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See table of contents

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Article abstract

For Cirque du Soleil's touring arena show *Corteo*, music is a central feature of every performance. In this article, I focus on *Corteo*'s touring sound technicians, who play an essential role in the show's musical presentation. I discuss a methodological approach to my ethnographic research, which provides new insights into large-scale intermedia performance environments like *Corteo*. I theorize a masculine-gendered, stoic mode of emotional labour that is enacted through voice-to-voice remote communication during performance. Through participant observation, public intercept interviews, and what I call "working interviews"—interviews with the sound technicians that take place *during* performances or other operational activities—I engage directly with the technical and emotional labour practices of musical production.

WORKING INTERVIEWS: BLENDING FIELDWORK AND TECHNICAL WORK ON TOUR WITH CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

Jacob Danson Faraday

For Cirque du Soleil's touring arena show *Corteo*, music is a central feature of every performance and is composed and performed to align with the narrative and the acrobatic action on stage. But the music an audience hears depends on much more than the nightly performances of *Corteo*'s live musicians; the touring sound technicians also play an essential role in the show's musical presentation. In this article, I discuss a methodological approach to my ethnographic research of *Corteo*'s sound technicians—a methodology that provides new insights into large-scale intermedia performance environments like *Corteo*. Through participant observation, public intercept interviews, and what I call "working interviews"—interviews with the sound technicians that take place *during* performances or other operational activities—I engage directly with the technical practices of musical production on *Corteo*'s international tour. I show that by reconceptualizing participant observation and interviewing—two cornerstone ethnomusicological methods—working interviews can reveal what is obscured in live music settings like *Corteo*. I provide an example of remote communication between sound technicians during a performance and show how a working interview helped me theorize a new mode of emotional labour amongst sound technicians—one that is gendered masculine and characterized by stoicism. I begin with an overview of Cirque du Soleil (CDS) and *Corteo*, my own background as a CDS sound technician, and my fieldwork research methods, paying particular attention to working interviews. I then move to a detailed discussion of emotional labour, showing how I expand definitions through the context of *Corteo*'s sound technicians. Finally, to illustrate the value of working interviews as an ethnographic method, I provide a description of a moment during a performance of *Corteo*, excerpted from a working interview, that facilitated my theorization of stoic, masculine emotional labour on tour.

Context: CDS, *Corteo*

CDS is a world-renowned entertainment production company. Established in Quebec in 1984, CDS focuses primarily on live circus performance. Before the COVID-19

pandemic forced CDS into bankruptcy in 2020 (Montpetit 2020), the multinational corporation employed about four thousand people and had an annual revenue of about US$1 billion (Peterson-Withorn 2015). In its pre-pandemic structure, CDS had two main divisions that governed its approximately forty live shows: the touring shows division and the resident shows division. Within the touring shows division, there were two subdivisions: big top and arena. A big top is a large canvas tent that CDS (and countless other traditional circuses) tours with; arenas are typically municipal multipurpose sports arenas (e.g., the Centre Bell in Montreal). I focus on one of the touring shows in the arena subdivision: *Corteo*.

Corteo is a story of a man who dreams of his own funeral. Accompanied and guided by angels, he traverses his dream: he relives parts of his childhood, meets old friends and lovers, and finally ascends—by bicycle—into the light, whatever that may be. Though *Corteo* is highly acrobatic, it is also rather theatrical, by which I mean its narrative is more or less clear throughout the entire show. *Corteo*'s theatrical narrative derives from recurring music, characters, and themes, such as death, nostalgia, and memory. There are eight musicians who perform the score, and four sound technicians who manage all aspects of the sound, including what the audiences and musicians hear. *Corteo* has room for small adaptations to the acrobatics and plenty of space for musical improvisation, but generally, each performance remains the same from night to night.

Methods Overview

Doing ethnographic research on tour is challenging. The schedule is gruelling and space is limited for extra staff. While CDS is not closed to researchers or journalists,[1] it is protective of its public image and its intellectual property. Having an "in" through existing relationships with CDS staff wasn't enough to conduct fieldwork on *Corteo*; I needed to be part of the team and have an integrated approach to data collection. Like Boden Sandstrom's (2000) and Whitney Slaten's (2018) ethnomusicological research on the live sound industry, my research is based in part on my own lived experience as a professional live sound technician and is intimately linked to my own in-depth familiarity with the industry. I am a former CDS sound technician, and my embodied knowledge of the job deeply informed my research. It guided my interviews and observations, and it helped with my integration into *Corteo*'s sound department as a participant-observer. I was hired to work as a sound technician on *Corteo* for three months before spending the subsequent six months focused on ethnographic data collection while remaining an ancillary member of the sound department.

Increasingly, ethnographies of sound technicians are by scholars with a stake in a creative product.[2] Ethnomusicologist Eliot Bates, for example, de-

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[1] Circus scholars have examined and critiqued CDS's creative practice (Batson 2012; Jensen-Moulton 2016; Paul 2012; Rantisi and Leslie 2014), while others have focused on CDS as a corporate institution (Leslie and Rantisi 2019; Mahy 2005). As part of past marketing strategies, CDS has granted privileged access to journalists and to other corporations (Sennheiser 2019; Ztélé 2013).

[2] Often the scholars are sound technicians (live or studio) who write about their own experience (Bates 2016; Dahlie 2018; Marshall 2020; Porcello 2004; Scales 2012; Sandstrom 2000; Slaten 2018; Williams 2012).

termined that being invested in the object of his research (in his case, Turkish recording studio work) was not just desirable but essential for his project. He writes, "I discovered that there was no way that I could conduct long-term observations of recording work without being somehow integrally involved with the process" (2016, 24). Given my background with CDS, I could have conducted informed observations on *Corteo* without having been as involved as I was—without a stake in the process. I knew the job already: I understood the work, schedule, politics, divisions of labour, music, travel, and constant change. But I agree with Bates. My observations were deepened and my relationships with the sound technicians and the musicians were enriched because of my integration with the show.

As an ancillary member of *Corteo*'s sound department, I relied heavily on participant observation—a method at the heart of ethnomusicological research that is contingent on a researcher's immersion in the field site (Barz and Cooley 2008; Geertz 1973). As a participant observer, I worked closely with the sound technicians and musicians during each phase of the weekly production schedule (e.g., load-in, soundcheck, performance, load-out). I participated in troubleshooting and performed repairs. I travelled with the tour to each new city, lodged in the same hotels, and ate my meals in the same catered dining halls at each venue. I attended nightly performances, engaging with technicians, musicians, and audience members at different points before, during, and after the show.

I conducted interviews in three ways. First, I conducted formal, dialogic interviews (Jackson 1987). These were usually hour-long, one-to-one sessions with the sound technicians, musicians, and other *Corteo* (and CDS) staff. Second, to determine an audience's relationship with *Corteo*'s sonic product, I conducted short public-intercept interviews (Flint et al. 2016) with anonymous audience members in arenas across North America. Finally, I conducted what I call "working" interviews, which will be the focus of the rest of this article. Working interviews were formal, pre-arranged interviews, but they took place while the sound technicians were actually working: doing load-in, mixing front-of-house (FOH), or mixing monitors.[3] I distinguish between these and traditional "sit-down" interviews because the focus of working interviews is informed by the context and activities of that moment. Similar to Harris Berger's research participant who actually played guitar to determine his own experience of a recorded song in "phrase-by-phrase detail" (1999, 176), the working interviews I conducted were significantly complemented by the sound technicians having their hands on the gear and their ears in the show. Working interviews are especially valuable because of how labour is implicated in the research. The sound technicians' labour is an object of analysis and constitutes the data collection method. In other words, my working interviews were contingent on active, concurrent labour, while my traditional dialogic interviews, for example, were not.

Working interviews with *Corteo*'s sound technicians provided a unique perspective of how the sound technicians think about, talk about, and work with

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3 The front-of-house (FOH) mix is what an audience hears during a performance; the monitor mix is what the musicians hear.

sound on tour. In the next section, I focus on two particular parts of their work that emerged during working interviews: how they listen to and communicate through sound, and how they perform emotional labour. Here I draw on a specific working interview that was itself unique because I was not physically present during the interview. This methodological experiment was conceived and undertaken in response to the constraints of the field and my own embodied knowledge of the work.

For this interview, two of the sound technicians, Christian and Davie, the head and assistant head of *Corteo*'s sound department, undertook a rare follow-up training session together at FOH during a performance. Christian had trained Davie to mix FOH months earlier, and Davie had been mixing FOH on his own since then, but this was an opportunity for Christian and Davie to sonically regroup and talk about the show while Christian mixed. Mixing FOH is a one-person job; there is barely room for two people behind the console, so I could not physically be there with Christian and Davie. However, having been a touring CDS sound technician, I know what those conversations are like and how fruitful a working exchange of ideas between colleagues can be. Christian, Davie, and I all felt it was an important moment to capture and, as a group, we agreed on the means and logistical details. I mounted my camera on the FOH console in a static position to capture their torsos, hands, and faces, and asked them to start the video recording before the performance began.[4] I consider this recording to be a working interview *in absentia*, since they were effectively interviewing each other about their work—while working—without me. This method, guided by participants and by the field site, captured conversations that would not have happened had I been present, and, moreover, would not have happened had either Davie or Christian been on his own at FOH. However, in discussing the excerpt together afterwards,[5] our analysis and conclusions were drawn on shared, embodied knowledge of FOH mixing.

The excerpt shows a conversation between colleagues who have a job to do—not only do they have to make that specific performance sound good for the people in the audience, but as head and assistant head of the sound department, they have to plan for the future of *Corteo* and consider its stability and longevity as a touring production. As I show, their concerns are much broader than what is happening in front of them; they must consider backstage while maintaining a deep engagement with the activity onstage. This working interview is an evocative moment that could not have been seen or retold otherwise. What follows is a description of a rich seventy-five-second video excerpt, as well as the theoretical framework that guided my analysis of the working interview, beginning with a discussion of emotional labour.

4 Steven Feld and Carroll Williams (1975) sternly critique the use of a locked-off camera position; however, my use of this technique does not align with their two assumptions that a locked-off camera must be hidden from those being filmed and not have an operator. My camera was not hidden; indeed, the sound technicians themselves were the operators.

5 Video ethnography has long been a part of ethnomusicological research (e.g., Zemp 1988; cf. Feld and Williams 1975), while contemporary ethnomusicologists have theorized and established an ethical practice of dialogic video analysis with research participants (e.g., Guilbault and Cape 2011; Qashu 2019; cf. Pink et al. 2017).

Emotional Labour

According to Arlie Hochschild, emotional labour "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (2003, 7). In other words, emotional labour is the internal management of emotion that someone does to influence another person's emotional state. Crucially, emotional labour is a "management of feeling" that is part of a person's conditions of employment (e.g., with clients) by explicit training or by convention, as a flight attendant might be trained—and expected—to be cheerful and friendly with passengers. Hochschild's description continues, emphasizing the "outward countenance" and distinguishing between emotional labour and emotion work: "I use the term *emotional labor* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage.… I use the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in a private context" (7; original italics).

Here Hochschild distinguishes between emotional labour, which is a part of one's job, and emotion work, which is private, use-value work that people do in their daily lives for many reasons (e.g., managing emotions amongst family members).

In primarily theorizing service industry work, Hochschild argues that emotional labour is gendered feminine because of the assumptions, power structures, and cultural hierarchies in that industry. The standardization and professionalization of service industries extend home-based, unpaid, nurturing emotion work now expected of and presumed to be innate in women. "The world turns to women for mothering," Hochschild remarks, "and this fact silently attaches itself to many a job description" (2003, 170). Beverley Skeggs similarly aligns gendered labour with cultural rewards and expectations: "If men deploy aspects of femininity to make them more caring managers they are rewarded, if women employ femininity in the same way, they are just seen to be doing what they are expected to do" (2004, 55). Beyond the gender of the actual worker, however (cf. Sedgewick 1995), the gendering of labour is primarily a sign of power and dominance and can be further tied to intersections with race, class, education, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability (D. A. Brooks 2021; Duffy 2016; Johnson 2017; Kotiswaran 2011; McRobbie 2011; Momsen 1999; Price-Glynn 2010; Vagnerova 2017).

In the few extant ethnographies of live sound technicians, gender and race are central to how emotional labour is deployed in the white-male-dominated live sound industry. Slaten (2018) describes how his own deep ambivalence about his work as a live sound technician is partly grounded in the parallels between an acquired impulse to erase his own Black masculinity—passed down through generations—and the expectation that technicians efface themselves and their sonic influence while doing live sound. Sandstrom (2000) shows how her decidedly feminine-gendered approach to live sound led to collaborative, co-educational FOH mixing—a stark contrast to the competitive, antagonistic approach of her formative years.[6] In the deeply masculine spaces of record-

[6] Other live sound ethnographies also point to a male-dominated industry (see Dahlie 2018; Kielich 2021; Reeder 2014).

ing studios, meanwhile, emotional labour is deployed by sound technicians to stimulate musical creativity (Diamond 2021; Scales 2012; Watson and Ward 2013) but is also at the heart of a continued "lack of trust and tolerance" felt by minority studio workers, such as cis-gendered women, people of colour, and LGBTQ2S+ people (G. Brooks et al. 2021, 249; cf. Meintjes 2003).

Corteo's sound technicians perform emotional labour to better provide the services for which they are responsible. They build and maintain the audio infrastructure on tour, which is used by the band and other performers, the backstage touring staff, and the audience. Sound technicians are expected to treat these groups as a service industry worker would clients, and regularly adjust their emotions when working (e.g., to calm a performer, or to get more information about an equipment malfunction). Further, emotional labour is an important strategy for workers managing life on tour. Labour practices of late capitalism can cause workers to view challenging conditions (e.g., long hours, little sleep) and high expectations (e.g., "the show must go on" ethos) "not as conditions of employment but as moral virtues" (Kuhn 2006, 1339). This distorted view shifts the focus from the profit generated by the labour to the manner in which that labour is carried out. In this context, sound technicians emerge as stoic: they suppress frustrations or worry in order to provide a seamless performance for audiences. Though Hochschild most thoroughly theorizes women's emotional labour, she notes that men too have a socially constructed emotional role to play: "the private task of mastering fear and vulnerability" (2003, 163). She marks this as a private task of emotion *work*, not exchange-value emotional *labour*, but in the context of *Corteo*'s touring sound technicians, it is part of the job. If silent, stoic stress management is viewed as a means of mastering vulnerability and fear for the sake of the job, my research positions my cis-gendered, male interlocutors as enacting one kind of emotional labour that Hochschild identifies as gendered feminine (service), and another kind of emotional labour that I argue is gendered masculine (stoicism).

Through a recorded working interview, I observed this masculine, stoic mode of emotional labour during remote communication, that is, conversations that happen over coms—the two-way verbal communication loops that connect the band, the sound technicians, and other technical departments at different parts of the venue. On *Corteo*, remote communications are expected to be calm, clear, and concise, no matter how stressful or worrisome the situation.[7] This conversational etiquette over coms is, I argue, grounded in masculine-gendered, stoic emotional labour.[8] In a crisis, there is no room in a remote communication to express worry or surprise, let alone panic. Priorities for this coms etiquette are a focus on technological facts and solutions to problems, and a recognition that time is short.[9] *Corteo*'s musicians and sound

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7 Alan Williams (2012) and David Grubbs (2020) discuss remote communication in recording studios.

8 Modes of remote communication and reasons for using it have been gendered since the early days of telephony: social calls were feminine, "frivolous, trivial, [and] idle," while business calls were masculine and "legitimate" (Sterne 2003, 197–8, 208; see also Martin [1991] 2012).

9 For similar ethics of terseness, calmness, and emotional control during remote communication see Sharon H. Mastracci and Ian Adams's (2019) discussion of emergency dispatch operators;

technicians described prevailing com practice, which was not formalized nor explicitly taught, as "common sense." Instead of being taught, it is imparted over time to the group by the group's own communications (cf. Porcello 2004). In this way, the coms etiquette is performative. For example, Christian uses his terseness not just to adhere to the etiquette, but also to produce—and establish the primacy of—the etiquette. He shows musicians and other sound technicians how to be terse and inscribes the etiquette onto remote communications and the role of "sound technician." The metacommunicative message (Bateson 1972) embedded in a sound technician's terseness over coms during a performance is clear: "There is a show going on, I have limited time and attention, please adhere to the established coms etiquette, and we'll discuss this in more detail later."

Just as sound technicians must *speak* correctly during remote communications, so too must they *listen* correctly. I agree with Slaten (2018), who argues that mixing FOH involves listening acoustemologically. By critically navigating the assemblage of disparate but crucial acoustic stimuli in the arena during a performance (e.g., speakers, microphones, individual instruments, coms, audience members, venue acoustics), sound technicians engage a way of listening that affords "a knowing-with and knowing-through the audible" (Feld 2015, 12), by which they can know or deduce the state of their equipment, the performers, the audience, and each other. Listening at FOH on *Corteo* goes further, however, and is more like what Martin Daughtry calls "expert masculine auscultation" (2015, 130). This mode of listening positions military personnel, in Daughtry's case, as objective, rational, tough "expert auditors." He elaborates with an evocative passage: "[Military service members] *transform sound into actionable intelligence; with great precision, they can determine what's happening by tuning into the sounds that surround them. They calmly assess the situation, as a doctor would, discerning, through listening and looking, the sonic and other pathologies in the neighborhood. They act bravely when they encounter sonic evidence of danger, and maybe even crack a little joke to demonstrate their sangfroid*" (2015, 131; original italics).

FOH sound technicians also listen incisively for *information* encoded in sound and respond to that information with cool, calm, decisive action. Through this way of listening, FOH sound technicians focus on or filter different sound sources, vigilantly scanning for disruptions and irregularities (e.g., faulty equipment)—their version of sonic evidence of danger.

I now turn to a description of a moment of terse speech, emotional labour, and expert masculine auscultation, drawing on a working interview with Christian and Davie. Here I transcribe and explicate a seventy-five-second video excerpt that begins with a remote exchange over coms. It starts a short discussion between Christian and Davie at FOH. The video concludes with a second coms exchange, which is essentially the same as the first.

Gene Krantz's (2001) of NASA space flight controllers; and Daughtry's (2015) of U.S. combat aviators. Hochschild's study included telephone-based debt collectors (2003, 138), but they were decidedly emotive (e.g., aggressive, belittling, sympathetic).

"Something's Wrong with the SPD-S"

The orange call light flashes, strobing in their faces. Reflexively looking down, Christian grabs the old-style phone-shaped coms handset with his right hand, squeezes the talk button mounted on the inside of the handle with his middle finger, and utters a terse "Hello" in a practised quiet-but-audible-over-coms voice. There is a pause as Christian listens to a sound technician backstage giving him some presumably equally terse instructions. While listening, Christian shifts the phone to his other hand and continues to adjust the mix, though his attention is divided and his hearing is compromised. His eyes dart here and there in thought, focusing for an instant on the console, the next instant on some undetermined middle distance, then back to the console. Still holding the phone, he reaches over and, finding a specific channel on the console, mutes it.

"Done," he says, marking the end of the exchange. Waiting just long enough to hear a quick "thank you" from the other end, Christian replaces the handset, the exact reverse of the first pickup gesture.

The brusque register of remote communications between FOH and backstage is part of a largely unspoken understanding amongst sound technicians and musicians, an unwritten coms etiquette that everyone seems conditioned to follow. This isn't necessarily the tacit knowledge based on common, assumed proficiencies in a technological craft that sound technicians generally share (Horning 2004) but more in line with Aaron Fox's "material/technical" framework for the analysis of vocal practice (2004). For sound technicians, speaking on coms is what Fox would call "intuitively mastered patterns of expression" (36)—one they do not theorize or articulate in the abstract. Christian knows to keep his verbal exchanges short, he knows *how* to keep them short, but unless pressed—in a formal interview, for example—he would not be able to easily say why or how he does it.

Again, this coms etiquette is built on an extended mode of emotional labour, one enacted remotely and gendered masculine. Christian's abruptness simultaneously masks his own misgivings (which emerge below) and reassures (i.e., produces the proper state of mind in) the sound technician backstage. Responding immediately to the call, Christian engaged in a no-questions-asked, apparently unperturbed exchange, and concluded with an authoritative "Done." The problem, whatever it is, needs to be concealed, and Christian's "pattern of expression" dispels the behind-the-scenes fear that the audience might be subjected to an unpleasant, unscripted sound that would suddenly render the *sound technology* "visible," rather than maintaining the *sound* as an invisible, affective complement to the action on stage.

This brief exchange on coms is reassuring for another reason, at FOH and backstage. Remote conversations are integral to a broad production perspective that includes all activities of performers and backstage staff—what Nick Hunt and Susan Melrose call the "human-real realm [of the] production organism" (2005, 77). A FOH sound technician must maintain backstage operations in mind as part of the show's narrative, just as a backstage sound technician must keep FOH in mind, despite being invisible to one another. Remote voices,

speaking in clipped and coded bursts of information, act as "a denial of the frame [the proscenium and backstage curtain] as a limit and an affirmation of the unity and homogeneity of the depicted space" (Doane 1980, 37–8). Essentially exchanges on coms can remind the sound technicians that the other contingent is there and that they will respond to a call, however brusquely. The voice over coms *is* that other technician,[10] it *is* their knowledge, authority, understanding, abilities, experience, and expertise. This informative, professional closeness through remote communication—what Daughtry calls "a simulacrum of presence" (2015, 50)—is crucial to the work and the emotional well-being of the sound department during a show.

Throughout this brief exchange on coms, Davie, standing in the background, remains mostly still, apart from leaning away slightly to allow Christian to more easily access the coms handset. His eyes take in what is happening, but his face, like Christian's, conveys no emotion. Once the exchange is over, Davie, again, like Christian himself, refocuses on the sounds of the stage and the changes on the console, as if the exchange had never happened. During the exchange, both the FOH mix and the voice-over-coms flitted into the realm of noise, impinging on the other, as each signal vied for Christian's attention. Each signal, the mix and the voice, was at once pre-eminent and something to be temporarily ignored.[11] This is why conversations must be terse: conversation will always hinder careful attention to the mix, especially if that conversation went on too long, or if it had extraneous expressiveness.

Several seconds pass. Christian tweaks the mix, Davie watches his movements. Glancing up at the stage momentarily, Christian furrows his brow. "Something's wrong with the SPD-S," he says rapidly, referring to the drummer's Roland SPD-S, an electronic percussion instrument used on *Corteo* to trigger certain sound effects (e.g., tympani). It had frozen and needed to be "power cycled"—turned off and on—which sometimes can cause unwanted sounds in the PA or in the monitor mixes.

"Oh, God," Davie replies, half sardonically. He considers. "We did get a new one, right?"

"Yeah."

Davie, happy with this confirmation, allows himself a single, short laugh. Davie's laugh is at once relieved and resigned (e.g., "Great. Now even the *new* one is messing up."). He and Christian have been overworked for the past few months. Because of private matters involving other people, Christian and Davie were thrust into their respective head and assistant head positions, under-prepared and understaffed. It was impossible for them to keep track of details, like the most recent status of the SPD-S, without conferring with each other, even during a show. When he was still at the rank of "sound technician," an entry-level job in the four-person sound department, Davie would have been responsible for such details himself; he would have known the SPD-S's current

[10] Jonathan Sterne (2003) and Miriama Young (2006) have made similar arguments about the recorded voices of singers.

[11] See Daughtry's (2015, 47–53) discussion of U.S. military personnel navigating multiple remote signals, voices, and inputs during combat and patrols.

status and would have been the one to fix any problems like this during a show. Now, during his training at FOH, he is physically and mentally rooted in place, unsure of what the problem is or if the people backstage can fix it.

With another squint and furrow, Christian continues: "Had an issue with it last night, but I didn't mention anything." He looks up, watching the stage, making sure the sound of the singer's voice effortlessly draws his eye to the singer himself. "But it was like one little glitch."

"What did we do with the old one?" Davie interrupts.

"It's a spare, I think."

"Huh?"

"It's a spare, I think."

Christian's misgivings about the SPD-S are clarified here. He is reminded of yesterday's "issue" and that he didn't say anything about it. Davie then reveals his own misgivings, too, essentially asking whether the current SPD-S is reliable and if the old one is accessible. This brief conversation between Christian and Davie voices what is explicitly missing from and suppressed by the two-word exchange on coms with the sound technician backstage: anxieties about the exchange itself, as well as any short- and long-term ramifications.

This dialogue is especially revealing because under normal operational circumstances it would not have happened at all, as Christian or Davie would have been mixing alone. Their consternation, precisely what Hochschild points to as being suppressed in her definition of emotional labour, is expressed in their conversation and faces during this short exchange. This working interview excerpt is a portrait of two colleagues—the senior members of the sound department—discussing a problem together, expressing their anxieties to each other by word and facial expression, but suppressing those anxieties through remote communication.[12] After this dialogue, Christian and Davie turn their full attention back to the show, watching the performers on stage, pushing vocal lines in the mix. At the beginning of a crescendo, Christian positions himself for a specific set of fader movements on the console. Davie positions himself to watch these movements, leaning in and looking down. He nods rhythmically as the music reaches its peak. As if on cue, the call light flashes again. Christian, apparently ready for it, repositions himself in front of the offending channel: the muted SPD-S.

"Hello."

There is no hand-switching with the coms handset this time. He moves deliberately, knowing what's coming, what the instruction from the other end will be. He unmutes the channel, quicker than last time, keen to get back to the mix; the sax solo is a few seconds away.

"Done."

Anxieties once again masked, he replaces the handset on its shelf, this time not waiting even long enough for a "thank you" that was likely not forthcoming in any case.

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[12] Sara Ahmed notes that an apparent lack of emotionality "*is not the absence of emotion, but a different emotional orientation towards others*" (2014, 4; original emphasis).

Conclusion

Terse speech, militaristic listening, veiled stress, invisibility, and performativity contribute to the masculine-gendering of stoic emotional labour over remote communication at FOH. This mode of emotional labour, performed by convention and hidden by design, is an everyday part of the sound technicians' backstage professional practice. Christian, Davie, and I share a lived experience as touring CDS sound technicians and have embodied knowledge of the situated labour of mixing FOH; this was invaluable in the analysis of working interview. It helped me interpret their movements and conversation: watching the video, I could feel the faders and the coms handset; I could feel the mental strain and anxiety of divided attention and technological failure. Perhaps because of my own masculinity, I also appreciated—indeed, felt deeply comforted by—the mode of communication. For me, the terse, clipped speech underscored the sense that problems were getting resolved in the background with no questions asked, which is valuable on a show like *Corteo*. By drawing on my own embodied knowledge, I do not mean to conflate or falsely amalgamate my past mixing (and troubleshooting) experience with that of Christian or Davie. I simply seek to underline one of the most important relationships my research participants and I had: our working relationship. In this article, I showed the unique value of a working interview to my research methodology, hopefully demonstrating how this method could be productively applied to ethnographies of labour generally, especially in work communities where the researcher has a close association to the work.

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ABSTRACT

For Cirque du Soleil's touring arena show *Corteo*, music is a central feature of every performance. In this article, I focus on *Corteo*'s touring sound technicians, who play an essential role in the show's musical presentation. I discuss a methodological approach to my ethnographic research, which provides new insights into large-scale intermedia performance environments like *Corteo*. I theorize a masculine-gendered, stoic mode of emotional labour that is enacted through voice-to-voice remote communication during performance. Through participant observation, public intercept interviews, and what I call "working interviews"—interviews with the sound technicians that take place *during* performances or other operational activities—I engage directly with the technical and emotional labour practices of musical production.

Keywords: Cirque du Soleil, emotional labour, sound technician, ethnomusicology, working interview

RÉSUMÉ

Pour le spectacle itinérant du Cirque du Soleil, *Corteo*, la musique est au cœur de chaque représentation. Dans cet article, je me concentre sur les techniciens du son de tournée de *Corteo*, qui jouent un rôle essentiel dans la présentation musicale du spectacle. Je discute d'une approche méthodologique de ma recherche ethnographique, qui fournit de nouvelles perspectives sur les environnements de performance intermédia à grande échelle comme *Corteo*. Je théorise un mode masculin et stoïque de travail émotionnel qui est mis en œuvre par une communication à distance voix à voix pendant la représentation. Grâce à l'observation participante, aux entretiens publics interceptés et à ce que j'appelle des « entretiens de travail » —des entretiens avec les techniciens du son qui ont lieu pendant les performances ou d'autres activités opérationnelles—je m'engage directement dans les pratiques de travail techniques et émotionnelles de la production musicale.

Mots-clés : Cirque du Soleil, charge mentale, technicien de son, ethnomusicologie, entrevue de travail

BIOGRAPHY

Jacob Danson Faraday is a performer, sound designer, and touring sound technician. As a scholar, he examines the creative influence of live sound technicians and the working communities of large-scale touring productions. He is a recent graduate of the ethnomusicology PhD program at Memorial University of Newfoundland.