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California mission bells: Listening against the "fantasy heritage"

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Abstract

The paper takes a critical look at the legacy of the Spanish mission period in California as symbolized by the mission bell. According to "fantasy heritage", that is the myth of California's pastoral beginnings under Franciscan missionaries – a myth perpetuated by Mission Revival writers, real estate boosters, public space projects, etc. – the bell is synonymous with benevolence, charity, nurturing mercy, etc. Responding to the recent expansion of the Mission Bell Marker (MBM) program (a dense network of eleven-foot roadside markers in the shape of Franciscan staffs donned with cast bells, placed along a route of California's highways, freeways, and local roads collectively known as "Historic El Camino Real"), the paper attempts to investigate the original function and implications of the bell as it was deployed by the missionaries upon contact. This is gleaned from a Franciscan account of the behavior of St Junípero Serra. Following a brief discussion of the function of listening, it is argued that Serra practiced "predatory" listening and used audio-pollution by the bell as a strategy devised to intervene in the very foundations of the epistemic certainties of the Indian world-view. An argument is made that Serra's bell was the first instrument of colonization, of physical and epistemic invasion, of temporal regimentation, and the silencer of all other sounds. In the last section of the essay it is argued that no driver in California is safe from the ideological interpolation of the MBM and a strategy of resisting the bell's romanticization is offered.

Keywords

bell, California missions, colonization, Junípero Serra, listening

Cloches des missions californiennes – une écoute contre le « héritage fantastique »

Résumé

L'article présente une analyse des fonctions de la cloche dans le mythe de la période missionnaire en Californie. Le mythe missionnaire est souvent appelé aujourd'hui le « héritage fantastique » (ang. *fantasy heritage*) car il présente la période du franciscanisme en Californie comme une idylle. Ce mythe a été représenté non seulement dans la littérature, mais aussi dans l'architecture, dans les spéculations foncières et dans les projets de l'espace public. Dans le mythe, la cloche symbolise la douceur, la bienfaisance, la charité etc. En se référant au programme *Mission Bell Marker* (MBM) qui a été financé par les ressources fédérales et celles de l'état de Californie et qui a fait planter environ sept cents colonnes en forme du bâton franciscain avec une cloche au dessus tout au long de *El Camino Real*, le présent article cherche à retrouver la fonction des cloches utilisées par les franciscains au moment du contact. En s'appuyant sur la description du comportement de saint Junípero Serra et sur l'analyse de la fonction de l'ouïe dans les cultures tribales, on propose une interprétation de Serra vu comme un pratiquant de l'écoute « prédatrice » et son comportement est décrit comme « auto-pollution » qui visait à perturber la perception du monde des Indiens. La cloche de Serra est devenue le premier instrument de la colonisation, de la violence physique et symbolique et des règlements temporels, qui ont servi comme un étouffoir des sons indésirables. Dans la dernière section, on se réfère à une rencontre avec MBM et on propose un exercice épistémique : une méthode de résister à l'ambiance romantique des cloches.

Mots-clés

cloche, colonisation, écoute, Junípero Serra, missions californiennes

Dzwony misji kalifornijskich – słuchanie na przekór "wyimaginowanemu dziedzictwu"

Abstrakt

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie funkcji dzwonu w micie okresu misyjnego w Kalifornii. Mit misji często nazywa się "dziedzictwem wyimaginowanym" gdyż przedstawia on okres franciszkańskiej Kalifornii jako sielankę rodzajową. Mit ten znalazł odzwierciedlenie nie tylko w literaturze, ale także w architekturze, spekulacjach ziemią i projektach w przestrzeni publicznej. Dzwon jest dla mitu symbolem łagodności, dobroczynności, miłosierdzia itd. Odnosząc się do programu Mission Bell Marker (MBM), który czerpiąc z funduszy federalnych i stanowych doprowadził niedawno do ustawienia wzdłuż całego El Camino Real w Kalifornii ok. siedmiuset słupów w kształcie franciszkańskiej laski zakończonej dzwonem, artykuł próbuje odtworzyć funkcję dzwonów używanych przez franciszkanów w momencie kontaktu. Na podstawie opisu zachowania Św. Junípero Serry i analizując funkcję słuchu w kulturach plemiennych proponowana jest interpretacja Serry jako praktykującego "drapieżne" słuchanie, a jego zachowanie określone jest mianem "audiozanieczyszczenia", które miało za zadanie zachwianie aparatem poznawczym Indian. Dzwon Serry stał się pierwszym instrumentem kolonizacji, fizycznej i poznawczej przemocy, regulacji czasowych, i zagłuszania dźwięków niechcianych. W ostatniej sekcji, odnosząc się do nieuniknioności spotkania z MBM zaproponowane jest ćwiczenie poznawcze, metoda oporu wobec romantycznej aury dzwonów.

Słowa kluczowe

dzwon, Junípero Serra, kolonizacja, misje kalifornijskie, słuchanie

1. Introduction: Mission myth, its bells and its markers

On September 23, 2015, Pope Francis canonized Junípero Serra (1713-1784), a Spanish missionary and the first president of the California Catholic missions. This, in turn, was the latest installment in the continuous production of what Mike Da-

vis calls the "ersatz history" (1992: 30) of California. Missions and missionaries serve this "history" as cognitive artifacts mediating the region's founding mythology which holds that in the "golden age" of California kindly Franciscan *padres* provided their Indian "children" with rudiments of Christian doctrine and civilized life – the missionary effort being explained as both worldly and spiritual salvation. This myth – incessantly recreated in public fiestas, architecture, films, literature, political ideology, etc. – depicts race relations in California as "a pastoral ritual of obedience and paternalism" (Davis 1992: 26). Kevin Starr puts it this way: "graceful Indians, happy as peasants in an Italian opera, knelt dutifully before the Franciscans to receive the baptism of a superior culture, while in the background the angelus tolled from a swallow-guarded campanile, and a choir of friars intoned the *Te Deum*" (Starr in Davis 1992: 26). Since Helen Hunt Jackson's bestselling novel *Ramona* (1884) the missions have been synonymous with "Earthly Paradise" (Jackson 2002 [1883]: 1), a "Spanish Colonial daydream of Arcadia" (Starr 2005: 148), metaphors which conferred, as Starr says, "a pseudohistory [...] upon the region, anchoring it in a mythic time and place" (2005: 148). Missions, however, now turned into museums and enclaves of tranquility, belie a darker history which many critics demystify as, to use Carey McWilliams famous phrase, the "fantasy heritage" (1968 [1949]: 35-47) or, after Leonard Pitt, "Schizoid Heritage" (1966) and which the above mentioned canonization attempts to provide with a deontological closure.

One of the strongest elements providing tacit epistemic support for the reigning "Mission Pastoral" is the ubiquitous presence of mission bells in both imaginary and real California landscapes. Jackson in "Echoes in the City of the Angels" (1883) assimilates them with poetry, devout religiosity, leisure and soothing sounds of music when she proclaims that, "[t]he tale of the founding of the city of Los Angeles is a tale for verse rather than for prose. [...] The twelve devout Spanish soldiers who founded the city named it at their leisure with a long

name, musical as a chime of bells" (Jackson 2002 [1883]: 1). Dramatist Chester Gore Miller, the author of *Junipero Serra* (1894), a eulogical play in four acts, romanticizes the sounds of "soft and low [...] silver bells" as "tuneful sweet [...] holy music" which provides "absolution [...] / [...] consolation" – "those saintly bells / [...] / [...] their sacred tune" (1894: 69). John Steven McGroarty's famous *Mission Play*, an immensely popular pageant which opened in 1912 at Mission San Gabriel and would eventually be seen by more than two million people on site, as well as in numerous recreations around the US, used as central part of its set a replica of the mission campanile. In 1928 Charles Wakefield Cadman authored *The Bells of Capistrano: An Operetta in Three Acts* which was subsequently turned into a popular musical western *The Bells of Capistrano* (1942) starring Gene Autry.

These and countless other artistic expressions enshrined the bell as a metonymy of Christian benevolence, morality and sanctity – a vehicle which magically transports us to get in touch with better versions of ourselves. Even William Carlos Williams, the quintessential American innovator intent on forging fresh poetic imagery, could not help being captivated by the bells. His poem "The Catholic Bells" begins with a confession: "Tho' I'm no Catholic I listen hard" (1951: 111) and ends with exalted praise, "O bells / ring for the ringing! / the beginning and the end / of the ringing! Ring ring / ring ring ring ring ring! / Catholic bells!" (1951: 112). Williams and others would probably concur with Satis N. Coleman who writes in *Bells: Their History, Legends, Making, and Uses* (1928): "Bells are ever with us, and ring for all the great changes that come to us, from the cradle to the grave. Nations rejoice with bell ringing, and the same bells give voice to a nation's sorrow in times of national calamity" (1928: 5).

As evident in McGroarty's stage sets, bells can be evoked not only aurally or poetically but also in terms of elements of architecture (as evident in the Mission and Spanish Revival architectural styles) and in other public space interventions.

Perhaps the most pervasive and enduring of these public space projects has been the Mission Bell Marker (MBM) initiative first conceived in 1892 by Anna Pitcher, the Director of the Pasadena Art Exhibition Association. Her idea was to place mission bells along the entire length of the Camino Real, the old Spanish Royal Highway which connected all of the twenty one Catholic missions and which today is roughly coterminous with the 101 and 82 Freeways, as well as a number of local streets. It was only in 1902, however, that the idea gained support from the California Federation of Women's Clubs (CFWC) and the Native Daughters of the Golden West (NDGW). In 1904 members of these organizations formed El Camino Real Association ("The GFWC Story" n.d.) which commissioned Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes to design the marker – a cast iron mission bell hanging from an eleven-foot bent staff in the shape of a Franciscan walking stick.

The first such marker was erected at the Old Town plaza in Los Angeles in August of 1906. By 1913 there were already about 450 markers installed ("El Camino Real Mission Bell Marker Project" n.d.). For various reasons (road construction, natural damage, vandalism, theft, etc.) by the late 1960s only about 75 bells remained. Although in 1974 California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) was named the guardian of the markers, the maintenance efforts were plagued by underfunding. Meanwhile, in 1996 an "Adopt-A-Bell" program was initiated and organizations like CFWC and Knights of Columbus continued to work for the promotion and preservation of the markers. Also in 1996, the renewal project was initiated under the Caltrans Landscape Architecture Program. More recently, the 2004 "California Mission Preservation Act", which allotted federal funds to help restore many of the missions, was accompanied by two federal Transportation Enhancement grants (2000, 2010) totaling $2M, designated for the reconstruction and robust expansion of the MBM system. The funds allowed for the extension of the original 450-mile-long route to 700 miles. Almost 600 new markers have been installed in the

past decade – first, in 2005, between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and later (2012) between San Francisco and Sonoma ("El Camino Real Mission Bell Marker Project" n.d.). Today, every one to two miles, tall Franciscan staffs with replicas of mission bells and a plate reading "The Historic El Camino Real," stand in a historio-graphic gesture executed with Swiss watch precision (every minute a marker), appropriating the visual field of California motorists and subliminally declaring California a "historic" mission land.

The ubiquitousness of the bell, now silent, but visually inescapable provokes me, weary of McWilliams' warning of the "fantasy heritage," to act against the pull of romanticization and ask questions about the *real* significance of the bell and its sound. What did it mean to toll the bell in California at the outset of European colonization? And was it just saintly chimes?

2. Serra in the Sierra

To ponder this, let me consider one inaugural moment in California colonial history. Serra arrived in California with a troop of soldiers in 1769. Having established what would later become Mission San Diego he proceeded up north where in 1770 he founded Mission San Carlos in the Monterey area. The following year, in July 1771, upon receiving viceroyal orders to immediately proceed with the expansion of the mission system and supplied with new provisions, bells and vestments included, Serra marched south from San Carlos in search of a site for a new mission. Zephiryn Engelhardt reports:

> Proceeding for about twenty-five leagues [...] the little company reached an oak-studded valley in the Santa Lucía Mountains [...]. When the mules had been relieved of their burdens, and the bell swung from a stout oak tree, the Fr. Presidente *in a transport of zeal suddenly rang the bell and exclaimed in a loud voice: "Oh ye gentiles! Come, come to the holy Church! Come, come to receive the faith of Jesus Christ!* Amazed at this strange action of their supe-

> rior Fr. Miguel said to him, "Why, Father, do you tire yourself? This is not the spot on which the church is to be built; nor is there a gentile in the whole vicinity. It is useless to ring the bell!" "Father," the Fr. Presidente pleaded, "*let me give vent to my heart which desires that this bell might be heard all over the world, or at least by the heathens that live in this sierra!*"
>
> (Engelhardt 1908: 87-89; my emphasis).

Serra was right. The ringing of the bell and the subsequent mass attracted curious Indians and, in a matter of days, Mission San Antonio was established. But to say this only, without pondering the significance of that moment, would be to miss out on the fundamental facts about Serra, his relationship to the world, as well as the role of listening and sound for the Indians.

First, from the above fragment we learn that the methods of early colonization depended on performative techniques and relied on noise-making instruments – bells. Secondly, the excerpt informs us about the way the Father President conceives of his surroundings, that is, we learn about his cognitive apparatus. He puzzles fray Miguel by tolling the bell in what the young priest considers an uninhabited location. Serra, however, has a different sense of his surroundings: "heathens […] live in this sierra!" Surely, the president does not see any Indians there either. However, he is experienced and well-read. He draws from his earlier eight-year tenure among the hunter-gatherers in Mexico's Sierra Gorda (he had spent eight years among the Chichimecas in Mexico's Sierra Gorda, and a year in Monterey where Indians, though initially invisible, eventually showed themselves[1]), he knows reports of the 1769 Portolá expedition in the region (which describe numerous inhabitants

[1] Engelhardt, after Francisco Palou, reports on the initial contacts in Monterey: "Thus far no Indians had allowed themselves to be seen, probably from fear which the roaring of the cannons had excited when the *San Antonio* first appeared. Gradually dread gave way to curiosity. Thereafter they frequently visited the mission, but none could be admitted to baptism until six months after the founding of San Carlos" (1908: 79).

of these mountains[2]), as well as builds on prevailing preconceptions about the nakedness of the natives, originated by Columbus, which allows Spaniards to conflate them with nature and come to conclusions about their "barbarity."[3] Here were Indians not unlike the Caribs or the Chichimecas whom the Spaniards had met in the sixteenth century.[4] Tzvetan Todorov explains Columbus' stance on Indian nakedness: "[p]hysically naked, the Indians are also, to Columbus's eyes, deprived of all cultural property: they are characterized, in a sense, by the absence of customs, rites, religion" (1987: 35). Columbus concludes that Indians lack culture which, in turn, degenerates their status to elements of natural scenery.[5] Similarly, Charlotte M. Gradie says that the Chichimecas' "lack of clothing [...]

[2] Miguel Costanso notes that, "[t]he Natives of Monterey live in the Sierra" (47) adding that the "Serranos are docile and tractable to the extreme …" (1901: 46). Fray Crespí, in his journal entries from the Santa Lucías, notes many encounters with the natives to whom he refers to as "very gentle and friendly" (Bolton 1971: 192), or "friendly and obsequious" (Bolton 1971: 198). Whereas the southern tribes are described as living in well organized villages - most notably, the Chumash, whom Costanso defines as "of good figure and aspect" (1901: 39) and whose labor habits are for him "well worthy of admiration" (1901: 40) - the expedition sees fewer settlements in the Sierra and, frequently, "wandering" Indians (Bolton 1971: 197-198), Indians avoiding contact (Bolton 1971: 200), or only traces, "many roads and paths beaten by the heathen" (Bolton 1971: 199), without Indians in sight, are reported.

[3] Costanso says about the Chumash that, "the Men go entirely naked" (1971: 39) and, in relation to the Indians of Monterey, commander Fages says that, "[n]early all of them go naked, except a few who cover themselves with a small cloak of rabbit or hare skin, which does not fall below the waist" (qtd. in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 127). Fages adds: "The women wear a short apron of red and white cords twisted and worked as closely as possible, which extends to the knee. Others use the green and dry tule interwoven, and complete their outfit with a deerskin half tanned or entirely untanned, to make wretched underskirts which scarcely serve to indicate the distinction of sex, or to cover their nakedness with sufficient modesty" (qtd. in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 127).

[4] David J. Weber says that in Alta California Spaniards "met Indians who might have been living in the sixteenth century" (2004: 57): they were innocent "of Spaniards and Spanish arms" (2004: 57), "lacked horses, guns, and tactics to repel the Spaniards" (2004: 47).

[5] Columbus "speaks about the men he sees only because they [...] constitute a part of the landscape. His allusions to the inhabitants of the islands always occur amid his notations concerning nature, somewhere between birds and trees" (Todorov 1987: 34).

was the most salient indication of their barbarity" (1994: 71). Gines de Sepúlveda would use nakedness as one of his arguments for Indian inferiority (Todorov 1987: 156). Nakedness, therefore, has two intertwined consequences in the founding discourses of coloniality: a) denial of full humanity, b) conflation with nature. Thus Serra has reasons to believe that there is more to the landscape than meets the eye, while the correctness of this claim is confirmed by the following concise description of the Indians, which Serra expressed in Monterey in June 1770 – Indians are "little devils who might lurk in the land" (Sandos 2004: 43) whom he wants to entice by staging an elaborate and noisy Corpus Christi procession.

These preconceptions about the Indians allow the President to imagine himself in relation to the new environment and its people: (1) he understands his role as a messenger of Christ who is peremptorily obliged to intervene in the Indian world in order to uproot them from their "heathen" state; (2) he develops a special relationship to the surrounding landscapes, that is, his sensory apparatus does not prioritize sight. Unlike Fr. Miguel, he not only looks around him but he also listens and anticipates human presence in seemingly empty spaces. His experience of nature is thus akin to mediumship. And, indeed, in this respect, he is not unlike the Indians.

In this double stance, one tactically sensory, the other imperatively conative, Serra replicates the earliest colonial encounters in America. Todorov's analysis of Western civilization's colonial success in the Americas points to the "Europeans' capacity to understand the other" (1987: 248) as the determining factor. This is however a peculiar form of compromised empathy which Todorov divides schematically into two phases of "adaptation and absorption" (1987: 248). As an example, he points to Hernan Cortes: "The first phase is that of interest in the other. [...] Cortes slips into the other's skin. [...] Thereby he ensures himself an understanding of the other's language and a knowledge of the other's political organization" (1987: 248). Even though this phase is characterized by "tem-

porary identification" (1987: 248) with the other, the European feeling of superiority is "never abandoned" (1987: 248). The second phase is characterized by a reassertion of one's identity and a move "to assimilate the Indians" (Todorov 1987: 248) into the European world. The behavior of Serra at the site of the future San Antonio Mission reflects the sequential model proposed by Todorov. In his silent mediumship practice Serra, as it were, slips into the Other's skin but only strategically as a maneuver of Cortesian "adaptation" (Todorov 1987: 248). When he tolls his bell and cries out he absorbs Indians into his world and once the Indians show themselves he will no longer be able to listen, or rather, he will hear what he wants to hear.

3. The passing of the 'Oak of Dodona'

What did it mean, then, to ring the bell that day in 1771? Indians as hunter-gatherers are intimately immersed in their environment. They practice attentive listening that is, they have developed acute listening habits because their survival in the forest, where sight can be deceptive, depends on hearing as their first radar. It demands making sense of the fine line between the familiar and the unfamiliar. To misread acoustic signs, therefore, could cost dearly. Thus one not only listens but also keeps quiet. To hear "what lies beyond the world of forms" (Toop 2010: viii) literally means to last. In *Ways of Seeing* John Berger argues that it is "seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world" (1972: 7). But as we know from, say, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans,* there is also another way of being in the world where hearing, not sight, is our first cognitive apparatus. In David Toop's summary of Cooper: "No footfall is safe from the cracking of a dry stick, no rustling of leaf free from suspicion: night trembles with calls and whispers that demand perpetual vigilance. […] Chigachgook, is always alert, head turned" (2010: viii). Toop analyses the experience of listening: "Sound is absence,

beguiling; out of sight, out of reach. What made the sound? Who is there? Sound is a void, fear and wonder" (2010: vii). As such, indeed, it is a form of mediumship, of making sense of the invisible.

After Roland Barthes we can add that listening is also inseparably connected with the "notion of territory" (1985: 247). Barthes says: "the appropriation of space is also a matter of sound: domestic space [...] – the approximate equivalent of animal territory – is a space of familiar, recognized noises whose ensemble forms a kind of household symphony" (1985: 246). Hence, for Barthes, the function of listening is to continually assess "the space of security [...] listening is that preliminary attention which permits intercepting whatever might disturb the territorial system; it is a mode of defense against surprise" (1985: 247). Barthes further distinguishes the double function of listening as "defensive and predatory" (1985: 247); we listen and make decisions about the nature of sounds as either "danger or prey" (Barthes 1985: 248). Thus, according to Barthes, listening is a form of fundamental intelligence because by listening we make "what was confused and undifferentiated [...] [into] distinct and pertinent" (1985: 248); listening is "the very operation of this metamorphosis" (Barthes 1985: 248). Listening is then the first and elemental cognitive instrument with an indexive function, it orients us and tells us about the nature of our surroundings. To expand on this argument, we can add that if space or territory, as Vine Deloria (1992: 62-77) argues, is the prioritized concept in the American Indian worldview then, logically, the prioritized indigenous mode of relating to the world is not visual but aural. And this would mean that for people of the forest all sounds are language. Barthes says: "By her noises, Nature shudders with meaning: at least this is how, according to Hegel, the ancient Greeks listened to her" (Barthes 1985: 250). This is not Saussurean *langue*, a pre-existing system independent of individual users, but language always *emerging* and always in need of active interpretation. Language becomes an expansive category

in this context; it is, as Julia Kristeva would have it, "a complex, heterogeneous, signifying process located in and between subjects" (Sarup 1993: 123). This epistemology is not anthropocentric but is always inter-subjective, *becoming in relations* to a variety of human, animate, and inanimate actants.

Drawing from these insights, we can term Serra's preliminary behavior in the Santa Lucia Mountains as predatory listening and his bell as an instrument of original violence against hitherto existing forms of intelligence, understood as a way of making sense of relations. Serra's peals are synonymous with aggression, the bell's sound nullifies the rules of inter-subjective communication drowning in its singular, strange, unfamiliar, dangerous, and monologic acoustic power all other sounds and silences and becoming an instrument of a one-way territorial and epistemic encroachment on Indian territory. As the sound-waves spill out, Serra's influence expands centrifugally. Once the bell tolls, it occupies the totality of material and symbolic space within its hearing distance. Kaja Silverman suggests that "the maternal voice is experienced by the foetus as a 'blanket of sound', a 'sonorous envelope'; [...] an acoustic space that would be the 'originary psychic space'" (in Venn 2007: 102). Building on this, we can say that Serra's bell envelops not only the phenomenal world within its space of resonance but also establishes the inaugural colonial psychic matrix from which henceforth there will be no escape. Toop says that, "all hearing individuals are open to sounds at all times. There is a shuteye, but no shutear" (Toop 2010: xi) and adds that a voice possesses "the stark power [...] to disrupt and dismay. Softly unassuming in repose, voices can mutate into weapons with an inexhaustible supply of ammunition, the harm of their most serious wounds lingering over a lifetime" (2015). Barthes theorizes aural intrusion as "audio-pollution" which can intervene into our abilities to relate to our surroundings: "pollution [...] [is] corruption of human space, insofar as humanity needs to recognize itself in that space: pollution damages the senses by which the living

being, [...] recognizes its territory [...]. [...] audio-pollution [...] is deleterious to the living being's very intelligence, which is, *stricto sensu*, its power of communicating effectively with its *Umwelt*" (1985: 247).

It seems that the colonists were well aware of this power of audio-pollution and used the bell as a means of piercing into the most intimate spiritual beliefs and epistemic habits of traditional societies. We should remember that ancient divination depended on listening. Barthes says: "The oak of Dodona, by the murmur of their boughs, uttered prophecies, and in other civilizations as well [...] noises have been the immediate raw materials of a divination, cledonomancy" (1985: 250). Todorov argues that American civilizations fell to European power not due to superior warfare but because Indian gods no longer spoke (61), that is, Indian divination ceased to yield information and this, interpreted as an omen of apocalypse, brought about the Aztecs' defeat. Building on this, it seems legitimate to claim that Serra's loud bell, swung from no other than "a stout oak tree" does more than invade Indian space and psyche. Equally importantly it drowns out the spiritual messages encoded in sounds and silences of the landscape effecting perhaps a similar kind of silence of the gods that befell the Aztecs. Thus his bell performs acts of symbolic rape and possession and although the Franciscan habit occludes his identity as a white colonial male and disarticulates his non-ethics of war (if aural only in this fragment), his ambition to penetrate spells another interpretation: he is both *ego theologicus*, as well as the phallic *ego conquiro*. Taking these insights into consideration we can conclude that Serra armed with his bell was an agent of coloniality *par excellence*, performing an immediate and total assault on Indian spaces, psychology, and spirituality.

Additionally, when Indians start moving to the missions, he will add to these modes of intrusion yet another one: the bell will become an instrument of temporal regimentation, its tolls will announce activities for the day (prayer and work)

from sunup to sundown and will intrude on all kinds of epistemic and cultural modes of operation in the Indian world and land. We can also add here that the bell had a very practical function at the missions beyond being a time measuring device. It does not take much to imagine that the bell became a useful means of drowning out other less desired sounds, those resulting from suffering and violent punishments inflicted upon the Indians. As Jean Francois de La Perouse, a French captain who visited San Carlos on September 14, 1786, and Robert Archibald after him remind us, "[m]en were publicly whipped to serve as an example while women were lashed in an enclosed and distant area so their cries would not be heard by their men" (1978). If the concern with the audibility of cries of terror was that real it is entirely possible that the peals of bells merged into a gruesome cacophony with victims' screams or silenced them altogether.

And, finally, one more aspect about the bell should be mentioned. The bell nullifies the pluricentric geography of what, after Edward Casey, we can term "placescapes" (1993: 29) and announces the arrival of center-periphery (as opposed to implaced) geography and linear historicity, that is, of what Edouard Glissant calls "the linear projection of a sensibility toward the world's horizons, the vectorization of this world into metropolises and colonies" (2010 [1997]: 31-32). The bell becomes the first and the most effective means of holistic absorption and submersion of the Other in the white theo-secular imaginary. From this moment on, after Barthes, listening will be "no longer immediate but displaced, conducted in the space of another navigation, 'which is that of narrative, the song no longer immediate but recounted.' Narrative [...] delayed construction" (1985: 257). Subjecting the world hitherto understood as a network to imperial and pontifical zero point the bell becomes the ultimate medium and message of the clash between what Todorov terms the "narrative and interpretative civilizations" (1987: 78), between what Barthes calls civilizations of Sin and of Shame (1985: 250) and between community ethos

and the "mentality of empire" (West-Pavlov 2010: 128). It severs ties with traditional society and its collective bonds and introduces the Indians into the condition of individualism under which they will have to abandon their hitherto responsibilities towards their communities or tribes and assume new responsibilities towards the new sovereign – Christian God and capitalist nomos. The bell thus announces a series of fundamental transformations in the Indian world signaling the arrival of accelerated egocentric, monadic solitude and an axiological redefinition to which they will be forced to adapt at a breakneck speed or perish. In this way, the bell stands as a metonymy of what, after Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo terms the "Colonial Matrix of Power" (Mignolo 2011: 8).[6]

4. Conclusion: Ethical and cognitive challenges

Today, safe within their cars, Californian motorists do not hear the bells. However, although the bells are silent, their clappers removed, no driver nor passenger is insulated from their influence. Each roadside Franciscan staff measures their journeys along the state's freeways and at the speed of sixty miles an hour the markers begin to merge into a nearly continuous presence. They become the frame lines of a giant film strip which begins to stretch between them and like a subliminal veil mediates and frames the landscape behind the windshield as the mission land. The markers recapitulate ad infinitum the old myth of glorious beginnings effecting what, after Mignolo, we can term "epistemic lobotomy" (2011: 156). We have told this story from July 1771 to encourage an effort to defamiliarize the bells, to break the hold of the veil and its colonial code and suggest that not unlike Confederate flags in the South, the mission bells are not what they purport to claim. To recognize the difference between the real and the imagined history of the

[6] Mignolo, after Quijano, defines the colonial matrix of power (CMP) as based on four interrelated domains: "control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity" (2011: 8).

bells is to realize the ineluctable imbrication between modernity/coloniality and to begin to question one's location in relation to this divide as "our ethical responsibility" (Mignolo 2011: 94). Mignolo says that a shift of paradigm is necessary from "I think therefore I am" to "I am where I think" (2011: 81), that is, the fundamental question today is, "where we are [...] located in the house of modernity/coloniality. [...] Are we humanitas or anthropos [...]?" (2011: 94).[7]

The bell's real and not just wished effects force me to make that choice and I slide into the decolonial option, stand with anthropos, and endeavor to intuit tools of "epistemic delinking" from the Western code. One such tool in relation to the bells would be a cognitive opening up to synaesthetic perception, that is, a practice of imagining sounds in their absence. In a world where everything real is a fantasy (like California's artificial landscapes) to make something real would be to imagine it. In this sense, the real rests on the imaginary, on our skills at "imaginative visualization" (Rattigan 2002: 1) or rather, imaginative listening.

Hence, paradoxically, we need to become a little like Serra, to recover or resurrect the inaugural, adaptive epistemology of California, a pre-modern cognitivity which anticipates the invisible and the inaudible in our surroundings, engages in mediumship, and eavesdrops on voices drowned by image pollution. The more silent mission bell markers are installed along the ever-extending "historic" Camino Real, the more visually assimilated and normalized does the epistemic coloniality become. A counter strategy would be to think in sound, to (re)imagine the sound of the bells and imagine the work they did in order to understand what we are missing about Califor-

[7] Those who control discourse, who "assert themselves by disqualifying" (Mignolo 2011: 82) the Other on the basis of "difference corrupted to inequality" (Todorov 1987: 146) are referred to by Mignolo as "humanitas" (2011: 82). Those who are subject to those enunciations and are denied genuine alterity are the "anthropos." The divide between humanitas and anthropos is the arena of coloniality.

nia's past and present. And what we are missing about ourselves.

Because the sound of the bell can be quite easily imagined, it may constitute the Huxleyan "doors of perception" in our synaesthetic practice. Once this sound is imagined, we can slip into a zone where other abject voices can possibly surface as well. We discover that a plurality of voices or *eidola* can also be resurrected. The bell as an imaginary practice, in the specific contexts of the mission, can constitute a sort of retrospective "ladder" through which to access the past reconstituted as a synchronous zone of "everywhen". Once this sound is imagined, a process of cognitive expansion can be set off and a plurality of other sounds, perhaps an Indian chant, can be imagined *and* actualized. Coleman says of the bells:

> Is it any wonder that the feelings of people are so bound up with their sounds? When the vast still air between earth and heaven is suddenly made alive and quivering by the sound of the magic metal, is it any wonder that there are then set free, phantoms, spirits, memories, that run riot with imaginations of men?
>
> (Coleman 1928: 8)

To generatively and critically listen to the silent bells would mean to conjure these phantoms and to recognize the lure of romanticization set against the dark horizons of originary violence. We need to challenge the rhetoric of progress, of deficit, of objectification the bells as metaphors of salvation have sustained; to recognize the monologic non-ethics they have engendered; to challenge the epistemic relations of heteronomy and to bring to the fore the inaudible aporias of Western Modernity vibrating just beneath our gaze.

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