

Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 320 pp.

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Yá'át'ééh, shik'éeí dóó shidin'éé,¹ greetings, my dear readers, I begin this book review in an unconventional way, but more importantly, in a way that honors my relationship to you, the reader, and situates this space we have entered together. Shí éí Renata Yazzie yinishyé. Tó'aheedlínii nishłí, Kinyaa'áanii bashishchín. Bit'ahnii dashicheii, Honagháanii dashináłí. This is who I am, as a Diné person. I further acknowledge and honor the Tewa peoples as the past, present, and future caretakers of the land on which I write these words.

"Dachin!" My Chei exclaims. My Másání gestures to the pot on the stove. I serve them, my elders. What a wholesome hunger.²

Hungry Listening emerges out of the musical encounters and subsequent relationships between Indigenous sonic expressions and Western art music. Robinson ultimately seeks to address how these encounters perpetuate settler colonialism in Indigenous sonic spaces, and beyond, by proposing an increasing awareness of our listening positionality so that we might deconstruct the settler ear in all of us through decolonial listening. This requires us as listeners to be familiar with and attuned to the ways in which settler colonialism operates in sonic spaces and, more importantly, how

settler colonialism has oppressed and continues to oppress Indigenous ways of knowing and being. By confronting our "tin ears" and appropriately implementing Indigenous sound logics, the goal of decolonial listening is to be "no longer sure what LISTENING is" (47). "Hungry listening" is derived from two Halq'eméylem words, shxwelítémelh and xwélalà:m, and are best translated into English as "a settler's starving orientation of listening." Yet, English cannot even begin to fully encapsulate the implications of this settler starvation.

'Acha ho'niilhi. The Biligáana man loiters. He demands to know if I am fluent. I wonder if these words will satiate his curiosity.

Robinson begins his critique of settler positionality by characterizing how music can function in Indigenous paradigms outside of aesthetic consumption. Music is medicine; it brings healing. Music is law; it guides relationships to our human and non-human relatives. Music is history; in it we know who we are and where we come from. Before we examine our positionality, recognition of how we contextualize the sonic content is crucial.

Critical listening positionality "involves a self-reflexive questioning of how race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and cultural background intersect and influence the way we are able to hear sound, music, and the world around us" (10). Rather than a listening identity, a listening positionality acknowledges how "perception is acquired over time" (10) and encourages a response that is acutely aware of our listening biases,

privileges, abilities, and habits. This practice enacts “guest listening,” in which a listener auditorily occupies a temporary “sound territory” within a sonic space to which they are a visitor. A final component of Robinson’s critical listening framework proposes the relationship between music and listener as a form of intersubjectivity. Drawing on various fields of scholarship to understand how we give songs life, Robinson centres a fundamental element of Indigenous knowledge and practice, the extension of kinship to non-human entities for time immemorial.

As with all Indigenous territories upon which settlers reside, Indigenous sound territories are not exempt from settler extraction. Robinson employs various case studies throughout Chapter 3 that focus primarily on Indigenous music in relation to settler music genres, including art music, musicals, and popular music. His case studies fall into four different models: (1) integration, (2) nation-to-nation music trading and reciprocal presentation, (3) a combination of the first two models where music trading progresses into integration, and finally (4) the purposeful avoidance and refusal of integration in favor of coexistent and apposite structures. These models are not just for sounding encounters, they also influence the physical encounters between singers, instrumentalists, and composers.

In Chapter 4, Robinson “sustains critical pressure on inclusionary art music that appropriates Indigenous songs and represents Indigenous people” (150). Part of his critique of “inclusionary” art music involves recognizing that Indigenous sounds and rhythms can’t

simply be “pinned down” on staves, an act justified by years of salvage-based ethnography. But this chapter isn’t about perpetuating settler consumption of Indigenous trauma. His focus is on “the legacy of ethnographic collection,” and “current actions and lack thereof to address histories of misuse,” which speaks to the years of ethnographers dialoguing with settler composers to establish a genre of “national” Canadian/American music based on Indigenous songs. Thus, settlers and Indigenous peoples alike bear a responsibility to promote redress.

Bee’ ak’e’eshdlí. The choir sits “Indian-style,” chanting “peyote” over and over. Perhaps if they sing it enough times, a peace pipe will materialize.

In discussing musical encounters, Robinson offers a “partial taxonomy for examining the structures of inclusionary music and Indigenous+art music” (122). Robinson uses “Indigenous+art music” to accentuate the frequent incompatibility of their meeting and to maintain the sovereignty of Indigenous acts.

In Chapter 5, Robinson once again turns to case studies, offering up three inclusionary performances presented as part of the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad. He suggests that *Different Drum*, *Hannah and the Inukshuks*, and *Beyond Eden* all contest the assumption that shared affects represent a homogenized participant experience. Rather, these inclusionary performances provoked very different responses from Indigenous and settler audience members. Within the performances’ capability to resonate and “engender felt

forms of reconciliation” (203), the “good feelings” assumed to be universally felt instead demand that Indigenous people abandon their resentment and negative feelings towards the Canadian settler state for the genocidal acts committed. But we cannot move on without reparations or redress.

Dibáá biíłhé. I spend a week observing an international piano competition. Attending. Listening. Wishing. When it is finally over, I drink our language straight from the stream, our sounds cleanse my ears. It prepares me for what will come.

Hungry Listening is a powerful piece of listening through reading that not only critiques settler listening but also candidly addresses the ways in which settler colonialism has impacted Indigenous sonic spaces. In the Conclusion, Robinson invites respectful dialogue with Drs. Ellen Waterman and Deborah Wong and, within this dialogue, he strongly encourages non-Indigenous readers to reflect on the ways they have perpetuated colonial violence in Indigenous spaces. Perhaps some will be defensive, but I appreciate the way Robinson sets a firm precedent in not prioritizing settler feelings of guilt. For myself and perhaps other scholars seeking publishing opportunities, it is incredibly empowering to witness. More importantly though, Robinson reaffirms the experiences and thoughts of Indigenous classically trained musicians like myself, generously putting into words what many of us have not known how

to speak about or are afraid to speak of and out against.

One of the most unique characteristics of *Hungry Listening* is the argument for reading as a way of listening through event scores, various poeticisms, and dialogic improvisation. These literary configurations gracefully and creatively unsettle the settler expectation of appropriate writing protocols. I cherished each event score and was compelled to engage with them. Not only do they provide poetic relief to an academic piece of literature, but they also breathe a distinctive kind of humanity into each argument Robinson makes. I similarly fell in love with “Writing Indigenous Space” — an interlude addressed to Indigenous readers — and the refusal to translate Halq’eméylem words for non-speakers. Indigenous people are constantly othered, and Robinson’s creation of an Indigenous hub (Ramirez 2007), where we could find brief respite, left me weeping in relief. The atmosphere shifted immediately into a feeling of ‘áshinee’: a space of comfort for young ones.

Robinson has put forth a challenge for all of us, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, to confront the listening habits we have acquired as a result of settler colonialism and redress the issues caused by the colonization of this fundamental sense.

Adaa ‘ahólyą dóó t’áá hwó ájít’éigo t’éiyá — it will be up to you to carry the beautiful things Dylan has said into our spaces for the sake of an Indigenous future. 🌱

NOTES

1. The reviewer has intentionally chosen not to italicize words in Halq'eméylem or Diné Bizaad.

2. The interspersed stories throughout this review have been crafted in homage to Robinson's dialogic improvisation and represent the reviewer's positionality as a Diné scholar.

REFERENCES

- Ramirez, Renya K. 2007. *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.