Introduction

*Noise and the Concept of the Cinema
Soundscape*

"So, what do you do?" I turn, still grasping the tongs from the cheese platter at a reception, and take a breath as I face the question. Or I bellow the response while waving my pear cider over the nearly tangible sound waves of overly loud music at a dim local bar. I answer it politely over the plate of asparagus at the walnut table at a very nice dinner party hosted by a friend. Sometimes I speak to it quickly while walking from place to place across campus with a new colleague, as we mutually attempt to explain just what it is we *do* before we arrive at a university event. Speaking about my research with friends, family, and new acquaintances, I often find myself having varying levels of conversation about the topic. If I do not believe the conversation will last long, I say that I write about cinema sound. If the conversation continues, I am often asked what I mean when I say this. When most people ask whether I write about the sounds of films, I say that I have done so. I also clarify that it is not really what I do.

All academics, of course, risk boring their listeners when they get too deep into their objects of study in conversation, and I keep an eye out for this. But I also watch for perplexity, which I feel I am more likely to need to combat. So, when I explain what I really study, I monitor where my listeners begin to resist the narrative. As I get deeper into the historical and cultural details of my objects of study, I see their expressions change, moving from a place of understanding and polite interest to a fracture of the social facade. "How is that cinema?" they ask. This story

is not what they expected to hear. And then I begin an explanation, with animation and an awareness of the need for what I research and write about. I trace a network with my words and the delicate, excited gestures that I trace in the air with my fingers, often realizing I am doing so only once I have already begun. I am delineating its outlines: sketching the approach I see that we as a culture have taken to film through sound throughout the years. This is unfamiliar territory for most listeners. What I do, I explain, is think about the manner in which we have listened to cinema over time. And this is a necessary precursor to truly understanding film sound in a certain, far-reaching way at all. Film sound is an aspect of a broader culture. I think of the sounds of cinema environments, rather than cinema texts. I think about what we bring with us to the listening environment in terms of sonic predispositions and beliefs, and how that conditions the sounds we hear and the way in which we understand those sounds in cinema culture. I focus on how the history of cinema aligns with the history of American listening culture.

The aim of this book is to make my most profound and best explanation yet, to answer that deep and consistent question clearly: What, exactly, do you do with this research and why do you do it? The answer is that I do it to present readers with a rich alternative to the conventional history of film sound. It is one that focuses on the aural context of film culture in its multiple environments, especially the contexts in which we physically encounter films and hear them. My aim is to articulate how, and why, a broader network of components of American aural culture is necessary for relating the history of noise that occurs within film culture. This history of noise in cinema culture recounts how we have listened to cinema within its varied environments, and what forms that listening has taken. Also, it elucidates what kinds of strictures we have placed upon this understanding and where those originate in our culture. Cinema sound is under these circumstances not the films themselves but the sound culture that surrounds them and allows cinema to be heard in the way it is.

This entails a different method from the mainstream. Interdisciplinary in its focus, broad in its scope of historical and cultural analysis, and clear in its aims of pushing the envelope methodologically, this book looks to move the boundaries on how we explore the topic of film sound. I believe we can expand the scope of cinema's preexisting methodology of sound studies to include projects that help realign the axis

along which we construct histories of sound in cinema. Widening the field on which we play and study allows the creation of a new type of history of cinema sound. This is what I do here. In connecting cinema sound in a systematic way to the wider world of sound in the public arts, the history of listening, the study of physics and electrical engineering, the study of acoustics and electro-acoustics, the history of technology, and the history of mobile listening, I map a constellation of forces that intimately connect media's sound historiography with the history of listening within specific moments. These efforts, ultimately, showcase how different forms of sound are connected within a broader culture and how that network of connections then finds a home in cinema culture. This scholarly practice allows us to think of cinema sound differently, as a category: of cinema as a culture in which sound has arrived in particular ways at particular times, emerging out of a meaningful confluence of aural cultural experiences. Cinema sound engages in creating a culture of silence and noise that tells us more than we might have imagined. In a mode of cultural sound studies rather than cinema studies alone, this work attempts to sketch that map, showing us where the fault lines are that mark the boundaries between "good" and "bad" listening.

This method builds upon previous methodologies. Among these are the study of the soundscape as a broader cultural term that allows us to map the sounds of a culture, the history of sound media, the history of listening in America, and cinema sound studies. The work I do here is not entirely new; its important antecedents are evident enough.[1] It draws on the excellent extant studies of the silent film era by scholars such as Rick Altman, the coming of film sound as analyzed by Donald Crafton, and histories of the aural culture of American society. In orientation, however, it is different from these works.

The goal of this work is, by example, to help create a small space for this type of sound work in cinema studies: one that is inspired by work on sound that ventures outside cinema studies. This includes work by sound studies scholar Jonathan Sterne, aural historian Emily Thompson, and film and media sound historian James Lastra, all of whom explore a broad range of sonic texts and contexts. It is similarly inspired by a growing range of texts on noise itself. Specifically, this new approach has to do with the way in which we align our sonic objects of study with the larger cinema culture. In analyzing the nature of noise in cinema and its relationship to what I call the American cinema sound-

scape, I assert the necessity of an expanded range of sounds that we think of as essential to the writing of film history. Noise, and sound proper, outside the realm of the text, become film sound too. The intervention that I pursue here, then, acknowledges the object of interest to be aural culture, a constellation of forces that constitute and create "cinema sound" in a much broader sense, and investigates a written aural history for cinema that emerges, not in its filmic texts, but in its far-reaching and varied aural-historical *contexts*. In what follows, the cinema soundscape that I analyze focuses on how we encounter motion pictures via the context of multiple forms of creation that bring motion pictures to us. These range from the exercise of creating environments for film exhibition to the industrial cultures of their creation. This book is engaged with how we listen to cinema—and how the construction of a sound culture around cinema creates that mode of listening.

I am also consistently interested in where the boundaries of an ideal culture of listening lie in cinema, and why, for reasons that extend beyond films themselves, they are set there; this is why noise, specifically, is a primary tool for me in my pursuit of the forms of listening that populate this book. I have chosen noise as a focusing device very consciously. Noise allows me to tell the sort of conflicted history that I need to relate to illustrate how the aural culture of cinema manifests its main concerns, and to explicate the issues of aural cultural tension that I have focused on within it. Noise answers many questions within cinema culture when we consider the matter carefully. How is the way we encounter cinema aurally conditioned? How do we know where the boundaries between good and bad sounds are set? The aim is for this book to be a provocative and thoroughgoing study of key moments in the history of two intertwined and neglected objects: noise, that little-understood but much-used term for many types of unwanted sound, and the sounds of cinema's aural contexts that have animated it over the course of its history.

These contexts include a broad range of sites in the history of American aurality in the moments that I study, including the history of modes of listening that, I will argue, turn out to be intermedial across these arts, ranging between and across media; the history of the development of technologies of cinema sound, and sound historiography; the history of acoustics and electro-acoustics; and practices of media use that carry some modes of listening across contexts. While each of these topics has been studied before, this particular mix forms a distinct constellation. My

method is also uniquely suited to articulate the need for "soundscape studies" for cinema auditoriums—one that takes the environments of cinematic listening as soundscapes to be explored. Rather than focusing on what is conventionally within the discipline thought to be "cinema sound"—that is, the sound of cinema itself, or of the artworks in which sound appears, or even of film exhibition environments—this work delves into a wide range of disciplines, creating a map of the soundscape of the cinema house itself, the field of acoustical research and development, the rise of architectural acoustics in film culture, and the phenomenon of smartphone listening, as well as the range of sounds that emerge from these contexts. The soundscape of cinema, then, enfolds the entirety of not only purposeful sounds but also incidental forms of noise, the creation of sonic rules for listening, the cultivation of sonic aesthetics, and ways of listening that condition our experience of cinema, on the understanding that each of these affects the way we listen in the auditorium.

The history of noise in cinema culture is not yet generally discussed, but it is consistently present in film history: in the work at hand, it is like an ongoing, flowing river that runs under an inhabited and meticulously mapped city. The city is the established sound culture: this is the basis for our way of understanding our written film history. It maps out the history that we know. We know the structure of the city: its streets, intersections, buildings, and landmarks are familiar to us. We even have a sense of its soundscapes, the sounds that we can expect to hear on any given corner. But we are less familiar with the sounds from underground that trouble the soundscapes above them. The underground river, with its constant sounds, is the history of noise. This book draws the two into a tight relationship, identifying their connectedness: how the familiar map operated in deep conjunction with the underground noise that existed in relationship to it. What was happening under the pavement when a specific series of events was happening on the street? Its sound can be heard between the elements of film history we already know. It becomes audible at the interstices, where the gaps in the official history are clearest: when it echoes through the chinks. Its sound lies underneath the sounds we know, as a sort of white noise that we have often ignored—often because we did not know what to make of it. Though we have been listening to the sounds of films, we have not harkened to the subterranean river, with its sounds. It is the white noise underneath a much more familiar story. When

we listen to it carefully, however, we hear what we generally try to filter out: what we did not wish to hear before, and what was considered extraneous to the story. This book thus functions to create a counterpoint to the more familiar history of sound *in* media: one that rounds out the richness and complexity of its entire soundscape, rather than just the sounds.

Throughout this project, I tasked myself, to the best of my ability, to call upon methodologies that lie outside media studies proper in order to analyze noise within that discipline. For that reason, cultural history, the history of the senses, urban history, anthropology, and the history of technology all feature prominently here. As a scholar who works specifically in the relationship between sound technology and cultural history, I find that the relations between sound technologies and our culture's ways of thinking about sound are especially vital to my project. My work, in this vein, relies upon media studies, sound studies, aural history, and aural culture. It draws upon the subfields of the history of electro-acoustics, the nineteenth-century study of the brain and the will, the history of etiquette at artistic performances, and the history of sound technology from transistor to podcast. I analyze how, and when, these factors interact with one another to produce a distinct approach to noise at many moments of cinema history. My mission is always to combine methodologies and produce a history that explicates how the soundscape of American cinema culture came to be. Noise defines where conflict appeared that strained the order. This work is not intended to fill in the gaps; rather, it attempts to identify a history that, despite being previously untouched, illuminates the one we already hear so clearly. It attempts an addition to the dominant threads of film sound history that assume these sonic meanings to be clearly codified as soundtrack, score—and the rest? Just noise.

The conditions that serve as the necessary determinants to how we listen, when, where, and with what understanding become, then, of the utmost importance in the service of the creation of a *different* cinema sound history: one that showcases cinema as *part* of that aural culture, as well as a specific aural field within itself, though it is in constant contact with the whole. This aural field is a site of tension. This culture is determined by listening traditions both within cinema and without it, sonic aesthetics borrowed from other art forms, enormous steps forward in sound technology and the need to adapt to those steps, and the birth and development of acoustical design, as well as changing ways of listening that emerge with cultural shifts.

The cinema soundscape emerges from a host of factors that we haven't often dealt with as cinema scholars and that we tend to see as outside the purview of cinema studies; these include the history of listening, aural culture, and the history of technology, broadly defined. In this, my vision of the soundscape owes a great deal to visions of scholars such as Sterne and Jonathan Crary, both of whom study how modes of art and technology fit into the epistemes of certain sensory formulations.[2] Elements of this soundscape emerge earlier than the birth of movies to inflect the beginning of film culture, and they continue in a modified form even as cinema changes. This book covers multiple moments when the soundscape coalesced into a particularly striking pattern. Each marks a particular turn when the soundscape changed markedly: from noisy to quiet audiences (in chapter 1), from nonsynchronized to synchronized sound (chapter 2), from imperfect to perfected auditorium acoustics (chapter 3), and from movie theater to city streets as our listening venue (chapter 4). Together these instances provide a context in which cinema culture can best be understood not only as the manifestation around an audiovisual art form but as an aural culture. Sounds, and the way they are heard, have a culture and a history. However, cinema culture has less often been considered within the realm of a broad definition of cultural sound studies: as an area of deep and thoroughgoing research into the *cultural* history of sound.

While a cultural study of film sound in the exhibition context has certainly been done before—most notably by Altman, whose *Silent Film Sound* serves as a benchmark for work that powerfully reconsiders cinema to be an *event* and not just a text—it has not yet been done in quite this way. This book finds its home at the intersection of sound media, historiography, and the history of listening. Listening to the soundscape of cinema and its rules, we begin to understand what investment people made in the social meanings of sound and the creation of cinema culture. We can examine how the social, political, cultural, and historical realities of the moment came to affect the manner in which a cinema culture could both sound and be heard by listeners. In short, here the soundscape of cinema culture—and not its sounds—showcases the ways we have invested cinema's sounds with meaning, and then policed that meaning, over time.

Noise has an important role to play in the cultivation of these meanings and in this construction of the soundscape. As a term that is often used in sound discourse, *noise* has had many definitions. Noise's role in my analysis of cinema culture is always to reveal the areas that are

believed to be either inside or outside the bounds of the accepted and acceptable sound culture. To do this, I explore how noise has appeared in several different areas that combine to create film's sound culture. These include film exhibition; film technology; auditorium acoustics; and the history of aurality and mobile listening. The first chapter concerns film exhibition: the sounds of the audience. The second concerns the sphere of production—specifically, how noise has been defined, researched, and mediated by technologists. The third concerns the development of architectural acoustics, which determine the sound of films. The fourth considers the sphere of listening to media while we are moving privately, enacting our own rituals of listening within public space.

"Noise" has already been an evocative and provocative concept for cinema studies. But it needs to have this place acknowledged. Art and media historian Douglas Kahn speaks of noise as a site where "productive confusion" can occur, causing us to think carefully about something we cannot immediately grasp.[3] I take that stance to heart here. Noise here will always be the cue to let us know that something more is happening than we had believed within the historical moment under our study; it is an underlying indicator of tension and danger to the status quo.

NOISE

Calling sound "noise" is an act of judgment with sonic, social, and aesthetic ramifications. In making such a differentiation, one acts to classify certain sounds and their makers as undesirable. The etymology of noise itself implies negative responses. Latin roots for the term can be traced back to "nausea," "disgust, annoyance," or "discomfort." Another etymological theory traces it from the Old French *noxia*, meaning, "hurting, injury [or] damage."[4] Philosopher and musician Paul Hegarty writes: "Noise is negative: it is unwanted, other, not something ordered." It is defined by what it is not: "not acceptable sound, not music, not valid, not a message or a meaning."[5] As sound studies scholar Caleb Kelly puts it, "Noise is often heard as excessive and transgressive," or "loud and disruptive."[6] Marxist philosopher Jacques Attali writes: "Noise has always been experienced as destruction, disorder, dirt, pollution, an aggression against the code-structuring messages."[7] However, as philosopher Michel Serres writes, "We must keep the word noise." It is, after all, "the only positive word that we have to describe

a state that we always describe negatively."[8] The positive aspects, and generative aspects, of a category that is always thought of in terms of negative and destructive characteristics are key to the study I do within this book. Thinking of noise as positive is a hallmark of certain recent forms of sound scholarship.[9]

Noise is, in this context, bound up with conflicts that occur on the level of the social order. Attali makes this assertion in his work, stating that noise serves as an expression of power relations in a society, connecting sounds heard with struggles being fought. As Hegarty puts it, "Noise is not an objective fact."[10] And as Kelly writes, "The perception of noise occurs in relation to a historical, geographical, and culturally located subject, one whose listening" is grounded in the context of a social order, a power structure, and a historical moment.[11] What constitutes noise, and who is making it, are rooted in the social positions of those involved, their relative power within the social order, and the dynamics that control their interactions. This is true in cinema culture just as it is in our general aural culture. "Noise needs a listener" to make it noise.[12] It cannot exist as a category independent of dynamics of power. As Kahn writes: "Whether noise is happening or not will depend also on the source of what is being called noise—who the producer is, when and where, and how it impinges on the perceiver of noise."[13] Noise is a situated phenomenon. As Attali puts it, noise "does not exist in itself, but only in relation to a system within which it is inscribed"; this is a system of "emitter, transmitter, [and] receiver," and each of these has a part to play in determining whether a specific sound is, indeed, noise.[14] Noise tells us more about its listeners, then, than it does about itself. The category is fluid and may be filled with whatever concerns animate the moment. Noise's presence in each moment analyzed by this book is always an indicator of a conflict larger and more complex than just the immediate sonic scenario. Acoustically, noise is a mess, but the play for power and control that is evident in the ability to assign the category of noise to a sound? That matter is crystal clear and readable through history.

I am consistently engaged with how listening itself was constructed and conceived of. Examples of noise in cinema culture push the boundaries, making the lines that it creates visible. What was considered to be ideal? And what agendas did these ideals serve? The form of listening that has been considered to be ideal at different points in history varies widely; part of what this project does is to draw these moments together

and place them in the meaningful and illustrative context of each other. This allows one to see how models of listening have become dominant (and then have passed away into obscurity) in cinema culture. Two of the *most* dominant are musical listening, a public model of listening that encourages transcendent absorptive attentiveness, and listening to cinema as if one were in social space, either on the street or in other forms of public social environments. There are, in short, trends, and they can now be seen, identified, and classified. This too enables a new approach to writing the history of cinema sound as a phenomenon that can be described only as an aural culture.

THE SOUNDSCAPE

This book considers cinema's venues as soundscapes. In 1977, Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer coined the term *soundscape*.[15] An aural analogue to the landscape, the soundscape, Schafer writes, is the sound of a place: the acoustic ecology in which we live and are embedded, whether we realize it or not. The soundscape reflects the geography and natural environment, as well as the effects of the politics, history, and culture of that environment. As sound artist Marina Guzzy writes, "Sound, when understood as an environment, is a *soundscape:* a powerful tool that helps humans relate to their surroundings. They can be consciously designed by an individual or group of individuals, or the byproduct of historical, political, and cultural circumstances."[16] She writes: "Sound-scapes define communities—their boundaries, their actors, their geographic intricacies, and industries." The soundscape, Schafer originally argued, went beyond a mere assortment of sounds; it was an ecology of them that created its own ecosystem. The fundamental question asked by Schafer's invention was: "What is the relationship between man and the sounds of his environment, and what happens when those sounds change?"[17] Listening to the sounds of the world around us, Schafer argued, we can tell a great deal about what occurs within it. Sounds, when properly attended to, offer a way to read the space to which we are listening. In identifying the sounds that are characteristic of a space, we are able to tell a great deal about that environment: its sonic priorities and its sound culture.

Of course, Schafer's focus was not that of this work. Schafer was committed to using this understanding of an acoustic environment to determine the relative health of a social space—whether it suffered from

sound pollution and whether it was "beautiful" or healthful or not. This book takes the concept of soundscape to quite a different place— one that operates on the level of social analysis. Our society is motion picture culture. When we listen to the soundscape there with the kind of attentive hearing that Schafer suggested with his concept of "ear cleaning," we can begin to make stronger, finer distinctions in our aural analysis of cinema culture. The soundscape is a powerful tool for analyzing. What follows in these chapters, then, is an analysis of how attempts to control noise actually define cinema's soundscape—and how the strains within its aural culture have manifested in motion picture environments.

OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

This book selects four significant moments in noise within American cinema culture and traces them through historical analysis of the factors that went into constituting the soundscape during that time. Each historical moment comes at a turning point in the history of the American soundscape. The first arrives at the beginning of modern cinema, in the 1910s. The second comes with the widespread adoption and standardization of film sound. The third comes with the midcentury refining of the movie theater's acoustics as a tool for crafting silence. And the last comes at the moment when cinema culture is becoming something else that is much more hybrid with other technologies of listening. For each moment, I explicate how noise presents us with the vital sonic conflicts that were animating film culture. I also explore how noise in each moment provided a keener sense of the tensions in that area of film culture. The chapters of this work trace the evident connections between the cultural scenario in which film culture finds itself at any given moment and the definition of "noise" that arises within cinema culture at that moment. In each instance, cinema negotiates a perceived threat—a threat that takes different forms—to maintain order. In each case, tensions in the soundscape of cinema culture become apparent, complete with their formative conflicts, in the noise discourse.

Often, the story told within each chapter to describe the creation of a soundscape begins *before* this historical moment. This gesture shows that cinema always participates in a genealogy of sound cultures before itself.

In chapter 1, cinema's middle-class reformers create a moviegoing etiquette that mandates quiet in order to quell what they call salacious audience noise. This chapter makes the conflict over the audience's social and sexualized noise in cinema houses in the early period of film exhibition audible. It details the rise of silence among audiences around 1912 and traces where it came from culturally, detailing how a growing culture of public silence came to affect the soundscape of cinema. It explores how cinema manifested, but did not originate, the "aural etiquette" of the silent spectator, which in fact arose as a result of an increasingly normative "constellation of silence" in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century aural culture. It also describes how the maintenance of such a constellation of silence had implications that were classed and gendered: audience noise was categorized as working class and sexualized in the trade press. This chapter, then, takes the now-familiar moment of the rise of feature film and the concretization of audience norms as it has been brilliantly described in the works of Miriam Hansen and Tom Gunning and reads it through the lens of not visual but aural culture.

Chapter 2 explores how noise became a major topic of study in the film industry at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) in the late 1920s and early 1930s, inspired by the concept's life within science and engineering companies. I focus particularly on the significance that Bell Laboratories placed on the subject and how this pet subject became a project of vital importance to AMPAS at the moment of the film sound transition. Tracing the origin of the development of the study of noise at Bell Labs and AT&T, I then follow that phenomenon to Los Angeles along with the sound engineers, where the film studios developed a research strategy very similar to that of their electro-acoustical partners. AMPAS, motivated by a desire to guide their industry during a frightening time of technological change, began to mimic its electro-acoustical partners by developing a specialized study of noise. Creating and then sharing among the studios a "secret" about sound, based in a body of research and in a tradition already started with Bell Labs, AMPAS allowed Hollywood to keep its autonomy during the shift to film sound. Noise, as the focal point of a mission to replicate the labs' structures for innovations, served a purpose true to its role in scientific history: to reveal a secret in sound well worth knowing. This chapter, perhaps most of all, acknowledges that noise does not exist as a category until we quantify it and define it, develop methods to identify it, and at times attempt to eradicate it.

In chapter 3, noise presents itself as a specter that haunts the ideal of absorbed listening we have sought to achieve throughout two centuries, in different architectures designed for different art forms. Noise appears, in this context, as an enemy to listeners attempting to escape it, and also as a motivating factor in the rise of architectural acoustics, which, as I will argue, invites a pure interaction with sounds that comes not merely from film culture but from an earlier culture: that of musical listening. Chapter 3, then, turns to the creation of listening environments designed to perfect a spectator's experience of film. Applying the study of acoustics to the noise problem, this discussion examines how certain movie theaters created environments of silence that encouraged exciting sensations of aural transport. Thinking also of historical models of listening and how they align with modes of spectatorship and understandings of architecture, I work to combine acoustics, noise, and listening into one way of conceiving of the cinema spectator's presence and the dangerous noise that it presents.

In chapter 4, my argument arrives at the noise of our present-day cities and the listening technologies that we use to sonically manage what we do and do not wish to hear. Crafting scenarios in which we listen to our media as we travel along a city street or in other public spaces, we have begun to use audiovisual media in ways that correlate clearly with how we have used mobile listening technologies for decades. This chapter examines how noise, in the twenty-first century, becomes a matter for our personal negotiation. We are armed with personal mobile devices that allow us to engage with films not in conventional, brick-and-mortar contexts, as in the previous chapters, but on small screens of our own, and on the move. We listen now over earbuds, everywhere we like. Rather than having a rarified experience of pure concentration, we employ tactics of negotiation, navigating public space with a device that is used to differentiate sound (our media) from noise (the sounds of the public space). And we do this in a manner that echoes the history of audio technologies more than that of visual ones.

This book outlines the creation and maintenance of the cinema soundscape, as well as its current boundaries. It ends by speculating where this soundscape might be headed in an era in which cinema is changing profoundly. Throughout this work, I address how the cinema soundscape has been inflected by the listening mores of a broader American soundscape, including the life of the other public arts, interactions with the sounds of budding technology, engineering's influence that tends us

toward silence in our approach to art, and our current use of cinema media to sift out a desired signal from our noisy experiences of the public realm. Noise becomes our best friend in this often very complex search. It is key to identifying the greater tensions that create the soundscape, tracing where and why they occur, and identifying the ways we have tried to resolve them. Noise can be—and has already been—a rich, challenging, and productive concept in film studies. But it has also been understudied. It deserves to be acknowledged as a real marker of cinema's aural culture's meanings. Finding coherence in the chaos of film sound's history throughout this book, this work aims to make the place of noise clear. Noise is a sign of alterity—of differences in gender, class, modes of listening, and listening cultures within cinema culture. Noise, as the category of undesired sound under which anything may be classified depending on the cultural context, may tell us as much or more about cinema culture than the more properly formed category of the soundtrack. Exploring a soundscape, we discover the subterranean meanings that noise points to in our cinema sound culture of the past century. We explicitly consider the aural culture that surrounds cinema to be the largest component of the history we are telling. We listen to the subterranean undercurrents of the river as they join. In so doing, we begin to consider noise and the cinema soundscape.