into intensity... With the body, the “walls” as sensory surfaces.

Adapting Massumi’s (2002) terminology, it follows then that resonance within the panacoustic apparatus expresses itself as a dynamic unity: throughout the prison there is an emptiness in which vibration resonates between cell walls and the “walls” of incarcerated bodies. Further, the reverberation of sound by the architecture can be likened to a form of amplification in which distance is converted into intensity rather than extension. Put simply, in the context of the prison environment, sounds impress themselves on the affective sensorium as events rather than locations in such a way that incarcerated people remember their experiences in terms of intensity and unitary patterning. We take up this principle of walls (both of the prison and of the prisoner) serving as sensory surfaces to state that walls are a medium of the prison apparatus.

In addition to rethinking the role of walls and sound in panoptic surveillance, we also propose to adopt and slightly modify Szendy’s (2016) concept of “otographic surveillance,” an affect of fear provoked by auditory surveillance. Prompted by the Snowden revelations of wiretap dragnets deployed by the NSA, Szendy (2016) argues that espionage is inseparable from listening. He conceptualizes this argument by establishing an etymological connection between listening and espionage, through the French verb *escouter*, “to hear with attention, to lend an ear in order to hear,” and its connection to the noun *escoute*, “a place from which one listens without being seen” (Szendy 2016: 10). Further, *sur écoute* means to be put under surveillance, to have one’s phone tapped (Szendy 2016: 11). Thus, Szendy (2016: 11) explains that in French etymology and common parlance, listening is “an activity of intelligence” and an affair of spies and moles.

Of particular relevance to our concept of panacoustics is Szendy's (2016: 11–12) neologism *surécoute*, which he uses to define an “intensification of listening... a synonym for auditory hyperesthesia, a superlative super-listening.” This heightened form of audition is useful in conceptualizing post-9/11 wiretapping practices by the NSA, as it is meant to articulate a technical or technological connotation (Szendy 2016: 15). Yet, at the same time, *surécouter* or being “all ears” recognizes that there is always “a surfeit of ears, a surplus in the web of listening” (Szendy 2016: 14). This surplus means that there are always multiple “lines of listening” (Szendy 2016: 14) that are connected by sound. Put simply, super-listening or super-hearing/overhearing characterizes a form of listening in confrontation with the “ear of the other... His ear in the hollow of my ear” (Szendy 2016: 121).

One practices a form of super-hearing by interpreting oneself as an object of acoustic surveillance, thereby listening for oneself. This is distinct from the internalization of disciplinary panopticism because it offers a mode of resistance realized through the work of art and potentially through collective social practice. For example, in Hamdan's (2018) investigative practice of documenting earwitness testimonies, two forms of super-hearing are evidenced: first, his work with Amnesty International reveals how Saydnaya prisoners survived and subverted surveillance by learning how to listen, remain silent, and whisper to cellmates in order to fend off violence and the psychological effects of incarceration; second, as an artist, Hamdan invites his audience to engage in super-hearing practices that challenge the omnipresent power of contemporary surveillance conditions. *Surécoute* thus recognizes how panacoustic surveillance and the weaponization of vibration can be internalized by its subjects, that is, by Hamdan's earwitnesses from Saydnaya and by artwork audiences across the globe. Therefore, Hamdan (2018) invites us to bear witness to the injustices of panacoustics: more precisely, his work suggests that super-hearing is a power that can be expressed collectively as an act of resistance in calling for justice, redress, accountability, and transparency.

The Walls of Saydnaya

In the aftermath of 9/11 and with the recent rise of populist authoritarianism, the “return of the wall” as a physical object and political instrument (Vallet and David 2012) has compelled scholars to rethink the formal properties of walls and security barriers as purely defensive or territorial (Brown 2010; Jones 2012). Barriers do not necessarily exert a binary logic of inclusion/exclusion by distinguishing inside from outside, since they are rarely hermetically sealed. Rather, barriers represent a point of contact, an “interface” (Konrad and Nicol 2008: 8), that works to regulate *circulation* and facilitate data capture (Pallister-Wilkins 2016). As a result, barriers are both visually symbolic of surveillance and a crucial aspect of surveillance and security processes—erecting checkpoints that facilitate the social sorting of bodies and things (Jones 2008). Building on this, Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2016: 156) argues that security barriers function as “sociotechnical devices,” productive technologies that not only funnel and check but also serve to collect, analyze, and compose datasets about the populations they govern.

Of course, walls and the security barriers of borders should not be treated as synonymous since a borderline is bilateral whereas a wall is typically unilaterally imposed (Sajjad 2006; Vallet and David 2012). However, we aim to show that, like barriers, walls are inherently sociotechnical devices, media that facilitate circulation and structure conditions of surveillance. Unlike security barriers, walls may not be designed to facilitate flows of bodies, things, and data, yet they necessarily function as sonic media that subdivide acoustic space, transmit sound, and effect what is heard and how listening unfolds (Thompson 2002). Thus, our discussion of walls as media contributes to acoustic-based frameworks in surveillance studies by stressing that the panacoustic affects of prison architecture are two-sided phenomena—simultaneously harassing the subject who involuntarily overhears and compelling the body/voice to become muted so as to reduce suffering in a surveillant violence apparatus.

When taken to its extreme, panacoustic surveillance is coordinated with physical violence to create an atmosphere of hallucinatory fear—an auditory chilling effect that imprints itself on the bodies of subjects by affecting their experiences of sound. Our entry point into this problem is through a case study of the Saydnaya prison, which, as an architecture of power, is exposed by Hamdan's private ear practice and art

exhibitions (Hamden n.d.). The case reveals the full extent that walls are used as instruments of power by confining subjects and exposing them to panacoustic violence. From our analysis of the prison, we extrapolate lessons of panacoustic technologies more broadly, which are not necessarily or immediately violent but nonetheless disempower citizens by constraining their behaviors and rendering walls indefensibly porous.

In Saydnaya, the three-pronged shape of the prison features long corridors designed to reflect all sounds occurring in the cellblocks towards a central listening tower, allowing the guards to surveil the entire prison from this monitoring position. Prisoners in Saydnaya are at all times absolutely forbidden to make any sound or noise, including whispering to their cellmates, coughing, breathing heavily, or even scratching an itch. This state of silence is brutally enforced by guards, including during torture when prisoners are subjected to harsher and prolonged episodes of violence with the release of any sound of anguish. A survivor from Saydnaya recounts: “If you scream the beatings would intensify. So, we could always know if there were new arrivals to the prison if you hear their screams of pain. There isn’t a single voice to be heard throughout the entire prison. If they are killing someone, you will not hear their voice” (qtd. in Hamdan 2018).

Saydnaya’s central listening tower is accessed by a spiral staircase extending from the basement to the roof of the structure, creating a large opening filled by a column of air. Hamdan (2018) explains: “All the sounds made in the prison are by design directed towards this listening tower, making this column of air act like a huge megaphone, funneling and forcing sound throughout the three wings in ways that defy proximity.” The disorienting effect created by the acoustic architecture is accentuated by the practice of blindfolding the eyes of prisoners at Saydnaya whenever exiting or entering their cells, further distorting their perception and memories of space. Unlike the observation tower of the panopticon, the central listening tower in this prison doubles as a sonic amplifier of the reverberation of torture, purposefully giving a nightmarish form to the space and time of incarceration and violence.

Utilizing the prison’s acoustic architecture, a special weapon of torture is used in Saydnaya that modulates the destructive energy of corporeal punishment. Earwitness testimonies recount the seemingly ubiquitous sound of the plastic plumbing pipe used to inflict physical violence and disseminate sonic terror throughout the prison: as this singular sound is typically met with silence by the disciplined subject, the vibration of violence permeates Saydnaya’s panacoustic architecture. The percussive impact of the hollow pipe’s blow against a body is followed by a “muddled thud” that booms throughout the prison at 250 Hertz, “the exact frequency of which the walls of Saydnaya are built to vibrate, creating the illusion that the sound is emanating from within the walls themselves” (Hamdan 2018). Thus, these weapons of torture not only inflict physical pain but also trigger the resonate violence of walls, unleashing psychosomatic trauma and acousmatic torture upon the earwitness.

As a wall vibrates with the sound of torture, it not only represents a physical barrier towards one’s freedom but also the becoming of an imaginary instrument—a medium of violence and terror. Paraphrasing a survivor’s testimony, Hamdan (2018) explains: “As torture rings through the porous and yet inescapably solid membranes of this structure, it doesn’t sound like something hitting a body... it feels like someone is demolishing a wall.” Thus, the vibrating wall extends a singular act of violence throughout the prison, disseminating horror to every cell and inflicting agony to every incarcerated body. Moreover, as torture becomes the sound of demolition, the prisoner’s mind and body are repeatedly broken down by a surveillant violence apparatus that can make physical contact through its walls. In Saydnaya, the permeability of walls in transmitting vibration coordinates surveillance and torture by allowing the guards to listen in on the prisoners while broadcasting terror throughout its built structure.

While the focus of our discussion has concerned acoustic architecture, Hamdan’s (2018) emphasis on sonic reverberation is offered to problematize understandings about the essence of walls as barriers or boundaries. Yet, crucially, sound is not the only waveform capable of passing through the interstices of walls. Commenting on molecular visualization technologies, such as thermal imagers used by the military and law enforcement, the artist explains: “Now, no wall on earth is impermeable. Today, we’re all wall and no wall

at all” (Hamdan 2018). Following Hamdan (2018), we argue that walls do not represent an absolute barrier but a medium by which power and knowledge can permeate and reflect as vibration.

The belief that walls limit or otherwise demarcate spatial boundaries is clearly supported by the defensive function of walls in protecting the integrity of an enclosure while physically defining outside from inside. Yet, as walls mediate acts of surveillance and violence—as through the Saydnaya apparatus—one’s perception of space is absolutely distorted and blurred. Moreover, as one *feels* the tortured suffering of other prisoners, the blurred distance between prison walls converts the distance between incarcerated bodies into a space of resonant intensity (Massumi 2002). Thus, the walls in Saydnaya demolish the body’s sensory surfaces to rebuild them as “walls” that vibrate within its architecture of terror. Therefore, the wall is a medium, not a demarcation of limits but an intensification and dynamic patterning of vibrational power.

Conclusion: Accountability

Hamdam and his colleagues at Amnesty International recognize that Saydnaya’s walls function as media of torture and surveillance, yet the pursuit of accountability for prisoners and their families is a lost cause at the national level due to a “culture of impunity” supported by Syrian legislation (Amnesty International 2016: 18). Moreover, until recently, the Syrian government has been protected from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court by the veto power of Russia, a close ally of the Assad regime, in the UN Security Council. Thus, Amnesty International’s forensic architecture project not only targets the prison walls at Saydnaya but also challenges the barriers protected by Westphalian sovereignty as reflected by a mass petition that implores US and Russian governments to use their global influence in calling for independent monitors that will investigate the conditions in Syria’s torture prisons (Amnesty International n.d.a). Central to their advocacy work is the interactive multimedia exhibition of Saydnaya created by Amnesty International in collaboration with Goldsmiths University of London: the project operationalizes earwitness testimonies through 3D and acoustic modelling alongside a documentary narrative form. Their work demonstrates the potential of earwitness practices as a mode of actuarial surveillance of human rights abuse—sounding out evidence for legal prosecution.

Hamdam’s (2018) contribution to a just form of actuarial surveillance is both methodological and epistemological. In his interviews with survivors, he asks them to remember what they heard and how they experienced the soundscape of the prison since their vision was always brutally suppressed. Further, as a sound artist, he is uniquely attuned to panacoustic affects, and, thus, his work powerfully implores the viewer as listener to imagine the trauma and abhor the injustice. Hamdam’s (2018) earwitness audits represent an innovative form of actuarial surveillance that disrupts understandings of witnessing. Because Saydnaya has been inaccessible to journalists and independent monitoring groups there is an utter absence of photographic evidence of Saydnaya’s exterior walls and interior spaces. This constitutes a kind of “crisis of witnessing” (Felman and Laub 1992) that is compounded by the lack of any *eyewitness* testimony from former prisoners. After all, witnessing is a practice bound up with visual knowledge, as *wit* derives from *weid*, “to see.” Bearing witness represents a “foundational practice” for Amnesty International, an organization that has ardently documented human rights abuses, mobilized volunteer-activist networks, and advocated for the release of political prisoners since the 1960s (Hopgood 2006: 8). Moreover, working with Hamdan and others, Amnesty International has also pioneered the development and deployment of new forms of witnessing that focus on the socio-technical construction of intelligibility (Gray 2018; Gray 2019). Their work has helped mobilize knowledge about international abuses of power and supplemented traditional forms of witnessing that stress spatio-temporal presence (see Peters 2001). The actuarial surveillance of earwitnessing, then, does not stop with victim testimonies but is passed onto global citizens who cannot tune out violations of human rights and, thus, are motivated to help redress the disciplinary vibration of the prison through that very vibration that resonates as acoustic memories from within Saydnaya.

Hamdan’s work compels us, as surveillance scholars, to listen past prison walls to recognize what is at stake with the vibrational mediation of walls. *Walled Unwalled* (2018) offers numerous examples of panacoustic

surveillance deployed by law enforcement and the military. Panacoustic surveillance technology extends the power and knowledge of the state and other actors by exploiting the permeability of walls in a manner that violates normative understandings about what is off limits and private. Resultantly, Hamdan (2018) celebrates the Supreme Court ruling in *Kyllo v. United States* “that anything vibrating through a wall, be that liquid, heat, or sound that was not detected by human senses unaided by technology was a breach of the border that separate the home from the city, the private from the public.” If one can no longer defend the physical integrity of walls, one tactic of resistance is to protect their social and legal-conventional integrity. Indeed, the mediation of walls threatens liberty and sonic agency (LaBelle 2018), as humans cannot deter the escape of sounds, images, molecules, and vibrational waves.

Notably, Hamdan’s (2018) work does not specifically defend the right to privacy but rather engages in what we call a *politics of transparency* and a just form of actuarial surveillance, or, some might say, “sousveillance” (Mann and Ferenbok 2013). This tactic of resistance recognizes the principle of walls as sensory media, subverting the apparatus to enact justice, redress, accountability, and transparency. Hamdan’s collaboration with Amnesty International articulates a political praxis of resistance by reproducing the sounds and architecture of Saydnaya to allow the activist-public to experience its prison walls as sensory media for themselves: in doing so, Hamdan’s (2018) work provokes ethical commiseration from an activist-public with the survivors of Saydnaya while helping to build a case for legal prosecution. This articulates the subversive power of the work of art and the super-hearing potential of the earwitness collective.

In other terms, as an artist and private-ear investigator, Hamdan’s (2018) work confronts a violent dominant social order in Syria by amplifying emergent forms of resistance. This exemplifies Brandon LaBelle’s (2018: 56, 18) notion of a “negative aesthetics” by reproducing the *invisible* figure of resistance that reveals “how listening may direct us toward the hidden and the uncounted, as well as the faceless.” By sharing the voices and stories of Saydnaya survivors, Hamdan’s work articulates a mapping of the spaces of violence in Syria while building a case for the accountability of the Assad regime, the prison institution, and the design of carceral architectures that use walls as weapons. Informed by earwitness testimonies, Hamdan (2018) demonstrates a superhuman power that effectively punctures the visual limits of Saydnaya’s exterior walls and invites an activist-public to share in this power of super-listening.

Our theorisation of walls and architecture as sensory media reveals that they are not just permeable but that they can amplify, and hence violently shake, our bodies. In moving forward with a politics of transparency, those who design, construct, and operate walls as instruments of power must be treated as culpable to a resonant accountability. With the dissolution of walls as barriers and boundaries, an earwitness collective subverts walls as weapons by listening with compassionate attention to the victims of violence and injustice. Further, due to the contemporary proliferation of acoustic surveillance, scholars, artists, and activists must further amplify this politics of resistance and continue to develop creative modes of earwitness attunement.

Saydnaya is certainly a peculiar case of panacoustic architecture; however, in modern prisons across the globe, sound shapes experiences of confinement for a “captive audience” (Rice 2016) through harsh exposure to auditory violence and enforced conditions of silence, monotony, and isolation. Prison walls can amplify human suffering and engender a form of sensory deprivation to sonic stimulation and companionship. Thus, Tom Rice (2016: 15) notes that access to privatized listening devices (e.g., MP3 players) in prisons can help empower individuals with “acoustical agency” by softening feelings of loneliness or, more generally, by allowing them to prioritise and manage a range of affective states. In the US, the Bureau of Prisons has noted this and uses MP3 players and other devices as part of a “disciplinary tool kit,” serving as both a reward for good behavior and means of producing “docile bodies” by pacifying prisoners (Kirkpatrick 2013). Evidently, control over prisoners’ acoustical agency can support a top-down management of prison populations that is congruous with surveillance regimes.

Panacoustic surveillance in prisons is beginning to converge with consumer-based “eavesmining platforms” (Neville 2020). For instance, there is discussion underway about using AI voice assistants, similar to

Amazon's Alexa, in prisons to help address the solitary confinement crisis in the US (Završnik 2019). The deployment of voice assistants in prisons may help foster feelings of acoustical agency by having something to talk and listen to; however, the technology's surveillance affordances reflect an ulterior motive. This serves as a reminder that, in addition to the high-intensity and dramatic violence enacted by prison walls, we must not lose sight of the mundane and low-intensity forms of sonic warfare and surveillance that increasingly shape a politics of transparency in everyday life. For instance, with the domestication of smart speakers and other microphone-equipped devices, surveillance is being normalized even in the most private and intimate of spaces. The result is not only that users cannot trust their devices but also that people commonly feel exposed and unprotected wherever they are. For instance, dating back at least to the release of Siri in 2011, a prominent surveillance "conspiracy theory" (see Holm 2009) has emerged that tech companies use phones and other smart devices to conduct secretive eavesdropping campaigns to deliver targeted advertisements (Bergstein 2012; Kleinman 2016; 2017).² Undoubtedly, fears of such panacoustic surveillance have been fueled by prominent news coverage of shady end-user agreements for smart TVs (Goldman 2015), faulty smart speaker devices (Burke 2017; Chokshi 2018), and even hidden microphones in smart home devices (Bastone 2019). Although scholars have refuted and tested the conspiracy of always-listening technology (Pan et al. 2018; Kröger and Raschke 2019), feelings of acoustic insecurity are likely to persist. One can attribute such "paranoia" (Harper 2008) to the ubiquity of microphones in contemporary life, but we must also address how the "walls" between users and technology construct an asymmetrical power relationship: just as the modern prison is decidedly opaque, the black box design of consumer technology fabricates walls that shield tech corporations, third-party companies, and law enforcement agencies while exposing users to surveillance and other abuses of power. Thus, if our walls are being broken down, we must assert the right to audit and hold accountable those who construct the conditions of panacoustic surveillance.

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² Remarkably, Mark Zuckerberg was specifically questioned about the conspiracy theory of always-listening technology during his testimony to US Congress concerning the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal in April 2018 (Jeong 2018).

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