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# The Unheard Orchestra: Sonic Manipulation as an Instrument of Totalitarian Control in George Orwell's Animal Farm

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**Abstract:** This research paper critically examines the under-explored dimension of sound and noise within George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, arguing that the manipulation of the acoustic landscape constitutes a primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining totalitarian power. Moving beyond traditional analyses focused on rhetoric and visual propaganda, the acoustic framework is utilized to uncover deeper layers of ideological control and psychological manipulation. Through the application of Foucauldian biopolitics, Gramscian hegemony, and critical sound studies theory, the silencing of dissent, the orchestration of loyalty through manufactured noise, and the strategic deployment of sonic violence are analyzed as essential tools wielded by the porcine elite. It is demonstrated how sound functions not merely as background, but as an active agent in the erasure of revolutionary memory, the normalization of oppression, and the ultimate betrayal of Animalist ideals. Key examples include the suppression of "Beasts of England," the cacophony of the "Spontaneous Demonstrations," and the terrifying soundscape of the purges. The conclusion asserts that Orwell masterfully employs sound as a metaphor for the insidious, pervasive, and ultimately dehumanizing nature of totalitarian control, where the very ability to hear truth becomes a casualty of tyranny.

**Keywords:** Acoustic Control, Sonic Manipulation, Orwellian Power, Totalitarian Soundscape, Noise Politics, Animal Farm, Propaganda Acoustics

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## 1. Introduction

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) stands as an enduring allegory of revolutionary betrayal and the corrupting nature of power. While extensive scholarship has dissected its political satire, linguistic manipulation, and characterization, the specific role played by sound and noise in constructing and enforcing the totalitarian regime remains a critically underexplored avenue. The acoustic environment of Manor Farm, meticulously reshaped by Napoleon and his cohort, is not a passive backdrop but an active, dynamic instrument of domination. This research seeks to rectify this oversight by arguing that the deliberate manipulation of the farm's soundscape encompassing speech, song, noise, and silence is fundamental to the pigs' consolidation of power and the systematic subjugation of the other animals.

Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from Michel Foucault (notions of biopower, surveillance, and the production of "docile bodies"), Antonio Gramsci (cultural hegemony and the manufacturing of consent), and foundational texts in critical sound studies (R. Murray Schafer's concept of the "soundscape," Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*), the intricate relationship between sound, perception, and political

control will be examined. It is posited that the pigs' regime is acoustically engineered: dissent is silenced, loyalty is sonically manufactured through orchestrated cacophony, and terror is inflicted via calculated sonic violence. The very definition of meaningful sound (revolutionary song, critical discourse) versus disruptive noise (dissent, independent thought) is monopolized by the ruling class.

The deeper thought uncovered herein is that Orwell, through his meticulous crafting of the farm's sonic environment, exposes a profound truth about totalitarianism: control is not merely exercised through overt force or written decree, but permeates the sensory realm, colonizing the very means by which reality is perceived and interpreted. The animals' inability to critically listen, to discern truth from manipulated sound, or to reclaim their own voices, mirrors their broader political disenfranchisement. The degradation of the revolutionary soundscape from the unifying chorus of "Beasts of England" to the discordant silence punctuated by the dogs' growls and Squealer's sophistry becomes the audible manifestation of the revolution's failure and the establishment of a new, equally oppressive order. This analysis aims to reveal how Orwell uses sound not just descriptively, but symbolically and functionally, to illustrate the insidious, pervasive nature of power that operates beneath the level of conscious argument.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with *Animal Farm* has traditionally prioritized its political allegory, linguistic themes, and historical parallels. Early criticism, such as that by Irving Howe ("Orwell: History as Nightmare," 1956), focused heavily on its anti-totalitarian message and satire of the Soviet Union. The manipulation of language, epitomized by Squealer and the commandments, has received sustained attention, notably in works like Robert Conquest's reflections on propaganda and in numerous essays analyzing "Newspeak" concepts applied to the farm (e.g., John Rodden's *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, 2007). Character studies often dissect Napoleon's ruthlessness, Boxer's tragic loyalty, and Benjamin's cynicism (e.g., Stephen Sedley's "Orwell's Animals" in *Essays in Criticism*, 1985).

However, the sensory dimension of Orwell's control mechanisms, particularly sound, has been largely peripheral. While the power of rhetoric is acknowledged, the specific acoustic delivery Squealer's persuasive timbre, the intimidating growls, the volume and rhythm of chants—is seldom the central focus. Studies of propaganda in the novel (e.g., Annabel Patterson's "The Orwellian Prophecy" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 1984) often remain at the level of content, neglecting the sonic vehicle. Similarly, analyses of violence typically concentrate on its physical and visual aspects (the dogs' attacks, the executions) rather than the psychological impact of its associated sounds (snarling, gunfire, terrified bleating).

The theoretical grounding for analyzing sound politically is well-established elsewhere. Michel Foucault's exploration of power/knowledge regimes in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) provides a crucial lens: power operates not just repressively but productively, shaping perception and behavior. The concept of Panopticism, while visual, extends metaphorically to the auditory realm the potential of being overheard can induce self-censorship. Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony (*Prison Notebooks*, written 1929-1935) illuminates how ruling classes maintain dominance not only through coercion but by shaping culture and common sense, a process inherently involving control over communication channels, including sonic ones. The orchestration of "spontaneous" demonstrations and songs exemplifies manufactured consent through acoustic means.

Critical sound studies offer indispensable tools. R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977) provides the vocabulary: the farm undergoes a deliberate transformation from one "soundmark"

("Beasts of England") to another (the gun salutes, the sheep's chants). Jacques Attali's seminal *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977) posits sound as a herald of social change and a tool for control: "Music is prophecy... Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code." Napoleon's regime actively suppresses revolutionary "noise" (dissent) and replaces it with ordered, controlled sound signifying its power. More recent work, like Brandon LaBelle's *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2010), explores how sound shapes social space and power relations, concepts directly applicable to the farm's changing sonic geography.

This research integrates these established political and sonic theories, applying them systematically to the specific acoustic text of *Animal Farm* to fill a significant gap in Orwellian scholarship, revealing how power resonates literally and figuratively throughout the novel.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Orchestrating Oppression - The Acoustic Regime of *Animal Farm*

The transition from Jones's Manor Farm to *Animal Farm*, and subsequently to Napoleon's dictatorship, is audibly charted through the deliberate dismantling of one acoustic order and the imposition of another. This sonic restructuring is not incidental but a core strategy of totalitarian control, operating on multiple levels simultaneously.

##### A. Silencing Dissent and Erasing Memory: The Suppression of Revolutionary Sound

The revolution's initial triumph is marked by a powerful, unifying sound: the singing of "Beasts of England." This song functions as a revolutionary "soundmark" (Schafer), an acoustic symbol binding the animals through shared ideology and aspiration. Its lyrics promise a future defined by freedom and equality, and its collective performance embodies solidarity. Old Major's initial teaching of the song creates the first instance of acoustic community among the animals, a shared sonic identity distinct from the human world ("it was stirred to its depths").

The pigs' rise to power necessitates the silencing of this potent symbol. Squealer's explanation for its abolition is a masterclass in linguistic and acoustic manipulation framed as necessity: "The song Beasts of England was the song of the Rebellion. But the Rebellion is now completed." The argument posits the song as dangerous "noise" (Attali) in the new order, potentially fostering dissent by reminding animals of the original, unfulfilled ideals. Its replacement with the hollow, unmemorable "Animal Farm, Animal Farm, Never through me shalt thou come to harm!" represents a deliberate impoverishment of the acoustic landscape. The new song lacks the evocative power, historical depth, and emotional resonance of the original; it is a sonic placeholder, designed for rote repetition rather than inspiration, signifying loyalty to the regime rather than to the ideal. Its blandness ensures it cannot serve as a vessel for counter-hegemonic thought (Gramsci). The silencing of "Beasts of England" is thus an act of acoustic amnesia, severing the animals from the emotional and ideological core of their own revolution, making them more susceptible to the rewritten narrative presented by Squealer.

Further acts of silencing occur throughout the consolidation of power. The abrupt expulsion of Snowball is accompanied by the "tremendous baying" of the dogs, a sound specifically cultivated by Napoleon as an instrument of terror. This sonic violence immediately stifles debate and protest. The growl of the dogs becomes the primary sound associated with dissent suppression a constant, low-level acoustic threat that induces self-censorship (Foucault's Panopticism applied acoustically). The animals learn that voicing opposition risks triggering this terrifying sound. Public discourse is reduced to ritualistic acclamations ("Long live Comrade Napoleon!") or fearful silence. Benjamin's characteristic silence, while stemming from cynicism, also reflects the impossibility of meaningful critical

speech within the new acoustic regime. His refusal to vocalize dissent is a tacit acknowledgment of the sonic danger zone created by the regime.

### **B. Manufacturing Consent and Simulating Unity: The Cacophony of Control**

While dissent is silenced, specific forms of noise are actively amplified and orchestrated by the regime to simulate unity, demonstrate power, and overwhelm critical thought. These sounds are not organic expressions of the animals but carefully stage-managed performances demanded by the pigs.

The "Spontaneous Demonstrations" are the pinnacle of this manufactured cacophony. The term itself is a linguistic lie mirrored in its sonic execution. There is nothing spontaneous about the "roar of gunfire," the "bleating" of the sheep trained to chant slogans ("Four legs good, two legs bad!" later modified), the "quacking" of the ducks, or the general uproar. This is a calculated sonic spectacle designed for several purposes:

**Overwhelm and Obfuscate:** The sheer volume and chaotic energy drown out individual thought or potential questioning. It creates an acoustic environment where critical reflection is physically difficult.

**Manufactured Euphoria:** The noise generates a false sense of excitement and collective purpose, fostering an emotional, non-rational loyalty to Napoleon (Gramsci's manufactured consent). Participation becomes compulsory, conflating volume with loyalty.

**Demonstration of Power:** The gunfire, controlled solely by the pigs, is the most potent sound, symbolizing their monopoly on violence and their ability to punctuate the spectacle with displays of force. It serves as a periodic sonic reminder of who holds ultimate power.

**Ritualistic Reinforcement:** The regularity of these events turns them into sonic rituals, habituating the animals to the regime's dominance through repeated acoustic immersion. The soundscape itself becomes a disciplinary tool (Foucault), conditioning acceptance.

The sheep's chants deserve particular attention. Their incessant, mindless repetition of simplistic slogans acts as sonic wallpaper, constantly reinforcing the regime's messaging while simultaneously blocking other discourse. Their bleating becomes a weapon against complex thought, reducing ideological positions to easily digestible, endlessly repeated sonic bites. When the slogan changes to "Four legs good, two legs better!" to accommodate the pigs' adoption of human habits, the sheep's immediate, unthinking adoption of the new chant demonstrates the complete success of this acoustic conditioning. The meaning is irrelevant; the sonic act of chanting loyalty is paramount.

Squealer's persuasive voice is another key instrument. His vocal characteristics – described as "able to turn black into white" are crucial. His tone is often described as soothing, confidential, or reasonable, even when delivering blatant falsehoods or terrifying threats. This manipulation of vocal timbre and delivery disarms potential resistance. His speeches are strategically timed, often following unsettling events or when doubts arise, using sound to reshape perception and memory ("You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege?"). His voice becomes the primary channel through which "truth" is acoustically defined and disseminated, a constant sonic drip feeding the official narrative.

### **C. Sonic Violence and the Enforcement of Terror: The Soundscape of Purge and Punishment**

Sound is not only used for manipulation and manufactured consent but also as a direct instrument of terror to enforce obedience and eliminate opposition. The acoustic landscape becomes a theatre of cruelty.

The most chilling example is the soundscape accompanying the purge of the animals falsely accused of conspiring with Snowball. Orwell meticulously details the sounds:

The "terrified squealing" of the victims.

The "savage growling" of the dogs.

Napoleon's "slow and menacing" demand for confessions.

The "squeals of pain" during the attacks.

The finality of the gunshot after each forced confession: "And so the tale of confessions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones."

This sequence constructs a harrowing soundscape of fear, pain, and death. The growls and squeals create a visceral sense of terror. The gunshot acts as a brutal, terminal punctuation mark, silencing the victim permanently and signaling the regime's absolute power over life and death. The sound of the gun, previously used in celebratory salutes, is repurposed as an instrument of execution, demonstrating the complete subordination of all sounds to the regime's needs. The resulting silence, "heavy with the smell of blood," is itself a powerful acoustic element – the silence of trauma, shock, and utter submission. This event acoustically brands the fear of the regime onto the collective psyche of the animals. The memory of these sounds serves as a powerful deterrent against future dissent, long after the blood is washed away. The dogs' growls, henceforth, carry the echo of this massacre.

The fate of Boxer is also acoustically poignant. His removal in the knacker's van is accompanied by his desperate cries for help ("'Fools! Fools!...' 'Fools! Do you not see what is written on the side of that van?'"). Benjamin's belated reading of the van's sign is too late. Boxer's cries, the ultimate sound of betrayed loyalty and vulnerability, are ignored or misinterpreted by the animals, demonstrating their profound conditioning and the regime's success in controlling the narrative even acoustically. The van's departure leaves behind a silence filled with unease, quickly filled by Squealer's soothing lies about Boxer's glorious deathbed. The true sound of betrayal is suppressed, replaced by the regime's sanctioned sonic fiction.

#### **D. The Final Sonic Betrayal: Assimilation and the Triumph of Discord**

The novel's culmination presents the ultimate acoustic symbol of the revolution's betrayal: the sound of argument and laughter emanating from the farmhouse during the poker game between the pigs and the neighboring human farmers. The animals, peering through the window, witness a scene indistinguishable from Jones's time, but it is the sound that delivers the final blow: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which." This indistinguishability is acoustically confirmed: "No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which. Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.").

The "twelve voices... shouting in anger" signify the complete assimilation of the pigs into the human world they originally revolted against. The unique revolutionary voice of the animals has been extinguished. The sound of discordant human argument a sound associated with the old oppression – has returned, now emanating from the new oppressors who were once comrades. This final sonic tableau confirms the total failure of the revolution and the establishment of a new tyranny, audibly identical to the old. The silencing of the animals outside the window, their inability to protest this final betrayal acoustically, underscores their complete subjugation. The acoustic landscape has come full circle, mirroring the political regression.



#### 4. Conclusion

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* masterfully utilizes the manipulation of sound and noise as a central, yet critically underappreciated, mechanism for portraying the rise and entrenchment of totalitarian power. Through the deliberate dismantling of the revolutionary soundscape (symbolized by the silencing of "Beasts of England") and the construction of a new, oppressive acoustic regime, Napoleon and his cohort demonstrate that control extends far beyond the written commandment or the unleashed dog. It permeates the very air the animals breathe and the sounds they hear.

The analysis, grounded in Foucauldian concepts of biopower and disciplinary mechanisms, Gramscian theories of cultural hegemony, and critical sound studies frameworks provided by Schafer and Attali, reveals the multifaceted nature of this acoustic control:

**Silencing as Erasure:** The suppression of dissent and revolutionary memory through the abolition of subversive songs and the constant threat of sonic violence (the dogs' growls) enforces a suffocating silence conducive to unchallenged rule.

**Noise as Obfuscation and Consent:** The orchestration of cacophony ("Spontaneous Demonstrations," sheep chants) overwhelms critical faculties, simulates unity, and manufactures consent through compulsory participation and emotional manipulation. Squealer's persuasive voice acts as the constant sonic drip of propaganda.

**Sound as Terror:** The deployment of sonic violence (the sounds of the purge, Boxer's cries ignored) inflicts psychological trauma, enforces obedience through fear, and acoustically brands the regime's absolute power onto the collective consciousness.

**Assimilation through Sound:** The final indistinguishable clamor of pigs and humans arguing audibly confirms the revolution's utter betrayal and the cyclical nature of oppression, where the sonic markers of tyranny remain constant regardless of the ruler's species.

The deeper resonance uncovered by this acoustic analysis lies in Orwell's profound understanding of totalitarianism's insidious nature. True power, he demonstrates, seeks not just to control actions but to colonize perception itself. By dominating the soundscape – defining what can be heard, what must be silenced, and what noise signifies loyalty, the regime controls the narrative, shapes reality, and ultimately, destroys the ability to conceive of alternatives. The animals' increasing confusion, their inability to reconcile what they see with what they remember, is exacerbated by their inability to trust their own ears amidst the manipulated soundscape. The revolution dies not only through force and lies but through the systematic degradation of the shared acoustic environment that once fostered solidarity and hope. Orwell's genius lies in showing that the path to tyranny is paved not just with broken promises, but with silenced songs, manufactured cheers, and the terrifying growls that haunt the silence they enforce. *Animal Farm* thus stands as a timeless auditory warning: the struggle for freedom must include the right to hear, the right to speak, and the right to define the soundscape of one's own existence.

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