Public Ears and Auditory Shields:
Sound Spaces for Democratic Education

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John Dewey is credited with a philosophy of democratic education that identifies the conditions necessary for critical communication and pedagogical interaction to manifest. One such condition is that educational spaces must be insulated from the broader public and public life, and that education must itself be a vehicle for creating community. In this essay, I extend on Dewey's work by arguing that sound plays a vital role in satisfying the condition that educational spaces must be separated from public life. I theorize an "auditory shield," a practice that excludes the public ear from educational spaces and allows for play and experimentation with convictions and beliefs. To demonstrate how sound constitutes pedagogical interaction, I offer a case study of "the spread" in American style intercollegiate policy debate. I define spreading as the practice of providing as many arguments as possible within the time limits for a debate. While I apply this theory of the auditory shield to a set of intercollegiate American style policy debates, the argument is that the auditory shield can help explain a broader set of auditory publics, how they deliberate while navigating the public ear, and how sound constitutes the pedagogical interactions that produce dialogue and deliberation.
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In Fall 2008, a reporter from the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Richard Lake, came to report on the success of the local college debate team in Las Vegas, Nevada. When he listened to the first speech, he was horrified. He reported, the speaker "waves his arms, sucks in breaths so quick and deep he sounds like a dolphin. What comes out of his mouth seems ridiculous."[1] Lake smashed lines of letters together to illustrate how it might have sounded and wrote that it "made no sense" and remarked "it sounds like, one long string of unseparated words, like a comedic performance without the comedy."[2] The reporter confronted what is known in the debate community as "spreading." Spreading describes the practice of speaking rapidly to offer as many arguments as possible within the time limits. And, for Lake, it was "completely incomprehensible."[3] Lake's experience resonates for those who imagined competitive debate as an exercise in public eloquence but are shocked to find it is otherwise. Yet, those familiar with competitive debate, specifically American style policy debate, recognize that the activity's aims are not training better public speakers, but better *critical thinkers*.

Many have noted that spreading produces critical thinking by asking students to calculate the best counter attacks, weigh outcomes, evaluate claims, and make tactical concessions.[4] I am not interested in making these arguments—because these studies are primarily concerned with the students evaluating content of the speech—cleaving the content from sonorous form. Studies focusing on the content of speeches views debate as a disembodied series of reading texts. But, spreading also involves breath, vibrating vocal cords, and smacking lips. What is missing from studies about the content of debate speeches is sustained study of the sonic dimensions of spreading. In this context, sound is defined as "vibrating air molecules apprehended by the body and consciously registered as" culturally significant.[5] Beyond overwhelming an opponent with reasons, spreading creates an auditory space for both sides in a debate to experiment with ideas.

In ordinary settings, students must contend with "public ears," or a listening practice that assumes a spoken commitment represents convictions (people believe what we say). This essay argues spreading provides a paradigm case

of an "auditory shield," which I define as the spontaneous creation of an ephemeral, sonorous space precludes the public ear from listening, and facilitates experimentation with commitment without fear of them being mistaken as a conviction. That is to say, it allows students to advance position they might not actually believe, to test out different positions, beliefs, and identities. Sound's capacity to exercise form, flow, and force, enables the auditory shield to exercise unique forms of sonorous privacy that ensures students have mobile spaces to play with ideas, identities, and commitments without public risk of distraction or interference. This is a position that is underscored in an era when spaces are increasingly digitized, uploaded, and propagated. While an auditory shield does not guarantee the best protection, its sonorous qualities hold some hope of preserving spaces for democratic experimentation where people can play creatively with novel ideas before carrying them out in public life, enhancing their critical thinking skills.

The next section outlines John Dewey's philosophy of education to explain the importance of critical experimentation as a foundation of democratic pedagogy. However, for experimentation of ideas to remain democratic, students need a space separate from the public, and an auditory shield is an example of such a space. I then apply the theory to the practice of spreading. Here, I turn to a personal performance of spreading, reviewing the many, contradictory positions circulating online. The key point is that the auditory shield makes it difficult, if not impossible for the public ear to make sense of what is said. Finally, I conclude by speculating on the cacophony of auditory shields.

The essay offers two interventions. First, this work extends into sound studies and pedagogy. Christopher McRae and Keith Nainby explored "listening in the classroom as a starting place for considering what a pedagogical emphasis on an ethic of listening might sound like" by arguing that listening is "a necessary constitutive element" of pedagogy that reveals "our ethical relation to one another."[6] I extend this work by moving from ethics to politics, arguing that sound provides pedagogical resources that facilitate a robust democratic culture. When sound creates enclaves for people to test commitments and eventually forge convictions, it enhances democratic decision-making.[7] Second, the auditory shield intervenes in the sub-discipline of debate pedagogy and its influence on democratic

education. While the experimental "switch side" format is integral to most debate pedagogy; very few have considered its sonorous elements. A more robust account of the sonority enables study of the practice outside the logocentric language of "strategic trade-offs" that are common to prior research on debate pedagogy.

DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHY OF DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION, AND PUBLIC LIFE

The relationship between education and public life centers on the democratic potential of learning environments. Some suggest that pedagogical interactions connecting education and public life ought be a process that directly involves the public ear for dialogue and experimentation. Rosa Eberly called for students and academics to become citizen critics, where individuals gather in public and deliberate over issues of common concern.[8] However, I diverge from this line of research on pedagogy and democratic citizenship, since if individuals in learning environments are viewed as citizen critics, then anything they say may become an assumed belief. The pressure that anything said in public sticks as a potentially permanent belief would chill speech and experimentation. For some students, they need an opportunity to fail with ideas, before they are held accountable for those ideas. Or, they may need to advocate and test those ideas, before they are held accountable to those beliefs. There must be a space for playing with ideas without the possibility of public sanction.

John Dewey argued that educational environments create space for members of a community to develop shared values, a sense of social identity, and to test ideas. Dewey is credited with a comprehensive theory of the relationship between education and democratic experimentation in his germinal works, *Philosophy of Education* and *The Public and its Problems*. Members of a society need educational spaces to explore ideas and to figure out who they are, individually and collectively, by testing those ideas. Dewey contrasted educational spaces and public life by arguing that the former was a necessary condition to produce the latter. He claimed, "If we do not ask what are the conditions which promote and obstruct the organization of the public into a social group with definite functions, we shall never grasp the problem."[9] The public, Dewey argued, is a

"community as a *whole*," involved in "not merely a variety of associative ties which hold persons together in diverse ways, but an organization of all elements by an integrated principle." [10] Individuals with associative ties beyond temporal and geographical localizations, in Dewey's view, were "too narrow and restricted in scope to give rise to a public." [11] Although education is a cornerstone of the general public, pedagogical interaction must constitute itself free from the complexity and influence of forces outside of educational spaces.

As a foundation of public life, Dewey conceived of pedagogy as a series of educational spaces where students could form and shape their mental and moral dispositions. However, to accomplish this goal, educational spaces could not be open to the entire public for two reasons. First, educational spaces function as simplified social organs. The public, Dewey claimed, is too complex for students "to be assimilated *in toto*," meaning that educational spaces gradually introduce its members to "Business, politics, art, science, religion," and more. [12] In other words, the intimacy of learning environments prepares students for the social and political arenas they may eventually enter. This is not to say educational spaces lack social qualities or that they are entirely disconnected from public life. "Many private acts are social," Dewey argued; "their consequences contribute to the welfare of the community or affect its status and prospects." [13] Educational spaces have bestowed communities with "works of art, with scientific discoveries, because of the personal delight found by private persons in engaging in these activities," making the exclusivity of such spaces "socially valuable both by indirect consequences and by direct intention." [14] The social value of an educational space extends beyond creation and discovery. It also indirectly teaches students to take risks, becoming open and vulnerable to alternative, unfamiliar, and sometimes-uncomfortable perspectives.

Second, educational spaces are free from the influence of outside stakeholders. According to Dewey, educational spaces, insulated from public life, could free its inhabitants from the influence of social and political environments to which they ordinarily belong, allowing them to test ideas from new perspectives. He claimed that students participating in dialogue with multiple perspectives created a private, transactional learning process that prepared them for tackling public problems later on:

When A and B carry on a conversation together the action is a trans-action . . . the activity lies between them; it is private . . . The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for [15]

This transactional process, Dewey argued, was "the line between private and public," a line that was "to be drawn on the basis of the extent and scope of the consequences of acts which are so important as to need control, whether by inhibition or promotion" in order to maintain learning environments as an experiential medium. [16] Without separating educational spaces and public life, "they tend to encroach on one another." [17] If public life encroaches on the sanctity of education, the moral and social quality of pedagogy suffers.

Dewey contended "effective moral training" could only occur in educational spaces if certain conditions were met. The most significant condition for an educational space to thrive is that it must "be a community life in all which that implies. Social perceptions and interests can only be developed in a genuinely social medium – one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience." [18] To be a genuinely social medium, educational spaces must be set apart from public life, yet form "a miniature social group in which study and growth are incidents of present shared experience." [19] The ideal educational space for Dewey was "a special territory" for individuals that could form "the whole ground of experience," yet "remain within its own boundaries." [20]

While Dewey theorized an educational space insulated from the public, he was primarily conjuring a material space. Since the "ultimate value" of an educational space was determined by its "distinctively human effect," Dewey called for "direct tuition or schooling" as the desired site of learning. [21] Learning was most likely to succeed in specific material spaces, when "Intentional agencies—schools—material—studies—are devised." [22] Building intentional agencies for learning, like the schoolhouses Dewey imagined, were the most effective avenue to "transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society." [23] The physical structure of a school was the primary means for insulating education from public life and regulating learning. Dewey argued that "the only way in

which adults consciously control the kind of education which the immature get is by controlling the environment in which they act and hence think and feel. We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment."[24] To shape educational environments, members of the community could weed out undesirable influences, omit things from the environment, "and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group" they were born in, coming "into living contact with a broader environment."[25] Since schools were material sites that were "deliberately regulated" for educative effect, Dewey treated them as "the typical instance of environments framed with express reference to influencing the mental and moral disposition of their members."[26] However, because of the available communication technologies at the time, Dewey may not have explicitly imagined the potential for educational spaces to be defined by not just their static material properties, but also by their sonic properties.

There may be temptation to treat educational spaces as static, material entities. Starting with sound, this essay expands how pedagogical interaction is understood; beyond a material, static site for learning, toward a sonorous activity that can be created anywhere. It begins that expansion by asking questions like: How do educational spaces sound? Who can listen to what happens in an educational space? What are the acoustics of those spaces? These are important questions; the answers have strategic effects on pedagogy, the parameters of professional communities, and the boundaries between public and private. This essay also extends on Dewey's conception of democratic education and its relationship to public life by moving beyond the claim that educational spaces are best characterized as a schoolhouse or similar institutional sites, arguing that such spaces can emerge in multiple places and times when protected by an "auditory shield." This essay's intervention avoids the temptation of understanding education as a predominantly static, material process, and instead as multimodal branches of activity, specifically sonic activity. People frequently employ "audible techniques," or culturally learned methods for identifying sonic activity and assigning it meaning in "public, private, and/or technical" circumstances.[27] Pedagogical interactions are produced by sonic activities belonging to distinct "epistemic fields, such as the mechanic's

capacity to discern the meaning of a car's noise."[28]

THE PUBLIC EAR AND THE AUDITORY SHIELD

Ordinary, everyday argumentation involves offering conclusions and supporting them with data. Yet, rarely is an argument so explicitly formulated in common discourse. People do not make conclusions and data so explicit. An auditor must rely on sonorous cues like inflection, emphasis, and pause to make sense of an argument and reconstruct it. The kind of listening involved in the process of arguing with others in the role of citizen is generally called the public ear. The "public" acknowledges the dynamic social nature of engaging anyone in their capacity as a fellow member of a community. A public ear is related to, but different from what Justin Eckstein called a public mode of audition.[29] While Eckstein used a public mode of audition to underscore how some sounds supply generic topoi for an arguer to draw from to offer a reason to do something, the public ear describes how we listen to argumentation as an interactional activity. The public ear describes how citizens listen to others arguing over what is in the interest of the common good. Such an act asks citizens to reconcile the costs and benefits of a potential policy action to the community against any possible ethical implications. Listening to a member of the public relies on a series of audible assumptions required to reconstruct ordinary language into a series of propositions and statements, complete with assumptions to turn vibrations into audible sound. In addition to interpreting linguistic content, the public ear involves a meta-assessment of sincerity of a speaker's proposal.[30] When someone advocates positions in public, the public believes that person is genuinely advancing her position. Most often, the person believes the position they have staked out, it is their conviction; an advocate would not risk being wrong in public if they did not believe in their cause.[31] In short, the public ear operates to suggest that a public commitment is a conviction. Sincerity has a ring to it; conviction has a tone, a volume, and a resonance.

While the public ear allows for citizens to meet in the public square to debate over the costs and benefits of a position, citizens also need strategies to evade being tied to a conviction in order to formulate beliefs. An auditory shield

provides a temporary reprieve from the public ear to experiment with ideas. As Dewey indicated above, enclaves for belief formulation are especially important. Yet, in the digital age, students may fear that their static learning environments may not be safe for exploring identity positions, ideas, or advocating for unpopular beliefs without the distraction of public interference. The notion of a space must be tweaked to accommodate that rapidly changing nature of our contemporary moment to recognize the realization that classrooms themselves are becoming enclaves that are shaping public discourse.

As a strategic tool, sound provides three ways to exclude the public through its form, force, and flow to create different kinds of privacy. Sound can manipulate intensity, frequency, and timing that may require virtuosity to discern (form), it can increase of slow down the speed of a sound (flow), or it can amplify sounds (force) in ways that are designed to exclude the public ears. Any one of these vectors can be used to exclude the public ear and create an auditory shield and create a private auditory shield and enable free experimentation. The form of an auditory shield may require some kind of virtuosity to discern a source of information available only to members of that community. For example, a group that primarily communicates via telegraph would need to understand Morse code in order to interpret messages. The flow of an auditory shield may have a high velocity, moving at a rate outsiders do not understand. As this essay demonstrates with the practice of spreading, only a community trained to listen to speech at high rates of delivery can understand what is being said. Or, the force of an auditory shield may simply be too much for an outsider to withstand. [32] It is important to note that an auditory shield may form if any one or more of these three characteristics are present. The form, force, and flow of sound may each provide an inventional site to create an auditory should.

Ultimately, the creation of an auditory shield demands unique modes of audition for its members, and when the need for argumentation between members arises, a set of judges or "referees" to evaluate the arguments made by those members.[33] Beyond evaluating claims in the content of a speech, the form of communication itself will have characteristics unique to a private group. When considering the sonority of a speech act, private sounds require specialized modes of audition, providing degrees

of intimacy to the speakers. Given the expertise needed to meet the demands of a specialized knowledge form, members of the public are unlikely to offer substantive contributions for evaluating the arguments made by requisite experts. The lack of public oversight also allows members to loosen convictions, exploring potential avenues without being beholden to the whims of public popularity. This allows space for democratic experimentation and informed judgments. As this essay makes clear, the capacity for members of a community to produce democratic judgments on a range of issues depends on auditory privacy to keep the influence of outside stakeholders at bay.

In the next section, I demonstrate how an auditory shield functions by analyzing a series of speeches that occurred during an intercollegiate debate tournament. A debate tournament occupies an in-between zone; students are debating issues of public concern. Even though students are in a school building, they must contend with the public ear, they are debating issues concerning the common good. Yet, students rarely offer positions in a competitive debate that align with their convictions. A debate tournament employs a method known as "switch side" debate, which Gordon Mitchell noted is a "malleable method of decision making, one utilized by different actors in myriad ways to pure various purposes."[34] Debaters "switch sides" by defending one side of a controversy in one debate competition and then defend the opposite side of that controversy in the next. While debate utilizes an insular jargon that excludes the public, it is the form, flow, and force of spreading that precludes public apprehension of what is being discussed, provides auditory privacy, and a pedagogical space to play with commitments and form convictions.

AMERICAN STYLE POLICY DEBATE AND "THE SPREAD"

The goal of spreading in a debate is to overwhelm an opponent with arguments, force concessions, and exploit those concessions. This practice is accomplished by speaking as quickly as possible, modulating tone, rhythm, and breath to maximize words per minute. Many debate practices spend time on "speed drills" to increase debaters' speed. If debaters are not fast, they will get "spread out of a round," they will be unable to keep up with all of the arguments, make too many concessions

and lose. Some speed drills include asking debaters to read evidence for thirty minutes at maximum speed to increase endurance, others might ask debaters to randomly increase vowels to enhance clarity, and other may tell debaters to read backwards to remove the need to read for comprehension. In competitive debate, the team who wins is often decided by how much of that team's arguments are addressed or conceded by their opponents. Spreading allows a team to overwhelm an opponent with arguments, increasing the likelihood that the opponent will be unable to address all of the arguments in the given time limit.

The rise of spreading in competitive debate can be traced back to chronicles in the *Journal of the American Forensics Association* (JAFA), the journal of record for the National Debate Tournament, in 1968. In his study of rate of delivery in the final round of the National Debate Tournament from 1968 to 1980, Kent R. Colbert found that "the average (speaking rate) of all debaters observed in this study has risen from about 200 wpm (1968) to 270 wpm (1980)."[35] Colbert extended his study into 1985 and found upward trend with speeds around 300 wpm.[36]

The following speeches I analyze are from American style intercollegiate policy debates sanctioned by the National Debate Tournament. In this switch-side debate format, a single controversy area and corresponding resolution is chosen for the entire academic year. Throughout a given season, debate teams conduct an abundance of research as arguments and strategies develop. It is not uncommon for individual members of policy debate teams to conduct research equivalent to a thesis project to satisfy requirements for a Master's degree. Policy debate teams prepare both a set of affirmative propositions and negative strategies that respond to the range of all potential affirmative propositions other teams may offer. Debate teams travel across the nation and compete against other colleges and universities at tournaments during the course of a season.

The controversy area for the 2011-2012 American policy debate season centered on the U.S. response to protest movements in the Middle East and North Africa, known as the Arab Spring. Specifically, the resolution for the topic was "Resolved: The United States Federal Government should substantially increase its democracy assistance for one or more of the following: Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen." This topic was introduced to debate significant issues revolving around whether or not the United States should assist protest movements achieve a peaceful transition in the aforementioned countries or whether such intervention would cause unnecessary interference.

Key arguments developed by affirmative teams included an obligation for the United States to reduce instability caused by state-sponsored crackdowns on protest movements, the need to maintain U.S. leadership in the Middle East and North Africa, and the benefits of reducing the sphere of influence other great powers, such as China or Russia. Conversely, negative teams relied on arguments that included the risks of incidentally propping up authoritarian regimes, overstretching the U.S. military, and criticisms of promoting democracy and meddling in elections of other nations. Clearly, the core controversies established by this topic required debate teams to take contradictory positions that often introduced highly sensitive issues. As a result, it was important that competitors did not feel pressured by the influence of outside stakeholders and the public ear when taking such positions.

I analyzed speeches from three debates from the 2011-2012 season, all of which occurred at one policy debate tournament. Each debate features the same two-person policy debate team from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), competing on both sides of the resolution against a different university. In the debate against "Team A," UNLV argued for a policy increasing local governance assistance in the Republic of Yemen in order to blunt the threat of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Then, in the debate against "Team B," UNLV refuted a policy calling for military education democracy programming in Egypt. Finally, in the debate against "Team C," UNLV took a unique approach, proposing that the youth movement in the United States join forces with protest movements in the Arab Spring as a rejection of U.S. democracy assistance. The key point is that UNLV made contradicting arguments in each debate, arguments they may not have made in reach of the public ear. In the first debate, UNLV was in favor of democracy assistance, while in the second and third debates, UNLV opposed democracy assistance. Despite the series of contradictions in their positions between debates, the content of each debate was highly informative and tested a variety of arguments from multiple perspectives.

Debate #1: <u>Affirmative versus Team A</u>

Against Team A, on the affirmative, UNLV made a number of controversial claims that, if mistaken for their convictions, may have invited public backlash. These claims included arguments that making drone strikes *more* effective was an ethical act, that the U.S. had an obligation to defeat a group characterized as a terrorist organization, and that imperialism was a necessary evil. While none of these claims necessarily represented the team's convictions, they certainly represented the team's commitments in the debate given the policy they had proposed and the arguments presented by the negative in response.

UNLV proposed the following policy: "The United States Federal Government ought to substantially increase its local governance assistance for democratic capacity-building to Shaykhs and the Yemeni Youth Movement in the Republic of Yemen." They made two arguments to support this policy. First, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was a growing threat in Yemen. This threat would culminate in three types of attacks on the United States, an attack involving the use of bioweapons, an attack on domestic forests resulting in mass forest fires, and an attack involving the theft of nuclear material. Second, UNLV argued that supporting local populations in Yemen's regime transition was necessary for a peaceful transition. This support would encourage Yemeni civilians to cooperate with the United States and form a human intelligence network, increasing the effectiveness of U.S. drone strikes targeting members of AQAP.

UNLV's arguments in their debate against Team A required several controversial commitments. First, they claimed that existential threats, such as an AQAP attack, must be prioritized over epistemological considerations, including whether or not the motivations for their policy were ethical. This was a sensitive position given debates heard by the public ear about the ethicality of U.S. drone strikes. Second, they argued that realism was the most accurate theory of international relations, and the AQAP threat was legitimate and true, another commitment that was highly contested in public deliberation. Third, UNLV claimed that criticisms of security logic would not affect the U.S. realist approach to Yemen, nor would they stop AQAP. UNLV's fourth argument was that a U.S. imperialist agenda was inevitable; it was only a question of its effectiveness. In other words, UNLV adopted a commitment that if the AQAP threat was legitimate, action was necessary, even if the motivations for doing so were unethical. Finally, UNLV's most controversial commitment was that abandoning U.S. imperialism was itself an unethical act, since U.S. leadership had prevented global conflagration since World War II and that the alternative was the rise of other great powers, such as China or Russia, advancing an equally imperialist agenda.

UNLV and Team A argued about several complex social and political issues, made clearer by utilizing competition as a simplified social organ for learning. At its conclusion, UNLV had covered topics including: international relations, democracy promotion, civil instability in the Arabian Peninsula, U.S. imperialism, the motives of non-state actors to incite terrorism, and the relationship between the War on Terror and drone strikes. The auditory shield created by spreading created sonic distance between the debate and outside stakeholders. Fear of distracting interference from a university, certain Internet groups, or even government officials, would no doubt implicate UNLVs' ability to play and experiment with sensitive issues pertaining to the ethics of U.S. democracy promotion.

Debate #2: <u>Negative versus Team B</u>

Against Team B, while on the negative, UNLV made a number of controversial claims that posed a risk of public rebuke. These claims included a call to eliminate democracy assistance for Egypt, that Iran did not pose a threat to Middle Eastern or North African stability, that democracy assistance would mobilize the Egyptian military to foment a coup and take over the Egyptian government, and that a relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was desirable. These claims did not necessarily represent UNLV's convictions, but rather their commitments given the policy their opponents had proposed and the arguments needed to refute it.

Team B proposed the following policy: "The United States Federal Government should offer military education democracy programming in Egypt to substantially increase Egyptian participation in military education democracy programming." Team B made three arguments to support this policy. First, they argued growing protest movements in Egypt made it likely that the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) would crack down on protestors, resulting in failure of Egypt's transition to a democracy. A failed transition presented an

opportunity for Iran and Israel to engage in proxy conflicts, leading to an escalatory war. Second, the U.S.-Egyptian alliance was necessary for the U.S. to maintain its global leadership, dampening the likelihood of conflict. Third, Team B's policy could alleviate these risks by offering Egypt military-to-military cooperation via the Expanded-International Military Education and Training program (E-IMET). This cooperation, they claimed, would improve civil-military relations in Egypt, allowing Egyptians to maintain civilian control of their government.

UNLV refuted Team B's policy with five arguments. First, UNLV argued that, rather than increasing democracy assistance to, the U.S. should phase out its democracy assistance to Egypt altogether. This was a controversial commitment at the time given burgeoning conversations heard by the American public ear to support democratic protest groups in Egypt. Second, UNLV claimed democracy assistance in Egypt was unpopular with the Egyptian public, military, and government. Augmenting U.S. democracy assistance in Egypt, UNLV argued, would cause anti-American populism. The implicit commitment that underscored this argument was that the reaction by Egyptians who preferred authoritarian rule outweighed the calls for help from democratic protesters. Third, UNLV argued that democracy assistance to Egypt was unnecessary because there was no risk of Iranian or Israeli aggression in North Africa. This commitment would have obviously drawn criticism if heard by the public ear, since there has been a constant debate in U.S. discourse about the looming threat of the Iranian nuclear program and support for Israel. Fourth, UNLV claimed the SCAF would control the media spin of the aid package, drumming up public support for a military coup and causing the peaceful transition to a democracy in Egypt to fail, resulting in the Muslim Brotherhood radicalizing. UNLV contended this would change Israel's strategic calculus, making a war between Iran and Israel *more* likely. Finally, UNLV argued that phasing out U.S. democracy assistance to Egypt would ensure the Muslim Brotherhood remained moderate, enabling a peaceful transition to an Egyptian democracy and a sustained U.S.-Egyptian alliance. If mistaken for a conviction by the public ear, this argument may have been understood as UNLV calling for the U.S. to actively support the Muslim Brotherhood, a position that may have proven unpopular.

In this debate, the auditory shield created by spreading created distance between the debate and the influence of outside stakeholders. The fear of being characterized as unpatriotic for criticizing the military, of right-wing backlash to calling for an end to foreign aid to Egypt, or even a pro-Zionist critique for arguing that Iranian threats to Israel were overblown, would no doubt implicate UNLV's ability to play and experiment with sensitive issues pertaining to the role that the U.S. military plays overseas.

Debate #3: <u>Affirmative versus Team C</u>

Against Team C, while on the affirmative, UNLV took a non-traditional approach by refusing to advocate a policy proposal to increase democracy assistance to any of the countries included in the resolution. Instead, UNLV argued that democracy assistance was unethical, a commitment that directly contradicted the one that UNLV adopted in the debate against Team A. While U.S. citizens have rights that afford them the freedom to criticize the federal government and its policies, the arguments UNLV made in this debate certainly risked their public face and could have incited interference from those in public earshot.

UNLV proposed the following advocacy statement: "The topic countries should provide democracy assistance to the youth movement in the United States." UNLV made five key arguments to support this advocacy. First, the epistemological justifications for democracy assistance policies rely on the logic of economic exploitation and imperialism. They cited democracy promotion policies in Iraq from the George W. Bush presidency as an example of how claims of building democratic nations can be a veneer for more sinister objectives. Although support for the Iraq War had dwindled, the commitment that democracy assistance was a ruse for economic imperialism may have drawn harsh criticism from public supporters of the democratic protest movements overseas. Second, UNLV argued that foreign aid packages in general and democracy assistance programs in particular are crafted out of calculated, strategic interest. UNLV claimed that the United States offered democracy assistance programs to nations it perceived as hostile in order to monopolize its own form of democracy and to build alliances that would help advance its imperialist agenda overseas. Third, they contended that economic exploitation in foreign nations was the most accurate historical explanation for the rise of racist, imperialist,

oppressive policies. To make this point, UNLV pointed out that the U.S. was largely responsible for installing the very authoritarian regimes that protestors in the Arab Spring were attempting to remove, such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. UNLV's commitment that underscored this argument may have easily been conflated with a conservative, isolationist stance on foreign policy by the public ear. Fourth, UNLV proposed that the growing anti-imperialist, anti-racist youth movement in the United States needed to join forces with the protest movements in the Arab Spring, independent of federal government involvement. This action, they argued, would allow protestors overseas *and* the youth movement in the U.S. to reclaim a form of democracy devoid of imperialist undertones. Members of the public may have likened this line of thinking to groups such as Occupy Wall Street, groups that were not universally popular in public discourse. Finally, UNLV argued that this combined movement would position U.S. citizens as the students of the unfolding democratic revolution, and not its professors. In taking this approach, powerful youth who would eventually have their hands on the levers of power could abandon the type of colonial management the U.S. had long employed through the façade of democracy assistance and promotion packages.

If the public ear had heard all of UNLV's debates at this lone tournament, they may have been confused or even outraged. Against Team A, UNLV advocated *for* democracy assistance, claiming it was necessary for the U.S. to be involved in Yemen's transition to a democracy. Against Team B, UNLV advocated for phasing out democracy assistance in Egypt to maintain a strong U.S.-Egyptian alliance. Against Team C, UNLV advocated *against* democracy assistance, claiming it increased economic and imperialist exploitation; thereby criticizing the types of government-to-government alliances they defended against Team B.

The ability for UNLV to advocate the plethora of positions taken during one debate tournament reflects Dewey's call for educational spaces that permit entry-level access to complicated social and political issues and to be able to share those ideas in the process of collective learning. There were clearly arguments presented in each debate that, if mistaken for UNLV's convictions or beliefs, would incite backlash from outside stakeholders. Fortunately, the auditory shields provided by spreading enabled the competitors to engage in democratic, educational experiments over the issues without fear of being reprimanded for engaging in playful pedagogical interaction.

ASSESSING THE AUDITORY SHIELD IN SWITCH-SIDE DEBATING

Although this essay's analysis of three American style policy debates begins from the starting point of the material status of a competition room, the static location of the debates did not factor at all into exploration of the auditory shield. In fact, the focus was on the vocality of the speaker, the topics discussed, and how they were communicated. The auditory shield shines light on the mobile potential of democratic learning environments. Had the competitor analyzed not engaged in spreading, then the material elements of the space, such as the walls of the classrooms, may not have protected them from the reach of the public ear. The form, flow, and force of spreading made it much more difficult for the public ear to conflate the content of the speeches with the speaker's convictions because the auditory shield was only accessible to those participating in the switch-side debate format, individuals accustomed to the acoustics of a speaker rapidly delivering information, the force of the delivery bouncing off of the walls. Given the propagation of American style policy debates online and the mobility of an auditory shield, particularly the practice of spreading, the competitor analyzed needed the ability to turn the shield on or off depending on the space in which discussion was occurring.

When an auditory shield is not in play during a competitive debate, particularly if a recording of the debate is circulated online, the public ear has access to the content of the discussion and the participants lose control of their dialogue, subject to attention by outside stakeholders. For instance, in fall 2012, during an intercollegiate policy debate at Harvard University between the University of Oklahoma and the University of West Georgia, the participants spoke at a much slower speed than is typical of intercollegiate policy debates and tackled sensitive issues involving structural racism. The University of West Georgia offered a critique of whiteness, advocating for a metaphorical "end to white life." This metaphor was not a suggestion that white folks literally die, but rather that life as we know it, life that structurally disenfranchises black

people, must end. Several online periodicals obtained footage of the debate, spliced up portions of speeches, and published editorials about "white genocide" with inaccurate information about intercollegiate policy debate that spread like wildfire. The *Daily Wire* referred to the debate as "insanity," labeling the debaters from West Georgia "pro-genocide activists."[37] *LifeZette* magazine published a similar editorial, mistakenly labeling the debaters from West Georgia "Black Lives Matter student activists" that were calling for white debaters to commit suicide.[38] Although the gap created by debating multiple sides of an issue and debaters' personal convictions yields the potential for switch-side argument to emerge "as the proper method of adjudicating disputes in a democratic culture," it must be done with the protection of an auditory shield, else it risks drawing unwanted attention from those that cannot separate competitive debating from participants' personal convictions.[39] While this essay provided one example of what this may look like in the world of competitive debate, there are many examples of debate rounds that circulate online and become subject to distracting public interference when they are not protected by an auditory shield.[40]

Reception to intercollegiate policy debates by the public ear demonstrates why Dewey called for educational spaces that are insulated from the influence of outside stakeholders who may have interests that exceed or contradict the issues discussed in learning environments. When outside stakeholders become involved in intimate learning environments, the possibility of a dangerous form of distraction is heightened. The danger is that public involvement in technical or intimate dialogue may conflate individuals' commitments and convictions in the democratic experimentation process or shift the focal point of the conversation altogether. If these are the outcomes, individuals' ability to utilize learning environments as a space for free play with ideas is hampered, undermining democratic potential, assigning static properties to interlocutors, and preventing them from carrying out their ideas in public life. The auditory shield allows for switch-side debate "to animate rhetorical processes such as *dissoi logoi*," offering a sonorous umbrella of protection for participants.[41] Despite the clear contradictions in UNLV's arguments between debates, each set of arguments is the product of rigorous research, tackling significant issues and producing knowledge from a multitude of

perspectives, forming a bond between debate and deliberation.

The rapid rate of delivery in the switch-side debate format, combined with the auditory privacy it affords, allows for community members to engage in socially valuable dialogue, gently introducing complex ideas and problems that impact the health of democracy and public life. This format enables students to discover politics, art, science, and religion, covering a wide breadth of topics without the overwhelming task of being fully assimilated into large social organs. While Dewey may have imagined a more static, material-learning environment, the auditory shield reveals how educational spaces have dynamic and mobile potential when specific sonorous elements are in play. Sonic activity may function as a mechanism for auditory privacy, but also as the foundation for pedagogical interaction in the first place.

The auditory shield is a necessary tool to carve space for pedagogical interactions without fear of social or political influence from public life. Auditory privacy enables educational spaces to serve their ideal purpose, to function as a special territory for study, growth, and shared experience through a give and take that culminates in effective moral training. Without the protection of an auditory shield, the line between educational spaces and public life becomes blurred, leading to Dewey's fear that the social and political predispositions of the public ear would encroach on pedagogical interactions occurring in educational spaces. The above example demonstrates what that encroachment may look like, when a group of online periodicals acquired video footage of an intercollegiate debate not protected by an auditory shield. Although an auditory shield may not protect students from outside forces that dictate how learning environments are funded or who is assigned to maintain them, the sonorous qualities of an educational space impacts whether and how intimate sharing of knowledge and values among its members is circulated within and beyond that space. As this essay has shown, the static, material structure where deliberative discussion takes place pales in comparison to an auditory shield in terms of offering students protection from the public ear.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I theorized the auditory shield as a mechanism for excluding the public ear from democratic educational spaces where students experiment with convictions and beliefs by testing commitments that are often contradictory in nature. The auditory shield makes a necessary move from static, material conceptions of educational spaces toward the dynamic, mobile, and sonorous potential for pedagogical interaction in learning environments. My analysis reveals the sonic potential of educational spaces beyond the classroom. If learning environments realize their democratic potential, then once they become unmoored from the schoolhouse or similar static spaces, students can establish new experimental learning environments elsewhere. The mobility of auditory privacy is especially important in the digital age, where individuals are constantly subject to the influence of outside stakeholders, requiring adaptive techniques to preserve auditory privacy and prevent unwanted distraction. This requires that educators and students alike acknowledge that static material privacy is not always available, but this analysis suggests that an auditory shield is a suitable adaptation in those circumstances. My claim is not that the public ear should *always* be excluded from the content of learning environments, but rather that the auditory shield functions as a sonorous on/off switch when the issues being explored in such environments require auditory privacy.

Theorizing the auditory shield also offers insight on pedagogy and sound studies more broadly. By studying switch-side American policy debate, I demonstrated that the sonorous elements of spreading enable participants to temporarily suspend their convictions in order to examine, explore, and experiment with a variety of contradictory commitments that could otherwise incite unwanted distractions or responses if heard by the public ear. There is a need for scholars of debate pedagogy to more seriously consider the sonorous elements of argumentation and deliberation. Although sound studies has previously explored how sound can produce a public ear, this analysis begins a conversation about the ways that sound can impact educational spaces and produce auditory shields, and the ways that sound may insulate and/or protect those auditory shields from the public ear. While Eckstein argued that "sonic

signals . . .must adhere to the auditory context to be relevant to the discussion," this analysis reveals some ways that "sounds can create a new context," insulating auditory shields from public exposure by imposing specific types of sonorous form, flow, or force.[42] Future research should continue exploring the relationship between sound and a cacophony of other private communities, including but not limited to: the climatology community, the military, labor unions, the argumentation community, and others. In each of those private communities, there is often a need for auditory privacy in order to prevent distraction or interference from the public ear that may undermine the goals of each group.

While this essay identified a specific set of benefits to an auditory shield and hope to expand that analysis to a range of other auditory shields, future research should also consider the ways that auditory shields may cultivate a problematic relationship with evidence, argumentation and debate, and community. With regards to evidence in American style policy debate, the "confluence of speed, evidence, time constraints, and a burden of rejoinder cultivates . . . a sound to listener relationship, where the veracity is assumed and significance is dictated by strategies, not the least of which is vocal."[43] In other words, auditory shields in American style policy debate allow for the experimentation of ideas, but encourages a form, flow, and force of evidence proliferation that may trade off with a demand for high quality research, in depth discussion of specific bodies of literature, and the substitution of evidence for reasoning. Moreover, when the quantity of evidence trumps the quality of individual arguments, a condition of auditory shields in policy debate, "the rationality used to organize the evidence relegates veracity to the epiphenomenal. This fosters an epistemic leveling, indexing expertise according to its exchange-value."[44]

In addition to evidence and argument, the auditory shield may cultivate a problematic relationship with community. Although the auditory shield offers a layer of protection from the public ear, the exclusion of individuals from participation has the potential to fracture community. The reality is that persons who wish to belong to an auditory shield such as intercollegiate American style policy debate may be unable to engage the form, flow, and force typically associated with the activity. Future research must engage this issue in a manner that

balances protecting debate participants from the public ear with fostering space for all individuals wishing to compete, coach, and judge in the activity. Auditory shields are designed to exclude the public ear, and I have argued there are benefits to this exclusion; but it should not inhibit interested persons from participation. If an auditory shield is a necessary condition for pedagogical interaction in isolation from the public ear, certain individuals will never be able to fully participate. This demands additional study aimed at investigating the acoustics of competitive intercollegiate policy debate and how to optimize the activity for testing argument while creating space for all competitors to gain the benefits from participation.

Despite the potential pitfalls of an auditory shield, it produces necessary conditions for pedagogical interactions that allow students to play and experiment with convictions and beliefs. The ability to engage in such dialogue better prepares students for the moment when they are fully assimilated into public life and must defend their convictions and advocate for their beliefs. Moving forward, the auditory shield is a foundation for exploring the ways that sound creates and enacts critical communication. While this essay analyzed intercollegiate American style policy debate, the analysis paves the way for additional inquiry into the ways that auditory shields constitute and shape dialogue and deliberation more generally. For instance, one particular avenue of inquiry worth exploring involves the intersection between auditory privacy and argument spheres. In that type of research, scholars may be interested in the use of technical language or community-specific communication techniques that heighten auditory privacy when significant political issues are subject to deliberation by experts. Additional inquiry in this area of research has two tangible benefits, it will teach us more about the conditions under which dialogue and deliberation succeed and fail, and it will help us to more completely understand the role that sound plays in critical communication.

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[11] Ibid, 39.

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[13] Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 13.

[14] Ibid, 14.

[15] Ibid, 13-16.

[16] Ibid, 15.

[17] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 288.

[18] Ibid, 416.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, 288.

[21] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 8.

[22] Ibid, 9.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid, 22.

[25] Ibid, 24.

[26] Ibid, 22.

[27] Justin Eckstein, "Sound Arguments," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 53, no. 3 (2017): 167, https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2017.1337328

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Alex Pentland and Tracy Heibeck. "Honest signals." *MIT press* (2008).

[31] For more about the natural normativity that emerges in an argumentative interation please see Jean Goodwin, "Argument has no function." *Informal logic* 27, no. 1 (2007): 69-90; Sally Jackson "Reason-Giving and the Natural Normativity of Argumentation." *Topoi* (2018): 1-13; Fred J. Kauffeld "Presumptions and the distribution of argumentative burdens in acts of proposing and accusing." *Argumentation* 12, no. 2 (1998): 245-266.

[32] For example, consider the metal band Myrkur. You have to have a particularly attuned ear to understand it, the tempo is so fast some may not consider it music at all, and it has such a force that it is painful for some to listen to.

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