

The Listener and the Machine, an interview with Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne

Mathieu Aubin and Katherine McLeod

May 14, 2021

Interviews, SPOKENWEBLOG | Jonathan Sterne, Listening-Sound-Agency, Mara Mills, Plenary

Tweet

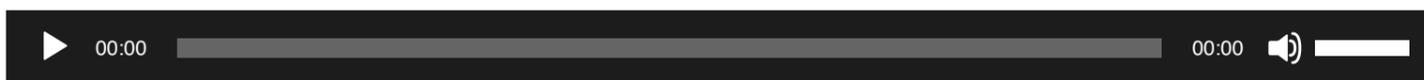
Share

Cite this article



On October 15th, 2020, we, Mathieu Aubin and Katherine McLeod, had the opportunity to speak with Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne – two of Listening, Sound, Agency’s plenary speakers – about their recent publication, **“Aural Speed-Reading: Some Historical Bookmarks,” PMLA 135.2 (2020)**. In this research profile, featuring audio clips from and transcriptions of that conversation, we discuss various approaches to listening as reading, histories of hacking and jimmying audio equipment, and even jimmying the affordances of the PMLA journal.

TRACK 1: Interview Opening – October 15th, 2020 at 2:21 PM ET



Mathieu Aubin: The introduction is simply that we’re here obviously October 15 and it’s now 2:21 is time that we’re officially starting our interview and I’m situated in Montreal. And my name is Mathieu Aubin. And, if you don’t mind stating your names for the record and where you’re located, it’d be great to have that. Katherine...

Katherine McLeod: My name is Katherine McLeod and I am also coming to you live from Montreal.

Mara Mills: Mara Mills, coming to you from NYU housing in New York.

Jonathan Sterne: Jonathan Sterne, coming to you from Montreal. But it’s important to note we’re nowhere near one another in Montreal and it’s not even legal for us to be.

Mathieu Aubin: Absolutely. Yeah. Zone Red.

Mara Mills: Which one of you is in Zone Red?

Mathieu Aubin, Katherine McLeod, Jonathan Sterne: All of us.

Mathieu Aubin: So obviously this interview, I mean, in a way we’re really lucky to be able to do this over Zoom, and have people from different countries and also across the city in the same virtual space. The reason why we’ve gotten together is because we have the opportunity to have the two of you, Mara and Jonathan, to present as plenary speakers up the **2021 SpokenWeb Symposium** and your talk was proposed as the title, “Tape and Time: Compressing and Expanding Sound in the Analog Era.” I imagine that it might’ve changed – [dear reader, it has changed – in fact, now Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne are each delivering plenary talks and the new titles are [here](#)], but if it hasn’t, then I’m glad it’s on the record here. And what we realized is that it seems based on the description that you had for that talk, that there’s a lot of overlap with what is in your most

recently published piece with the *PMLA*. And I want to give our listeners a bit of an auditory insight into what you've been working on recently and what we can maybe look forward to next summer. And this is going to be going up on *SPOKENWEBLOG*. Is there anything else I should add, Katherine?

Katherine McLeod: No, that's a great introduction. [Siren noise in background.] I think that we could start – Mathieu's got a great question to start us off.

TRACK 2

Mathieu Aubin: So you've already started talking about this a bit and you talk – we talked – about this with the two tracks, as you kind of frame them in your article and what I was curious about and what I felt about it was that as though I was reading different writing styles: in the first one, being more of a narrative, and the second one being more, what we would traditionally expect from an academic article. And so what I was thinking about was, you know, what types of reading audiences did you have in mind for these two tracks?



Mara Mills: Originally, those were woven together in one longer article for that *PMLA* piece. And we originally wrote it, not for the *PMLA*. We wrote it as one of the chapters in the book, which we are hoping will have a mixed audience of academics, as well as anyone who's interested in time stretching. We're hoping that the book will be published in a print format as well as either an audio book format – correct me if I'm wrong with what we're talking about now, Jonathan – or an online format with embedded audio. So we had to sort of break apart some of the narrative and create a longer narrative rather than separate chunks of, say, interviews with Harvey Lauer or descriptions of what we found in the archive to create that track on the left-hand side. We also have written more recently, in fact, published last week, a piece for a more popular audience for the online magazine *Triple Canopy*, which is part two of the *PMLA* article. If you're interested, it carries that story from the pre-war period, from the 1930s through to the 1960s and the first commercialization of time-stretching devices that were tape recorder attachments.

Jonathan Sterne: Yeah, I think we didn't think too hard about different audiences for *[P]MLA*. We were just thinking about writing in more than one voice and also messing with the format a little bit. Honestly, it was sort of like, let's do this cause we could. It also performs, importantly I think, something that the story tells, which is messing with the limitations of the device to get it to do something that it doesn't want to do otherwise. Just a little as long as we're flogging the book, the book does not yet exist. The working title is – correct me if I'm wrong, Mara – *Tuning Time: Histories of Sound and Speed*. I'm leaning more towards enhanced audiobook than [a] website, just in terms of long-term durability for the multimedia version, but we got to finish the book first, which we're hoping to do in 2021. But, you know, who knows – COVID-willing, COVID-willing... It was an opportunity to write a little differently. I think that, although individually, our writing styles are somewhat – we both do this sort of narrate and then pause and reflect kind-of-thing. And this was a way of spatializing that instead of temporalizing it or, or spatializing it according to something other than just the linearity of print – one sentence after another.

Mara Mills: And, frankly, the *PMLA* journal is one of the more exclusive academic journals that there is. Even to publish in it, you have to be a member of the MLA, Jonathan and I had to sign up and pay membership dues – high membership dues – just to publish that piece. And there's a paywall to read it. So it's not open for everyone to read. And the premise of, or the core anecdote, in that story is about a group of blind students at an institution and the Janesville school for the blind hacking into, you know, hacking their, or as they call it, jimmying, their talking book player to try to make it play faster and to drive the motor faster so they could hear their homework books at really high speed, which worked for a while until the record player broke. And so, you know, like Jonathan said, we're trying to re-perform, re-stage, that sort of jimmying of something that actually is a restricted medium because they were not allowed by their teacher to use a different kind of machine. They had to use the one prescribed to them and it didn't work the way they wanted it to. It didn't play as fast. And I think, for me, another important feature of that short piece was just putting as much of Harvey's voice in there as possible. He died last year. He himself was a writer. He published tons of articles. He was an engineer. He had a graduate degree. He spent over 30 years working as the technology transfer specialist for the VA. In other modes, I've just republished some of his writing that had gone out of print. He's an expert. He's told this story himself. And so I have to ask myself: what am I doing by retelling his story? I wanted to give space for him to tell his own

story, and then for us to do some analysis or some conversation with him. In a longer article that would've just happened in a back and forth way, but it was very hard in a short piece – for essentially a roundtable – to preserve lengthy enough parts of his own voice.

TRACK 3

Katherine McLeod: *That idea of telling the story in different ways makes me think of the way in which the piece – well it – draws attention to how you're reading it. And that was something that, in splitting the tracks, you're almost, you can't read that piece without thinking about how you're reading it. You have to either choose: are you, am I, going to read this one first or this one, or am I going to sort of skim back and forth? And it's interesting then to think of not only how you're sort of telling the story in different ways, but you're also asking the reader to read in different ways. So, I'm interested to hear you speak a little bit about that slippage between techniques of reading and techniques of listening that starts to happen in the piece, and the big question – and pretty much informs the entire piece, but just to sort of just start with unpacking – in what moments are you talking about listening? In which moments are you talking about reading? When do they start to blur for you? And also why is it also important to think of them as different, different things, different acts?*



Jonathan Sterne: I think, we're talking about blind readers, and one of the misconceptions about blind readers is that most people read with braille. I learned this from Mara, by the way. But, the important thing is that reading in this context is listening. Now, listening, isn't only reading. It is one – it's a – it's a whole field of techniques, one of which is a technique of reading by listening. But in this context, reading and listening are the same thing. And certainly in the current audio book context, there's been a lot of talk about that, and there's been research on it. The Danish researcher Iban Have has done a bunch of scholarship on audiobooks. And I think it's important not to assume – I mean, it's sort of, one of the things we were really pushing on is – this presumption of visual reality as the modality of reading, which, there's nothing inherently, ableist about reading with your eyes rather than your ears. But if you say this is the supreme form of literacy, and all other forms of literacy are subordinate to it, very quickly, that turns into an ableist logic in the context of blind cultural and technical history. So that's how I sort out the techniques in the piece.

Mara Mills: Yeah. I mean, reading is an invented behaviour. It's easy to forget that. Reading is an invented behaviour and impairments of reading, whether it's dyslexia or print disability, a whole range of other print disabilities are prime examples of the social model or the social construction of disability. Of course not all things fit into that category. And so, you know, the stigmatization of talking book reading, which really has happened in both mainstream schools and also certain institutions across the 20th and into the 21st century is something we want to push against by asking about what different modes of reading there are and might be with new electronic reading that many of us are constantly doing. I mean, since the 1930s, when talking books were first developed – and again, that's what they were called – they were precursors to what are now called audio books, which were commercialized, as Matthew Rubery has beautifully written about after World War II – but, ever since the beginning of talking book reading, many blind people, not all of them, because blindness is a very diverse category and there's lots of different ways to read when one's blind, but many blind people have been adamant that listening to talking books is a form of reading, just as tactile reading of braille is a form of reading. And one of the things we point out in the PMLA piece is that reading a talking book by ear isn't the kind of listening that one does when listening to the radio, because you're employing all the kinds of extensive reading techniques that one would do if reading tactically or reading ink print by eyes. So people skip ahead several chapters using tonal indexing, people are skimming by speeding up, people reread. It's a particular kind of listening, which is reading by ear. We also don't want to conflate all kinds of reading into one thing. I would never say that that tactile reading and oral reading and visual reading are the same, but they can still all be reading. So we also wanted to explore the distinctions and the distinctions are important because honestly visual ink-print reading has set the standards to which other kinds of reading are compared: how much homework is assigned, what the norms for how fast one should read are, how quiet one should be in the classroom. My blind students at NYU often are now reading text to speech and it makes noise. It makes noise on the phone. It makes noise on any other platform that one is reading through it, even if one is wearing headphones. Visual ink-print reading also

set standards of cost. Usually other formats, if one isn't accessing them with accommodations that would allow one to get them free from a publisher, actually cost more. So we do want to be cognizant of the differences in these kinds of reading and how some modes of reading, namely ink-print visual reading, put pressure on the others and on people who read in other ways.

TRACK 4

Mathieu Aubin: *That, for me, is really rich in the sense of thinking about the multiple ways of reading, the multiple ways of listening, and that's part of what I was thinking about when I first approached the text. I was like: Where do I start? Is this a typical PMLA article? What am I to read? And then I realized that I could have read the beginning of one article, then read the beginning of the next one, or not the beginning of the article, but, you know, one side and the other side, and worked with that as another form of reading experience and to challenge what I'm thinking about linearly. The other thing that really struck me is this idea of not only speed reading but also speed listening. And this is a concept that you talk about in your article and something that we think about more and more. I have friends who listen to podcast episodes and go to 1.25 so they can get through that episode faster, for some reason. I don't know why – I don't enjoy that because I think it sounds more anxious perhaps, depending on the podcast. But, something that is interesting – and I was really struck by the following statement that you made in the piece – which was that "speed listening is, in many ways, blind reading and oral speed reading is the technique that ghost writes today's algorithms for stretching time-based media." And that really struck me, and I was wondering if you'd be open to unpack that idea a bit further in this space?*



Mara Mills: Well, one thing I would point out is that, if I were an early modern scholar, I would say that people have been reading by ear throughout time, whether it's choral reading or being read to by a minister or a parent. The lone individual doing ink-print reading in a silent way is actually fairly modern and a fairly unusual way to read. What's unique about the kind of oral reading that blind people were doing – and many people do today, either with text-to-speech or with sped up audio books – is that you're reading a sound recording. So it's something you can manipulate, and you can play it at faster speeds than the human voice unaided could speak at. In fact, talking books can be played back or synthetic speech can be played back so quickly that, to the untrained ear, it's very difficult to even make out the different words. So that's distinct to these recording and synthesis technologies, as opposed to all sorts of other kinds of oral reading throughout history.

Jonathan Sterne: Yeah, I think there's a bunch of things to unpack there. One is, let's take the concept of words-per-minute, which is like a weird concept, but how are you going to measure the speed of reading otherwise? So it's something-per-something. Somebody like me reading ink-print reads at a certain speed. It's much faster than I speak. But one of the things we discovered that is actually quite fascinating is that human beings can hear speech and understand speech at rates much faster than they can make it with their mouths. Even, you know, auctioneers, and people who can talk really fast. One of the results of that is, if you are reading by ear rather than by eye, it makes sense to read fast if you're measuring the speed of reading against the speed of speech, but speed reading by ear is not necessarily as fast as ink print reading. So even the idea that it is fast is itself based on assumptions about what reading is and how reading works. Then the question is: if you're listening to this at 1.25, is that reading it? Well not necessarily, I think you have to sort of think about it in the context of like, what is your practice of attending to it? What is the institutional milieu and what is the way it's being received? What are the techniques and technologies that you're engaging with, whether you're just, you might be speed listening and not speed reading. I don't want to be too pedantic about it. But I think that that's a crucial thing to understand is that, when we're talking about blind reading by listening, it's actually not speed listening in the same way that we would understand speed reading is.

And it's not a violation of the text so much as it is an attempt to engage with the text in a manner similar to, or I should say analogous to cause it's not similar, but it's analogous or structurally homologous to the way an ink print reader reads visually. So that's sort of like – the very idea of speed there is, I think, problematic and it's different than, say, an undergrad student listening to my lecture sped up. In fact, just today I did midterm evaluations for my class because I've never taught an all-online class during a pandemic before. It will not surprise you to learn that the undergrads are stressed out, and not just because of my class, but one of the things that struck me was, so, at the end of the term, there's always people who say the lectures are too fast or too dense, and then the lectures are too slow. And, I'm like, in this milieu you can fix it. So I made a video with VLC player where I was speeding

up and slowing down the lecture from two weeks ago, on labour just to, you know, for a performative point to show them how to do it and say like, look, if you don't know how to do this, this is way better than me trying to speak more slowly. You're the listener, you're in control. And I think that's one of the sort of more hospitable results of the mainstreaming of time stretching is this control over playback. I know that some musicians and artists don't like that because they're really fixated on the idea of artistic intent, but I effectively, I mean, I believe that I intend things I just don't think it really matters when the reader picks up the texts, they're going to have their own engagement with it.

Mara Mills: I think what you're saying, Jonathan – about how speed depends on the beholder or the positionality of the listener – is super important and this is something that we've struggled with in terms of framing because for talking books, whether they were on records or on tapes, what sounded like speed reading to a sighted person, what sounded like really fast playback, or really fast words to a sighted person might actually be fewer words per minute than that same sighted person read with ink print. It's really not until you get to synthetic text to speech that mostly blind people, but also other people who've trained with text to speech, start to read at much higher rates than visual ink print reading.

And what we did in our *Triple Canopy* piece that just came out was to try to theorize rate instead of time, time is, you know philosophizing about time is basically a cottage industry in media studies, especially in cinema studies. People thinking about sculpture, book reading, and it tends to be universalizing, as Jonathan says, either people are, you know, posing as physicists and making large claims about time with a capital T, the time of the universe or you know drawing on philosophy or phenomenology and making claims often universalizing about temporality and human experiences of time and what the right experience is or extrapolating about one mode of temporality or temporal resistance that can be applied to all other humans. And that doesn't line up with what we're seeing in the archive. The other big issue is that most media scholars focus on a single medium at a time just cinema. I am thinking about the emergence of "cinematic time" by Mary Anne Doane for it as just one example. But what we have found in the 20th century archive is that most people are navigating multimedia in their everyday lives, in their homes, in transit, in workplaces, in schools.

And each of those media industries has its own rate setting. And the rate is various; it is always contextual. As Jonathan said, there's always a per – there it's something per something words per minute, distance per hour – and that attending to the per but also attending to what the two key terms are really forces you to focus on context. And so we tried to do a little theorizing of rate and a little push back against grand theories of time that we have found aren't really adequate for describing what our composers or our blind readers or anyone else who we've studied in the 20th century were doing.

Jonathan Sterne: Yeah, I'd go further and say, – I'm triggered by universal theories of time – it might be excessive, but I really have a bee in my bonnet about it. And this is actually like, this is how we got into the project together: Mara was doing the blind readers stuff and interviewing Harvey for a completely different project and I was going through the papers of Dennis Gabor who came up with this particle theory of sonic time because I was really pushing back against some of the predominant ideas of analog and digital, especially in German media theory, inspired media theory. And pretty soon we just discovered them, you know speeding up. We were both interested in speeding things up and slowing them down. That's how we wound up doing this, but I see that as like one of the major sort of theoretical arcs of the book that we're really going to be working because it comes up in every context in every chapter is like, what does it mean to have a rate and to change your rate, and the rate against what. You know, one of the things I don't remember is which of the pieces we mentioned this in, but that time compression and time stretching become useful in broadcasting systems like the U S and Canada that have spot advertising.

So if you're selling 20 or 30 second spots and then hiring human musicians to compose a jingle that jingle won't come in, note perfect at second 20 or second 30 and time stretching or time compression allows you, then, to change the duration and the music a little bit. So it's the opposite of like super slow down or super sped up stuff. And actually this is much more the use of the technology today is these smaller adjustments that aren't even really perceptible, but are all about producing synchronization where it wasn't there in the first place.

Mara Mills: Yeah. And one of the – I think you had this insight, Jonathan – but there tends to be a real technological determinism and some of the other media theories of time, like cinematic time or book time. And we definitely see technology as an actor here, but when you compare two different groups of users, just to use an ugly word, working with the exact same tool at the exact same time at the exact same speed, there's utterly different personal meaning and political meaning to those acts. So I think Jonathan, you were looking at like the ultra-rate changer and the way German so-called avant-garde composers were using it in a given

moment and then blind readers who were testing it in the United States at the same time, fifties and sixties I'm being, you can correct me, but you can give me the exact data. And we realized that they were even working with the same tool and manipulating it to the same speeds they were using it on different material, you know tones versus verbal material and their whole context. Again, the things on either side of the per in terms of rate really made a difference regarding how the outside world interpreted what they were doing and also how they experienced the temporality of that machine.

TRACK 5

Katherine McLeod: *I think too, with picking up on that point around different users using the very same tools for very different purposes both Mathieu and I were fascinated by how this idea of the hock and like hacking the machine or jimmying the record player, how that kind of that the spirit of that word, how that it changes the way that the story is told or what use does the hack have for thinking about this kind of use of the technology and how does it maybe retell the story in a different way or even for how you see these technologies being used today, to what extent is it hacking or jimmying the record player, or is it something else that's happening there?*



Mara Mills: We have collected a little set of actors' terms for things like hacking in this as we've gone through the different chapters of this book. To hacking we've added jimmying, which comes out of Harvey's American lingo from the forties, the mid-century, but also we've looked at the term "joyriding" and late 20th century hip hop artists and electronic musicians talking about joyriding machines to get them to play sounds they weren't supposed to play or work in ways that they weren't supposed to work. Jonathan, help me out here cause my mind is spacing. But at one point, we did the most basic like years into this we did the most basic research task, which was just Googling who invented time stretching which we had never thought to do before.

Jonathan Sterne: It turns out there's a definitive answer.

Mara Mills: The internet has an answer.

Jonathan Sterne: The internet says Goldie invented time stretching. But if you go to the video, he's actually pitch shifting, not time stretching, he's doing the opposite, changing the pitch without the playback rate and it's also a little later than we think.

Mara Mills: And he talks about joyriding, but I forgot what machine he was. What was he joyriding? Was it like an Eventide?

Jonathan Sterne: Yes, I think it was an Eventide.

Mara Mills: So we were like, "Oh, this is so interesting hacking and jimmying and joyriding ." But I have to say so, yeah, we're going to itemize those, but we really, really, really don't want to romanticize hacking, but it's important to say yes, hacking takes place in institutions where people don't think that any scientific or technical creative work or innovation could ever happen when people think about, you know, institutionalized, disabled children, they don't think of innovation usually. And so we do want to make the point that yeah, technical innovation and brilliance are happening in those sites, but we don't want to romanticize it, which often happens because of course that innovation just gets appropriated by firms who then financially capitalize on it.

Mara Mills: And in the story we tell as, as commercial time stretchers were developed, they often excluded blind people in different ways, whether or not having braille labels or not sinking up to the talking book machines that were available at the time or being too expensive. So even if blind people had the idea or were the test subjects for some of these devices, those devices often ended up excluding them. And we are trying to make an intervention into the theory of technological appropriation a bit. There's a very different use of the word appropriation in STS than in other versions of cultural studies or in art appropriation tends to be seen as a very negative act, cultural appropriation in most fields, but in science studies, when people talk about technological appropriation, it's usually a story of an actor with less power appropriating an expensive industrial corporate device and hacking it. And so there's a tendency to romanticize appropriation and we're trying to say that there actually is still power dynamics at play. And, yes, hacking happens by all sorts of artists who aren't as famous as Goldie and disabled people. But it doesn't the story doesn't end there with that intervention into one single machine.

Jonathan Sterne: Yeah. I think the other thing is to say like, when is it hacking? When is it not hacking? Hacking's a term like maintenance, it's something people treat when they write about technology. They treat it as exceptional, but it's actually the more normal thing that happens to the technology is that people hack or adapt or appropriate in some way, that's more common than not just as most things need to be maintained or they stop working after a while. So that's part of it. The other thing is not all use or appropriation is hacking. So if I said to my students "don't speed up or slow down my lecture, that's not my intention," and then they do it anyway, that's not really hacking. It's a form of use though. And it's a form of use that involves them, would be a form of use that involves them exercising their agency in spite of mine, or in a context where mine may still be greater in other ways.

And I think that's, if you look at the sort of mundane uses of time stretching and pitch shifting, which is most of what we're interested in, I mean, sure we can talk about chipmunks and Cher and stuff like that, but the much more common uses of pitch correction you don't even hear in time stretching and time compression, you don't even hear. That is very often a form of appropriation, but it's not this like radical "yay, I'm sticking it to the man!" It's just this everyday sort of, I don't know, it's not that different from like Stuart Hall says about meaning, right? That is always contested. And there's always a negotiation that happens, or as Deleuze and Guattari say, a machine's not working unless it's broken. All of these writers are sort of pointing at this idea that the systems that we describe in narrated scholars are never as smooth and as friction free as we make them out to be

Mara Mills: Well, we're toggling between two different categories of listening or use of time stretching in this book. And one is quite easy to write about it and one is quite difficult to write about. So on the one hand where we're writing about people, individuals, and also members of groups, self-described members of groups like composers, blind students who actually used the equipment to manipulate sound themselves for their own listening and or the listening of others. And then we also want to address listeners who are inundated like a wash in sounds that have been time stretched whether they're aware of it or not and that includes experts. I know a lot about time stretching now, but I don't always know when I'm listening to the radio or a movie on TV if something's been touched or even my own voice on a podcast. Sometimes I think God, has that been sped up a little bit or do I really talk that fast?

I don't always know when I'm hearing time stretching, I might use the tool in one context, but I'm still engaging as an active listener, if that can be considered use in other where someone has physically manipulated the sound with a time stretching device and that person not being me. And so it's very hard to write about that second category. It's very hard to find accounts of that in the archive. Harvey has, in some interviews, described to me his experience of listening to the radio and hearing a shift in the seventies toward time stretching on the radio stations that he was habitually listening to, but we don't have that many accounts or diaries of people talking about their listening. And like Jonathan said, 99.9999% of time stretching today is sub perceptual. And we don't really have a good theory in media studies for how to analyze sub perceptual phenomena. I'm not talking about subliminal perception. There was tons of analysis of that by psychoanalysts and others in the mid-century, but just minimally perceptible or sub perceptual changes. We have to address that too and that's going to be a challenge.

END OF RECORDING: October 15th, 2020 at 3:32 PM ET

It was a pleasure speaking with Mara and Jonathan and we look forward to catching up with them at the Listening, Sound, Agency Symposium. Find all the information about Mara Mills's plenary talk [here](#) and Jonathan Sterne's plenary talk [here](#).

Mara Mills is Associate Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University, where she co-founded and co-directs the NYU Center for Disability Studies (CDS). She is also a founding editor of the journal *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* (winner of the 2020 4S STS Infrastructure Award). Mills works at the intersection of sound studies and disability studies. Most recently, she co-edited the book *Testing Hearing: The Making of Modern Aurality* (Oxford University Press, 2020) with Viktoria Tkaczyk and Alexandra Hui. She has published articles in *Grey Room*, *differences*, *Social Text*, *PMLA*, and *Technology & Culture*, among many other academic journals. Her public arts and humanities writing can be found at sites like *Triple Canopy*, *Artforum*, *Public Books*, *Somatosphere*, and *AVIDLY*—a channel of the Los Angeles Review of Books. Her writing has been translated into German, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. More details about her research, grants, and awards can be found at maramills.org.

Jonathan Sterne is James McGill Professor of Culture and Technology at McGill University. He is the author of *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Duke, 2012), *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke, 2003); and numerous articles on media, technologies and the politics of culture. He is also the editor of *The Sound Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2012) and co-editor of *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age* (Minnesota, 2016). His next book, *Diminished Faculties: A Political Phenomenology of Impairment* is forthcoming from Duke in December 2021. He's at work on *Tuning Time: Histories of Sound and Speed*, co-authored with Mara Mills, and beginning a project on artificial intelligence and culture.

*

This article is published as part of the **Listening, Sound, Agency Forum** which presents profiles, interviews, and other materials featuring the research and interests of future participants in the 2021 SpokenWeb symposium. This series of articles provides a space for dialogical and multimedia exchange on topics from the fields of literature and sound studies, and serves as a prelude to the live conference. All conference events are free to attend. Register at [Listening, Sound, Agency](#).



Mathieu Aubin and Katherine McLeod

Mathieu Aubin is a scholar on print and performance cultures in Canada. He completed his PhD at UBC and is now an Horizon Postdoctoral Fellow at Concordia University where he holds a leadership position within the "Oral Literary History" research component of the SpokenWeb project. As part of this project, he is working towards recuperating queer people's contributions to Canadian literary culture. His work on queerness, literary communities, and Vancouver has been published in the journal *Canadian Literature*.

Katherine McLeod researches poetry, performance, and archives. She has co-edited the collection *CanLit Across Media: Unarchiving the Literary Event* (with Jason Camlot, McGill-Queen's UP, 2019). She is writing a monograph that is a feminist listening to recordings of women poets reading on CBC Radio. She produces the monthly series *ShortCuts* for *The SpokenWeb Podcast* and she is the managing editor of *SPOKENWEBLOG*. This year, she is the Researcher-in-Residence at the Concordia University Library.

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Get Involved](#)

[Downloads](#)

[News](#)

[Opportunities](#)

[Submit an Event](#)

[Log in](#)



SpokenWeb is a SSHRC-funded partnership grant.

All material that appears on this website is used for the purposes of academic research and critical study.

SSHRC  CRSH

© 2010-2022. All rights reserved.