SO! Amplifies: Phantom Power

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Abstract

***SO!* Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig.**

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***SO!* Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome!**

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Phantom Power is an aural exploration of the sonic arts and humanities, that launched in March 2018 with Episode 1: Dead Air (John Biguenet and Rodrigo Toscano) Hosted by poet + media artist **cris cheek** and sound + media scholar **Mack Hagood**, this podcast explores the sounds and ideas of artists, technologists, producers, composers, ethnographers, historians, cultural scholars, philosophers, and others working in sound. Because Phantom Power is about to kick off its second season on February 1, 2019, we thought we'd dig a little deeper into who they are and who they'd like to reach with their good vibrations.

Funded through a generous grant from the **Miami University Humanities Center** and **The National Endowment for the Humanities,** *Phantom Power* was created with the goal of bringing together three important streams of conversation in the humanities

> *(1) diverse and interdisciplinary scholarly pursuits, taking place under the umbrella of "sound studies," that analyze and critique the sonic entanglements and practices of human beings;*
>
> *(2) experimental aesthetic practices that use sound as a medium and inspiration to expand the boundaries of art, music, and poetry;*
>
> *and (3) the nascent use of podcasting as a mode of scholarship, intra-/interdisciplinary communication, and public outreach.*

The public-facing podcast draws on the extensive radio experience of co-host cris cheek, creator of *Music of Madagascar,* made for BBC Radio 3 in 1994, which won the SONY GOLD AWARD, Specialist Music Program of the Year. In 1998 he made *crowding*, a three and a half hour live-streamed webcast of largely improvised speech and sound events, commissioned as part of Torkradio from by Junction Multimedia in Cambridge. In 2004, cheek was part of the BBC series *Between the Ears*, on the subject of speaking in tongues, in conversation with the artist and film-director Steve McQueen, exploring the boundaries of vocal expression with actress Billie Whitelaw, and linguistics professor William Samarin. cheek appears in the first episode talking about the many contradictory experiences of "dead air" in an age of changing media technologies.

Phantom Power also alchemizes the scholarship of co-host Mack Hagood (see *Hush: Media and Sonic Self-Control* forthcoming in March 2019 from Duke University Press and his 2012 *SO!* post "Listening to Tinnitus: Roles of Media When Hearing Breaks Down") as well as his audio production background as a musician, producer, and radio DJ—skills he has long incorporated into his scholarship and teaching. At Indiana University, for example, he and his students and won the

Indiana Society of Professional Journalists' 2012 Best Radio Use of Sound award for our documentary series "I-69: Sounds and Stories in the Path of a Superhighway." The first episode even featured music by Hagood and by Graeme Gibson, who was touring on drums with Michael Nau and the Mighty Thread at the time. Additional sound is by Cl0v3n.

"We spend *a lot* of time on the production aspects of this podcast," says Hagood, "because we want it to be a sonic and affective experience, not just an intellectual one. Many of us in sound studies have complained that we always find ourselves *writing* about sound. *Phantom Power* is our attempt to treat sound not only as an object of study, but also a means of understanding and *feeling* sound scholarship. This makes our show very different from most academic podcasts, which are usually lo-fi discussions between scholars about recent books. We love that kind of podcast but we build upon it by using narrative, sound design, and music to tell a compelling story that we hope will appeal to the public and sound specialists alike."

In addition to their exploration of "dead air," Phantom Power's inaugural season included longform interviews with urban scholar Shannon Mattern (Episode 2, "City of Voices"), sound artist Brian House (Episode 3, "Dirty Rat"), Australia-based sound composer, media artist and curator Lawrence English (Episode 4, "On Listening In"), and with scholar and SO! ed Jennifer Stoever (Episode 5, "Ears Racing"). The final two episodes explored what "the future will sound like" on World Listening Day (July 18th) [Episode 6: Data Streams (Leah Barclay and Teresa Barrozo) and featured Houston's SLAB car culture [Episode 7: Screwed & Chopped (Langston Collin Wilkins)].

"I'm super excited about Season Two," says Hagood. "Our opener stars one of my favorite sound scholars, NYU's Mara Mills. It also uses one of my favorite formats that cris and I have developed, where one of us brings in some crazy sounds for the other to listen and react to, then we gradually develop the backstory to the sounds through our guest's words, eventually landing on the sonic and cultural implications of it all. It's like a fun mystery, where one co-host acts as guide and the other gets to stand in for the listener—reacting, laughing, and questioning."

When *Phantom Power* returns next month, other new entries will feature cheek's interviews with Charles Hayward of legendary experimental rock band This Heat and poet Caroline Bergvall, whose work has been commissioned by such institutions as MoMA and the Tate Modern. "I interview amazing sound scholars, but I'm a bit star struck by some of the musicians, sound artists, and poets cris interviews!" says Hagood.

You can access *Phantom Power* and subscribe on a plethora of outlets: itunes, android, stitcher, google podcasts, and/or by email.

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