

Forum: The Diplomat's Soundworld



Introduction: Diplomacy, Audible and Resonant

Damien Mahiet

Cogut Institute for the Humanities, Brown University, Providence,
Rhode Island, US

damien_mahiet@brown.edu

Rebekah Ahrendt | ORCID: 0000-0003-2857-7832

Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, Utrecht,
the Netherlands

r.s.ahrendt@uu.nl

Frédéric Ramel

Center for International Studies (CERI) and Department of Political Science,
Sciences Po, Paris, France

frederic.ramel@sciencespo.fr

Diplomacy is sonorous: diplomats deliver speeches, manage silences, applaud, and laugh; they give toasts, clink glasses, and make noise. They listen to the tone of their interlocutors and modulate the timbre of their own voices. Sound – a vital component of representation, mediation, and negotiation – permeates the record of diplomacy, as media transmits images or recordings of leaders in the act of giving a speech or holding a conversation. And music, or “organized sound,” is a standard feature of diplomatic ceremonial, solemn commemorations, social occasions, and the work of public and cultural diplomacy.¹

¹ See, for example, Paulmann, J. *Pomp und Politik: Monarchenbegegnungen in Europa zwischen Ancien Régime und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

Empirical accounts offer evidence of the functions of sound in setting the space for diplomatic “scenes.” The attention paid to music, performed as a gift or in the background, is only the most obvious manifestation of this process.² Woven into the fabric of diplomats’ everyday life, the “resounding” nature of international relations pertains both to the environments in which diplomats operate and to the roles they perform.³ Following Schafer, diplomatic “soundscapes” might be parsed out productively into “keynote sounds” that may not be consciously heard, foreground “signals” that must be heeded, and “soundmarks” that are inherited or identified as characteristic of a place and community.⁴

Recent scholarship has furthered the “sonic history” of diplomacy and the promise of an “acoustic turn” in international relations.⁵ This literature spans multiple disciplines – anthropology, communication studies, ethnomusicology, geography, history, international relations, musicology, to name but a few – but, broadly speaking, has advanced knowledge of sound and music in three configurations: first, the affirmation and maintenance of presence on the international stage through propaganda, cultural work, and public diplomacy;⁶ second, the mobilization of sound in conflict, war, and torture, and

2 Neumann, I. *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64–68.

3 Franklin, M.I., ed. *Resounding International Relations: On Music, Politics and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

4 Schafer, R.M. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny, 1993), 9.

5 For a brief literature review, see Guillaume, X., and K. Grayson. “Sound Matters: How Sonic Formations Shape the Nuclear Deterrence and Non-Proliferation Regimes.” *International Political Sociology* 15 (2021), 153–71 (esp. 155–57). On an acoustic turn, see also Ramel, F., and C. Prévost-Thomas. “Introduction: Understanding Musical Diplomacies – Movements on the ‘Scenes.’” In *International Relations, Music and Diplomacy: Sounds and Voices on the International Stage*, eds. F. Ramel and C. Prévost-Thomas (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–19. On the sonic history of international relations, see Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E. “Introduction: Sonic History or Why Music Matters in International History.” In *Music and International History in the Twentieth Century*, ed. J.C.E. Gienow-Hecht (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 1–30.

6 The United States has been the focus of much attention. See for example, Von Eschen, P. *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E. *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Fosler-Lussier, D. *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Rosenberg, J. *Dangerous Melodies: Classical Music in America from the Great War through the Cold War* (New York: Norton, 2020); and Katz, M. *Build: The Power of Hip-Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For alternative case studies, see, for example, Fléchet, A., and A. Marès, eds. “Musique et relations internationales,” special issues of *Relations internationales*, 155 and 156 (2013); Ahrendt, R., M. Ferraguto, and D. Mahiet, eds. *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (New York: Palgrave

the audible formation of domination and hegemony, from colonial empires to surveillance institutions;⁷ and third, the figuration of peace and transformation of conflict through musical ideas and practices.⁸ Studies of sounding conflict resolution, while often originating in a moral commitment to peace, have also taken a more critical tenor as they unravel the ethical implications of using musical ideas like harmony and performance as operating concepts for peacebuilding or humanitarian intervention.⁹

There is more work ahead to excavate and reconstruct sounding formations of diplomacy and international relations through history and across the globe, and the four articles in this forum each contribute to this endeavor. Mark Everist, Damien Mahiet, and Jann Pasler offer case studies of cultural

-
- Macmillan, 2014); and Dunkel, M., and S.A. Nitzsche, eds. *Popular Music and Public Diplomacy: Transnational and Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2018).
- 7 From a growing literature, see especially Radano, R., and P. Bohlman, eds. *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Randall, A.J., ed. *Music, Power, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Van Orden, K. *Music, Discipline, and Arms in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Cusick, S. "Music as Torture / Music as Weapon." *Trans: Revista transcultural de música* 10 (2006), <https://www.sibetrans.com/trans/articulo/152/music-as-torture-music-as-weapon/>; Pieslak, J.R. *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Goodman, S. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Warfare and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Fauser, A. *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Velasco-Pufleau, L., ed. "Musique et conflits armés après 1945," special issue of *Transposition: musique et sciences sociales* 4 (2014); Daughtry, J.M. *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in War Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Radano, R., and T. Olaniyan, eds. *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Jardin, E., ed. *Music and War in Europe from the French Revolution to WWI* (Brepols, 2016); Szendy, P. *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Gavin, W. *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- 8 See for example, O'Connell, J.M. and S. El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds. *Music and Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Urbain, O., ed. *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Sandoval, E. "Music in Peacebuilding: A Critical Literature Review." *Journal of Peace Education* 13 (3) (2016), 200–17; Urbain, O. "Overcoming Challenges to Music's Role in Peacebuilding." *Peace Review* 31 (3) (2019), 332–40. Music in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has generated a thoughtful literature; see, for example, Brinner, B. *Playing Across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Beckles Willson, R. *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Belkind, N. *Music in Conflict: Palestine, Israel and the Politics of Aesthetic Production* (New York: Routledge, 2021).
- 9 Phillips-Hutton, A. *Music Transforming Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Ndaliiko, C.R., and S.M. Anderson, eds. *The Art of Emergency: Aesthetics and Aid in African Crises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Howell, G. "Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16 (1) (2021), 85–101.

diplomacy in three different contexts: in Metternich's Austria in the first half of the nineteenth century, Napoleon III's imperial France in the 1850s and 1860s, and Senghor's Senegal in 1966. These case studies span a timeframe that saw the emergence of a new lexicon, from "diplomacy" at the end of the eighteenth century to "cultural" diplomacy in the twentieth century. Considered together, they nuance the narrative of increasing professionalization and labor division between "political" and "cultural" actors suggesting a variety of configurations through which, from patronage to administration to performance, diplomats have engaged with sound to depict, support, and shape international relations. These case studies suggest that a typology of musical diplomacy may include paradigms beyond that of the musician-envoy supported by, but independent from, political entities.¹⁰ In certain circumstances, diplomats have stood on the international stage efficiently as music lovers and musicians, while arts institutions such as the Paris Opera served as de facto extensions of the foreign affairs ministry. That applies, of course, to situations of conflict and war as well, as both Mark Everist and Jim Sykes remind us. Directly inspired by recent developments in the field of sound studies, Sykes emphasizes the mobilization of "listening" to describe and publicize enemy surveillance in the Indian Ocean, demonstrating the significance of broadcasting one's ability to (over)hear.

While these articles further distinct disciplinary projects and commitments, we believe that they – and, more broadly, the various subfields outlined above – can gain from being read together under the heading of "the diplomats' soundworld." There is no established definition of "soundworld," though the term appears frequently in scholarly contexts, often interchangeably with "soundscape." Significantly, *soundworld* and *soundscape* are both byproducts of modernity and globalization in the literature. The term soundscape, thanks in no small part to Schafer's pioneering work, has been the subject of more extensive elaborations in scholarly, activist, and legal forums, and now underpins public policy and regulation. However, *soundscape* as a term is often curiously separated from its physical milieu, for example to designate the production, commodification, and circulation of both sound and sound perceptions through new media technologies and migrations.¹¹ The International

10 For an analysis of this paradigm, see Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E., and M. Donfried. "The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance, and the Promise of Civil Society." In *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. J.C.E. Gienow-Hecht and M. Donfried (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 13–29.

11 Pinch, T., and K. Bijsterveld. "New Keys to the World of Sound." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. T. Pinch and K. Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–36. Frischkopf, for one, opposes the "disengaged" experience of "soundscapes" in "global flows," proposing instead to conceive of "soundworlds" where sound remains linked with "its social,

Organization for Standardization (ISO) norm 12913-1:2014, in a manner consistent with the term's origin in city planning and environmental discourse, distinguishes soundscape as a "perceptual construct," while the acoustic environment remains "a physical phenomenon."¹² This normative "conceptual framework" serves to establish standards for the study, planning, design, and management of soundscapes. While seemingly neutral, the international definition of "soundscape" in fact expands upon earlier work, strongly influenced by ideology, to negotiate uniform standards of tuning frequencies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹³ The impetus, to borrow the subtitle of Schafer's book, was and is to tune a world grown dissonant and noisy.

The term "soundworld," as we intend it, does not imply a normative project; it attends to the concatenation of materiality, imagination, and practice, which social studies – in the work of Howard Becker and Arjun Appadurai, for example – have long sought to capture over and against epistemological dichotomies opposing materialists and idealists or realists and constructivists.¹⁴ Soundworlds invoke the situated production of silence, noise, and music as well as the "audiotopias" or imagined spaces that listeners may seek to enter or to which they may find themselves transported.¹⁵ Soundworlds are both non-linguistic and linguistic. On the one hand, soundworlds are generated by bodily comportment and presence, encompassing the tone, volume, and feeling of the voice as well as the placement of the diplomat and her use of objects in the space of the negotiation, for example.¹⁶ On the other hand, soundworlds are also composed through webs of discourses and texts. Indeed, diplomatic reports can index, reference, narrate, or silence the sounds that characterize a place, a ceremony, or a meeting. Imagined as well as experienced, soundworlds

semantic and somatic groundings"; Frischkopf, M. "Globalizing the Soundworld: Islam and Sufi music in the West." In *Sufis in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*, eds. M. Dressler, R. Geaves, and G. Klinkhammer (London: Routledge, 2009), 60.

12 Axelsson, Ö. "Soundscape Revisited." *Journal of Urban Design* 25 (5) (2020), 553.

13 Gribenski, F. "Negotiating the Pitch: For a Diplomatic History of A, at the Crossroads of Politics, Music, Science and Industry." In *International Relations, Music and Diplomacy*, eds. F. Ramel and C. Prévost-Thomas, 173–92.

14 Becker, H.S. *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Appadurai, A. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

15 Kun, J. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Born, G. *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sterne, J. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

16 Ahrendt, R. "The Diplomatic Viol." In *International Relations, Music and Diplomacy*, eds. F. Ramel and C. Prévost-Thomas, 94.

can be tethered to a place or forged through migration and media. As such, their performance can be either aspirational and prefiguring another world, or naturalized and experienced as the wholesome manifestation of a community present to itself.¹⁷ The emphasis on soundworlds may be seen to complement and alter approaches to the “real world experience of diplomacy.”¹⁸ It expands the work of scholars focused on thinking together the practice and theory of diplomacy and the imbrication of aesthetics and politics in international relations.¹⁹

The four texts, read together as part of the study of broader soundworlds, underscore the way diplomacy maintains sound, musical or otherwise, at the threshold between knowledge production and world making. All at once through sound, diplomats endeavor to know, to compose, and to make known the world. For example, musical diplomacy that seeks to propose a shared soundworld, such as that developed by Metternich in the nineteenth century, relies on an assumption similar to the metaphor of “listening stations” in the twenty-first century, namely that by being “all ears,” one can effectively monitor adversaries and diagnose transformations.²⁰ Similarly, public diplomacy and surveillance can both be built on a framework of amplification, whereby technologies of power – here, the Opera house, there an underwater sensor – make loud and clear what actors assume to be already present in the world (whether that be a relation of dissonance or harmony). That assumption, of course, can be a self-fulfilling prophecy: as Sykes demonstrates, the listening stations that seek to capture the noise of conflict are themselves generative of that noise, a riff on a familiar story where “the medium is the message.” Finally, the soundworlds of diplomacy can be prefigurative of worlds-to-come: festivals and

17 Smith, S.J. “Performing the (sound)world.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000), 615–37.

18 Mösslang, M., and T. Riotte. “Introduction: The Diplomats’ World.” In *The Diplomats’ World: A Cultural History of Diplomacy, 1815–1914*, eds. M. Mösslang and T. Riotte (Oxford and London: German Historical Institute and Oxford University Press, 2008), 10.

19 In an extensive literature, see for example Bleiker, R. *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Shimazu, N. “Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955.” *Modern Asian Studies* 48 (1) (2014), 225–52; Adler-Nissen, R. “The Social Self in International Relations: Identity, Power and the Symbolic Interactionist Roots of Constructivism.” *European Review of International Studies* 3 (3) (2016), 27–39; Welch, E.R. *A Theater of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Ball III, J.R. *Theater of State: A Dramaturgy of the United Nations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020); Callahan, W.A. *Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

20 On monitoring, diagnosis, and synthesis as types of knowledge one can gain from sound, see Pinch, T., and K. Bijsterfeld, “New Keys,” 12.

staged performances, bounded in space and time, lend themselves particularly well to the shared experience of a “world-as-if” – a world of dialogue, cooperation, and community, for example, at the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar – but this refigurative quality is also embedded, with perhaps more lasting transformative effect, in the everyday rituals of diplomatic etiquette and ceremonies.²¹

The invitation for scholars to hear as well as read and see the world, from the Frankfurt School to Jacques Attali to sound studies, has a rich history.²² Rather than adding another call to imagine modes of knowledge production that would attend to sound, it might be more productive to ponder why students of international relations can so easily neglect sound in their analysis. Archival lacunae are but one factor, especially in the era before recorded sound, despite the fact that the work of aural historians has done much to render the past audible through proposing alternative ways of listening to documents.²³ The stake may be less to demonstrate the need to incorporate sound in narratives of diplomatic life than to ponder what function the muting of sound has fulfilled in the theory and history of international relations. Several hypotheses and considerations may be worth exploring. For example, the division of labor between treaty- and sound-makers, and the separations of the spheres in which those activities took place, might have been generative for diplomats, facilitating informal exchanges and the maintenance of good relations in environments where non-verbal communication could make or break relationships. Editing out sound from official diplomatic documents has also afforded diplomats a more strategic – at times, theatrical – use of tone and gesture at the negotiation table and in other sites that should nonetheless be accounted for in studies of diplomacy.²⁴ Crucially, it should be acknowledged

21 For an analysis of the role of etiquette, see for example Frey, L., and M. Frey. “The Olive and the Horse: The Eighteenth-Century Culture of Diplomacy.” In *Performances of Peace: Utrecht 1713*, eds. R.E. de Bruin, C. van der Haven, L. Jensen, and D. Onnekink (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 25–39; McConnell, F. “Performing Diplomatic Decorum: Repertoires of ‘Appropriate’ Behavior in the Margins of International Diplomacy.” *International Political Sociology* 12 (4) (2018), 362–81. More broadly, on the transformative potential of “as-if” rituals in everyday life, see Puett, M., and C. Gross-Loh. *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About the Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

22 For a selection of key texts, including an excerpt from Attali’s now-classic work, see Sterne, J., ed. *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

23 Smith, M.M., ed. *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

24 See Neumann, I. *Diplomatic Sites*, and the suggestive reading of Neumann’s work by Nigel Gould-Davies, who invites the reader to think of diplomats “as dancers . . . engaged in continuous, complex, intimate movement with one another.” Gould-Davies, N. “The Intimate Dance of Diplomacy: In Praise of Practice.” *International Affairs* 89 (6) (2013), 1459–67.

that in diplomatic history, whose documents ought to be listened to remains contentious. Only recently, for example, have women begun to sound in the historical record, despite the fact, as Carolyn James and Glenda Sluga observe, that today women are more frequently appointed to diplomatic roles than other ministerial offices, and that women have undeniably occupied significant (unaccredited) diplomatic positions for centuries.²⁵

Sonorous and audible, diplomacy is also resonant. This realization, already suggested by the title of the volume edited by Marianne Franklin in 2005 – “resounding international relations” – has productive implications for both research and practice. Resonance, as an acoustic phenomenon and interpretive metaphor, entails the sympathetic vibration of entities real or symbolic, bridging the divide between the material and the immaterial.²⁶ Ethnomusicologist Marié Abe has recently emphasized the constructive nature of resonance in her discussion of the Japanese word *hibiki* (resonance): *sounding* is “an affectively, politically, and discursively generative practice that produces a conception of space,” and in this light, Abe finds that *hibiki* becomes a “dynamic and indeterminate articulation of sound, space, time, and sociality; it is a way to think of these things together.”²⁷ For the sociologist and critical theorist Hartmut Rosa, resonance offers a framework to think about relations with others and the world: it signals a capacity to be affected by and respond to each other, but also a degree of self-consistency whereby those in resonance speak with their own voices, and simultaneously indicates the existence of “mutually accommodating” spaces conducive to resonance.²⁸ Sound thus offers a starting point

-
- 25 James, C., and G. Sluga. “Introduction: The Long International History of Women and Diplomacy.” In *Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500*, eds. G. Sluga and C. James (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 1–12. For further on this topic, see Bastian, C., E.K. Dade, H. von Thiesen, and C. Windler, eds. *Das Geschlecht der Diplomatie. Geschlechterrollen in den Aussenbeziehungen vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013); Mori, J. “How Women Make Diplomacy: The British Embassy in Paris, 1815–1841.” *Journal of Women’s History* 27 (4) (2015), 137–59; Bashevkin, S. *Women as Foreign Policy Leaders: National Security and Gender Politics in Superpower America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Cassidy, J.A., ed. *Gender and Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2019); Allen, G. “The Rise of the Ambassador: English Ambassadorial Wives and Early Modern Diplomatic Culture.” *The Historical Journal* 62 (3) (2019), 617–38; Aggestam, K., and A. Towns. “The Gender Turn in Diplomacy: A New Research Agenda.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21 (1) (2019), 9–28.
- 26 Erlmann, V. “Resonance.” In *Key Concepts in Sound*, eds. D. Novak and M. Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 175–82.
- 27 Abe, M. *Resonances of Chindon-ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 29.
- 28 Rosa, H. *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 164–75.

to interrogate operating concepts and everyday practices, opening avenues for new assemblages. Looking ahead, the philosopher Baptiste Morizot postulates sound as one of the possible starting points to experience and rethink the organization of relations between human and non-human living beings in diplomatic terms.²⁹ Such thoughts allow us to ask under what conditions diplomacy constitutes and sustains a productive sphere of resonance. In this context, the stakes for the history and study of the diplomats' soundworlds are perhaps higher than we have recognized them to be.

This series of essays, in another time, another world, would have encompassed case studies from other centuries and continents. The impetus for this collective project first emerged late in 2019, and as a result, the work has been significantly impacted by the global COVID-19 crisis. We want to convey thanks both to the contributors who managed to complete their submissions as well as to the contributors whose circumstances did not allow them to carry out the work they envisioned. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the editors of *Diplomatica* who, with infinite patience, shepherded the articles through reviews and revisions and to the peer reviewers who generously contributed time and thoughts in the midst of the pandemic.

29 Morizot, B. *Les Diplomates. Cohabiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2016). See also Morizot, B. "Passer de l'autre côté de la nuit: Pour une diplomatie des interdépendances." In "Homo diplomaticus," eds. E. de Vienne and C. Nahum-Claudel, special issue of *Terrain* 73 (2020), 88–111.