

‘I turn up the volume and walk towards home’: Mapping the Soundscapes of *Loaded*.

JOSEPH CUMMINS
University of New South Wales

One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.
- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari
A Thousand Plateaus.

Listening to music is listening to all noise,
realising that its appropriation and control is a
reflection of power, that it is essentially political.
- Jacques Attali
Noise: The Political Economy of Music

Loaded: A ferocious hymn

Christos Tsiolkas’s first novel *Loaded* (1995) is one of the most sonically intense Australian works ever written. Taking place over a 24-hour period, it depicts Ari—a 19-year-old child of Greek migrants—engaging in a continuous flow of sexual encounters, drug taking, walking, dancing, and listening to music. Traversing between venues of excess and confrontation—the city street, the nightclub, the Greek club, and a variety of domestic spaces—Ari is constantly immersed in the soundscapes of Melbourne as he pushes the boundaries of his identity, his sexuality, challenging what it means to exist in urban modernity. Whether it is disco, punk, pop, Elvis, Michael Jackson, pounding house music or melancholy Greek *rembetika*, music accompanies Ari’s every step through the streets, homes, pubs and clubs of Melbourne.

Critically reframing the process of reading the sonic profusion of *Loaded* as a form of auditory simulation, in which the ear of the reader is actively drawn into a densely populated soundworld that jars, disrupts and confronts, this article traces Ari’s engagement with popular music, sound technologies, and sound spaces. The conceptual key to this encounter between fictional characters, imagined sounds and spaces is the soundscape. First discussed by sound theorist and composer R. Murray Schafer in *The Tuning of the World* (1977), Barry Truax provides a useful definition: A soundscape is an ‘environment of sound (sonic environment) with emphasis on the way it is perceived and understood by the individual, or by society’ (126). Truax focuses on ‘the relationship between the individual and any such environment’ (126), on the interiority of the listening experience and the simultaneous internalization of the outside environment. Bringing sound into contact with the listener, Truax’s definition emphasises the centrality of the relation between the individual and his/her sonic surrounds.

This essay will concentrate on Tsiolkas’s central character and narrator Ari, a figure defined by movement, chaotic energies, and liminality. His refusal of categories— ‘I’m not Australian, I’m not Greek, I’m not anything. I’m not a worker, I’m not a student, I’m not an artist, I’m not a junkie, I’m not a conversationalist, I’m not an Australian’ (149) —belies the urgency of his search for an identity from amongst the conflicting forces of mainstream heteronormative Australian culture, his Greek

family life and his homosexuality. Ari's use of popular music through sound technologies such as the Walkman and sound system is a fault-line of this tension and ambivalence: in many ways Ari's interaction with popular music provides a level of stability that his identity does not. In a discussion of music and queer identity formation that links with Ari's use of sound, Jodie Taylor posits the term 'musico-sexual identification' to describe 'music's capacity to not only signal but also engender variations of erotic identities from within, and perhaps beyond discrete identity categories' (606). Following Taylor's discussion, I argue that Ari uses popular music, through a range of sound technologies and in a number of different sound spaces, to position his identity in the turbulent domain somewhere between his Greekness, his homosexuality, his masculinity, and his place and time. While Tsiolkas's description of such an abundance of popular music serves this central purpose, part of the achievement of the novel is the creation of a historically and sonically authentic Melbourne in the early-90s. Immersing the reader in a landscape that explores queerness and novelistic realism from an auditory perspective, the novel offers a sonic realism that places a unique representational responsibility on novelistic sound.

In addition to the concept of the soundscape—which provides the foundation of my discussion of the novel—a number of interconnected theories of sound, space, and technology inform the following sonic analysis of *Loaded* and its dissonant central character Ari. Despite the vitriol and aggression of Ari's behavior and commentary throughout the novel, he is constantly listening, experiencing the world through his ears. Jean-Luc Nancy's theorisation of listening and 'being with' in his book *Listening* (2007) elucidates a similarly vigilant, yet generative, connection between sound and subjectivity. Discussing the way sound constructs being, or what he calls the 'listening body' (40), Nancy observes: 'A blow from outside, clamour from within, this sonorous, sonorised body undertakes a simultaneous listening to a 'self' and to a 'world' that are both in resonance' (42-3). Nancy's concept of listening accounts for both interior and exterior, describing a space filled with sound. Nancy's theorisation also intimately links sound to the body through listening. Ari's use of the Walkman and his patronage at the nightclub transforms him into what Nancy would call a 'listening body'. This connection between sound and the body is performed repeatedly throughout the novel, as Ari, in the company of different sound technologies, engages (or disengages) with his family, friends and different pockets of society. Examining Ari's experience of both the street and the Greek club or nightclub emphasises the malleability of his use of popular music. Mediated through the Walkman, the radio, or the sound system, music becomes a means of rejecting mainstream society, enabling him to embrace the range of subcultural communities with which he is aligned through his family, generation and sexuality. If Ari is a listening body, *Loaded* is the soundscape of a Greek body, a homosexual body, and a modern technologised body.

Every location of Ari's day and night is filled with resonant streams of popular music. Cultural theorist Josh Kun, describing this kind of dissonant immersion in popular sound, has suggested that 'popular music is...one of our most valuable sites for witnessing the performance of racial and ethnic difference against the grain of national citizenships that work to silence and erase those differences' (11). Articulating the complexity of popular music as a cultural form, Kun argues that 'like all forms of popular culture, [popular music] is hybrid, synchronized, and the result of multiple convergences, compromises, overlaps, recoding's and appropriations' (20). For Kun, the most important aspect of popular music is its multiplicity: 'As such, popular music does not simply produce difference; difference is not merely an effect of the popular. It *is* difference' (20). Ari's Melbourne is awash with popular music and it is through this form of sound that Ari's multifaceted embodiment of difference – his personal identification with and his rejection of many aspects of Australian society and history – is both enabled and embodied.

Diversely transmitted into bodies by the house and car radio, the CD player, the Walkman, the P.A (the public address system used by the band in the Greek club) and the nightclub sound system, the musicality of the novel is constantly evoked by Tsiolkas as an alternative, yet highly mediated and technologised form of communication. Media theorist Georgina Born discusses the formation of the contemporary soundscape exemplified by *Loaded*, highlighting the ‘proliferation of audio media’ which, she argues, ‘results in a situation in which acoustic environments are increasingly multiple, recursive and topologically malleable’ (27). Citing the ‘potential of music and sound media to demarcate and reinforce social and psychological boundaries through the creation of sonic autonomy and segregation’, Born also suggests that music can ‘overcome such boundaries through sound’s omnidirectional, mobile and enveloping materiality, as well as through the mediated weaving of translocal sonic connections’ (27). The acoustic environments Ari is submerged in throughout the 24 hours of the novel shape his identity in the ways Born outlines. Through the interiority created by the Walkman, sound forms a sonic barrier in which each sonically autonomous individual can exist in their own ‘head space’ or sonic bubble. Through the sound system, larger spaces with the capacity to house multiple communities of dancers are opened.

The physical presence of sound, either via the Walkman, the sound system or any other type of sound technology, links the different spaces opened by sound. Julian Henriques theorises this affective force as ‘sonic dominance’ (451). Describing the mobile sound system culture of the Caribbean, Henriques explains: ‘Sonic dominance is hard, extreme, excessive. At the same time the sound is also soft and embracing and it makes for an enveloping, immersive and intense experience’ (451). The ‘enveloping’ presence of sound resonates between ideas of music technology, space, and the body, accounting for the role of sound in the transgressive space of the nightclub, where Ari is able to fulfill his desire for dance, take drugs and escape the alienation he feels outside—you need to unpack this sentence it is not clear. This transformation can only take place in a space dominated by sound.

Henriques’s concept of sonic dominance can be further extended and nuanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s theorisation of the ‘refrain’ as a structure of sound. Deleuze and Guattari call the refrain ‘a prism, a crystal of space-time’ (385). The refrain’s repeated melodic and rhythmic motifs are of particular relevance for gauging the spatial work of popular music where repeated phrases are fundamental, although the concept has been taken up in gender studies, cultural studies, literary studies, and various strands of musicology (Battersby, 1998; Stewart, 2013; Vallee, 2013; Kreutzfeldt, 2012; Keeling, 2014; Cummins, 2014). The key difference between the musicological meaning of refrain and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept lies in their emphasis on the structural and rhythmic labor of sound. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, refrains are ‘rhythmic, melodious patterns, small chants, ditties, that shape the vibrations of milieus into the harmonics of territories, the organization of a wall or barrier’ (54). This shaping of space through sound is fundamental to Ari’s negotiation of his sexuality: a song refrain can provide a way out of a negative frame of mind, and the repetitions of dance music can open up the carnivalesque space of the nightclub. Both offer Ari a few moments of respite where he can briefly stop being ‘a runner’ (149) avoiding either his Greekness or homosexuality.

Running from life in the suburbs, as Joan Kirkby has argued, is a central motif of Tsiolkas’s work. The suburb, as Kirkby notes, ‘was neither country (village) nor city; neither at the centre, nor with a centre; neither one thing nor another; it was hybrid, potentially abject’ (2). For Ari this hybrid sense of space is intensified by a confusion of masculinities and competing nationalisms, as Linzie Murrie has observed in her reading of the novel (1998). The only ephemeral refuge Ari finds, as Elizabeth McMahon has argued, is in the rhythms of dance and walking as he traces an alternative sexually encoded cartographies of Melbourne: ‘Ari’s walking knowledge of Melbourne produces an alternative map of the city according to ethnicity, particularly the map of second-generation Greeks;

and of sexuality, specifically male homosexuality' (2000, 169). Drawing upon and expanding on McMahon's reading, the following section opens up new critical territory through a consideration of how Ari's use of popular music and sound technologies intersects with this 'walking knowledge' of Melbourne. While McMahon suggests that Ari is 'the conventional *flâneur* crossed with the girl in red shoes of fairy tale...compelled to travel over this [Melbourne's] ground and to transform the grid of the city into personal space by dance' (166) my focus here is on the role of popular music in this movement. Where McMahon argues that 'Ari is a choreographer...as he creates patterns of experience across his city' (167), I pursue the soundings of such patterns.

Ari: the Walkman

Plugged into his blaring Walkman, Ari's struggle with the life narratives of both his family and Australian capitalist society in the early-1990s could be described as a mobile politics of the everyday. McMahon underscores the value of considering Ari's constant traversal of the city in terms of Michel De Certeau's theorisation of walking from his *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau states: 'The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers...' (93). A key aspect of De Certeau's concept of walking is the way 'bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it.' By walking, De Certeau suggests '[t]hese practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen....' (93). Ari the 'walker' enacts the text of the city by walking with sound, giving another dimension and physical texture to the De Certeau's positioning of action 'below the thresholds at which visibility begins' (93).

In the early 1990s listening to music while walking was not the pervasive practice it has become today, where personal music devices have transformed public transport and mobilised music libraries. Noting his own immersion in these networks of sonic mobility, Christos Tsiolkas has written about how music technologies shaped his love of music and played a role in his writing.¹ In the short article *Mixed Tape: The Technology of a Passion* he discusses music technology and his love of mixed tapes and the Walkman: 'My memories of music cannot be separated from the devices that bring the music to my ear' (138). In a paragraph reminiscent of the cadence of Ari's voice in *Loaded*, Tsiolkas proclaims:

God, how I loved my Walkman. The Walkman propelled me into the world, gave an urgency to my step, allowed me to feel euphoria anywhere I was. Yes, it shuts out the world but it fills your head and mind and body, the beats pump through your body, it fills you up with music, it makes you drunk on music, it is an intoxication. (140)

Tsiolkas's discussion of the mobility enabled by the sound device, its creation of a different space, the bodily effect of the music, and the relation between music and drugs, are all ideas performed in his first novel. In *Loaded* Ari says: 'The Walkman is my favourite toy. It creates a soundtrack for me and lets me slip into walking through a movie' (18).

The spatial flexibility generated by this device is discussed by media theorist Shuhei Hosokawa, who argues the Walkman '...decontextualises the given coherence of the city-text, and at the same time, contextualises every situation which seemingly does not cohere with it' (171). Plugged into his 'favourite toy', Ari has a personal soundtrack, and his experience of his environment is transformed: the city becomes a site offering opportunities for the fulfillment of his desire for movement, for sex and drugs, rather than one of work and domestic life. Registering this sonic refashioning of the city from a site of work into a site of possibility, Hosokawa integrates the mobility of the Walkman into a discussion of walking and space, stating that '...every sort of familiar soundscape is transformed by

that singular acoustic experience coordinated by the user's own ongoing pedestrian act...' (175). As a move against the dominant flows of power and space, Hosokawa's comments align with De Certeau's discussion of walking, but in addition to this, the Walkman produces an 'autonomous 'head space' between [the] Self and his [sic] surroundings...' For Hosokawa, the result is 'a mobility of the Self' (175).

Technology theorist Michael Bull extends Hosokawa's discussion of the Walkman, suggesting '[s]ound and forms of ontological security appear to be closely related in the world of Walkman desires' (96). The need for 'ontological security' is linked to what Bull calls 'the consumption of sound', which he argues is 'highly successful in operationalizing this desire. States of 'we-ness' are indeed states of ontological security' (96). Ari's use of popular music and the Walkman for 'ontological security' is made concrete through the precise rhythms and modalities of the mixed tapes he designs. So important are these tapes that Ari lists all the songs on his 'perfect mixed tape':

My perfect mixed tape, the tape I listen to the most, is two years old. A collection culled from my records, Peter's records, friends' records. Side A: *I Want You Back*, The Jackson Five; *Lost in Music*, Sister Sledge; *Little Red Corvette*, Prince; *I Got You*, Split Enz; *Everything She Wants*, Wham; *Broken English*, Marianne Faithfull; *Gimme Shelter*, Rolling Stones; *Funkin for Jamaica*, Tom Brown; *Cloudy Sunday*, Sotiria Bellou. Side B: *Living for the City*, Stevie Wonder; *Temptation*, Heaven 17; *Walk Away Renee*, Four Tops; *Going Back to Cali*, L.L. Cool J; *Legs*, ZZ Top; *Man in Uniform*, Gang of Four; *Walk This Way*, Run DMC; *Like a Prayer*, Madonna; *The Road*, Manos Loizos. Not necessarily my favourite songs, not a tape I planned. A tape I put together over several days. But it has become my soundtrack to happiness. A soundtrack that goes nicely with speed, with summer. (24)

The tape is not simply a compilation of hits or favourites, or a closely structured set: it evokes specific spaces, locales and times that are laden with affect for Ari. The exhaustive listing of every song on the tape emphasises the delicate balance of its construction, while also indexing Ari's tastes and a whole range of implications associated with each track or genre. Contrary to his abhorrence for identity categories, music genre is important to Ari, and he links the energy of each style to the type of energy elicited from drugs:

This is an up tape, it makes me walk faster, keeps me at a distance from the people brushing past me. I like music. More than that, I love music but I'm definite in my tastes. Soul. Hard rock and punk. I listen to heaps. Heavy metal is mostly shit though some trash metal is okay (on speed or after a few bongs). Rap I like. Of course. Some disco, not high-energy, but house. Jazz means nothing to me because I can't understand it. I love Greek music but only the old stuff. I'm definite in my tastes. (19)

The movement of the body—also articulated in the club through dance—is calibrated to the different rhythms of the music currently playing: 'I love music, but I'm definite in my tastes' (19). Ari is like a DJ, only choosing genres, or parts of genres, that meet his needs. These descriptions of the mixed tape and genre also re-route the link between music and drugs from the familiar space of the nightclub rave to the everyday listening undertaken with a Walkman or a home listening device like a radio.

Hosokawa and Bull's ideas on sonic security link with another striking use of the Walkman in

Loaded where Ari describes listening to a tape with a whole side of 'I want you back' by the Jackson Five:

When things aren't going well, I play that cassette over and over and just walk around the city or walk around Richmond. I sit on a rock by the river throwing bread to the ducks, letting young Michael Jackson cheer me up. In the three minutes it takes the song to play I'm caught in a magic world of harmony and joy, a truly ecstatic joy, where the aching longing to be somewhere else, out of this city, out of this country, out of this body and out of this life, is kept at bay. I relive those three minutes again and again till I'm calm enough to walk back into life again. (19)

Creating a comforting space within the repeating refrains of the three minutes of the song, Ari's urgent desire for escape is diffused. The pop song refrain blocks out the chaos of the outside and Ari can block out the everyday of the urban: 'East, west, south, north, the city of Melbourne blurs into itself. Concrete on concrete, brick veneer on brick veneer, weatherboard on weatherboard. Walking through the suburbs, I feel like I'm in the ugliest place on the planet' (37-8). A soundtrack that only Ari can hear separates him from the boring and homogenous Melbourne landscape.

At the end of a night of hectic partying, Ari also uses the mobility and security offered by the Walkman to prepare himself for the return to the family home. After a difficult encounter with Peter, the man at the centre of Ari's romantic and sexual fantasies in the novel, he steals a Walkman from a house party in the early hours of the morning, using it to transition into a more sober state of mind. Ari listens: 'I take out the Beastie Boys cassette from my back pocket and put it on. A deafening crash of drums and guitars enters my eardrums and I'm no longer coming down. I turn up the volume and walk towards home' (135). The Beastie Boys track Ari is listening to is '(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right (To Party)' released on the album *Licensed to Ill* (1986). The track is built around a powerful lyrical/rhythmic refrain, creating a rebellious territory, a space in which Ari can retreat from the expected complaints of his parents once he reaches home. The 'deafening crash of drums and guitars' evokes sonic dominance, creating both a barrier against the outside and an opening into the familiar confines of adolescent interiority. Ari does arrive, eventually, in his bedroom, his private refuge from the intrusions of the world outside: 'The Walkman is screaming at me that I have to fight for my right to party but all I can think of is that Mum and Dad are going to kill me' (138). Swept up in the anthemic refrain of The Beastie Boys, Ari forgets his parents and the predicted confrontation, instead diverting from his walk home to enter a public toilet block for yet another sexual encounter.

'I sing along to whatever song comes on the radio'

These Walkman refrains create a private 'soundtrack' for Ari as he walks the city streets, as well as the domestic spheres that bookend the events of the novel. The day begins and ends with Ari in a bedroom, first at the home of his brother and finally in his own bedroom at the home of his parents. Additionally, we see Ari interact with family and friends in the domestic interiors of kitchens and lounge rooms. On page two we encounter the first description of sound in *Loaded*: 'I hear noises from throughout the house. A robotic voice is squealing over a bass-beat on the CD' (2). All of the domestic interiors in *Loaded* are filled with sounds, generated by CD players, radios, and record players. While it is hard to guess exactly what genre of music Ari hears as he wakes up, the robotic voice is probably produced by a vocoder, indicating a genre of pop or electronic music.

Deleuze and Guattari theorise this opening of domestic space through the differential repetitions of the refrain. Describing three interconnected stages of spatial formation, the second stage of the refrain, the formation of a home space, uses solid metaphors that evoke a house: 'Sonorous or vocal

components are very important: a wall of sound, or at least a wall with some sonic bricks in it' (311). Domestic refrains are produced by people or technologies: 'A child hums to summon the strength for the schoolwork she has to hand in. A housewife sings to herself, or listens to the radio, as she marshals the anti-chaos forces of her work. (311). Listening to records of Greek music with his mother, or dancing to his favourite Elvis song ('Little Egypt') with his sister, Ari connects with his family. The rhythms and melodies of the songs become more than just music, they become the media through which Ari is able to be with his mother and sister, a sonic salve for difficult and volatile relationships.

Reinforcing the everydayness of the domestic space depicted in *Loaded* is the sonic presence of the radio, a sound technology that Tsiolkas constantly mentions: 'Mum's smoking a cigarette in the kitchen and listening to the radio' (12)—'The hot water on my body gives the speed high a second rush and I sing along to whatever song comes on the radio' (25)—'I lie on my bed in my room and smoke a cigarette listening to soul on the radio' (25). Music theorist Simon Frith argues that, rather than film, 'it was radio...that established the possibility of music as an ever-playing soundtrack to our lives' (41). Just as walking with earphones blaring gives sonic control to the listener, tuning in to particular stations allows the individual to control their domestic soundscape. By listing several of the artists Ari listens to on the radio, including 'a seventies disco number by Aretha Franklin' (26), punk band T-Rex (48), the Beach Boys, Cher (80-4), and the Easybeats (140), Tsiolkas is able to give sonic specificity to the texture of Ari's character, building our knowledge of his musical taste and lending an authentic texture to the novel.

The stereo or CD player is another type of sound technology mentioned frequently in *Loaded*.² The stereo affords Ari an even greater level of control over his soundscape, with CD collections offering the possibility for specific choice. Entering the home of his friend Joe, Ari immediately changes the music: 'A shit CD is playing on the stereo, some ugly white noise like Phil Collins or Michael Bolton. I stop the music, whisk through the CDs on the shelf and find an old Rolling Stones record. *Let It Bleed*' (38). Ari uses music in this context to articulate his rejection of values he sees as false and weak: (supposedly) superior taste in music elevates Ari above others in a social and cultural sense. Rejecting the domesticity of Joe and his fiancé Dina, Ari's distaste for Phil Collins and Michael Bolton—two 'adult contemporary' artists—is tied to his criticism of his cousins' life choices: Joe is engaged to be married, has a job, and defers to the opinions of his partner (40).

Ari is able to bracket and criticise Anglo-Australian culture through his critical engagement with popular music. Hitch-hiking to the Punters club to meet his friend Toula, Ari is given a ride by a couple of heroin-addicts who are listening to 'some skip shit' (77). While on the surface this distinction is a throwaway comment for Ari, it refers to a politics of taste that relates back to Ari's stratification of Melbourne across the whole novel. Ari's musical choices are complex. He doesn't explain why Phil Collins/Michael Bolton is 'ugly white noise', but his choice to replace it with various tracks by The Rolling Stones underscores the latter artists' relation to the authentic masculinity associated with African Americans and the genre of Rhythm and Blues.³ In comparison to Phil Collins, The Stones carry significant counter-cultural credibility and Ari is attracted to the unique mix of hyper-masculinity, campness and swagger exuded by Mick Jagger. Such a choice is a sonic negotiation based on taste and connoisseurship, and while a full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that Ari's musical selections endow him with a sense of authority that cuts across sexual, racial, generational, economic and geographic lines, allowing him to, as Taylor suggests, perform his own 'music-sexual identification'.⁴

Lost in Music

Leaving the suburbs behind, Ari moves out of the private domestic soundscapes created by the radio

and stereo and into the immersive and pleasurable resonance of nocturnal Melbourne: ‘listening to the radio, listening to my friends sing along, out of tune, watching the headlights of cars, watching the suburbs drop away as we head into the city’ (48). The music resounding through domestic interiors and into Ari’s ears as he navigates the city with his Walkman does not have the same bodily effect as the soundscapes of the Greek club and the nightclub, spaces where the movement, pleasure and sexuality of the body is produced by sonic dominance. Instead of just the ear that hears, it is the whole body that feels sound. The soundscape of the Greek club is affirmative, cathartic—dancing to a live band performing Greek folk music, Ari describes the affective conversion of feeling and emotion enabled by the music: ‘On the dance floor I move between bodies twirling and swaying to the pain of the music. But in our motions we transform the pain into joy’ (66). Ari is riding high on a musical refrain that deterritorialises and transforms pain into pleasure through vibration.

Ari’s ecstatic experience in the Greek club—a place for the consumption of drugs, dance, listening and conversation—is consonant with his experience in the nightclub, but there are also several dissonances between the two spaces. From a sonic perspective, ‘Greek music’—Ari’s favourite Greek song is ‘The Road’ by Manos Loizos—and electronic dance music are at odds. The global resonance of dance music jars with the core experience of the Greek music which is located in nostalgia and lyrical reflection. Moving between subcultural spaces, between Greek music and electronic music, Tsiolkas is at once being provocative in sounding a link between these two very different modes of musical expression. At the same time, in positing this resonance he is highlighting an important similarity in the function of music for minority groups. Perhaps most importantly, linking the two music spaces means that Ari’s Greek ethnicity, homosexuality and drug ingestion are accepted and acceptable in both sonic domains. As a sensitised listening body cocooned in the Greek club, Ari’s sexuality and ethnicity are, momentarily, not a cause for anxiety or aggression.

The contrast between the Greek club and the nightclub is, like most spaces depicted in *Loaded*, registered sonically. Shifting from the ‘unmistakable sounds of *clarino* and the *bouzouki*’ (53), both high register instruments that characterise the soundscape of the Greek club, we encounter earth-shattering volume: ‘the heavy rhythms of the music inside the disco are shaking the earth; I feel the music vibrate under my feet’ (87). The dominance of the lowest bass set of frequencies literally carves out the sonic territory of the nightclub. ‘Once inside my eyes, ears, my skin is assaulted by sensation. The music belts me across the face and I cannot decipher a tune, a melody, a rhythm’ (87). Henriques’ characterisation of the sonic as an ‘understanding [of life] that is based on connection, combination and synthesis, rather than division, separation or analysis alone’ underscores the power of this type of sound saturation to create an alternative public sphere (453). This space of connecting through sound is played out in Ari’s euphoric dancing, where the power of the sound system is fused with drugs and the carnival atmosphere of the nightclub. As his favourite song *Lost in Music* comes on, Ari says: ‘The LSD, the ecstasy, the speed, the dope, the alcohol rush around my body and I feel one with the pulsating crowd [...] We’re lost in music. The song takes me higher and higher, the crescendo of bass beats lifts me into the stratosphere’ (94-5). Even though ‘[b]ass dominates the club’ (87), the music does not stifle or drown: instead it elevates Ari, holding him aloft in exultation.

The group intimacy forged within the nexus of sonic saturation, intense bodily movement and chemical accompaniment is unachievable outside of either the Greek club or the nightclub. Tsiolkas has repeatedly depicted his characters using recreational drugs in conjunction with listening and dancing, but in *Loaded* he manages to capture the zeitgeist of the early 1990s rave culture, distilling it within the larger illustration of Ari’s modern urban experience.⁵ While Ari’s moment of transcendence on the dance floor is total, by suggesting this pattern of behaviour is cyclical—a 24 hour-long odyssey of moods and bodily drives that reaches its highpoint during *Lost in Music*—Tsiolkas encases this moment within Ari’s general day-to-day experience of social alienation,

undercutting any of the Romanticism of Ari's 'being-with' through sound. The drug-fuelled desensitization of the body chronicled by *Loaded* also works against this impulse towards the Romantic.

For Henriques, the environment of the sound system is one that creates a unique relation between the body and sound: 'sound pervades, or even invades the body, like smell. Sonic dominance is both a near over-load of sound and a super saturation of sound. You're lost inside it. Submerged under it...' (451).⁶ Henriques's account of sonic dominance resonates with Ari's experience of the nightclub. The description of sonic dominance—'You're inside it'—even links to the title of Ari's favourite disco songs, *Lost in Music*, by Sister Sledge. While the outside world may recede into the background, leaving only the frequencies of the club music, being lost does not mean disconnection from the body: 'Sound at this level cannot but touch you and connect you to your body. It's not just heard in the ears, but felt over the entire surface of the skin' (Henriques 451). Similar to Ari's description of being 'belted' by the music, Henriques describes how the 'bass line beats in your chest, vibrating the flesh, playing on the bone and resonating the genitals' (451-2). The body becomes the ear, transforming into a form of Nancy's 'listening body' (40). Inside the resonant cavern of the nightclub Ari has no need of the safety blanket of the Walkman. Instead he is engulfed within a soundscape of his choosing. The troubling aspects of Ari's experience as a 'listening body' is that his excessive consumption of drugs—he could also be called a desensitised body—intensifies this transcendence. Letting go of the socially prescribed body allows Ari to experience his body as he wants it to be. For Ari, drugs are like another listening technology.⁷

Bathed in a constant soundtrack of popular musics, *Loaded* is defined by explosive energies and the testing of limits. The throbbing interior of the nightclub sound system, the ecstasies of the Greek club, the sonic bubble produced by the Walkman or the domestic spaces opened by radios and stereos are built from music that moves Tsiolkas's protagonist to walk, to dance, get high, and have sex. The 24 hours of *Loaded* is, for Ari, a relentless challenge, as he navigates his cultural heritage, his sexuality and his masculinity. As I have shown, popular music and sound technologies are integral to this negotiation. *Loaded* is a uniquely sonic novel that transcribes a dynamic Melbourne soundscape and it speaks to debates about sound studies, listening and mediated subjectivities by focusing on a specific spatiotemporality and identity. Tsiolkas's depiction of Melbourne in the early 1990s is a finely attuned record of a young gay man searching for his identity that simultaneously sounds the dissonance and struggle of second-generation migrants in Australia.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Tammy. *Rave Culture: the alteration and decline of a Philadelphia music scene* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.
- Attali, Jacques. *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Battersby, Christine. *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.
- Beasty Boys, The. *Licensed to Ill – '(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right (To Party)'* Def Jam Records, Columbia Records. 1986.
- Born, Georgina. (ed) *Music, Sound and Space: transformations of public and private experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Bull, Michael. 'The Seduction of Sound in Consumer Culture: Investigating Walkman Desires' *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2, 1 (2002): 81-101.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Cummins, Joseph. 'Echoes between Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania: Sound and the space of the island in Richard Flanagan's *Death of a River Guide* and Carmel Bird's *Cape Grimm*' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 49, 2 (2014): 257-270

- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Steven Rendall (trans). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles. and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. B. Massumi Trans. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Frith, Simon. 'Music and everyday life' *Critical Quarterly* 44, 1 (2003): 35-48.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Henriques, Julian. 'Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session' in Bull, Michael, and Les Beck (eds) *The Auditory Cultur Reader*. London, Berg Publishers, 2004: 451-80.
- Hosokawa, Shuhei. 'The Walkman Effect' *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 165-80.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Keeling, Kara. 'Electric Feel: Transduction, errantry and the refrain' *Cultural Studies* 28. 1 (2014): 49-83.
- Kirkby, Joan 'The Pursuit of Oblivion: in Flight From Suburbia' *Australian Literary Studies* 18, 4 (1998): 1-19.
- Kokkinos, Ana (dir). *Head On*. Village Roadshow. 1998.
- Kreutzfeldt, Jacob. 'Street cries and the urban refrain' *Soundeffects* 2, 1 (2012): 61-80.
- Kun, Josh. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.
- Murrie, Linzi. 'Changing Masculinities: Disruption and anxiety in contemporary Australian writing' *Journal of Australian Studies* 22, 56 (1998): 169-179.
- McMahon, Elizabeth. 'Lost in Music' *Meanjin* 59, 2 (2000): 166-177.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. Charlotte Mendel (trans). New York: Fordham UP, 2007.
- Redhead, Steve. *Rave Off: politics and deviance in contemporary youth culture*. Aldershot: Avesbury, 1993.
- Reynolds, Simon. *Energy Flash: a journey through rave music and dance culture*. London: Picador, 1998.
- Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. New York and London: Routledge. 1989.
- Schafer, R. Murray *Our Sonic Environment and the Soundscape: the tuning of the world*. Rochester, Vermont. Destiny Books. 1994.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 'Regionality' *The Geographical Review* 103, 2 (2013): 275-84.
- Straw, Will. 'Sexing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture' in Whiteley, Sheila (ed) *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. London, New York: Routledge, 1997: 5-16.
- Taylor, Jodie. 'Taking it in the ear: On musico-sexual synergies and the (queer) possibility that music is sex' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 26. 4 (2012): 603-614.
- Truax, Barry. *Handbook For Acoustic Ecology*. Vancouver: A.R.C. 1978
- Tsiolkas, Christos. *Loaded*. Melbourne, Vintage, 1995.
- _____. *Dead Europe*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2011.
- _____. *The Slap*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2008.
- _____. 'Mixed Tape: The Technology of a Passion' *Meanjin Quarterly* 3 (2006): 136-141.
- Vallee, Mickey "'Say Rawr!' Lyotard, Deleuze/Guattari, and the Refrains of Wesley Willis' *Cultural Politics* 9, 2 (2013): 188-202.

NOTES

¹ See the Slow TV interview <http://blip.tv/slowtv/christos-tsiolkas-on-the-influence-of-music-on-his-writing-2241916>) and Cyclic Defrost interview

<http://www.cyclicdefrost.com/blog/2009/04/cyclic-selects-christos-tsiolkas/>

² The CD player or stereo is mentioned on pages 38, 118, 133, 147, 150, and 151.

³ Ari programs 'Gimme Shelter first, then *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, then *Love in Vain* and...*Midnight Rambler*' (38), all by The Rolling Stones.

⁴ Andrew Ross's *No Respect* (1989) and Will Straw's 'Sexing Up Record Collections' (1997) are two important pieces of research into this intersecting area of cultural studies and pop music studies.

⁵ *Dead Europe* (2005), *The Slap* (2008) are two novels that feature music and drug-taking.

⁶ A sound system is a set of speakers connected to a mixing desk and turntables.

⁷ See *Rave Off: politics and deviance in contemporary youth culture* (1993) by Steve Redhead, *Energy Flash: a journey through rave music and dance culture* (1998) by Simon

Reynolds or *Rave Culture: the alteration and decline of a Philadelphia music scene* (2009) by Tammy Anderson.