

GHOST EXCAVATIONS AT BURNSIDE BRIDGE:

THE ACOUSTEMOLOGY OF A BATTLEFIELD HAUNTSCAPE

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*Abstract*

*This paper concerns archaeological fieldwork of the contemporary present, and focuses on what still remains of a Civil War battlefield soundscape at Burnside Bridge on the Antietam battlefield in Maryland. Antietam was the site of the bloodiest day of combat (with more than 23,000 casualties) in American history. A space-specific field performance, using an acoustemology of past soundmarks and “mimicking” I.M.P. (Inherent Military Probability) behaviors (or how the soldiers would have acted in specific situations), and focused in specific K.O.C.O.A. spaces (a military terrain strategy used by commanders during the Civil War) was used to “unearth” and record surviving “battle trance” (Jordania 2011) consciousness of this historic combat. The engagement at Burnside Bridge was called by some the “Thermopolyae” of the American Civil War. Various examples of these acoustical vestiges, including interactive communications, show that past social fields of militarily-defined presence still remain as surface assemblages at Burnside Bridge. The ability to unearth these vocalizations, using an archaeological sensitivity and sensibility, is based on the concepts of morphic fields and resonance proposed by Rupert Sheldrake (2012).*

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“We may have to come to terms with the fact that we are not the only souls occupying this earth, that there are indeed other entities, and that the sense needed to communicate with them requires a little care to develop” (Edith Turner, Anthropologist).

“No digging required. Just observe, engage, and think” (Rodney Harrison, Archaeologist).

“The spoken word is a gesture, its meaning, a world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, The Phenomenology of Perception).

“I don’t believe we can have an army without music”. (Robert E. Lee, Confederate General).

Kent Gramm, professor and author of various books about the Civil War (and a favorite writer of mine), once said, when asked what he does on the battlefield at Gettysburg: “We imagine....We try to see it. We make ghosts”. (2002:29) Personally, I

would disagree with him. I am an archaeologist. In my fieldwork, I do not “make ghosts”. I recover their still active presences. My “excavations” are a different type of archaeological approach to the unearthing of past material remains. It is not so much a “dig” into the past as it is a performance aimed at specific past actors. The archaeological act becomes, during the “excavation” process, a creative engagement with the past in which it (a past act) is produced in the present. This is a post-modern view of an archaeology of the contemporary past, and represents a break with traditional field methodologies.

The field of archaeological work can no longer be considered an exclusive focus that is centered on the excavation of past material remains. A present-centered gaze is today based on a shift “away from the study of the ruin....to become a discipline which is concerned with both the ‘living’ and the ‘dead’ (Rodney Harrison, Plenary Address, TAG 2011, Berkeley). This non-evasive approach, I propose, expands the field of archaeological inquiry (and its ensuing sensitivities) that move it from a concern for objects to a focus on agency, and from the physical recovery of material remains to cultural production. Archaeological fieldwork, in this new sensible guise, becomes an active agent of transformation that results in a reading with, rather than a reading from, “who” remains as past presence at many sites not considered archaeological in the past. This presence, as both residual and interactive manifestations, is no longer the “subject” of inquiry. The past, as a form of continuing presence, becomes a verb, something and someone that becomes present!

The “excavation” of the past, as the recovery of this presence, has thus changed. It is “life”, not exclusively “death”, that may be “unearthed” through an archaeological sensitivity and sensibility in fieldwork. This “life” becomes not merely a property (“alive”), or a series of properties (“material remains”), but a process, the unfolding of contextual cultural activity at a particular level of cultural production. “Life”, in this archaeological context, is not being. It is “becoming present” as a form of conscious behavior, unearthed through space-specific performance acts that are relative to past habitually-formed cultural situations and experiences. This is a view of the archaeological act “as a creative engagement with the past in which it (the past) is produced in the present” (Harrison & Schofield 2010:13). Until one “performs” as the archaeologist, one does not know “who” remains as the “audience”. “Remains” become not merely “what” is contained in the spaces of an excavated landscape setting, but whose presence becomes actively conscious through a non-evasive form of “excavation”.

Those life-forms of consciousness become present because, I propose, they are self-regulating social systems of communication that are “triggered” by auditory means. This auditory sense, and resultant manifesting sense data, produces presence itself. This is a model of archaeological work as a transduction within fields of social relations. This is a “sound” archaeological approach in which the sensory experiences of the investigators are linked to the archaeological environment of previous occupations. Space-specific performances can effectively engage us psychologically and emotionally, inducing a liminal state (or “stage” of performance) that can become a field of interaction between “what is” and “who becomes present” again. The amplification of a particular auditory resonance within a specific space can make manifest an immersive coupling of varied, once past, experience. It is here, within this “coupling field” where we can explore “being” as someone “becoming present” in a liminal zone that is neither present nor past but actual.

Specifically, what at first sounds uncanny can become a soundstage for both residual and interactive (past) auditory presences that “become present”. Especially prominent are the aural manifestations of habitual I.M.P. (Inherent Military Probability) behaviors of the “culture of war” that are being recorded within an acoustemological landscape of K.O.C.O.A. spaces on Civil War battlefields. Our “light peripatetic” surveys, following the original movements of battle in particular K.O.C.O.A. spaces on the Antietam battlefield in Maryland, have recorded the sense and sound of these I.M.P. behaviors (or how the soldiers would have acted in particular military situations and spaces) of this significant Civil War battle. Antietam was the site of the deadliest day of combat (with more than 23,000 casualties) in American History.

Our “light peripatetic” walk/survey, mimicking the movements of the Civil War battle, and the use of space-specific contextual performances, was a means of framing the battlefield using the K.O.C.O.A. fields as our baseline for excavation. This involved the documentation of aural vestiges of a past soundscape, and how it related to contextual I.M.P. behaviors of the Civil War soldier, occupying and fighting in particular battlefield spaces (the military configuration, K.O.C.O.A.). K.O.C.O.A. was the military terrain strategy used by commanders during the Civil War. K.O.C.O.A. stands for Key area (the military objective), Observation area (the location where battlefield movements were observed), Cover and Concealed areas (the location where units formed, rested, and retreated to), Obstacle area (the obstructions that were encountered in an assault toward the objective), and Avenues of Approach (the route of attack).

We sought to document how a past battlefield acoustic environment, as continuing surface configurations, might affect the contemporary archaeological record (as a particular layer of presence) as we extended our fieldwork to sonic articulations. Normally, we have only knowledge of past soundscapes through their “staging” on radio, in films, and in television documentaries as a mediated cultural heritage of sound. Why not use this same “staging” (as space-specific cultural contextual acts using past soundmarks) to recover those voices and other aural presences that may remain as traces and fragments of past (yet present) conscious I.M.P. behaviors? Such an approach involves an understanding of the soundscape as an informational system of social fields that remain operational (though fragmented) from a specific time period, location, and culture. If sound orients the body and anchors it in time and place, then producing and hearing particular sounds situate actors and their associate behaviors in particular historico-social worlds.

A battlefield was not perceived by the Civil War soldier as a physical landscape. A battlefield was, I propose, a soundscape, and I.M.P. acts and movements were initiated and conditioned by particular soundmarks received through habitual training and drills. Soundmarks (Schafer 1977) are sounds that possess qualities which make them noticed and evoke a certain state of awareness in a particular community. I propose that this particular state of awareness was “battle trance”, and that particular community was the culture of war (and its expressive I.M.P. behaviors) of the American Civil War. These soundmarks were both aural (drums, bugle calls, “rebel yell”) and vocal (“roll call”, commands, and military dialogue). It is proposed that activity fields of social and physical actions of I.M.P. behaviors were habitually conditioned through drills and particular soundmarks, and that these drills and soundmarks aided soldiers in combat and produced, I propose, what Joseph Jordania, in a recent book (2011), calls “battle trance”. “Battle trance” is defined as a specific altered state of consciousness that characterized the psychological state of soldiers in combat. I propose that traces of

“battle trance”, as surviving consciousness, still remain of these I.M.P. behaviors in particular K.O.C.O.A. on certain Civil War battlefields.

It is further proposed that this “battle trance consciousness” contains “some aspect of conscious personhood....(that) continues after the death of the physical organism” (Bowie 2010:100). I define this consciousness as “subjectively-experienced reality that is interpreted according to culturally-defined concepts” (Hume 2007:11). Thus, any interaction with past consciousness must be, I propose, contextually-framed and resonate with past occupations and cultural behaviors in specific spaces.

This means that in the context of our “ghost excavations”, the framing device for investigating and recovering past presence must be relative to I.M.P. behaviors of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War, and specifically directed at the “battle trance consciousness” of particular individuals in battle. Further, this directed “targeting” of individual (and “dead”) past presence must be, as Patric Giesler (1984) proposes (as a methodology for documenting psi phenomena) based within “a natural cultural or subcultural context....without (or minimally) altering or disturbing the context”. That is why the contemporary “ghost hunting” practice of “demand and command” (“show us a sign of your presence”; “do something”), coupled with the overuse of tech devices, is so detrimental to the integrity and context of manifesting past presence on Civil War battlefield sites. They are not contextual behaviors or vocalizations of past habitual I.M.P. acts.

“Battle trance consciousness” can be envisioned as a self-regulating morphic field similar to those proposed by Rupert Sheldrake (2012) as “social fields that link together and coordinate behavior of social groups” (2012:100). These “social groups” during the Civil War were the so-called “band of brothers”, whereby companies and regiments of men were recruited, trained, and fought from the same community/geographic area, and whose members were largely known to one another. This particular sense of “community” strengthened the cohesion and fighting ability of these groups, and was reinforced and maintained in combat by drills and particular soundmarks. On a battlefield, clouded by massive gunfire, it was these soundmarks that initiated and continued battlefield movement and flow (and their stationary pauses) in and through the K.O.C.O.A. spaces. The drills and soundmarks were an organizing field that maintained the state of “battle trance” in combat (and perhaps in death) because these drills and soundmarks were, in the words of Sheldrake, influences “by self-resonance from their own past” (2012:100), which maintained the identity and integrity of the “social field” (“battle trance”), as habitual behavior brought to “life” by specific soundmarks in battle (which recalled the non-combat drills).

Our fieldwork at Burnside Bridge on the Antietam battlefield was an acoustemological exploration, “as a sonic way of knowing and being” (Feld and Brenneis 2004:462) what still remains of the Burnside Bridge Civil War soundscape and specifically what remains of this “battle trance consciousness”. If, according to Sheldrake, “all self-organizing systems are influenced by self-resonance from their own past” (2012:100), then we could, by repeating soundmarks and contextual cultural behaviors in specific K.O.C.O.A. spaces that resonated with what occurred there in the past, recover what remains of that “social field” (community) of the I.M.P. behavior of “battle trance consciousness” of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War. If “minds are closely connected to fields that extend beyond brains in space....and....in time, linked to the past by morphic resonance” (Sheldrake 2012:229), then we could

communicate with those who remain because we would be identified as part of that community through our resonating behaviors and our contextual acts that responded to soundmarks in particular K.O.C.O.A. spaces. This would link similar morphic fields (as “social fields”) between the present and the past, and would represent the concept of “like attracting like”.

Sheldrake explains this process as: “all self-organizing systems are shaped by memory from previous similar systems, and drawn toward attractors through chreodes....(2012:228).The military drills (as cultural expressions of habitual I.M.P. behaviors of particular “social fields” and emotionally-stimulating applications of particular soundmarks that were practiced between battles) became embedded, I propose, in the memory of these soldiers. These memories were “re-activated” during combat through auditory (not visual) resonance, the soundmarks. The “attractors” were the embedded (and habitual) I.M.P. behaviors, manifesting as a result of soundmark stimuli (the “chreodes”). This patterning produced the “battle trance”, as habitual acts directed toward an objective in combat. That objective at Antietam was Burnside Bridge.

During our “ghost excavations”, we “unearthed” this “self-organizing system” of “battle trance”, I propose, through our space-specific performances in particular K.O.C.O.A. areas and our use of contextual soundmarks during situationally-performed acts. Cultural resonance was achieved through mimetic empathetic acts of certain I.M.P. behaviors that we recorded using RT-EVP recorders, triangulated with video recordings and photography. By using these RT-EVP recorders, we could hear any communicative responses to our actions through immediate “reveals” that allowed us to follow-up with appropriate contextual I.M.P. responses. These recorders were programmed to auto playback on a six second delay, allowing us to hear and immediately respond. The use of these recorders allowed us to construct an archaeology of loss through the recovery of previously missed communicative connects that are lost when using the methodological technology of “ghost hunting” post-investigative “reveals”.

In the analysis of the Burnside Bridge soundscape, we made a distinction between contemporary keynote sounds (those created by geographic and climatic conditions), contemporary signals (those created by human intervention), contemporary investigative “triggers” (drums, bugle calls, “rebel yell”), and historically-contextual soundmarks (sounds that were unique to individuals, the I.M.P. aural behavior of the “culture of war” of the American Civil War). In one of our mimetic scenarios, we recorded the soundscape of Rohrbach farm road, a Union avenue of approach, that contained all these elements (keynote, signal, “trigger”, and contextual) occurring simultaneously!

Our mimetic empathetic acts, organized into K.O.C.O.A. battlefield scenarios that sequentially followed the temporal frame of the battle, were NOT re-enactments, but mimetic performances aimed at particular historical actors in specific situations and spaces. We used the “mimic” concept as a resonating behavior to enact individual bodily behaviors (as non-verbal communication), senses, and sensibilities of I.M.P. behavior (as “battle trance”) empathetically. This allowed us to acquire a sense of past cultural reality through our own senses and proprioceptive movements. Taussig (1993) suggests that mimetic empathy is a powerful means of understanding, representing, and controlling investigative venues. Willerslev (2007) states that this “is the closest one can

come to experiencing another's point of view without being that other in an absolute sense" (2007:107).

Our use of mimetic empathetic acts and soundmarks in particular K.O.C.O.A. spaces created a field of morphic resonance, I propose, that bound together past "battle trance consciousness" and present investigative fieldwork into one specific "field" of haunting situational engagement. The manifestations that were "unearthed" in our "ghost excavations" afforded us meanings, in the context of current resonating acts that gave us representations of continuing social behaviors of a particular "ghost culture" at Burnside Bridge. It also created an open venue for future engagements (and transformations) of an expansive morphic social field of this I.M.P. behavior of the "culture of war" of the American Civil War. Since "like attracts like", the continued use (in the future) of our contextual behaviors linked to specific soundmarks would increase the frequency of manifesting presence by resonance with a similar past social field.

In this context, "knowledge" of what previously had been lost (or forgotten) was recovered by doing specific acts of cultural resonance in spatial, cultural, and historical context. This is an archaeological sensibility toward becoming present, AND an ethnographic sensitivity to past social realities. The scientific devices (EMF meters; thermal scanners: etc.) and pseudo-methodologies ("demand and command"; contemporary expressions) used in "ghost hunting", beside their lack of a moral and humanistic stance, do not give us this cultural knowledge. This is because, in part, they do not "mimic" past human behaviors and experience. What we "unearthed" and engaged at Burnside Bridge was not a transfer of energy, so much as it was an exchange of similar (and resonating) cultural information. At Burnside Bridge, our mimetic empathetic acts included:

- Bugle calls and "roll-call" at the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Monument that resulted in agentic manifestations of I.M.P. behavior. A Corporal Lewis Dayton, killed on the 1<sup>st</sup> assault toward the bridge, answered the "roll-call";
- A simulated "rebel yell" in the Union avenue of approach along Rohrbach farm road resulted in a contextual I.M.P. response that was ethnographically-sound. Someone answered "traitor" to the playback of the "rebel yell"; and
- The reading of a letter, in a cover and conceal area, written by an army surgeon of the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut to his wife describing the battle, read by a female investigator in "mimic" portrayal of his wife, resulted in an ethnographic manifestation of a "soldier", followed by others, singing about "home".

The reading of the letter at the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Monument, and the subsequent manifestation of the soldiers "singing" is significant. According to Jordania (2011), the central adaptive function of music was to put humans into a specific altered state of consciousness ("battle trance"). In this state, humans do not fear or feel pain, do not question orders, act in the best interests of the group (even sacrificing their own lives), lose their individuality, and are united in a collective identity (a "band of brothers"). This includes, according to Jordania, singing in groups before combat. The area of the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Monument was a cover and concealed setting used as a "staging" area for the 1<sup>st</sup> assault toward Burnside Bridge. Did we resonate with them, through our use of particular soundmarks (bugle calls, "roll-call", and the reading of a letter "home") that "unearthed" the "battle trance consciousness" of their first assault toward the bridge?

Did their “singing” initiate “battle trance” before attempting to take Burnside Bridge?  
Did we record that historic moment in time?

A “ghost excavation” involves field performances that produce messages that are multi-sensory in nature and which also include “tape recordings” of the environment which can be “played-back”, “erased”, or “recorded-over”. An example of the latter occurred in the K.O.C.O.A. obstacle area, the “bottleneck” located at the narrow entry point to Burnside Bridge. On September 17, 1862, this was the scene of intensive fighting, heavy casualties, and high emotion. During our “ghost excavations” there, we have a photograph (taken at 11:00 p.m. during a pause in the investigation) of a “jogger in shorts” running in full stride. There was no individual there “live” during our investigation, and this was confirmed by the National Park Service ranger who was there with us monitoring our fieldwork. The jogger’s habitual activity, a non-resonating action to what occurred there in 1862, did effectively erase or record-over any residuals of the intense battle in the “bottleneck”/obstacle area.

During our excavation, we also unearthed a “play-back” of the residual sounds of battle, along the Rohrbach farm road (avenue of approach) while simulating the assault of the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut. While preparing to enact a scenario on Burnside Bridge, we also recorded a totally unexpected (transductive) communication from a male that asked me: “Captain, is that you Captain?” This was NOT heard “live”, but was recorded on our RT-EVP recorders. This was a contextual question since I previously enacted (in a prior scenario) the “roll-call” of the 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut. There were many other aural responses that we recorded during our fieldwork at Burnside Bridge, including what I propose are “ethnographies of communication”. These were multiple, simultaneous manifestations of “becoming present”. This included aural (vocalizations), tactile (women being touched; a canteen of water being opened; a camera tripod moving), visual (moving “shadow soldiers”), and olfactory (smell of sulphur) elements.

A “ghost excavation” focuses on the triangulation of sound (as EVP), space (K.O.C.O.A.), and memory (I.M.P. behavior that manifests as “battle trance”) which creates an ethnography of communication that remains in situ as the surviving consciousness of the culture of war at Burnside Bridge. A battlefield was mapped by commanders along K.O.C.O.A. spatial parameters, but once the fighting began (and intensified as it did at Burnside Bridge) the physical map, with its visual focus, was lost. Flow, movement, and battle order became “guided” through the use of sonic elements, specific soundmarks. The K.O.C.O.A. battlefield mapping became an auditory map that evolved during combat.

At Burnside Bridge, during our “ghost excavations”, there was “recall” (what I call an “intelligent haunting”). This is, I argue, an “active reconstruction of the past....remembered....meanings or connections” (Sheldrake 2012:204). These meanings, I propose, are the I.M.P. behaviors of “battle trance” with connections through soundmarks. The Burnside Bridge battlefield landscape, emerging as a hauntscape, is the “unearthing” of cultural process (our space-specific performances which recovered similar past cultural patterns). The contemporary battlefield landscape, and its remaining past elements (as a hauntscape), was constructed and is reconstituted out of the interface between two similar resonating experiences:

- A codification of ambient sounds at Burnside Bridge and the I.M.P. soundscape as the organizing fields; and

- The mutual sensed experiences of verbal, musical, and mimetic contemporary vocalizations that reproduced the past I.M.P. soundscape and its “battle trance” consciousness.

In summary, what still haunts the K.O.C.O.A. spaces around Burnside Bridge, 150 years after the battle, I propose, are the continuing presences of acoustic remains of both residual recordings and interactive consciousness that becomes present (as verbal expressions) of frequent purposeful acts, thus representing the “life” not “death” that continues on the Antietam battlefield. Our mimetic empathetic contextual acts, in specific battlefield spaces, were resonating actions of “like producing like” that unfolded time and unearthed a similar state of consciousness to that of September 17, 1862. This represents, I propose, the continuation of an acoustemological and “social field” of a life after death.

A “ghost excavation” is a way of thinking about how past presence might continue to manifest. It is also a creative way of thinking about a particular sense of “community”, an old anthropological concept. A sense of community is one way to document why and where a haunting travels across space and through time in, I propose, an acoustical network of transduction. On the Antietam battlefield at Burnside Bridge, our non-evasive “excavations” showed how the “culture of war”, and its manifesting I.M.P. behaviors, can become present through contemporary performances of an ethnographic acoustemology of that particular “culture of war”. These excavations created, I propose, a semiotic relationship that collapsed the binary oppositions of Western scientism and philosophy in which there became (a verb) no clear distinctions between past/present, absence/presence, and alive/dead. A morphic “social field” unfolded time, and it compressed space into a surface assemblage that symmetrically linked present and past presences. It also created a transductive exchange of resonating acts and sounds that “re-played” the battle of Antietam in both residual and interactive forms.

Finally, the ethics of “digging-up” manifestations of interactive past presence and “bodies” of residual data should be more than simply obtaining the benefits of knowledge acquisition this fieldwork offers us. It must involve understanding, within the context of the humanity which bears witness to what was lost, what has been recovered, and how fragmented the remains have become. To confront bodies of remains and voices that retain the marks of politics, history, violence, and social ties must involve more than brief entertainment, or a lucrative economic venue (aka “ghost tourism” with “para-celebrities”).

A world, the contemporary one, where reality distinguishes between a past deposited in the earth as burial and something old and forgotten, and the present located on the earth’s surface as technological and scientific achievement, has disappeared. There is a new reality (or realities) of surface fields of ruin that haunt us. The significance that these hauntings reveal shows that there is no clear distinction between life and death. These haunted fields straddle the spaces between depth and surface. They are largely non-visible heterotopic spaces of expansive surface de-stratifications that contain multiple past actualities. These post-modern surface social fields, so ripe for excavation, are partially framed by improvements in technology. But we must never lose sight of a sound human element that “brings home” the point of sociocultural loss and familiarity that a haunting suggests.

That these same haunted fields do not fit the traditional concept of grounded excavation does not negate the importance of their cultural nature. This archaeological perspective of a “ghost excavation” is forensic work because it focuses on individuals and what happened to them in death. It is the continuing story of one Private Lewis Dayton, 11<sup>th</sup> Connecticut and one Lt. Colonel Holmes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Georgia (who is still buried near where he died in an unknown location). These individuals (and others), once lost and forgotten, become present as the “living” (not “dead”) representatives of all those lost voices still heard in combat along Antietam Creek, and who lost their lives at a haunted location we call today Burnside Bridge. Though it is usually a lonely and tranquil setting, it remains full of presences and the continuing horror of war!

Our fieldwork, combining habitually-learned behaviors (the I.M.P.), triggered and reinforced by specific contextual soundmarks, and integrated into a particular social context (battle/war) and military spaces (the K.O.C.O.A.), was designed to connect to the surviving consciousness of “battle trance”, a specific altered state of consciousness (ASC). Our field acts, during the “ghost excavation”, were used as a morphic social field, similar to those learned and executed in the past, that bonded, I propose, two communities in contemporary reality (the investigative team and a past, but still present “band of brothers”) together, joining (as “like attracts life”) present to past, and the presence of the past in future realities!

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## Biography

John Sabol is an archaeologist, actor, author, para-anthropological investigator of interactive past presence, and cryptozoologist. He has published 14 books, all dealing with his fieldwork, and his experiences acting in movies and on television. He has done archaeological excavations in England, Mexico, and in various parts of the United States, including site surveys in Tennessee and South Dakota. He has done ethnographic work among various native cultures in Mexico. He has also been an investigative consultant on the A&E series, *Paranormal State*.

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