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Into the Sounds of War: Imagination, Media and Experience

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You can't possibly imagine this horror. Nobody can, who has not gone through this (German trooper at the Battle of Verdun in Kershaw 2015, 62).

Experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it may fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper shows how it has reached a new low – that our image not only of the external world but also of the moral world has undergone changes overnight, changes which were previously thought impossible. Beginning with the First World War, a process became apparent which continues to this day. Wasn't it noticeable at the end of the war that men who returned from the battlefield had grown silent – not richer but poorer in communicable experience? What poured out in the flood of war books ten years later was anything but experience that can be shared orally. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body (Benjamin 2002. 143-4).

Adorno once claimed that progress in the West could be defined as progress from the slingshot to the atomic bomb - a fatal dialectical embrace between reason and destructiveness – of vulnerable human flesh and overwhelming technologies of destruction. (Adorno 2006.12) The slingshot, relatively quiet yet singularly lethal while the atomic bomb indiscriminately lethal yet both silent and loud – Silent at its epicenter it kills its victims before they hear it (beyond

300 metres) – it is the loudest sound imaginable, between 240dB to 280dB¹. I find it hard to imagine what 280dB of sound is, just as it is hard to imagine what being in a war zone would be like, I have, like many of the readers of this chapter, have never been to war, have never heard a gunshot - and neither would I want to.

This morning whilst listening to the *Today Programme* on BBC Radio Four I heard to a lengthy interview with a young Yazidi women who graphically described how all the men in her village in Northern Iraq had been executed by Isis fighters - she had lost her six brothers – and described how she and the other women of the village were kidnapped and enslaved by her captors - after trying to escape she was raped by all of the men. After she had successfully escaped she had spoken at the United Nations, to anybody who would listen. People listened, she said, but had done nothing.² The harrowing testimony was immediately followed by the sports bulletin – Manchester City won the *Capital One Cup* and Arsenal fell behind Leicester City in the Championship race after losing to Manchester United.

The distance between the testimony and its mediated reception is but a microcosm of much experience in the 21st century, to witness, to imagine, to listen and to be entertained. Our Yazidi witness has learnt how to listen to the sounds of conflict in order to survive, from the sounds in the street, to the cries of her neighbors, to the tone of voice of her captors, to the sounds of gunfire

¹ Imagination is required as filmic accounts of atomic bomb explosions are invariably dubbed, “If they do contain an actual audio recording of the test blast itself (many were filmed silently and have a stock blast sound effect), it’s almost always shifted so that the explosion and the sound of the blast are simultaneous. This is of course quite false: the speed of light is much faster than the speed of sound.” (Wellerstein in Mail on Line 16th July 2012)
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2174289/Ever-heard-sound-nuclear-bomb-going-Historian-unveils-surviving-audio-recordings-blast-1950s-Nevada-tests.html>

² The broadcast was aired on the 29th February 2016. The *Today Programme* is a daily news programme that is broadcast nationwide in the UK between 6.00a.m. and 9.00a.m. The Yazidi community in northern Iraq are seen by ISIL as a separate religious group. They were forced to flee their homes, and given the choice of converting to Islam or being killed or enslaved. The United Nations has called these acts, acts of genocide.

distant and approaching. She has trained herself in a manner unnecessary for the radio listener, the television viewer, and the Internet scanner. In the repeated telling of her tale, the voice both internal and externalized is perhaps therapeutic. The story becomes more fluid, the voice more regulated – it becomes a dominant narrative of the traumatized mind and traumatized flesh – it is lived. Audiences have different preoccupations - we listen, we might try to imagine, or we might not listen at all. The intimate testimony is sandwiched between the everyday, the desires and preoccupations of the moment. The narrative contains a sense of the ‘real,’ yet how can it be ‘recognized’ – it appears beyond ‘imagination’ to use the phrase of our German trooper at the Battle of Verdun in World War One? What then is the relationship between the testimony of something so far removed from the everyday world of the recipient and the recipient’s ability and perhaps desire to bridge the gap through acts of empathy and imagination? Are we consigned to the epistemological graveyard embodied in a leap from subject to object - to remain in a form of collective cultural solipsism; to be convinced in the myth of the epistemological leap while remaining in the ‘moral incoherence’ of a fully mediated culture (Crary 2013; Nagel 1986; Sennett 1999)?

The desire for mediated proximity has been understood since the writings of Benjamin and Heidegger, from the supposed abolition of distance embodied in media proximity to Benjamin’s understanding of film where he noted “the desire of present day masses to “get closer’ to things’ through film and other forms of mechanical reproduction...The alignment of reality with the masses and the masses with reality is a process of immeasurable importance for both thinking and perception ” (Benjamin 2002, 105). Benjamin appears to abolish the need for ‘imagination’ while simultaneously demanding it - if the viewer can indeed see past the ‘blue flower’ of technology that masks the nature of mediation in its very presentation with a false transparency. This is what Virilio meant by the apparent “loss of the phenomenological dimension that privileges lived experience” (Virilio 1989, 63). The demand for ‘realism,’ empathy and the imaginary leap of audiences into the ‘unimaginable’ world of war experiences is the subject of this chapter, a story of the blurred relationships between subject and object, between the nature of experiencing and observing,

between war, technology, and the sensory subject in a world that both appears to demand veracity and realism together with the imaginary and entertainment in equal measure.

The following pages interrogates these issues primarily through an analysis of accounts from World War One, located at the beginnings of the mature media age that we now inhabit - an age that joined the traditional media of print, music halls and reviews with the sonic technologies of the telegraph, telephone and gramophone coupled with the popularity of silent cinema. The account juxtaposes 'testimony' and its mediation through text and film with the reception of such testimony through a variety of 'direct' and mediated experience. The desire for sonic veracity will be located in a range of media (the rise of sound movies and the witness novel) as a counterpoint to the noise of state propaganda so dominant during the conflict between 1914 and 1918 producing a 'heterphonia' of competing sonic streams that continues to live on in contemporary mediated experiences of war (St Clair 2014,3). It was to this phenomenon that Walter Benjamin alluded to in the quote that begins the chapter. Benjamin was writing in the early 1930s during the rise of the Nazi State in Germany, but locates the profound shift in experience and mediated imagination to the trauma of World War One.

The demand for a specifically sonic re-addressing of the experiences of war has gained in volume recently beginning with Suzanne Cusick's analysis of the role of music in torture techniques in America and elsewhere, followed by more philosophically inspired works on sound and war (Goodman 2010); historical accounts (Birdsall 2012; Klimczyk and Swierzowska 2015) and accounts that situate soldiers use of sound and music in the recent wars in Iraq (Gilman 2016; Pieslak 2009; Doughtry 2015)

The experiences of World War One provides a template for a more general understanding of war: "In our reality, here at the century's end, the First World War remains a powerful imaginative force, perhaps the most powerful force in shaping not only our perceptions of what war is, but of the world we live in - a world in which that war, and all the wars that have followed it, were possible human acts" (Hynes 1992, 469). There is no shortage of accounts of World War One, it is the most written about of all wars in terms of its history,

cultural legacy, military history, film and representational significance and as literature and form. While this chapter touches upon these subject areas it does so largely from a position of sound and media studies. What constitutes 'war sounds' remains problematic. While World War One was the loudest and most technologically sophisticated war at the time, in between Adorno's slingshot and atomic bomb, the sound of shelling has, understandably tended to predominate in wartime narratives. In the following pages I broaden the understanding of wartime sounds to encompass a wider range than the existing 'stereotype'. War creates a spectrum of sounds that are not so easily distinguished from the 'normal' sounds of everyday life, yet are inflected by the situation that people confront in war. Dougherty usefully terms these sounds as 'bellaphonic' sounds in his analysis of the sounds of the Iraq war to include all sounds that derive from war explicitly.³ From this perspective, the sound of the postman knocking on the door to deliver the traumatic and feared telegram of the death or injury of a loved one is every bit as much a 'war' sound as that of the myriad sounds of the Western Front. Whilst sounds are by their very nature transitory and sometimes ephemeral they frequently persist in memory, trauma and nightmare (Leese 2014). This point is recognized by Birdsall who has also referred to the status of the sonic nature of World War One in regard to its lasting trauma, "the overpowering sounds of modern warfare – with shells, guns and artillery - were produced at an intensity unlike anything experienced or imagined before. This soundscape, dominated by the "technologized sonority" of warfare was the basis for distress, and often lasting trauma (Birdsall 2012,15).

While the following pages reinterprets sonic accounts of war it acknowledges the implicit distortion embodied in this approach, as

³ But I also intend for the term to encompass sonic material that is less directly or conventionally associated with warfare: the omnipresent civilian gas generators that appeared throughout Iraq after the partial destruction of the electric grid in the wake of the major combat operations in 2003; the sirens and other warning signals that punctuated life on the military bases and urban areas during the war; the propaganda recordings, made by all the major parties to the conflict, that proliferated in English and Arabic, on radio, projected through mobile or stationary loudspeakers, and on the internet; the live human voices whose presence, substance, and style were conditioned by the ebb and flow of combat (Daugherty 2015,3).

demonstrated in the war artist John Nash's demand for a multi-sensory, and embodied leap of the 'imagination' demanded by him to the recipient of his wartime correspondence, "The rain drives on, the stinking mud becomes more evilly yellow, the shell holes fill with green-white water, the roads and tracks are covered in inches of slime, the black dying trees ooze and sweat and the shells never cease. They alone plunge overhead, tearing away the rotting tree stumps, breaking the plank roads, striking down horses and mules, annihilating, maiming, maddeningly, they plunge into the grave which is this land; one huge grave, and cast up on it the poor dead." (John Nash in a letter dated 16th November 1917 from Passchendaele: Blythe 1997,126-7) The complex issues that arise from the relationship between sonic veracity, mediation and imagination are equally mirrored through a multi-sensory understanding of war and experience (Bull in Howes 2014).

The Sounds of World War One: Distance and Mediation

We began this chapter with the quote from a German soldier concerning the 'impossibility' of imagining what the war was 'really' like. In World War One, the distinction between participants and audiences was still fairly clearly defined as Amy Bell has acknowledged: "The knowledge gap between those at home and those who experienced the Front was a central theme of post-Great War writing" (Bell in Trotter 2013, 13). Normal life continued for many, with life in Paris or the French Riviera continuing as before where the population read, watched and listened to the propaganda put out by their government – a largely fictionalized and 'unreal' account of war. While London was, for example, periodically subject to Zeppelin raids, for the most part the war in the UK was never experienced as anything more than the dull rumblings of shell-fire heard two hundred miles away on the South East coast of Great Britain. Troops became disorientated by the relative ease with which they could return home on leave by train or steamer within hours of fighting on the Front. Early war testimonies emphasized the cognitive and moral distance between the civilian and the trooper first articulated during the war by the 1917 novel *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*

written by Barbusse which set the tone and author veracity for ‘truth’ telling: “The only acceptable attitude, in our view, to bring to their tombs, as one comrade put it, is ‘impeccable silence’. At least, if we do not speak in their name, no one else should dare to do so” (In Winter 2014,182). This accusatory tone was also evident in the 1919 film *J’Accuse* where the dead troops of battle are resurrected in order to admonish non-combatants for their profligate post-war ‘forgetting’, a theme revisited both in the writings and films of the war and typified by the remark made by a combatant in the 1932 French film *Wooden Crosses* on returning from leave in Paris that “the war could last for seven years and the cinema’s would still be full.” The perceived distance between witnessing and watching, a strong trope of much of the cultural output of World War One is not so very far away from much subsequent media thinking on the subject. This is not a linear history by any means, ‘Total War’ has woven in and out of the historical narrative - fully embodied in the destruction of World War Two in which the term ‘civilian’ ceased to have any meaning in the bombing of cities such as London, Dresden and Tokyo and in the targeting of subject populations for extermination; to be largely replaced by the perception of war at a distance in subsequent wars (Crary 2013, Virilio 1989).

The conditioning of the imagination is both historical and cultural, both in the desire and the available ‘tools’ that might, if so desired, enable the imagination to make its attempt to ‘connect’ to its ‘imaginary’ object. To understand this it is necessary to analyze the reception in 1916 of the first ‘realistic’ representation of World War One through the film *The Battle of the Somme* which demonstrates that an understanding of the multi-sensory nature of war as described above in Nash’s letter, did not appear to be widespread in 1916. Realism – or the ‘fiction’ of realism is itself culturally and historically situated; what felt ‘realistic’ to a cinemagoer in 1916, for example, differs from those visitors to multiplexes today- even though the fiction of ‘realism’ remains. The impulse for something to appear ‘real’ persists today as during World War One.⁴

⁴ The author’s own Corsican grandfather fought at both Verdun and the Somme. As a young teenager in the 1960s I remember him recounting his experiences to me. Two memories have remained with me – I can still hear the timbre of his

The Battle of the Somme (1916) was the first battlefield documentary to be based exclusively on film footage from the Front. As more and more troops enlisted, and as the false promise of the 'quick war' propaganda messages evaporated, and as more sons, husbands and brothers went, were injured or killed in battle, so there was intermittent interest from those at home in what the war was 'really like' for those at the Front. Up until that time the populace's knowledge of the war was limited largely to newspaper accounts, photographs, and patriotic popular song with perhaps some personal testimony from troops back from the Front, if indeed they spoke about the war at all. As Chambers has noted:

Widespread accessibility of photographic images gave World War 1 a mass audience, but it was an audience whose understanding of the "reality" of war was in fact mediated through images, just as much as it was interpreted by the printed word (Chambers and Cuibert 1996, 25).

This reliance upon the printed word or static image helps to explain the enormous popularity of the *The Battle of the Somme* with around twenty million people paying to see it in the cinemas across the country in the months following its release. The film, entirely filmed on the front, portrayed the haunting, if distant images of a ravaged countryside, spartan and flat with the occasional plume of smoke from an exploding shell. The troops were filmed marching, eating and moving through the trenches - the everyday life of a trooper. The views of cannon firing were a dominant presence in the film – these were shots

voice as he recounted how 'city boys' found the physicality of trench warfare too much for them, standing in three feet of freezing water for days on end often killing them. He never went back to Northern France telling me that "he wouldn't bury his cat there". The other story, which I have never been able to verify, was his claim that their horses could tell the difference between the sound of German and French aircraft. They could hear the sound of the aircraft, he recounted, before the troops could hear. If it were German aircraft they would nay violently alerting the troop to a potential attack. I like to feel that this is true – extending Walter Benjamin's claim to the animal species that our sensory apparatus is historical and adapts and learns from changing social circumstances.

that the technology of early cameras could capture well. When it came to injury and death, the audience was privy to the sight of wounded British soldiers and the remains of dead German soldiers. Controversially, the film also portrayed troops 'going over the top' and falling to their deaths. Whilst audiences at the time thought that these scenes were 'real' they were in fact simulations. None of the film was shot directly on the Front but some miles behind it. The realism of the film merely represented 'realism' for the audiences and critics. The editor of *Bioscope* (the cinema trade journal) was effusive in praise for the film:

No written description by an eye witness, however graphic his pen; no illustration by any artist, no matter how facile his pencil; no verbal description by the most interested participator in the event, could hope to convey to the man at home the reality of modern warfare with the force and conviction shown in this marvelous series of pictures (Reeves 1997,18).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the editor of a cinema journal should praise the realism of film over all other forms of representation, but the reviewer of the *Anglican Guardian* was just as taken by the realism of the film, commenting that it was "highly desirable that the realities of war should be made clear to those who stay at home" (Reeves 1997,18). There were some dissenting voices, believing that the simulated deaths were in fact 'real' and therefore could be disturbing to those with relatives at the Front but in the main, the public reception was overwhelmingly positive. Observing the troops in their field of battle was all that could be expected by the audience – this was their 'realism' devoid of smell and sound – recordings of the sound of battle would only arrive in 1918 and then only on record. The deficit 'realism' of *The Battle of the Somme* was apparent to a trooper on leave from the Front who, when asked about the film's realism, answered: 'Yes...about as like as a silhouette is like a real person, or as a dream is like a waking experience. There is so much left out - the stupefying din, the stinks, the excitement, the fighting at close quarters' (Reeves 1997,16).

Both our German trooper at Verdun who spoke of the impossibility of imaging the reality of the war, and our British veteran of the Somme who understands the filmic representation as a mere 'silhouette' or 'dream' cast doubt on the ability of representation to provide sufficient grounds for the 'imagination' to marry up with the 'reality' of the experience of war. Another veteran of Verdun questions how the meanings embedded in just one word of text can be comprehended, "How can they (the reader) imagine what that simple word 'held' means?" in describing the holding of a trench at the cost of thousands of lives (Reeves 1997, 27). These voices question the relationship between forms of representation and what is being represented. Reasserting the problematic claim to experience articulated by Walter Benjamin – of the 'being there' of the sensory body over the 'silhouette' of media fictions.

Voices of War: Intimate, Re-creative and Ideological

Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream (Adorno 1966, 362).⁵

The human voice and the 'inhuman' shell, one destroys the other - war voices populate space, inside and out - they are everywhere –propagandist voices, singing voices, suffering voices, intimate voices, the rasping voice of orders and the voice silenced in death and commemoration. Voices are grasped and lost through time, resurrected as memory, real, half heard – imagined – persistent. Dougherty observes in relation to the Iraq war that "sound lives on in human

⁵ This is not the place to delve into the very possibility of the power of language to represent experience, as an act of mimesis, dismissed by Adorno in his oft quoted remark that, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno 1967,34). In the present quote Adorno reclaims the power of the voice to speak. In *Negative Dialectics* he uses a visual metaphor to articulate his point, "No light falls on people and things in which transcendence would not appear. Indelible in resistance to the fungible world of exchange is the resistance of the eye that does not want the world's colors to vanish. In semblance nonsemblance is promised" (Adorno 1966, 404-5). Adorno had been thinking of the power of language used by the poet Paul Celan, a Holocaust survivor, in his poetry in which the phrase "we shovel a grave into the air" was neither borrowed nor metaphor (Felsteiner 1995, 288).

memory far after its physical vibrations die away. The sound of bombing and gun battles, the screams of victims and the wailing of the bereaved continue to haunt ” (Doughtry 2015,40); the voice as metaphor for both experience and suffering. The ambiguity of sound and its wartime recollection and significance is illustrated in a passage from Frederic Manning’s First World War novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune; Somme and Ancre, 1916* based largely upon his own experiences. The central character, Bourne on hearing of the death of a trooper called Bates, “tried to remember who Bates was; and, at the effort of memory to recover him, he seemed to hear a high, excited voice suddenly cry out, as though audible to the whole dugout: “What’s ‘e want to drag me into ‘t for?” And it was as though Bates were bodily present there...He knew no more of Bill Bates than that one phrase, passionately innocent: “What’s ‘e want to drag me into ‘t for?”” (Manning 2012, xiii).

The sound of Bates’ voice is dragged out of Bourne’s memory bank amidst all of the myriad of sounds and experiences of the war. A singular sonic memory of identity erased. The attempt to capture the ephemeral and the erased voice exists also in much Holocaust writing (Kulka 2013).

For the most part, the purpose of testimony, the giving of a ‘voice’ is to demonstrate to an audience what the experience was like. The inherent ambiguity in this aim is demonstrated in a subsequent testimony, not from World War One, but from the Holocaust, which is used to illustrate the point, not to digress. The significance of the thrown away phrase in auditory memory and testimony is articulated in the memoirs of filmmaker and Holocaust survivor Marcelline Loridan-Ivens who, after many years of silence, describes her experience of revisiting Birkenau Concentration Camp for the first time, in the 1990s, after having survived enslavement there in World War Two:

I remembered it in great detail...I picked up a music stand the camp orchestra had used, and a spoon, so precious in the past –they were both rusted and half buried in the ground. The place was empty. Then everything came back to me in a rush: the smell, the cries, the dogs, Françoise, Mala, the sky, red and black because of the flames. Then I found my bed and lay down on it. Ten years later, I made a movie about that moment, I wanted to walk through the mirror, clear a pathway, and touch

the imagination of everyone who hadn't been there. I'm not sure I succeeded. How can we hand down something we have so much difficulty in explaining to ourselves? I asked Anouk Aimee to take my place, to stretch out on the prison bed and speak the words I'd said to you: [her father was deported with her and died in Auschwitz] "I loved you so much that I was happy to have been deported with you (Loridan-Ivens 2016, 94).

The words, though simple, embody the trauma of Loridan-Ivens experience of the war and much of her subsequent life informed by those experiences which she barely understands herself and questions how she might convey this sentiment to a cinema audience. She decides to do it by proxy through the image and voice of an actress in an attempt to bridge the solipsism embedded in her own trauma.

Unlike the above examples the reclaiming of and presentation of the wartime voice in World War One was for the most part more direct even though many of these novelists had, like Benjamin had noted, remained silent for some years after the war. With the exception of the Manning example above, the novelistic accounts of the experience of war by Blunden, Sassoon and others speak a common, less complicated language of wartime experience that itself has been accused of perpetuating a myth of the experiences of troops in World War One, at least amongst audiences. (Fussell 2013, Hynes 1992, Winter 2014)⁶ Yet these accounts in 'fiction' bear remarkable resemblances to a number of unpublished diaries kept during the war by combatants. One such document is the wartime diary of Edward Campion Vaughan, a detailed daily account of his wartime experiences leading up to his first action at the Battle of Ypres in 1917. Vaughan was a nineteen-year-old captain in 1917; the diary discovered in 1940 by his family after his untimely death in 1925 was first published in 1981, some

⁶ The 'myth of war' claims seem strangely to be located in the subsequent reclaiming of this narrative in subsequent wartime accounts and amongst audiences themselves. This move to reception is problematic in terms of testimonies themselves that were largely written to demystify the state-engendered propaganda of a noble and patriotic war.

sixty-four years after it was written. There are many issues of note in this diary, primarily the language used to describe Vaughan's experience is in keeping with the tropes of war that were to become commonplace in the 1930s. Vaughan describes the mundane and matter of fact nature of waiting for battle, the excitement of being there - the diary for the most part unreflectively embodies many of the propagandist myths of the day until they are shattered when confronted by the brutality of actual battle. The last thirty pages, written between August 15th and August 28th 1917 are a harrowing testimony of the brutality of war experienced by a combatant. I restrict myself to just two entries. In the first Vaughan is leading his company towards the German trenches; his company is being decimated by shell and machine gun fire yet he continues to move forward:

Up the road we staggered, shells bursting around us. A man stopped dead in front of me, and exasperated I cursed him and butted him with my knee. Very gently he said 'I'm blind sir,' and he turned to show me his eyes and nose torn away by a piece of shell (Vaughan 1981,224).

Vaughan points him on his way back in the direction of his trench. Later that night Vaughan, back in his trench with those that remain of his troop describes his sense of helplessness as he hears the sounds of those wounded lying in no-man-land, some of whom are members of his own troop, slowly drowning in the shell holes they are hiding in as they fill with rainwater:

From the darkness on all sides came the groans and wails of wounded men; faint, long, sobbing moans of agony, and despairing shrieks. It was too horribly obvious that dozens of men with serious wounds must have crawled for safety into new shell holes, and now the water was rising about them and, powerless to move, they were slowly drowning (Vaughan 1981, 228).

Vaughan's sonic visions of Hell are simultaneously quiet and loud, singularly embodied and distantly collective - 'imaginatively', culturally and sensorally they resonate with Dante's *Inferno* or the paintings of Bosch. Vaughan's subsequent silence signifies the inability or impossibility of words to describe his experience. This is in contrast to the propagandist voices of war embodied in the public speeches of politicians back 'home' at the time and the patriotic voices

that resonated in street and home coupled with the bludgeoning commercial music industry that packaged hundreds of songs for the consumption of both troops and their families (Morat 2014).

Those at home could revel in the same music as the soldier on the front; some officers at the Front used portable record players to while away the time while not fighting (Elodie-Roy 2016). In World War One troops imagined, sang and reminisced through propagandist, yet utopian music. The 1915 song *Pack Up Your Troubles* for example, was a great hit with both troops and those at home:

“Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,
And smile, smile, smile,
While you've a Lucifer to light your fag, Smile, boys, that's the style.
What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile,
So Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile.”

The writer of this popular song Felix Powell also entertained the troops on the front performing his songs. Powell however was deeply disturbed by his role in what he perceived of as encouraging troops to die fighting whilst he made large sums of money from selling and performing his songs. The proximity of wartime experience appears to have shattered his own propagandist illusions: “By all accounts he had a kind of nervous breakdown in the trenches” (George Powell *The Independent* 4th Nov 2010). Powell later shot himself, dying in much the same way as those to whom he had sung. Wilfred Owen had used Powell’s refrain Smile, Smile, and Smile as the title of his anti-propagandist wartime poem published after his death:

Head to limp head, the sunk-eyed wounded scanned
Yesterday's *Mail*; the casualties (typed small)
And (large) Vast Booty from our Latest Haul.
Also, they read of Cheap Homes, not yet planned;
“For,” said the paper, “when this war is done
The men's first instinct will be making homes.
Meanwhile their foremost need is aerodromes,
It being certain war has just begun.
Peace would do wrong to our undying dead, —

The sons we offered might regret they died
If we got nothing lasting in their stead.
...Pictures of these broad smiles appear each week,
And people in whose voice real feeling rings
Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things.
(Owen 1997)

The dystopian sonorities of the wartime serving poets were in stark contrast to the songs of World War One, which were up beat, cheery or sentimentally cloying. The ballad '*Keep the Homes Fires Burning*' typically portrayed the warmth of the home for troops to come home to, a metaphor for both domestic life and nation written by the American lyricist Lena Gilbert Ford who, ironically was one of the few Londoners killed at home in an air-raid on London in 1918. Not widely reported at the time.

Song remains an ever present 'we' in theatres of war - dystopian and utopian - and troops would frequently subvert the lyrics of popular wartime songs, replacing them with their own dystopian or sexually explicit lyrics (Sweeney 2001). Early films also portrayed the role of song in ironic tones. In the 1932 movie *Wooden Crosses*, the troops sing, "they tell us we'll be getting bronze crosses (medals) but all we get are wooden crosses" to be placed on their graves. No commercial discs were made of these sonic transgressions at the time. The utopian voices of propaganda had to continue to drown out the voices of wartime experience with their simple and unambiguous dulcet, yet patriotic tones.

Wooden Crosses: Sound Testimony and Sonic Fidelity in Early Film

There was a sound like the roar of an express train, coming nearer at tremendous speed with a loud singing, wailing noise. It kept on coming and I wondered when it would ever burst. Then when it seemed right on top of us, it did, with a shattering crash that made the earth tremble. It was terrible. The concussion felt like a blow in the face, the stomach and

all over; it was like being struck unexpectedly by a huge wave in the ocean (Alexander 2010, 2).

Sound as physical force was not well understood during World War One. The above description by an American Red Cross Volunteer in 1916, describes a large shell landing 200 meters distant. In 1918 the recording engineer Will Gaisberg traveled to France to record the sounds of shellfire on behalf of the British War Savings Committee which had been set up by the British Government to raise money from the public in support of the war effort. His recording was later issued as an HMV recording, bought by those eager to hear what the sounds of war really sounded like. Gaisberg recorded the sounds of shells being fired – not the sounds of them landing and exploding as troops in the trenches would have experienced them (Goddard 2015). The early attempted efforts at fidelity falling short sonically and experientially - not that the record buyers would realize this. Goddard argues that it was these recorded sounds that contributed towards a misunderstanding of what war should sound like in the making of films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Nevertheless, the desire to represent ‘authentic’ war sounds in film had its origins at the very beginning of sound film. Howard Hughes’ *Hell’s Angels* originally made as a silent movie was subsequently dubbed with the supposedly life-like sounds of air battles. When it comes to the ‘realistic’ portrayal of war, much, perhaps undue, attention has been given to the 1930s movie *All Quiet on the Western Front*, adapted from Remarque’s novel of the same name. The film is noted for its gritty and powerful realism. The *New York Times* reviewer of 1930 describes the film as:

a trenchant and imaginative audible picture, in which producers adhere with remarkable fidelity to the spirit and events of the original stirring novel...Often the scenes are of such excellence that if they were not audible one might believe that they were actual motion pictures of activities behind the lines (NYT, April 30th 1930).

The realism of the film works on multiple levels, visual and auditory - yet it is to the auditory that the film claimed and has been received as breaking new ground:

Sound made action films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* so powerful – the impact of music, the realism produced by the sound of rifle fire, the staccato rhythm of machine guns, and the deafening roar of artillery shells. Milestone jolted his audience right onto the battlefield by simultaneously bombarding their senses and their emotions (Chambers and Cuibert 1996,19).

This realism was contested, lauded in the UK and America while the film was subsequently banned in Nazi Germany as anti-German propaganda. Beyond the cultural relativity of its reception, the films claim to ‘realism’ sonic or otherwise, requires qualification. The film was made exclusively in California by a director who relied upon documentary photographic representation as the basis for the verity of the film. These photographic representations were themselves representations of war after the fighting had taken place. Cameras were rarely permitted on the Front, as has already been noted with the making of *The Battle of the Somme*. While the film portrays the terror and futility of war and gives a generalized sonic soundscape to war it also enabled the audience to imagine what ‘being there’ might sound like. In this sense the film replicated some novelistic portrayals of shellfire, for example, that of troops experiencing shelling while underground:

Kas suggests a game of cards; what else can we do, perhaps it will make things easier? But it is no good, we are listening to every impact that sounds close, we lose count and we lead wrong suits. We have to give it up. It’s as if we were sitting inside a massive echoing boiler that is being pounded on every side (Remarque 2011, 81).

The novel embraces the physicality of the sound, as if “sitting inside a massive echoing boiler that is being pounded on every side.” This scene is also visualized in the film. Both the reader and the film viewers need to exercise their imaginative capacity to intuit what this might be like. In World War One, exploding grenades were loud and physical with impulses of 164dB, whilst mortars were louder at 185dB. Even in contemporary cinema’s loudness levels are not meant to exceed 80ddB. No one ever left a cinema with ‘shell-shock’.

Sonic realism remains a 'shadow' – with audiences not knowing whether the soundscape of the film war was accurate or not – indeed, the intensity of sound might have very little affect on how the film is read by audiences. A sense of realism as understood by audiences is all that is required. Perhaps this represents the fiction of sonic 'realism' embodied in the history of war films to the present day?

Remarque supposedly gave the film his blessing, yet the title of the book *All Quiet on the Western Front* is derived from the last page of the novel where the central character is killed off. In the book we are not told how he dies, merely that, "he fell in October 1918, on a day that was so still and quiet along the entire front that the army dispatches restricted themselves to the single sentence: that there was nothing new to report on the western front" (Remarque 2011, 201). The death is impersonal and inconsequential whereas, in the film, the central character famously stretches out from the security of his trench to touch a butterfly nestling nearby, and in doing so is killed by a single shot from a French sniper. The ending symbolically pits nature - the unsullied butterfly - and the desire for beauty within carnage, against the superior destructive tendency of the technology of killing. As a piece of fiction, the film's ending is powerful in its visual and emotive impact. Yet it disavows the nature of sonic learning at the Front: potential survival at the Front was about remaining hidden and listening as will be demonstrated in the following pages. In providing its symbolic ending the film distorts the listening skills embodied and required for survival.

The search for sonic realism is embodied more fully, not in the Hollywood made *All Quiet on the Western Front*, but in the French film *Wooden Crosses* directed by Raymond Bernard in 1932 and based upon the 1920 novel of the same name written by Roland Dorgelès. In this film the director takes the pursuit of realism further than any director since.⁷

⁷ Another fine example is the 1985 Russian World War Two Film *Come and See* which uses a mixture of surrealism and realism in its attempt to portray the experience of war. The lead character, a boy of 14 follows the film through the two years of fighting on Russian soil. The film uniquely is shot in sequence, the audience sees the boy mature from a fourteen year old to a sixteen year old as the film progresses to its grim ending.

The director had wanted to remain faithful to Dorgelès' novel, the same impulse as the director of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Dorgelès, like Remarque had been attentive to the varied sounds of cannon at the Front in his writing:

One's ears soon get accustomed to this rolling crashing. You recognize them all by their voice: the seventy-five that cracks in fury, sets off with a *whiew*, and passes so quickly that you can see it burst as soon as you hear it starting, the hundred-and-twenty, out of breath –you would fancy it too much a Weary Willie to finish its journey; the hundred-and-fifty-five, that seems to go sliding along rails; and the big Jack Johnsons, pass over high up with a tranquil sound of moving waters... The regiment next to us was trying a surprise attack, and it was they that the Maxim was on to, with its regular tap-tap like a sewing-machine (Dorgelès 1921,32-3).

Dorgelès' novel, like Remarque's, is instantly recognizable as inhabiting the anti-war trope inhabited by subsequent war novels. The 'realism' in the film extends beyond the gritty, close up shots of action that we also see in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The film portrays the varied sounds of everyday life both at the Front and behind it, dwelling on the troops fear, boredom, humor and cynicism towards both the powers that be and the 'distant' civilian population. The film portrays the troops as being hermetically sealed off from the world: this feeling is reinforced by the claustrophobic use of camera close-ups throughout the film - the viewer, like the main characters, cannot see much around them, but are subject to the random barrages of gunfire and shelling that engulf them.

The director Bernard, in his concern with 'fidelity,' only hired war veterans to act in the film, rejecting the offers of support from the French Army to act in the film with the claim that both existing troops and officers had never seen active service and hence could not know how to represent war authentically. The troops were used only to dig out the trenches used in the film. The entire film was shot in situ in the Champagne region of France where the fighting had taken place. In creating the battle scenes with the use of explosives, the film crew uncovered the still visible remains of many fallen soldiers - the silent dead. The director describes the film as a homage to the silent dead –

recreating their voice sixteen years after the fact. The actor Charles Varel who movingly portrays the death of his character in a war torn graveyard is asked how he could create such a sense of realism in his protracted death scene, says that, “for this type of work, you don’t need to act, you just need to remember”(Bernard interview 1972) thus prioritizing his experience of war while also being able to represent its ‘authenticity’ on the screen.

The soundscape created in the film is distinctive in its creation of a sonic landscape that creates a great sense of space. The viewer hears multiple sounds of shells moving across the landscape, as they ‘would have’ been experienced by troops on the ground:

We had to recreate the atmosphere of war in sound. To recreate the sounds of war. We had to record the explosions and machine guns and rifles being fired. I conducted numerous experiments. I don’t know how many microphones I destroyed. I remember that the first explosions I tried to record as an experiment naturally were very bad because the microphones got jammed by the explosions and the recording was far too short. I eventually worked out how to record an explosion by placing mikes at varying distances, gradually further and further away. That way, the sound recording got longer and became more real and bore a closer resemblance to the sound without a microphone, the live sound that could be heard...The cannon had to be recorded as it was firing. Then there was the whistling of the shell as it went up into the air followed by the whistling of the shell as it fell to the ground. And finally there was the explosion. The microphones had to be switched on and off one at a time in different places (Bernard interview 1972, Wooden Cross DVD).

Yet, despite this, the sense of the ‘real’ had to be qualified in order for the audience to hear the dialogue between the men in the trenches: the explosions had to be recorded in the background and the dialogue in the foreground. In the actuality of battle, it was often impossible to hear what anybody was saying as Gilbert has noted when discussing the Battle of the Somme:

The sound was so intense that if a man screamed at the top of his voice into another man’s ear, he could not be heard...with the sound of shellfire

an unbroken roar, the sound of individual shells bursting was lost”(Gilbert 2006, 50).

Bernard while aware of the limitations of film, created the soundscape so that the veterans who were invited to the first showing of the film would recognize what they were hearing and seeing. The film was primarily made for the participants of war who would be able to fill in their own embodied experiences of war as they experienced the film, revisiting the sounds of the past in the present in order to re-embody their silhouettes of the past.

Sonic Visibility, Sonic Invisibility: From Disfigurement to Shell Shock

Figure 1. William Kearsley: In October 1917, shrapnel struck Kearsley in the face, severely gashing his face.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/postcolonial/2014/may/26/broken-gargoyles-the-disfigured-soldiers-of-the-first-world-war>

While many writers at the Front were largely dismissive of those civilians left behind, there was much support from those civilians for those soldiers wounded at the front.⁸ But the ‘realism’ embodied by long lasting injuries both physical

⁸ The soldier listened to excited tails of air-raids. A bomb had fallen in the next street. The windows had been broken. Many people had been killed in a house somewhere in Hackney. It was frightful...The soldier on leave saw crowds of

and mental proved problematic for many civilians. Sonic trauma represents the visible and the invisible. The invisible, in the form of shell shock or other psychological trauma was often preferred to the overtly visible, especially severe, facial disfigurement. In the everyday life of civilians who might have imagined what the consequences of war was like to those engaged in fighting it, the presence of those who were suffering from the trauma of war was frequently disquieting. For those who were disfigured appeared to be too closing, too long lasting in the consequences of what the war represented. Theirs became a 'realism' unwanted, a physical reminder of the inhumanity of war. Their visual presence an unrecognized manifestation of the sonic – inextricably bound.

The sonic war represented a war of contingency and training - a war of size and speed. The disfigured were frequently victims of randomness and a lack of training in a war that pitted new forms of technological killing against fragile human flesh. Troops were not in need of sonic imagination as perhaps audiences back home were - but rather sonic training. Many of the young troopers pushed and rushed into the front line had no time to learn to listen as American surgeon Fred Albee noted in 1916:

Many soldiers were shot in the face simply because they had no experience of trench warfare: "They seemed to think they could pop their heads up over a trench and move quickly enough to dodge the hail of machine-gun bullets (Biernoff 2011,1).

Their injuries represented a misunderstanding of the sound and speed of the killing technologies that they confronted. Not for them, the romanticism of sonic Futurist fictions embodied in its founder Marinetti. Marinetti had been to war yet persisted in his fictions, "We wish to glorify War, – the only health giver of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive arm of the Anarchist, the beautiful Ideas that kill, the contempt of women" (in Hynes 1992,7). It proved harder for the public to aestheticize the face of victims such as William Kearsley. The

people taking shelter in underground railways, working men among them, sturdy lads, panic stricken. But for his own wife and children, he had an evil sense of satisfaction in these sights. It would do them good. They would know what war meant - just a little...An air raid? Lord god, did they know what a German barrage was like? (Grayzel 2012,239).

empiricism embodied in the everyday was more likely to be constituted by the averted gaze when confronted with facial disfigurement; images of physical disfigurement were largely absent in the public domain until Otto Dix dared to paint it in the 1920s.⁹

The State treated the disfigured better than amputees. The disfigured received a full pension thus giving them enough money to remain invisible and not having to beg like many of those with lost arms and legs who only received a fraction of the State Pension. Visibility and disability were treated incrementally - amputees were free to beg in the street - their visibility - less disturbing yet disturbing nevertheless. By 1917, specialist hospitals were opened in the U.K. in an attempt to both treat these soldiers and to keep them apart. Those with minor disfigurements were not permitted to return to the trenches as it was thought that the uninjured didn't wish to see what they might become. Many of the disfigured never went home but remained in these establishments; many-committed suicide.

A specialist facial disfigurement hospital was opened in Sidcup, Kent in 1917. The municipal authorities arranged to have some of the park and town benches painted blue. The aim of these blue benches was to "warn towns people that any man sitting on one might be distressful to view." (Biernoff 2011,674) The cinema in Sidcup had been full in 1916 with locals queuing up to see the 'real' war as portrayed in *The Battle of the Somme*, by 1917 even this 'reality' had palled with smaller numbers turning up to see the next installments, *The Battle of Ancre* and *Ypres* - after all - they all looked the same. Better to listen to the quickest hit of 1914, still a favorite in 1917 - the Ivor Novello song, *Keep the Home Fires Burning -Till the Boys Come Home*.

The isolation and silence surrounding the social recognition of disfigurement paralleled the descriptions of the sonic isolation experienced by troops bombarded by artillery shells on the front. Shell shock, whilst not always caused by the intensity of sonic bombardment, frequently was. Shell Shock while initially considered invisible was also often visually manifest for all to see

⁹ Otto Dix *The Skat Players. Card Playing War Invalids* 1920

Just as specialist homes were set up for the disfigured, so in 1917 convalescence homes were set up in the countryside for officers to recover from 'shell-shock' in peace and quiet, the quicker to send them back to the Front. Peace and quiet was class bound; normal troops suffering from shell shock normally remained a few miles from the front whilst 'recovering'. The poet and officer Siegfried Sassoon was sent to Lennel Auxiliary Hospital, a stately home to recover his senses, while recovering he wrote the following poem, pitting testimony - the testimony of shock, against the voices of propaganda:

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're 'longing to go out again,' –
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; there cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died, -
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter'd all their pride...
Men who went to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.
(*Survivors*. Siegfried Sassoon 2014).

In the aftermath of the war and with the rise of sound films shell shock became increasingly portrayed sympathetically in films such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Wooden Crosses*. But by that time the war had already become mythologized in the eyes of the audience - and the war just a distant mis-memory.¹⁰

The sense of disconnects between troops and a sympathetic audience is articulated in Henry Williamson's wartime novel, *The Patriot's Progress*, published in 1930. The leading character, after having his leg blown off in the

¹⁰ Subsequently, both physical disablement as a result of fighting in war and shell-shock were treated more sympathetically and centrally in film. The 1946 Hollywood movie *The Best Years of Our Lives* and the 1964 which portrays the effects of physical disablement and the Joseph Losey movie *King and Country* which centrally portrays the effects of shell shock.

war is trying to re-adjust to civilian life. On Armistice Day he's using his crutches to walk around and observe the day:

He was out in the street on the 11th November, waiting for the maroons to go off at eleven o'clock, when an old toff stopped him and asked how he had lost his leg. John Bullock told him. A five-niner, as we were going over. The toff soon lost interest, and when the flags were waving, he said: "well, I suppose it's a good thing it's over, but in my opinion the government is weak. We ought to have driven the Huns back to Berlin, and given their country a taste of what they gave in France.'

"Ah!" said John Bullock, shifting on his leg. "However," said the old gentleman, giving him a cigar, as he prepared to move on, to see the fun? Whistles were blowing, people shouting and singing, motor horns honking, and a deuce of a fine row everywhere. "We always did do things in England by halves." At this moment a very little boy ran up, waving a flag: and seeing his daddy talking to someone, he stopped.

"Look, daddy, look!" cried the little boy. The poor man hasn't got only one boot on!"

"Ssh! You mustn't notice such things!" said the toff. "This good man is a hero. Yes," he went on, "we'll see that England doesn't forget you fellows."

"We are England," said John Bullock, with a slow smile. The old gentleman could not look him in the eye; and the little boy ceased to wave his flag, and stared sorrowfully at the poor man (Williamson 1930, 193-4).

Now there is greater recognition of the devastating consequences of shattering noise, noise that splits the eardrum causing permanent hearing loss. In World War One troops had no technologies of 'in-ear protection' as contemporary troops in Iraq and elsewhere possess, but even in Iraq

these technologies cannot protect troops from all noises. Troops can suffer hearing loss from shooting off their own weapons (shooters ear) or being near to an explosion...Overwhelmed by the immediacy and materiality of *sounds which cannot be heard*, of waves of pressure that act violently on passive bodies, auditors became inauditors once again:

the waves constituted them as victims before the victims could constitute themselves as listeners...Knocked unconscious, deafened, concussed, and otherwise damaged by explosive sound, traumatic *inauditors* were rendered...incapable of meaningful thought or action (Daughtry 2015, 95).

The silence of trauma is mirrored in the silence of memorial. Rudyard Kipling created, in post World War One Britain, the idea of memorials written in stone and dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of unknown soldiers. Kipling had been a vigorous pro-war propagandist until his eighteen-year-old son John for whom he had pulled strings to get him into the army (he had very poor eyesight) went missing in his first weeks in France. Kipling interviewed as many of the troops that remained from the battle of Loos who had known John only to discover that he was, "last seen on the second day of the ill-fated attack, stumbling blindly through the mud, screaming in agony after an exploding shell ripped his face apart " (J. Brown. *The Independent* 28th August 2006). Henry Williamson, writing for the *Daily Mirror* on the Tenth Anniversary Remembrance Service held in London on 11th November 1928 wrote:

11 a.m. A note deep and sonorous, another deep note from Big Ben, and we are launched into silence and olden time. Whitehall is a chasm, filled with grey silence, and the people are dead: I am dead, but there is no Valhalla, only a strange immensity of twilight silence...the maroons crash, it is finished (Williamson 1998, 163).

The Sound of Arabian Adventures

When Ernst Junger, author of the novel, *Storm and Steel*, went to war in 1914, he went having been bought up with an Homeric sense of the grandeur and violence of war. Junger fought through the four years of the war as a trooper in the trenches and was wounded on seven occasions - yet always clung to the Homeric sense of war. For Junger as for so many others at the beginnings of the 20th century, war was mediated largely through literature and art. Yet in his writing Junger recognized the horror of a technologized war full of tanks and artillery pitted against heroic flesh:

For the effect of shelling was a psychological desolation to match the lands. Junger likens it to your being tied at a stake while someone constantly menaces you with a hammer: one hit whizzes past you; the next hits the stake, sending splinters flying (Nevin 1997, 50).

Homer's *Iliad* read by Junger "contains some of the most brutal battle scenes in the history of world literature. Scene after scene describes in gory and devastating detail" (Homer 2009, vii). However, T.E. Lawrence, the translator of Homer's *Odyssey* largely translated in the desert waste of the British army base in Miranshah India in 1927 where Lawrence had escaped the media noise of his military fame in World War One, had argued that Homer had never been in battle "and had not seen deaths in battle [but was] a bookworm, a mainlander, city bred and domestic" (Homer, tr. Lawrence 1991, vi). Lawrence had also been brought up with an Homeric sense of battle, taking with him Mallory's *Morte De Arthur* with him to battle but unlike Junger, he soon abandoned the precepts of the chivalrous war.

While much space has been given to the anti-war 'myth' embodied in the work of Sassoon, Williamson, Aldington and others, many within the artistic circles of Europe at the time had also been influenced by the aestheticization of war as we have already noted in the Futurist writings of Marinetti which embodied the glorification of a technologized urbanism already found in a wide range of writing from Simmel onwards. In a series of lectures held in London in 1914 Marinetti had proclaimed the virtues of violence, speed, and technology as the guiding principle of the future. His earlier wartime experiences, like those of Junger, did little to diminish his enthusiasm for war. Equally, the genre of adventure story writing played to the adventurous nature of war, as evidenced in W.E. John's collection of *Biggles* novels written for teenagers. Johns had been an airman in World War One yet filtered this experience into a glorification of the air-ace.

"Being-there" is not a prerequisite to artistic integrity – although the use of the imagination probably is. World War One authors invariably built upon their experiences, but their work is not necessarily reduced to their wartime experiences. Early critics of Barbusse's anti-war novel, *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* published in 1917 and based upon his own wartime experiences,

questioned the veracity of his account. Winter, however, claimed that “the literary technique he adopted was a kind of heightened realism, very much in the tradition of Zola, where the story came out of his own experience, but the story itself transcended it” (Winter 2014,184). What is common to all of these war-time novels is the sensory ‘veracity’ of the accounts; the authors have all been trained in their sensory awareness of the technologies of war - they know what different guns sound like, the sound of tank engines and so on. This is coupled with the desire to bear ‘witness’ to what they have experienced. This is not new. The creative turn is evident in much war writing. The sonic landscape of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is reliant on Tolstoy’s own reporting of the Battle of Sebastopol:

All of a sudden the noise of a most fearful explosion startles you out of your wits, delivering a severe jolt not only to your ears but to the whole of your being, making you tremble in every limb. Immediately afterwards you hear the fading whistle of the projectile, and a thick pall of powder smoke enshrouds you, likewise enveloping the platform and the black figures of the sailors moving to and from. You hear the sailors exchanging opinions on the subject of this discharge of yours...(return fire). And sure enough, a moment or two later you see lightning and smoke ahead of you; the sentry standing on the parapet shouts: ‘Ca-a-nnon!’ And then a cannonball shrieks past you, slaps into the earth and showers everything with mud and stones (Tolstoy 1986, 89).

We have noted T.E. Lawrence’s observation that Homer had never been near to battle. After the war Lawrence had ‘disappeared’ socially, had given up his army commission, and had re-enlisted as a private first in the army and then the air force under assumed names, primarily to escape an intense public scrutiny. Lawrence’s public reputation, or the myth of ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ is largely down to the role of the American journalist and impresario Lowell Thomas. In the immediate aftermath of war it was proving difficult to aestheticize the experience of trench warfare for the British and American public. Thomas during the war had sought out Allenby and Lawrence during the Middle-Eastern Campaign, to which access was easier and safer than reporting

on the Western Campaign. Thomas had taken his camera and filmmaker with him with the aim of filming and reporting on the campaign. With the end of the war, Thomas constructed a review show, very much in tune with popular music hall entertainment of the time, but with an authentic 'I was there' claim. The show entitled *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia* was to be both a 'witnessing' and 'entertaining,' a variation on the popular vaudeville style of the day.

The show opened to packed audiences in Covent Garden in London with Allenby, Winston Churchill and Lawrence himself attending the performance. The show was to run at various venues around London for over 200 performances before moving to America and then back to the UK with over 4 million seats sold worldwide. The show, narrated by Thomas, was innovative in so much as Thomas's commentary was synchronized to photos and movie clips of the battle for the Middle East. The show unusually used genuine footage of the war, unlike the fake ones usually staged for newsreels at the time together with Sudanese minstrels, incense and organ music. Thomas describes the event thus:

When I opened in London I used the sixty piece Welsh Guards Band in their scarlet uniforms, On stage, the Moonlight on the Nile scene, as the curtain opened on the Nile set, the moon faintly illuminating distant pyramids, our dance glided onstage for a two minute Dance of the Seven Veils accompanied by an Irish tenor in the wings, singing the Mohammedan Call to prayer which Fran had put to music. At the end of this I emerged in a spotlight and without even saying Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen, I started my show with the words: 'Come with me to the lands of mystery, history and romance (Wilson 2016).

The Palestine and Arabia campaign, had, in the public's mind, represented a romantic campaign rather than the horrors associated with the Western Front despite the fact of heavy losses on this front also. The campaign had been dubbed "The Last Crusade." Thomas's show presented a romantic campaign that audiences could feel good about in the immediate aftermath of the war. Both the audiences and the media celebrated the show's 'orientalism' uncritically.

Lawrence was referred to as “Shereef Lawrence, the uncrowned King of Arabia”
Lowell’s script goes as follows:

(There) is a young man whose name will go down in history besides those of Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Clive, Charles Gordon, and all the other famous heroes of Great Britain’s glorious past...The Germans and the Turks were so impressed with Lawrence’s achievements in Arabia that they expressed their admiration and appreciation by offering rewards amounting to over one hundred thousand pound on his head. But the wild sons of Ishmael regarded their quiet, fair-haired leader as a sort of supernatural being who had been sent from heaven to deliver them from their oppressors, and they wouldn’t have betrayed him for all the gold in the fabled mines of King Solomon (from *Struggle* 1914-20. J. E. Wrench, London 1935, 363-4).

The show transformed T.E. Lawrence into “Lawrence of Arabia.”(Korda 2011,479) Lawrence, in a letter to E.M Forster, disputed the depth of Thomas’s Middle-East experiences claiming that Thomas had only stayed with him for a short period of time, had taken a few still photos of him and had not been with him during any fighting:

He came out to Allenby’s as an American official correspondent, saw a scoop in our side-show, and came to Akaba (1918) for ten days. I saw him there, for a second time, but went up country to do some other work. He bored the others, so they packed him off by ford car to Petra, and thence backs to Egypt by sea. His spare credulity they packed with stories about me. He was shown copies of my official reports, and made extracts and summaries of them. Of course he was never in the Arab firing line, nor did he ever see an operation or ride with me. I met him occasionally afterwards in London in 1920 (T.E. Lawrence 2010,40).

The semi-fictionalized account of Lawrence and his Middle-Eastern exploits was taken as largely ‘factual’ by audiences. Thomas followed up his shows success with the writing of a biography *With Lawrence in Arabia* in 1924

to great critical acclaim. Lawrence who had written his own account of his war-time experiences in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* only allowing it to be published in the event of his death which occurred as a result of a motorcycle accident in 1935. Both Thomas and Lawrence describe the Battle of Seil el Hasa in detail. Lawrence was of course there whilst Thomas had only read Lawrence's dispatches of the encounter. Thomas follows the heroic and 'boys own' representation of the action:

The ricochets of the shells and shrapnel as they struck the flint boulders and glanced off were horrible, causing heavy losses among the enemy. Lawrence ordered the men on his left flank to fire an unusually heavy burst from the Hotchkiss and Vickers machine-guns at Turks manning the Maxims. These were so accurate that they completely wiped the latter out. He then ordered his cavalry to charge the retreating Turks from the right flank, while he also moved forward from the centre with his infantry and banners waving defiantly. Horse and man, the Turks collapsed and their attack crumpled...It was dark before his followers gave up the pursuit, exhausted from lack of sleep and food. "Allahu Akbar," cried the weary men as they fell upon their knees with their faces toward Mecca, giving praise to Allah for their victory (Thomas 1931,117).

On the 29th July 1935 the *Daily Mail* published a review of Lawrence's posthumous *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* written by Winston Churchill entitled 'Lawrence's great book: Grim war realism of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*' (T.E Lawrence 2015,1). Lawrence's account of the events at Seil el Hasa were downbeat in contrast to Thomas's account of the same confrontation:

Above six hundred were killed, and men said only fifty got back, exhausted fugitives, to the railway. The Arabs on their track rose against them and shot them ignobly as they ran. Our men gave up pursuit quickly, for they were tired and sore and hungry and it was pitifully cold...as we turned back it began to snow, and only very late and by the last effort did we get our wounded to the villages that night. The Turkish wounded lay

out, and were dead the next day...the next day and the next it snowed (Lawrence 2003, 546).

Thomas is no Homer, but his account fitted the 'heroic' fiction of war that was already a preferred option for audiences in the immediate post-war period. By 1935, with the publication of Lawrence's own work, and following on from the work of Sassoon, Williamson and others audiences were ready to listen to alternative accounts of World War One.

Epilogue: "I didn't even know there was a War" (Leonard Cohen)

Just as T.E. Lawrence and Ernst Junger had their imagination filled with the heroic myths of the past, so war, technology and media technologies have become more intimately intertwined, not just in the 'derealized' image of war but as a platform for performing war both as an interactive entertainment and as the 'real thing.' The training of troops through a range of media consumption and media play is commonplace. Patrick Hennessey, an English officer in the Iraq war, describes his training at Sandhurst:

Sandhurst relies on scenes from war movies for roughly 57% of the course teaching material, and there was barely a lecture we attended that didn't make use of one of the Sandhurst stock of war films for an element of instruction. For this reason there is almost no one in the army with less than five years' service who has not seen all *The Band of Brothers*, most of the *Gladiator* and *Saving Private Ryan*, not to mention significant sections of *Full Metal Jacket*, *A Bridge Too Far*, and for reasons that escape me, *Heat* (Hennessey, 2009, 55).

The experience of war amongst troops is increasingly informed by sonic media, from the boom box, Walkman, iPod, and beyond. Jonathan Pieslack's study of US troops in Iraq confirms the multiple use of the sound track through which to energize and make real combat situations, either through headphone use or through music blaring from loudspeakers. A contemporary *Apocalypse Now* played out in the field of combat.

In parallel to this synergy between technology, entertainment and war amongst troops has been the training of civilian populations; at times subject to total war, at other times removed from it by geographical distance – if not media distance. From the Blitz in London in World War Two to the present on-going war in Iraq subject populations have trained themselves to listen to the sounds of death approaching from the air and on land. H.E. Bates describes listening to the sound of a V1 Doodlebug flying over London in World War Two:

The doodlebug could be heard a long way off. It could be heard thirty miles away. It seemed to fly on an invisible track, as straight as a train. As it came nearer the roar became a metallic throb like the fiery stroke of a cheap motorbike and, as it passed overhead these throbs set up the most deafening reverberations that were like the explosion of a continuous backfire (Bates 1994,38).

Now, those in the West are largely separated from the wars they are involved in experiencing it in terms of news, film, newspaper reports and video games unlike the populations of Syria and Iraq who understand the nature of ‘total war’ (Doughtry 2015). In the West, populations are trained through a range of media technologies for war at a distance - the illusion of sonic and visual fidelity remains alive and well (Virillio 1989).

On Friday 13th November 2015 war temporarily visited Paris. As Parisians went about their normal everyday life, Isil terrorists, armed with Kalashnikovs killed 130 people at the Bataclan concert hall where the American band *Eagles of Death Metal* were playing inside. Jerome Boucer, who survived the carnage, described the scene thus: “ The concert had started. I was in the audience and I heard what sounded like a firecracker. It was loud but the gig was very loud and I thought it was something that was part of the show. I think lots of people did too.” Supposedly, the terrorists inside the Bataclan were heard to shout: “This is war. We will make you feel the fear that the people of Syria feel every day.” The concertgoers never realized they were in a war. They hadn’t learnt to recognize the sound of the firing Kalashnikov’s used by the killers.

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J'Accuse (1919) Directed by Abel Gance.

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Battle of the Somme (1916) Directed by Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell.

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The Best Years of Our Lives (1946) Directed by William Wyler.

King and Country (1964) Directed by Joseph Losey.

Come and See (Idi I smotri) Directed by Elem Klimov

Songs

Pack up your Troubles (1915), Music Felix Powell, lyrics George Henry Powell.

Keep the Home Fires Burning (1914) Music, Ivor Novello, lyrics, Lena Guilbert Ford.

There is a War (1974) Lyrica and music by Leonard Cohen.