



[\*Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies\*](#) by Dylan Robinson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020. 320 pp. ISBN: 9781517907693.

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*Hungry Listening* by Stó:lō musicologist Dylan Robinson is an exemplary text which forges space for Indigenous epistemological and ontological existence through decolonial critique in the realm of sound studies. Robinson, who sits as Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts at Queen’s University, engages critical thought around the settler colonial ways in which sound is connected with and experienced. Robinson encourages decolonial methodologies that allow for the unsettling of listening practices that are based out of consumption, extraction, collection, and violation. These practices only encourage the continuation of

epistemological and ontological violence on Indigenous peoples. Robinson’s *Hungry Listening* directly calls his readers to deconstruct the systems in which enforce perceived universals and replace them with systems that forge relationships, foster responsibility, and follow crucial protocols.

Robinson provides his readers with specific examples of the engagement of Indigenous peoples and music within the production of Western art music. Through these studies, readers are drawn to engage critically in the process of listening positionality and how this positionality encourages hierarchical thought and consumption with respect to our engagement with sound. Robinson identifies the “hungry” aspect of listening as untouched ethical questions around the ways in which Indigenous knowledge and sounds are consumed through an extractive process without Indigenous protocols being respected and enacted. Listening positionality is a way in which Robinson identifies the intersectional experiences that impact the way we perceive, interact, and engage with the sound we are surrounded with. He encourages his readers to develop intricate ways in understanding the diverse relationships that can be experienced with sound that challenge the settler “tin ear,” which is the inability to recognize the various functions Indigenous song can hold, such as historical relationships, spatial relationships, the objectification of sound, and the political



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approaches that influence interactions with sound. Robinson uses these examples to draw his conclusions around the importance of enacting sovereignty by connecting to space and relating to sound through an alternative complex knowledge system.

Listening positionality is a key concept in *Hungry Listening*. Essentially, settler colonial epistemologies can be recognized as based on consumption and extraction and therefore influence functions of settler colonial positionality. Robinson conceptualizes that one's positionality within this structure can be developed through substantive acts of unsettling. He draws clear examples of how Indigenous epistemological perspectives differ from settler colonial perspectives including the relation to space, divergence from extractive processes, and the recognition of more than human relatives. Ultimately, Robinson suggests that by dismantling the normative structures that have been projected on Indigenous peoples and song, there will be the ability to start to redress and take accountability toward the actions of epistemological violence committed through colonization. Listening positionality becomes a tool that encourages the unsettling of our perceptions and actions and, rather, promotes the shift towards frameworks of Indigenous subjectivity and agency. This shift has the ability to change the way in which music is able to function and influence cultural perceptions. Robinson suggest that by challenging our own positionality, there is the ability to deconstruct violent perceptions influenced by settler colonial epistemologies and the normative practices around engaging with sound. Through this deconstruction he suggests that here is the potential to affirm agency, responsibility, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Robison discusses multiple case studies of collaborations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous musicians within the sphere of Western classical music. These events are recognized by audiences and reviewers as collaborative cultural exchanges or as colourful encounters. Robinson uses these examples to illustrate the concept of "inclusionary music" by addressing the collaborative nature that these performances tend to deliver but draws critiques of these collaborations being an extension of settler colonial listening positionality that furthermore enforce aspects of Indigenous subjectivity and alterity. He suggests that through reclamation, Indigenous artists will enact the legitimization of law and affirm song and performance as having more than merely an aesthetic function. Furthermore, he mentions the ways in which listening can affirm these perspectives and contribute to his concept of Indigenous+art music. Indigenous+art music acts as a resistance to the "conflation for difference" and rather promotes "conjoining two areas of sound practice." (p. 9) By contrast, "inclusionary music" attempts to integrate and assimilate Indigenous sound into the production. (p. 9)

Further, Robinson employs these concepts through the discouragement of consumptive practices and spaces that attempt to preserve or incarcerate Indigenous peoples within the lens and expectations of the colonizer. The way in which performers are intended to project themselves as subjects in a concert hall, or other performance spaces, is an example that Robinson provides of the way Indigenous peoples, sound, and subjects experience forced integration. This integration can be expectations and concepts of performance. This is defined as an epistemological and ontological

violence and violation of the autonomy of Indigenous peoples and song. Spatial subjectivity is an aspect of Robinson's argument that exemplifies the importance of relationships to place and the agency space can give to experience, perception, and interaction. Overall, the case studies used throughout the text reveal how "inclusionary music" reinforces settler expectations and confines Indigenous ways of expression into formats that disallow the action of reclamation and autonomy.

There are various ways in which Robinson enacts forms of reclamation by declaring a space for his Indigenous readers within his work; for example, by writing a chapter for Indigenous readers only. These spaces are meant as affirmative actions of Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy. In addition, he includes several "event scores": poetic and prescriptive excerpts that interrupt the discourse and offer insight into elements of responsibility, accountability, histories, and human and non-human relations, which forge space for decolonization.

Political space sensory politics is an aspect of Robinson's argument that encourages sovereignty through the prioritization of Indigenous epistemologies through audience interaction, space, and sound. Sensory politics within this context partially pertain to the agency that nonhuman subjects deserve. This recognizes the intersubjective complexities that space can hold autonomously and in relation to sound. For example, the practice of restraining sound to only its aesthetic function, such as in Western art music practices, causes epistemological violence to Indigenous peoples and song. Robinson points to the act of scripting a performance as a key example of this violence and assimilation of Indigenous song. In addition, Robinson encourages the disruption of narratives that only look to reconcile through the projection of Indigenous trauma, victimization, or the melding of Indigenous song into Western forms of musical engagement. In conclusion, Robinson suggests a shift not only in performance formats but also through the way in which space, subjects, and relationships are allowed full autonomy. Through the commitment of responsibility for these subjects, there is the potential for reconciliation and the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty.

Robinson holds his readers responsible by challenging the ways in which settler society enforces our perception and engagement with sound. The contributions of this book and its concepts will resonate among Indigenous scholars but is intended as a text to help in the deconstruction of colonialism and to ground Indigenous epistemologies within sound studies. This text would benefit scholars attempting to conceptualize Indigenous ways of being and decolonial theory in the realm of music studies. It is a comprehensive text that provides terminology and concepts that allow for the engagement into an alternative worldview and relationship to sound. Through the deconstruction of settler colonial interactions with Indigenous sounds and peoples, Robinson draws on the values of Indigenous epistemological and ontological frameworks that prove the ability to hold a space that allow agency and sovereignty. He does this by outlining important concepts such as listening positionality, affirmative action, and decolonial practices. Robinson calls his readers to the opportunity to deconstruct the "tin ear" of settler colonialism and allow for a conceptual awareness that unsettles the ways in which we exert hungry listening.