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The Panaural People's Republic: Loudness, Loss of Self, and Sonic Social Control in Mao's China

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Abstract Perspectives on the establishment of social control have long been shaped by theories concerning visibility and observation, such as Foucault's concept of the Panopticon. In Mao era China, however, sound and hearing had a greater impact on citizens becoming self-disciplined. Reflecting on a variety of sources, with a particular focus on memoirs, this article details how the Mao era soundscape helped to fashion a new form of disciplinary society. This disciplinary society was chaotic, however, and sites of resistance remained, in which some individuals fought to retain their sense of self, even amid all the tumult and violence.

Keywords China. Sound. Noise. Soundscape. Radio. Loudspeaker.

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1 Introduction: The Panaural State and Discipline

Italo Calvino's collection of short stories *Under the Jaguar Sun*, contains three narratives concerning the senses: taste, hearing and smell. The collection as planned would have been called *The Five Senses*, and would also have included stories on sight and touch, but Calvino died before completing his work.[1] "A King Listens", the story concerning hearing, describes a king sitting on an 'isolated' throne in his palace, who fears the possibility of rebellion, and uses his hearing to detect whether or not a plot is stirring against him (Calvino 1988). The king uses attentive listening to decipher the meaning of the palace soundscape, scrutinising audible signs, or "signals", to use R. Murray Schafer's term, which are "foreground sounds […] listened to consciously" (1994, 101).

In Calvino's story, the palace is a "weft of regular sounds" which are "always the same, like the heart's beat" (1988, 43). These are "keynote" sounds in Schafer's soundscape concept, those that act as an "anchor" against which other sounds take on their "special meaning" (1994, 100). The palace in which the king resides is used as a metaphor for various things. It is a "clock", it is "a great ear", and it is the "body of the king" (Calvino 1988, 37-8, 43). Because of Calvino's use of the second person, and these metaphors of the palace, two of which are anatomical, readers are provoked to consider the ways in which sounds impact on the body ("your body sends you mysterious messages, which you receive with fear, with anxiety. In an unknown part of this body, a menace is lurking, your death is already stationed there"; 1988, 43), and how the ear, in times of great anxiety, is employed to disentangle both complex codes/signals and regular sounds/keynotes in order to avert possible danger. As "A King Listens" shows, this sort of auditory auto-surveillance, or paranoid attentive listening, can take hold of anyone, no matter their position in society, in moments of tension and fear, and in times of violence and political uncertainty.

In this article I will examine the ways in which sound organised people's daily routines during the Mao era, how certain sounds caused fear and anxiety for people, how people worried about being overheard, and how in combination such experiences led to a form of sonic conditioning in which individuals were, to a degree, disciplined by the soundscape in which they lived. I will examine the range of themes concerning sound, listening, and the body that inspired "A King Listens", to address the sonic aspects of the internalisation of obedience in the Mao era, and the early developments of contemporary China's "disciplinary society" (Foucault 1979).

1 This article has been adapted and subtantially reworked from my dissertation, *The Maoist Soundscape: Sonic Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1976* (Lovell 2022).

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The sources I examine primarily pertain to the early stages of the Cultural Revolution period (1966-76), when the connections between sound, fear and discipline were most pronounced, though I also refer to earlier PRC sources that detail the burgeoning relationship between sound and the internalisation of obedience. This article does not suggest that there was such a thing as a uniform soundscape that existed nationwide in China throughout the Mao era, but instead focuses on numerous individuals' emotional and affective sonic experiences in order to examine a range of issues concerning sound and everyday life in the Mao years. While this article makes quite extensive use of memoirs, it takes into account the understanding that an individual's recollection – especially during moments of trauma – is often imperfect. As Seán Street explains, however, "there is something much more profound about the function of memory than simply a facility for storage and retrieval" (2014, 20), and memory can also be considered "more a crucible of meaning than a vessel of truth", (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, Levy 2011, 311).[2] It is through using memoirs – in conversation with contemporaneous sources (such as articles from the *People's Daily* [*Renmin ribao* 人民日报], the mouthpiece newspaper of the Party, and documents from the British Foreign Office), as well as a few oral interviews,[3] secondary literature and sound studies theory – that I attempt to understand the place of sound in the broader meaning of the Mao years, both as lived and as remembered, by Chinese citizens as well as foreign visitors.

In examining the experiences and legacies of sound, fear and discipline in the early PRC's soundscape, I will engage with Michel Foucault's concept of the Panopticon, and its later adaptation to address the role of sound and music in a "disciplinary society", a form of social structure which I argue followed a path of development in modern Chinese history which was unique, and notably different from the disciplinary society described by Foucault. The Panopticon theory, originally associated with Jeremy Bentham, and later developed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,[4] concerns a prison design that has a central room from which a supervisor can observe all prisoners in their peripheral cells at any given moment. The prisoners are unable to tell when or whether or not they are being observed, because they cannot see out of their cells that surround the central observation room. Visibility becomes a "trap" for the prisoners, "he is seen, but he does not see", and "this invisibility is a guar-

2 This sentence is also quoted in Street 2014, 20.

3 The three oral interviews I reference in this article were carried out as part of my research for my PhD Dissertation (cited in the Bibliography).

4 In this article I cite from the 1979 English version, translated by Alan Sheridan (cf. Foucault 1979).

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antee of order" (1979, 200). This type of power relation, as Foucault details, could be repeated in any other institution as well, as long as the "see/being seen dyad" is established (1979, 202).

In recent years, scholars influenced by Foucault's work on discipline have modified his theories to consider the role of sound in guaranteeing order and compliance. Christiane Lenk, for example, in her chapter "Audibility Is a Trap: Aural Panopticon in *The Lives of Others* (2006)" from *Germany in the Loud Twentieth Century*, examines the latter years of the German Democratic Republic (the GDR, also known as "East Germany" [1949-90]), detailing how the film *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*) reflects the "permanent sound control" under which the citizens of the GDR lived (Lenk 2012, 128).[5] Lenk argues that this could best be described as a "panaural state", owing to the widespread practice of audio surveillance and spying (128), and an extensive network of informants, whose existence was common knowledge, which caused citizens to internalise obedience (126).

The Mao era PRC also constituted a panaural state, as I will explain, albeit a lower tech and far less cohesive version of the type delineated by Lenk.[6] This panaural state – a concept I use more broadly to refer to the internalisation of obedience caused by both enforced listening as well as the fear of being overheard – was, I contend, an early form of contemporary China's surveillance state. My arguments throughout build on Foucault's Panopticon concept, and his broader viewpoints on discipline, but not merely to suggest that Foucault's original theory was "ocularcentric" (a term explored in Jay 1988), or that sound has also been crucial in the growth of surveillance states, though both of these points are true. As this article outlines, the development of the panaural state in China differed from the evolution of Foucault's "disciplinary society", in one crucial way. Similar to what Takashi Fujitani describes in *Splendid Monarchy*, the rise in this form of modern society in China, as in Japan, did not coincide with "the decline of the monarchy, or at least of 'monarchical power'" (1996, 27). Owing to the existence of a sovereign or sovereign-like power in China, Mao (the cult of whom was at its peak in the Cultural Revolution period, but began to grow in the 1950s),[7] punishment was not as managed or regulated as it would have been in Foucault's vision of a disciplinary society.

5 Another work in which the Panopticon concept has been re-examined according to aural matters is Rounthwaite (2008, 193-207).

6 Andrew F. Jones outlines the challenges the CCP faced in rural broadcasting (2020, ch. 2).

7 Chang-tai Hung has explored how the "growing deification of Mao" was expressed in the National Day parades of the 1950s (2007, 419).

According to Foucault, the "gentle way in punishment" (1979, 104) that was advocated by prison reformers led to a system in which punishment became, as David Garland explains, "a reflection of the crime itself, as when work is used against idleness, shame against vanity […] and so on" rather than "arbitrary, the capricious expression of the sovereign's will" (1986, 856). As various anecdotes in this article elucidate, however, the "capricious expression of the sovereign's will" was still imbricated with punishment and discipline during the Mao years, especially during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, and in other politically unsettled periods. The sovereign's will was enacted through the people, who were encouraged to rebel and crush counter-revolutionaries, which meant that arbitrary forms of punishment continued to exist alongside the maturing disciplinary society. This chaos was also exacerbated by malfunctions and aberrations in both the organisation of controlling functions in society and the meting out of disciplinary measures, which led to sites of resistance or ways of avoiding discipline, co-existing with especially violent punitive measures (which were particularly evident in the early years of the Cultural Revolution).[8]

2 Acoustic Timetables, Discipline and Conditioning

Acoustic timetables – including broadcasting schedules, as well as time-marking keynote sounds such as bells – impacted on peoples' minds and bodies in everyday life in the Mao years, and certain scheduled sounds led to the internalisation of obedience, as I explain in this section. According to Foucault:

> [The] principle that underlay the time-table in its traditional form was essentially negative; it was the principle of non-idleness: it was forbidden to waste time, which was counted by God and paid for by men; the time-table was to eliminate the danger of wasting it – a moral offense and economic dishonesty. Discipline, on the other hand, arranges a positive economy; it poses the principle of an ever-growing use of time: exhaustion rather than use; it is a question of extracting from time, ever more available moments, and, from each moment, ever more useful forces. (1979, 154)

The timetable, Foucault argues, in combination with "a system of prohibitions and obligations, continual supervision, exhortations, [and] religious readings" helped to draw prisoners "towards good" and

8 Garland argues that Foucault overlooked the possibility for such kinds of malfunctions in his study of the penal system (1986, 873).

"away from evil" (121). E.P. Thompson, in "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", like Foucault, draws a connection between the conception of time, and how it ought to be utilised to its fullest extent in the workplace, with Christian morality ("the Puritan ethic"). Christian moralists wrote about "the brevity of the mortal span" as well as the "husbandry of time" in everyday life in the workplace, and in combination with "the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives […] new labour habits were formed, and a new time-discipline was formed" (Thompson 1967, 87-8, 90).

While the Christian moral basis of "time-thrift" did not apply to the PRC, I believe that there was a similar drive towards making workers internalise the concept of "time-thrift" in Mao's China, and that it was also connected with a moral dimension that extended beyond the mundane reality of daily life in schools, villages and factories. Acoustic timetables reinforced the connection between time-thrift and the morality/ideology of model citizens, which led to the internalisation of discipline. Loudspeakers, radios, bells and other amplified sounds marked routine in many people's daily lives during the Mao era. People were conditioned to respond to these sounds, and these sounds forced individuals to be cognizant of state-decreed conceptions/apportioning of time – i.e., time had to be considered in relation to a campaign period, the build-up to National Day, or its place within a five-year-plan –, all of which encouraged model behaviour.

Broadcasting systems in schools helped with the organisation and administration of school life, and they could also be used for a certain level of conditioning. To be clear, the conditioning of children in their education via public address systems or bells is not unique to the Mao years or China. In the United States and elsewhere we are "conditioned in time discipline by primary schooling" for our future as workers, as David Graeber states, and this is something that could be achieved even without specific acoustic signals (2018, 92). In the Mao era, however, the acoustic signals that children were expected to obey and follow ingrained within them a different sort of time-discipline, as time was apportioned/designated by the Party and the children's bodies and minds needed to be disciplined for the good of the Party and the new nation. Basic time-discipline was imposed on children/teenagers, but within the daily schedule, the presence of the state was felt in certain acoustic symbolism, or in the instructions that children/teenagers were given. For example, in Beverly Hooper's *Foreigners Under Mao: Western Lives in China, 1949-1976*, Western students who studied in the PRC during the Mao era give an account of how their days were structured by various acoustic signals:

> The students' day was punctuated by bells and loudspeaker broadcasts relayed across the campus. They were woken at 6 a.m. by a rousing rendition of "The East Is Red", followed by the daily political broadcast ('the news') and the morning exercise music. At 7 came the breakfast bell, followed by bells to start and finish class, punctuated by more exercise music at 10, the bell for lunch – and so on for the rest of the day. Wristwatches were still a relative luxury for Chinese students even in the early 1970s and there was a need for reminders, even though they 'made us feel like Pavlovian dogs', in the words of one British student. At 10 p.m., dormitory front doors and the high entrance gate were usually locked. (2016, 200)

It is interesting to consider that this British student used the term "Pavlovian", referring to Pavlov's famous experiments on conditioning, and that school life was deemed to be similar to life in a barracks. It should be noted that this student was studying in a nation that was a Cold War adversary, when concerns about Pavlovian conditioning/brainwashing by the Soviet Union and the PRC were rife, and foreigners would presumably have not felt like "Pavlovian dogs" when responding automatically to bells and loudspeakers in Western schools, but this is not to say that the observation was wholly unfounded. In terms of the presence of Mao and the Party in the daily soundscape, they were symbolically intertwined with the acoustic timetable owing to the enforced listening of "The East is Red" and the "daily political broadcast" (the news).

Acoustic signals within the soundscape, when intensely and regularly repeated in everyday life, caused some children and adults to be conditioned to respond appropriately. Such automatic responses were also usually linked to some form of behaviour that would be of benefit to the nation. For example, Rhoda Stockwell, an American who went on a tour of primary schools in several Chinese provinces in 1974, describes certain "eye exercises" being performed in time to loudspeaker music:

> At the sound of another bell, the children happily returned to classrooms but soon became quiet. Music came over the loudspeaker, and I very much expected what I have seen often in lower primary schools in the USA, that each child would rest his head on his desk for a quiet period. To my great surprise, the children did not do that at all but, rather, sat straight in their seats and rubbed their eyes. Watching more closely, I could see a definite pattern to the hand motions. The children were massaging certain muscles and stimulating acupuncture points we were told. The children were doing their eyes exercises. They do these twice a day at school, to protect their eyesight. (1975, 234)

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Stockwell explains that the physical development of the children was as important as their moral and intellectual growth, but does not explicitly connect it with national goals in her article. The connection between physical exercise, in time to broadcast music and instructions, and national goals, is attested to in various other sources, however, especially for the practice of broadcast led calisthenics or "radio gymnastic exercises" (*guangbo ticao* 广播体操), which all of my oral interviewees recalled taking part in and often enjoying in their schooldays. A *People's Daily* article from June 1952 explains how radio gymnastic exercises were an effective way to improve the health of the people, and that the extensive practice of radio gymnastic exercises was improving "efficiency" in workplaces and the "mood" for studying in schools (*Renmin ribao* 1952).

In factories (and other workplaces) there was a similar connection between acoustic timetables and discipline, and the timetable was also punctuated by propaganda messaging or soundscape signals that encouraged model worker behaviour. The Swiss photographer and reporter, Walter Bosshard (1892-1975), in "Stern Discipline in Communist China: Impressions from Peking" (originally published in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1 March 1955) relates the usage of loudspeakers in the "continuous process of teaching and enlightenment", giving an example of a typical broadcasting schedule at a building site:

> [As] early as five in the morning the loudspeakers started to blare out directions to the workers lodged in barracks on the site of the building. A paternal friendly voice repeating the same words three or four times reminded them that it was now time to get up. A new day had started. Chairman Mao Tse Tung once more expected them to overfulfil their norms. There followed explanations on the importance of physical hygiene. These invariably ended with the exhortation to remember to wash their faces and hands. In much the same way during the course of the day further instructions on how to work, how to behave, how to rest, how to share your meals with your comrades, were given. (Foreign Office Files for China 1954-55, 26)

Bosshard details all of this as a way of explaining his main thesis, that the continuous process of education and enlightenment (via the radio and loudspeaker) had brought about stern discipline to the extent that "a stage has almost been reached where people react much as automatons and adapt and subordinate their own free will to the orders which issue from the radio or loudspeaker" (26). He supports this argument by explaining how a foreign diplomat who lived opposite the building site and was exposed to the daily repetition of this broadcast eventually

> became so obsessed with the whole business that at the end of one month he began to feel a sense of guilt if he still remained in bed after the loudspeaker across the road had for the third time ordered everyone to get up. (26)

This early Cold War-era article is reminiscent of the sensationalist accounts of "brainwashing" and loss of agency detailed in the American journalist and propagandist Edward Hunter's then recent work *Brain-Washing in Red China* (1951), and certainly overstates the sinister effects of the broadcasts. It is true, however, that factory broadcasting was often used intensely to spread the new political culture, and to both motivate and shame workers (Lovell 2022).

Factory broadcasting encouraged greatly increased production around each National Day (1 October), and during the early stages of Great Leap Forward (1958-62), which was regularly reported on in the pages of the *People's Daily*.[9] Although the true success of these pledges is difficult to ascertain, it is evident that the broadcasts allowed for the restructuring of workers' daily and yearly schedules according to the Party's needs and its new political culture, with its attendant new customs and rituals. At times, naturally, employees were unwilling or unable to behave as model workers, however, and they ignored factory loudspeakers and bells, effectively neutering the Party's attempts to effect control via sonic means.[10] Also, even in the cases of relatively successful factory broadcasting efforts recounted in the pages of the *People's Daily*, the Party often encountered obstacles in attempting to ensure productive daily broadcasts that could engage and inform workers.[11] In these instances, workers were not heeding the dictates from above, and although the level of true resistance in such actions is difficult to ascertain, these were clear examples of the system of control malfunctioning.

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9 To give one example, in a *People's Daily* article from September 1959, it is claimed that after the broadcast of the communiques and resolutions of the Eighth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee (known as the "Lushan Conference"), steel workers in Zhejiang, in "high fighting spirit", introduced new targets for the Leap Forward. After listening to the broadcast, the workers of Zhejiang's biggest steel factory held a mass meeting and resolved to fight to overfulfil their quota. By midnight of 26 August, the workers had, five days ahead of schedule, completed their steelmaking duties for August, increasing their daily output 19.5% from the previous year (*Renmin ribao* 1959).

10 Frank Dikötter describes the ineffectiveness of CCP's propaganda techniques a few years after the Great Leap Forward had started, by which time the movement was an obvious failure, and starvation was widespread. Dikötter writes, "the deeper the country sank into famine, the greater the shirking became", and "cadres simply did not have the means to control every worker and punish every disciplinary breach" (2010, 209), and though "loudspeakers might be blaring exhortations to work" and "propaganda posters might extoll the model worker who overfulfilled the plan […] apathy more often than not governed the factory floor" (208).

11 As detailed in Lovell 2022.

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3 Fear and the Internalisation of Discipline

3.1 Amplified Sound at Public Trials and Struggle Sessions

Amplified sound, through loudspeaker usage at large-scale public events and live radio broadcasting of such events elsewhere, when combined with organised listening, was a powerful propaganda[12] tool for the CCP (Liu 1975; Li 2020; Huang 2013; Jones 2020), as it also was for the autocratic regimes of the Soviet Union (Lovell 2015) and Nazi Germany (Birdsall 2012). These tools were similarly effective, if not more visceral and potent, in conveying warnings to the people, regarding the consequences of any anti-Party actions. The PRC's sonic infrastructure enabled the Party to ensure that public punishments of supposed wrongdoers were no longer merely the spectacles that they would have been in earlier centuries around the world, but were instead events whose impact could be experienced intimately, widely and as they happened. In this way, loudspeakers and radios were employed to create the maximum amount of fear and anxiety in listeners, so that they would internalise discipline and learn not to challenge the Party.

A *People's Daily* article from May 1951 details a broadcasting conference/public trial that was set up to denounce supposed counter-revolutionaries. At the end of this denunciation meeting, held at a stadium in Shenyang, the Municipal People's Government accepted the people's "request" to execute the accused, according to the article (*Renmin ribao* 1951). This was a large-scale event attended in person by over 30,000 people from "all walks of life", which was broadcast via radio to over a million people, the article claims. On the day when the event was held, schools were shut and businesses were closed so that citizens could gather around over 300,000 radios to listen in to the "blood and tears" accusations made against the counter-revolutionaries. The meeting began after a "stirring" sing-along of a song from the opera *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai mao nu* 白毛女) and when the counter-revolutionaries were brought onto the stage, the whole venue became a "racket", and the crowd's cry of demand that the "heinous" counter-revolutionaries be shot "resounded across the heavens" (*Renmin ribao* 1951).

What is striking about this account is the representation of a kind of people's justice, the emotion-raising nature of the event, and the role of sound and technology in the proceedings. The article presents

12 I use the term "propaganda" here broadly to refer to both its more neutral original sense of "disseminating information" as well as the more negative connotations of its modern usage. See Kenez (1985) for a more detailed explanation of the historical shifts in the term's usage, and Bao (2015, 300-6) for the nuances of the word's meaning in modern Chinese history (the term for "propaganda" in Chinese is *xuanchuan* 宣传).

the guilty verdicts and death sentences as being the righteous culmination of the people's anger, and it asserts that the Party was merely listening to the people, and carrying out their clearly expressed wishes. The voice of the people, what was called for and the sentiments expressed, was unanimous, according to the article. The people called out "Long live Chairman Mao!", and "Long live the victorious suppression of counter-revolutionaries!", and the article presents these slogans as emerging spontaneously and as if delivered by one voice. The atmosphere of the event was emotional and almost carnivalesque at times as well, as dancing (*yangge* 秧歌) and drum and gong beating accompanied the sounds of the gunshots which struck the accused after they had been taken away from the stadium.

This denunciation broadcast was similar to emotion-raising events described by Elizabeth Perry (2002) and Yu Liu (2010), in terms of the managed communal outpouring of a wide variety of potent emotions, but the integration of broadcasting technology into the proceedings, and the halting of everyday life elsewhere as broadcasts were being relayed, shows how the Party carefully made full use of sound-reproducing technology to achieve their purposes. There was also recirculation across the mediascape to ensure that the maximum propaganda potential was wrung from the goings on at the Shenyang stadium. The event itself lasted three hours, ostensibly owing to the "impassioned masses", and the general crowd sounds as well as specific accusations were broadcast over the radio. As specific members of the audience, those that would best elicit sympathy (a "grey-haired old lady", a "thirteen-year-old orphan", and a mother whose children had been killed), "poured out" their "bitter complaints", people who were listening in on the radio were reported to have made telephone calls, and sent letters and money in order to show support for the victims and for the imposition of death sentences on all of the accused (*Renmin ribao* 1951).

During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, similar public trials (also known as "struggle sessions" or "denunciations", *pidou dahui* 批斗大会) occurred, some also within public stadiums, and some at smaller locations, without the sonic infrastructural set up for radio broadcast elsewhere. An anecdote from *Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China's Cultural Revolution*, Feng Jicai's collection of short memoirs on the period, vividly recounts one such event:

> Once during the movement, we were assembled in a stadium for a public sentencing. The audience was assigned spaces according to their work units. We stood in rows, facing an ad hoc stage that was set up with wooden planks. On the stage were some loudspeakers and microphones. When the criminals – altogether twenty-two of them – were led onto the stage, the noises from the handcuffs and shackles were magnified by the loudspeakers and heard

> throughout the stadium, sending shivers of fear to everyone in the audience. Then the crimes of those criminals were read. One of them was charged with writing "counterrevolutionary" articles and journals. The most lenient sentence that day was twenty years imprisonment. Most of the accused were sentenced to death. The one who wrote "counterrevolutionary" articles was sentenced to life imprisonment. (1996, 2)

This account, unlike the *People's Daily* article detailed above, gives a sense of what it would have been like to be an audience member in the stadium, and what the specific effects of amplified sound were. The microphones and loudspeakers amplification of the noises from the stage caused "shivers and fear" in the author, Feng Jicai, and "everyone in the audience", he presumes, because they allowed audience members to establish a connection with the criminals on the stage. Feng could hear the movements of the shackles and handcuffs, sonic details that would have been lost on the audience without technological amplification. If the accused were remote figures who could not be heard in any way, it would not have been as easy or automatic for audience members to identify with them in any respect, to internalise fear and, we can surmise, discipline.

3.2 Slogan Shouting and Targeted Sonic Harassment

Jacques Attali argues, in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, that "noise is the source of power" and that "in noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men" (1985). Of the examples introduced so far in this article, of instances in which aspects of the Mao era soundscape caused the internalisation of fear and discipline, Attali's view has been borne out. When people were denounced and verbally abused, those in the crowd witnessed and heard (owing to amplification) the power relations between the various figures within the trials/struggle sessions. The noise of castigations and the noises of handcuffs and shackles vividly attested to who was the subjugator and who was subjugated. Sound, both amplified and unamplified, was frequently wielded to harm and torment individuals at various stages of the Mao era, especially in the early years of the Cultural Revolution. Slogan shouting and other targeted noise attacks were sometimes combined with physical attacks, or other forms of torture (depending on where such events took place), but sound/noise was also used without accompaniment, as a form of no-touch torture (Cusick 2006, 4), or a method of psychological warfare.

Ji Xianlin's *The Cowshed: Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (2016), is an account of his downfall from respected linguist and professor at Peking University to imprisonment in a "cowshed"

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(*niu peng* 牛棚), a makeshift prison for "bad elements", staffed by Red Guards, for being a supposed capitalist roader.[13] In his memoir, Ji describes several instances of people using the tactic of aggressive slogan shouting to struggle against those who stood accused of some form of crime. He witnessed and heard many struggle sessions, and was the subject of many too once his persecution began. According to Ji, a typical struggle session ran as follows:

> Someone would read from Mao's sayings, and then the leader would call for ***, the capitalist-roader, to be brought to the front. The unfortunate individual would have his arms twisted behind his back with two Red Guards pushing down on his head as they led him onto the podium. Then the crowds would go wild shouting slogans: 'Long live Chairman Mao!'. Someone would make a speech, and whatever was said was by default true. All the capitalist-roaders had committed the same crimes: they opposed the Party, socialism, and the Great Leader. The masses could pin any label they liked on their unfortunate victims. They would always ask the capitalist-roader whether he admitted his guilt. If he hesitated, they would beat him savagely. It was unclear what the struggle sessions achieved, except to torment their victims. Some in the audience were completely earnest, others found it good fun, and still others took sadistic pleasure in the torture. (2016, 32)

As this passage shows, "noise" – a term that I use here in the general sense of "sound that is at a high volume" –[14] was one of several means used to attack an individual in these part-ordered, part-chaotic events. The beatings would, we can presume, mainly have been administered by those who were physically close to the struggled against individual, but the slogan shouting allowed everyone present to participate. Through Ji's graphic accounts of the numerous struggle sessions he endured, it is possible to gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of slogan shouting as a method of torture.

The noise of slogan shouting was something that energised the crowd and whipped them up into further violence. As Ji explains, "they would begin with deafening slogans, followed by speeches and a bit of punching and slapping if the crowd became animated" (101). A "successful" struggle session appeared to require sincere and full-throated slogan shouting (101). Inadequate slogan shouting was a

13 Cowsheds were "makeshift detention centers" that "sprung up in many Chinese cities" in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Those that were incarcerated in these cowsheds were made to perform manual labour and frequently "[recite] tracts of Mao's writing". The cowshed guards inflicted various kinds of "physical and psychological violence" on convicts (Ji 2016, 7).

14 For a more in-depth exploration of the term see Novak, Sakakeeny 2015, 125.

sign of a mediocre, or failed struggle session, as Ji details elsewhere: "The slogans were halfhearted, there was no kicking or punching, and I barely held the airplane position at all. The speeches were 90 percent nonsense and 9 percent lies, with 1 percent remaining as a grain of truth. If I were grading struggle sessions, this one would fail – I couldn't give it any more than a 3 out of 10" (64).[15]

When the slogans were more impassioned, louder and relentless, they could be severely disorienting, as Ji illustrates:

> People in the crowd began to throw stones at me, hitting my face and body. I was aware of being kicked, punched, spat on, and yet I was unable to fight back. Despite having lived near campus for nearly twenty years, I couldn't tell where the truck was going. I felt like a sailboat lost at sea or a fox surrounded by hounds. The slogans were making me dizzy, and I gave myself up for lost. (57)

In this brutal account, Ji claims that the yelling of slogans made him "dizzy", to the extent that he became unaware of his very familiar surroundings. As Ji stated in his outline of a typical struggle session quoted above, exactly what was being shouted was not especially important ("[the] masses could pin any label they liked on their unfortunate victims"), so it is possible that it was the sheer loudness of the experience that caused his loss of bearings, and to some extent the loss of his sense of self. This could be explained by the phenomenon Michael Heller terms "listener collapse", which occurs when

> loud sound dissolves the ability to distinguish between interior and exterior worlds, especially in regard to sound and self. Sound does not only touch, it saturates and fills mental and physical consciousness, eliminating the possibility of detached listening. In a sense, listener collapse acts as a forced imposition of the type of sonic experience proposed by [Jean-Luc] Nancy; it is a moment in which penetration erases our ability to distinguish between exterior/sound and interior/self, bringing both together in a single inescapable vibration. (2015, 45)

To some extent, however, as Ji explains when describing later struggle sessions, he learned to detach himself from both the sounds he endured, and the other forms of torture inflicted upon him:

15 Jan Wong describes a similar struggle session in *Red China Blues*, which took place in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution period, in which the distinct lack of noise and energy also signified its failure (1997, 114).

> After half an hour in the airplane position, I was often sore all over and drenched in sweat; before long, I would grow light-headed and sway slightly, my ears ringing. To keep myself going, I sometimes repeated a Mao saying to myself: 'Make up your mind to fight without counting the costs, overcome all obstacles, and strive for victory!'. Or in my case: 'Make up your mind to ignore the pain, overcome all obstacles, and strive not to collapse!'. This generally worked. As I persevered, the slogans and speeches began to sound faint and faraway, like thunder on distant hilltops. (2016, 65)

Later on (123), Ji describes a similar sort of disassociated response to being struggled against, and on other occasions, despite his ears ringing with slogans and having fists raining down upon him, he reports being merely "bored" and even "amused". Heller explains, quoting the work of Elaine Scarry on torture, that "experiences of extreme pain work to dissolve the most basic concepts of self and world. For the body in pain, neither self, nor world, nor choice exist, as torment becomes the only perceivable content of consciousness" (2015, 46). Ji describes detached listening almost as if he has lost his sense of self, and as if what he was experiencing was not truly happening to him. This suggests that there were limits to the effectiveness of loud struggle sessions, and that human beings can find audile techniques (Sterne 2003, 23-5, 92-5) to endure extreme loudness, at least when it is occurring. Or perhaps, more negatively, that the struggle sessions effectively destroyed Ji's sense of self.

Being targeted with extreme loudness can also cause trauma in the long-term, as evidenced by Ji Xianlin (in his descriptions of his post-Cultural Revolution life), and as seen in another description of a targeted sonic attack. Xing Lu, in her work on early Cultural Revolution-era rhetoric (2004), recounts the abuse her family suffered when her father was labelled a bad element:

> [We] endured humiliation and fear inflicted by a loudspeaker, which was placed outside our apartment building and constantly repeated at high volume: "Down with Lu Rong"; "Lu Rong is a capitalist running dog"; "Down with all the cow ghosts and snake spirits". The loudspeaker also broadcast revolutionary songs and announced public denunciation rallies. The projected noise was so loud and terrifying that Mother got into the habit of going to the toilet every time she heard the loudspeaker, and to this day whenever she hears a loudspeaker she has to urinate immediately. It would seem that Mother's bladder was totally conditioned by the terror of the Cultural Revolution. (2004, 20-1)

From this story we get a sense of the long-term impacts of extreme loudness, and the power of amplified sound as a tool for oppression,

persecution and possible conditioning. The family's private space was invaded with projected noise that could not be shut out, and which they had to endure throughout the day. The extreme loudness caused long-term trauma, or conditioning, recalling the arguments made in the second section of this article. Here, however, the conditioning was linked to a traumatic and protracted period of time, rather than the everyday regularity of the soundscape, suggesting something of the particularly affective power of loud noise and targeted harassment.

Heller argues that loudness, "especially at extreme levels [...] draws its force from an oscillation that flattens and/or transgresses several perceptual binaries: interior/exterior, self/other, presence/meaning, individual/social, physical/reflective", and it disorients us by "disrupting our most basic perceptual apparatuses" (2015, 54-5). Extreme loudness, in these early Cultural Revolution-era denunciations, was also coupled with the tactic of continuous broadcasting – or "acoustic bombardment", to use Suzanne G. Cusick's term – when loudspeakers were employed. Similar to the US military's usage of heavy metal music in the siege of Fallujah in Iraq in November 2004, the constant loud sounds, and the way in which they could reverberate, was disorienting. Regarding the Fallujah siege, a psyops spokesman said at the time, "it's not the music so much as the sound. It's like throwing a smoke bomb. The aim is to disorient and confuse the enemy to gain a tactical advantage" (Cusick 2006, 3). In cases where similar techniques were employed in Mao era China, the aim was also to psychologically weaken and destroy individuals as well, and remove to some extent their sense of self, no matter how much they fought against the ordeal.[16]

One important aspect of the psychological destruction experienced by struggled-against individuals in the early years of the Cultural Revolution is that it was primarily young people, the Red Guards, who were the protagonists of these events. These youngsters, who were shaped by the education system described above, constituted the crowds that verbally and physically assaulted Ji Xianlin, who frequently mentions the youth of his attackers in his memoir (2016, 32, 41, 60, 75). These youngsters were the prison guards of the cowsheds, and their life trajectories throughout the Mao era, from children raised within the PRC's education system to young adults encouraged to punish those they took for counter-revolutionaries, perhaps speaks best to the development of the chaotic disciplinary society in this period.

16 In the context of struggle sessions and interrogations, this tactic was known as "exhaustive bombardment" (*pilao hongzha* 疲劳轰炸). This method for forcing confessions is detailed in Cheng 2010, 20, 297.

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3.3 Eavesdropping, Bugging and Being Overheard

In this section I will outline a few instances concerning the dangers of being overheard, and the fears that individuals had of eavesdropping. I argue that although the PRC did not have access to sophisticated bugging and wiretapping technology (as detailed by Lenk [2012] in her exploration of the East German panaural state in the 1980s), or the means to apply any such comparable technology widely across the nation, the citizens of the Mao era still lived within a form of "panaural state", owing to a more generalised fear of being overheard.

In a number of Mao era memoirs, authors have written about either their fears of eavesdropping, or of the actual negative consequences of being overheard in some way that marked them as being against the Party. In his memoir concerning the early years of the PRC, *Escape from Red China*, Robert Loh describes the chilling effect on intersocial relations brought about by the strictures on freedom of speech that were becoming more and more apparent in daily life. On one evening when Loh was with his friends (the Chans) and their wives, the topic of military conscription came up, when his friend (Charlie) declared: "What a pity I am over thirty years old, and thus do not have a chance to be conscripted as I wish. I regret that I miss this chance to serve my country and my people". The rest of the group was "shocked" at hearing "group-meeting talk in a private living room" (Loh 1962, 173). After this, Loh writes:

> Charlie's wife then said quietly, "you are in your house with your family, Charlie. You needn't speak like that to us".
>
> But she was wrong, and we all knew it. I think each of us was picturing in his mind what would happen if one of us were found unacceptable to the regime. If we were then to save ourselves we would have to denounce him and use our knowledge of him, acquired from years of close friendship, to betray him. Instinctively each of us in that group realized that the others represented his greatest danger. For months, although we outwardly seemed unchanged, our conversation together had been the most inconsequential "small talk" interspersed with such 'safe' ideas as Charlie had automatically expressed. I know also that when Charlie made his comment each of us experienced a new depth of despair, but we were afraid even to show our anguish. Instead, we returned to meaningless chatter. (173)

This anecdote touches on a number of things about how the "panaural state" developed in the PRC. First, according to Loh, the constraints on what individuals should and should not talk about in public, even with close friends, had taken hold imperceptibly before that evening's get-together. Second, the panaural state, in which people felt

that they were being listened to, was not reliant on wiretapping or bugging, because saying something that could be construed as anti-Party to anyone, friend or enemy, could potentially bring about trouble at any point in the future. Third, the circulation of propaganda in the soundscape, and in the broader mediascape, all caused people to know by heart what talk represented pro- and anti-Party (or Mao or Marxism-Leninism) sentiments. It should be noted that this is an early Cold War-era memoir produced for a Western audience, but the situation related does chime with numerous other accounts that document either fears of being eavesdropped on, or of betraying other people – including family members – upon overhearing something compromising about them, in order to show greater loyalty to the nation, the Party and Mao.[17]

In Ji Xianlin's aforementioned memoir, the dangers of being overheard and of not internalising discipline on what could and could not be spoken publicly is quite apparent. In fact, the event that sealed his downfall was being overheard. As Ji explains:

> I read a poster criticizing an essay of mine called "Springtime in Yanyuan". The Red Guards claimed that springtime represented capitalism, and celebrating the spring amounted to celebrating capitalism. I was bewildered. If anything, spring has always been the sign of new life – since when had it been appropriated as the emblem of capitalism? […] At that point, I was still a true believer. But I knew perfectly well that the springtime I wrote about had nothing to do with capitalism and everything to do with the change of seasons. As I read the poster about my essay, I couldn't help snorting audibly. The enemy's eyes and ears were everywhere […] this single snort would later be used against me. (2016, 13)

This single snort was used by Ji's enemies to destroy his life, which is not surprising when we take into consideration the fact of the quotas on rightists/bad elements during the Anti-Rightist movement of 1957 and in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution[18] as well as the whole range of signifiers denoted as bourgeois or anti-Party sentiments in this latter period.[19]

17 Two examples of the innumerable accounts of such matters can be found in Nanchu (2001) and Ye, Ma (2005). Both memoirs describe the "fashionable" trend of reporting on one's own parents and Nanchu's memoir also delineates her fears about her house being bugged (2001, 21).

18 In these two movements, quotas were set for people considered to be either rightists or other sorts of bad elements – 5-10% in both cases –, so people were required to find 5-10% of their peers to have been guilty of something or other (Yang 2021, 86).

19 Numerous objects, customs and past-times were considered "bourgeois" at various stages in the Mao era. The Cultural Revolution saw widespread destruction or confis-

In the course of everyday life, however, when political campaigns were not ongoing, would people have been justified in assuming that others were eavesdropping on their conversations? The exact extent of public security/intelligence work at the grassroots of daily life in the Mao era is not known, and the domestic intelligence history of Mainland China has not been extensively researched. In one of the few academic works on this subject, *Spying for the People: Mao's Secret Agents, 1949-1967*, Michael Schoenhals argues that "widespread – but not necessarily efficient – use of agents was made by the competent governmental authorities in the urban People's Republic up to 1967 in counterintelligence and in compliance-oriented surveillance of status offenders (that is to say of 'class enemies')" (2013, 234).

As Schoenhals relates, a "Belgian correspondent for Agence France Press wrote in the early 1960s" that he had not yet met someone "who has actually discovered a microphone in his Peking home or office", but it is also true that the "neighborhood watch" or "social eyes and ears (*shehui ermu* 社会耳目)" could well have been gathering information on those "people deemed of interest", even if such people were not actually being bugged (51). This justified people's sense of being listened to at any given moment, by anyone around them, and caused many individuals to have a fear of being overheard, and to feel as if they were living within something akin to a "panaural state". Such a sense of paranoia naturally led to some people becoming self-disciplined about speaking in public, about who they would speak with, and even what non-verbal sounds they might make when in company, though as I explain in the following section, not everyone shared this anxiety.

4 Repetition

So far in this article I have explored the concept of a panaural state by examining the ways in which amplified sound usage in everyday life, struggle sessions, noise, and the paranoia of being overheard, caused citizens of Mao era China to internalise obedience and develop feelings of fear and anxiety, most notably in urban areas in the early years of the Cultural Revolution. To fully examine the "panaural state" notion, however, it is important to also consider flaws and aberrations in the sonic propaganda system in China during these years, and how even in situations where the Party was able to establish a robust sonic infrastructure, and regular broadcasting, with the type of content

cation of such bourgeois things as: ornamental plants and flowers, rockeries, goldfish ponds, cats, racing pigeons, articles of worship, luxury items, foreign books, concealed weapons, foreign currency, old land deeds, etc. (Dikötter 2016, 146).

and messaging they wished to deliver, they were still not always capable of obtaining the desired reaction from their listening audience.

In this section I consider repetition in the Mao era soundscape.[20] I argue that although recorded sound's capacity for repeatability was of value to the Party, repetition was not, by itself, able to ensure the success of Party propaganda due to two main factors: first, messaging was repeated too often, so that it became either irritating or easier to tune out, and second, messaging could be rendered ineffective if it was contradicted by what was being heard elsewhere in society – the hidden transcript (Scott 1990) – or by first-hand experience. Repetition was productive as a propaganda tool when there was some restraint in its usage, but at many points in the Mao era when the leftist wing of the Party (headed by Mao) was in the ascendancy over the non-leftist wing (represented by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping; Liu 1975, 8), repetition was overused in mass persuasion efforts.

The Nazi party also favoured the usage of repetition in their propaganda work. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels contended, however, that excessive repetition had an adverse effect, as Leonard Doob explains:

> On the one hand, Goebbels believed that propaganda must be repeated until it was thoroughly learned and that thereafter more repetition was necessary to reinforce the learning. Such repetition took place over time – the same theme was mentioned day after day – as well as in the output of a single day. An anti-Semitic campaign, for example, continued for weeks, during which time "about 70 to 80 per cent of our broadcasts are devoted to it" (366). On the other hand, repetition could be unnecessary or even undesirable. It was unnecessary when "the material thus far published has completely convinced the public" (386). It was undesirable when "the theme became boring or unimpressive". (1950, 435)

From many accounts of life in the Mao era it is apparent that the CCP did not adhere to this logic when conducting their own propaganda campaigns. There was excessive repetition of both musical and linguistic themes, particularly during the early Cultural Revolution period, and also a superabundant amount of amplification in the soundscape (Clark, Pang, Tsai 2016, 248). One notable musical example of extreme repetition is the song "The East is Red", a piece of music that Andrew Jones describes as

> the most widely known and frequently broadcast song of the [1960s], saturating the quotidian life of nearly a quarter of hu-

20 An attribute of recording technology whose history is explored in detail by Katz 2010.

> manity to an extent undreamed of by any entrant to the Western hit parade, including the Beatles. (2020, 2)

The ubiquity of this song is made especially clear in Rae Yang's memoir *Spider Eaters*:

> The east is red. The sun rises. China […] Mao Zedong […] Oh. Miserable! Just as I was about to fall asleep, this damn song starts. At five thirty! Every day. Seven days a week […] Never gives anybody a break […] I hate this song now! I used to love it […] Things change into their opposites […] Red Guards. Class enemies […] I wonder if any counterrevolutionary can match me in hating this song. It's not music. It's torture! Pouring out of a loudspeaker in a pine tree just outside my bedroom window. It drives me crazy! (2013, 157)

Rae Yang goes on to detail how much she despises the loudspeaker outside her window, and how she wishes she could destroy it. As propaganda from sound-reproducing tools became ever-present, on the streets, on public transport, in workplaces and elsewhere, it is apparent that many people during the Mao era were able to develop audile techniques (Sterne 2003, 23-5, 92-5) to shut out sounds that did not apply to them, but could quickly shift to paying attention to messages that directly affected them. In my oral interviews, and in other accounts, it is clear that people were exposed so often to various forms of political messaging, and were therefore made to understand very clearly their own particular place in the society of New China (as a member of a certain class, or as someone with a specific type of desirable or undesirable background), that they were able to recognise very quickly whether a particular message from a loudspeaker pertained to them or not. If not, they learned to ignore the propaganda.

One interviewee, who worked on a farm in Jiangxi from the late 1960s until the late 1970s, confirmed that loudspeakers could often be ignored quite easily, and that they had much less of an impact on the productivity of workers than the actual presence of a team leader. He described how workers would frequently sleep if team leaders were not around, but would make sure to look busy if they came by. Loudspeakers were merely for political propaganda, he said, which was particularly irrelevant when times were especially arduous, such as during the Great Famine (Interview One 2019). A British Foreign Office report from 1952 relates a similar instance of people learning to ignore excessive everyday noise: "On the trains […] loudspeakers intermittently blare songs of hate and lectures of vilification […] but the passengers by and large seem to carry on their conversations, reading, and throat-clearing with encouraging indifference" (Foreign Office Files for China 1952). This depiction gives the distinct impression that the passengers on the train were used to this sort of noise

in public spaces, and that neither the volume nor the content of the 'lectures' and 'songs' surprised them or particularly bothered them.

Even among youths, whom Mao believed to be the most receptive to mass persuasion, and who would have been exposed to repetitious political ideology from a very young age, there existed a hidden transcript that was at odds with the official soundscape of the Party. One collective listening event from 1963, described in an archival document,[21] shows the ways in which mass campaigns sometimes met with resistance, and Party propaganda efforts, over the long-term, were not wholly effective. This collective listening event involved the broadcast of a speech given by Premier Zhou Enlai to graduating high school students in Beijing. The document details the audience reactions to the re-broadcasting of the speech in various middle schools in Shanghai. Though the content of the speech itself is not reproduced, we can infer from the reactions to the speech that the topic concerned sending urban youths to the countryside. This was in some respects a precursor to the "Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside" (*Shang shan xia xiang yundong* 上山下乡运动) movement in the Cultural Revolution.

As the document makes clear, some students did not receive news of the education policies well, and the listening event/speech was not sufficient in itself to address their misgivings. Some students supposedly had "fantasies" about the policy, and thought that as long as they had a "hard" attitude to the arrangement and distribution of work then they would not need to comply; they could just persist in not going where they were instructed to go. Some students were vocal in their opposition to the policy. One said: "I want to stay in Shanghai, it's fine if you call me a reactionary, I will still stay in Shanghai. The next time we have one of these kinds of political movement, I will not attend". A number of students also had particular issues with the possibility of being sent to Xinjiang. There were several "rumours" that students had questions about. Students made the following comments: "Xinjiang is full of soldiers, they're all old soldiers, in their thirties or forties, and they want to marry, they want female students to go there to marry them"; "The ethnic minority people there all carry knifes on them, they're very scary people"; "Xinjiang has very little water, in your lifetime you can only shower three times (when you're born, when you marry and when you die)"; and "Xinjiang is very close to the Soviet Union, now the Soviet-Chinese relationship is very tense, is there a chance of war breaking out?".

That these 'rumours' circulated in society, and bore an influence on the youngsters growing up in the PRC, shows something of the difficulties the Party had in imposing their propaganda system, and in ful-

21 Cf. Shangai Municipal Archives B105-8-107-38.

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ly establishing a form of sonic social control. It is true that the political rhetoric of the era – especially during the Cultural Revolution – was circulated in a relentless fashion, so that students could easily regurgitate 'correct' interpretations of history or the 'correct' attitudes towards any given situation or current event, but as this document indicates, there were also ways in which the 'official transcript' of the Party's propaganda soundscape was undermined in everyday life. Significant resistance against the Party during the Mao era was also evidenced by the great amounts of letters from the people (*Renmin lai xin* 人民来信), which criticised corruption and the disastrous consequences of certain Party's policies, as well as by numerous acts of protest and petitioning, narrated in works such as Zhou Xun's (2012) documentary history on the Great Famine (1958-62). People were not always afraid to be heard, and as this section has shown, these instances of courageous speaking out served, in part, to subvert the official soundscape. As this section has also shown, the Party's intense efforts at homogenising the soundscape, even when they were achieved, did not always yield their desired results anyway, because extreme repetition of musical or linguistic themes often caused propaganda to become stale, deeply irritating, and unproductive.

5 Conclusion

In this article I have examined the various ways in which sound and listening caused fear and anxiety which led, to some degree, to the internalisation of obedience in the Mao era. My focus has been purely on sound, in terms of noise/loudness; listening, in relation to eavesdropping; acoustic timetables, enforced listening, and repetition; but it is important to bear in mind that the loudspeaker was also a tangible object and a visual symbol. Loudspeaker broadcasts also often encouraged, directly or indirectly, behaviour that other citizens could observe, and perhaps use as information if it was deemed counterrevolutionary. As Brian Larkin argues,

> the loudspeaker displays a meta-reflexive desire, that is, the desire to be *seen* relaying a message as well as simply relaying a message […] a loudspeaker is a visual device as well as an aural one, drawing attention to itself as a medium of relay. (2014, 990)

In the early PRC, the loudspeaker was a visual representation of the Party and Mao's voice, and people needed to comport themselves in a manner appropriate to the content being broadcast. Naturally, this also contributed to the internalisation of obedience and compliance. For example, in Ming Fang He's *A River Forever Flowing*, a memoir that documents the experiences of three women from their child-

hoods in the time of the Great Leap Forward (1958-62) to their lives in Canada as adults and academics, He documents her friend Wei's recollection of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution:

> Everywhere I went, people were parroting slogans and grabbing Chairman Mao's Red Book to worship Chairman Mao with the loudspeaker announcing the latest instruction from Tiananmen Square. Whenever Chairman Mao's speeches were broadcast through loudspeakers, people would stop and look excited with tears in their eyes. I had tears in my eyes too but for different reasons. (2003, 30)

We can surmise that at least some of the people within earshot of the loudspeakers would have been compelled to behave according to what was expected of them, rather than being genuinely tearful. This is not to suggest, however, that no-one behaved in a natural way in these situations, because of the imposition of the loudspeakers, or that people had no agency or support for the Party. The loudspeaker was an imposition, however, on those that did not genuinely share in the emotions that were obviously required of them. For example, when Mao died, because of the loudspeaker broadcast of the news of his death and the mourning music that was played everywhere, two people I spoke with recalled having to look "serious" and having to cry in public, though they did not truly care about what had happened (Interview Two 2020; Interview Three 2019).

Returning to the Foucauldian framework of the modern disciplinary society, in this article I have argued that sound was crucial to the internalisation of obedience, and that during the Mao-years China – the urban PRC at least – could be considered, to an extent, a panaural state, albeit a low-tech one. Audibility was as much a trap as visibility, as it also was in the later GDR (Lenk 2012). However, the PRC's divergence from Foucault's vision of a disciplinary society was not just because of this difference, but also because of the continued significance of a sovereign type will throughout society (Mao's will), which resulted in a generally more arbitrary and chaotic forced internalisation of obedience, in which discipline and punishment were often meted out loudly, publicly and in disorder, as much as they also occurred within the bounds of institutions, and were carried out in a more regulated fashion. China today may have entered into the "age of infinite examination", to use another of Foucault's terms (1979, 189), with its very high prevalence of sophisticated surveillance equipment,[22] but

[22] Two forms of mass surveillance that are particularly pervasive in China today are digital surveillance through social media and the Internet, and video surveillance in public areas, which also incorporates digital capabilities, such as facial recognition. These forms of surveillance have been widely covered in the Western media in recent years, for example: https://www.npr.org/2021/01/05/953515627/facial-

the early stages of this disciplinary society were built on audibility perhaps more than visibility.

As this article has shown, however, the Party often faced great difficulties in attempting to promulgate its messaging everywhere, and even in the circumstances where it could achieve intensely repetitious propagandising, an appropriate reception could not be guaranteed. As various accounts in this article have elucidated, though noise and ubiquitous broadcasting or slogan shouting certainly caused a great amount of fear, anxiety and lasting damage to many individuals in the Mao era, some people were able to develop audile techniques that could be employed to shut out the targeted or constant noise in order to fundamentally protect their selves. It was in these small acts of resistance – "internalised disobedience", it could be termed – that many were able to endure the chaos and destruction of the latter years of Mao's rule.

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Other Sources: Oral Interviews

Note: The oral interviews listed here are part of a larger set of interviews conducted for the Author's PhD Dissertation (cf. Lovell 2022). The interview numbers assigned here differ from those assigned in the official text.

Interview One (2019). Man; born in 1951; spent the entire Mao period in Jiangxi Province; became an agricultural worker in 1967. Interviewed on 29 October; follow up interview by phone on 7 December.
Interview Two (2020). Woman; born in 1944 in Tianjin; worked as a doctor in Tianjin from 1969. Interviewed on 26 September.
Interview Three (2019). Woman; born in 1951; grew up in Tianjin; sent-down youth from 1968 to 1975 in Inner Mongolia. Interviewed on 27 December.

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