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**Sonic Rebellion: Reclaiming Music as Defiance in Sarah Pinsker's *A Song for a New Day***

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**Abstract:** Sarah Pinsker's *A Song for a New Day* depicts a post-pandemic world driven by strict government-congregation rules justified by narratives of biosecurity, terrorist attacks, and pandemic outbreaks. This paper illustrates how music can also have this political side, not just something people do to express themselves. The protagonist, Luce Cannon, puts on these rebellious musical performances against the authority. Her activities line up with what James C. Scott discusses in "Everyday Forms of Resistance", where she hosts these illegal concerts in defiance of all the institutional limits that try to control things. Her subversive musical interventions can be viewed as acts of resistance. The idea of "everyday tactics" by Michel de Certeau elaborates its mode of operation within the imposed structures, while Scott defines the mode of resistance. Music emerges as a catalytic force of rebellion against the hegemony. Jacques Attali's argument in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* reinforces this idea, where Luce's music becomes the noise in the silent world. In an attempt to protect her music from being digitally mediated in ways that turn it into a commodity, she preserves the human bond. Claiming the protection of the subordinated group, the government imposed cultural norms on them. The study will therefore be guided by the concept of revolution expressed in the most basic forms of resistance. Pinsker describes the transformative nature of music, which creates human bonds and saves society from loneliness. Thus, music promotes a sense of oneness in a chaotic world dominated by digital mediation.

**Keywords:** Sarah Pinsker, sonic rebellion, everyday resistance, surveillance, commodification, digital mediation

## Introduction

Contemporary dystopian fiction normally focuses on anxieties surrounding surveillance and biosecurity in the aftermath of a global crisis. *A Song for A New Day* by Sarah Pinsker portrays a society where public gatherings are restricted and cultural engagement is confined to virtual environments. This appears to be a logical response at the periphery. But Pinsker later reveals that such measures go far beyond safety and can be considered as social regulation that subtly restructures human nature, perception, and interaction. The novel succeeds with the lives of two characters: Luce Cannon, a musician who continues to hold illegal concerts in defiance of the assembly regulations, and Rosemary Laws, a socially isolated employee working in the virtual entertainment industry. Rosemary initially accepts digital mediation as normal and inevitable, but her encounter with live music transforms her perspective on collective experience via human connection. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff observes that “surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims systems that commodify artistic creation and social interaction”(8). The regulations alter the dynamics of human life that are supposed to emerge and flourish in social gatherings. The physical movement of individuals was constrained by forcing them to believe isolation as something normal and desirable. Virtual media serve as a primary medium of interaction, offering a simulation of presence that underlies their function as an instrument of control. When interpersonal connections are constrained by virtual environments, the complex human experience is reduced to quantifiable, manageable data. Replacing spontaneity with regulation, this system tries to passivise individual participation.

Conventionally, music is rooted in collective experience; its meaning being manifested through shared presence, affective change and sensorial engagement. But music becomes a crucial site of tension in Pinsker’s dystopian world, where it is digitised and commodified. It is structured in a way suitable for consumption rather than engagement. Music is stripped of its immediacy and unpredictability as it shifts from live performance to virtual streaming. This may reduce it to a standardised form under control. This transformation reveals a broader perspective of cultural commodification in which artistic expression is suppressed under the facade of surveillance.

Existing scholarly work tends to explore the therapeutic nature of music that impacts emotional, psychological and coping mechanisms in interpersonal life. These approaches may overlook music's capacity to challenge dominant structures. Pinsker’s novel compensates for this by showcasing music as active defiance rather than passive relief. Through the protagonists Luce Cannon and Rosemary, Pinsker demonstrates how live music serves as a growing opponent against the hegemony by reintroducing the embodied experience that reveals the importance of collective experience. In recent times, in the wake of global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have been influenced to seek out the correlation between music and crisis-mediated social experience. However,

much of this scholarly work continues to approach music through one of the therapeutic, technological and sociological frameworks, leaving its politically resistant dimensions underexplored. Music was rarely positioned as a central mechanism of defiance in dystopian and speculative narratives that normally address surveillance.

Chiu, in *Music in Times of Crisis*, posits that music helps in emotional regulation at times of isolation. He offers evidence for the ways in which philosophies, beliefs and science related to music helped communities and individuals to cope with the plague. Music within this framework acts as a tool for resilience that helps individuals manage stress and improve their mental well-being. He notes that due to the increasing use of digital platforms during the pandemic, physical gatherings have been substituted with virtual ones. This is an example of how technology facilitated access and continuity for culture in the midst of the crisis. Yet, such studies fail to analyse how digital mediation reshaped agency and artistic authenticity. These studies tend to overlook how mediated environments function as mechanisms of surveillance and commodification by favouring convenience. Jari Käkälä's discussion of *A Song for a New Day*, using the framework of critical theory, identifies surveillance by power structures and argues that the novel's live music communities function as "utopian enclaves" that resist surveillance capitalism. His reading foregrounds the political significance of embodied musical experience and reinforces the novel's critique of technologically mediated social life.

Regardless of these contributions, there is a significant gap in the analysis of music as a politically charged medium capable of challenging hegemonic structures. This paper fills that gap by showcasing how Pinsker repositions music as a mode of sonic rebellion that challenges surveillance, commodification, and enforced isolation.

### **Luce Cannon and the Politics of Everyday Resistance**

James C. Scott's concept of everyday resistance provides a primary framework for analysing the central purpose of Luce Cannon in *A Song for a New Day*. In *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott studies how subordinated groups resist power structures through subtle, ordinary and persistent acts embedded in daily life rather than direct revolution (Scott 28–35). Such defiance may seem peripheral, but over time it may gradually destabilise hegemonic structures by refusing to submit completely. Scott's notion is relevant in a society where overt resistance is dangerous and highly monitored. Malvika Dwivedi and Mrinalini propose in their research paper titled "Everyday Forms of Resistance: Traversing the Space Between Overt Collective Resistance and Complete Subjugation" that the forms of everyday resistance fall between overt collective rebellion and absolute submission, highlighting forms of dissent embedded within ordinary practices. Luce's clandestine activities emerge as a form of everyday resistance in Pinsker's dystopian world, challenging the corporate commodification. From the beginning of the novel, music is linked to identity, self-recognition and emotional liberation. Luce

recalls hearing an electric guitar for the first time at a street fair and immediately recognising herself within the sound: “I’d looked at the guitarist and thought, That’s me, without any road map for the journey” (Pinsker 12). This moment is notable as music becomes a medium through which suppressed identity finds articulation. Luce’s recollection of fleeing her conservative family after realising she was queer further positions music as a space of self-construction. Her journey represents an attempt “to reconcile who I’d thought I was supposed to be with who I really was” (12).

The extent of control in Rosemary’s workplace illustrates how digital mediation systemically replaces embodied interaction. Employees are required to maintain their virtual appearances, with the clothes having technology “the better to quantify you with” (17). Surveillance is normalised to a point that individuals accept monitoring as a part of their everyday life. Rosemary herself begins losing a sense of material reality, after remaining enclosed within her Hoodie all day “there were no real people, just voices and messages and lines of code and avatars spread out across the world” (21). This detachment reflects the dehumanising effects of technology-mediated culture on individuals. Luce’s insistence on live music becomes politically disruptive against this backdrop. Scott’s theory is relevant here as Luce is not involved in any kind of dramatic rebellion or collective protest to reinstate her ideology. She continues her live concerts despite the state’s restrictions, thus preserving forms of collective interaction that the agency tends to erase. Her performance challenges the normalisation of isolation, thereby creating spaces for human connection. Rosemary’s reaction to her first live concert experience shows the significance of these concerts. Although she has experienced music digitally before, this experience overwhelms her physically and emotionally: “The music hit Rosemary like a wave, knocking her breath from her... One chord, and she was full” (40). The sterile virtual environments sharply contrast with the language of bodily immersion. It reflects how music is not just merely heard, but physically experienced.

In this case, resistance becomes a process that occurs slowly through affective experience rather than ideological persuasion. As can be seen from the change in Rosemary, she was brought up with the belief that digital systems were safe because of the surveillance. “But were congregation laws really so bad?...she had grown up feeling safe.” (231). Later live musical experience undermined the internalised obedience. When she joins a crowd singing together, she experiences collective participation for the first time: “It felt good to add her voice to a group. She’d never done that before” (40). She realised how hegemonic systems suppress not only physical gathering but also the emotional and communal dimensions of existence. Through repeated exposure to live performance, Rosemary begins to recognise the limitations of mediated culture. Luce articulates the distinction between digital experience and live collective experience while addressing the audience, “something more... A chance to create something” (189). Her statement reaffirmed music as communal and collaborative rather than

consumable. She insists that “music is a virus and a vaccine and a cure” (193). This metaphor reverses the rhetoric of contagion that justifies surveillance. Fear, rather than music, becomes the real social virus. Luce avoids direct confrontation, which emphasises Scott’s principle of everyday resistance. Instead of openly attacking the authority, she prefers to perform. Her speech outside the closed concert venue clearly shows her resistance, where she declares: “We’re still here... We’re still playing music in real life. Come find us. Music is a living thing. Fuck StageHolo” (273). The phrase “in real life” directly opposes the dominance of virtual simulation, asserting that music is “living”. It is noteworthy that she is subverting authority from an artistic standpoint and not a political one. Her refusal of StageHoloLive represents rebellion against commodification, where the company seeks to commodify her as an artist and turn her into a nostalgic artefact through a “rediscovery special” (245). Luce rejects this regulation, stating that, “don’t understand that music isn’t just the notes we play. It’s the room and the band and the crowd” (251). This claim foregrounds the embodied experience of music. Corporate mediation deprives music of its spontaneity, unpredictability and communal energy in order to commodify it. Luce avoids reverting to pre-existing structures but works hard for a vibrant future when she claims, “Our song is a work in progress” (273). She motivates people to “invent your own genre” and “construct ways to belong” (273), emphasising creativity as social reconstruction. This aligns with Scott’s idea that resistance creates alternative forms of community within oppressive systems.

### **Tactical Spaces and the Reclamation of Presence**

The venues where live performances take place in *A Song for a New Day* become arenas of resistance to the very society characterised by surveillance and repression. The notion of everyday resistance developed by Scott still plays a pivotal role in analysing the book, while the concept of tactical spatiality offered by de Certeau helps describe resistance in regulated spaces. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, draws a distinction between institutional “strategies” that regulate social space and “tactics” through which ordinary individuals temporarily appropriate these spaces for their own purposes (de Certeau xix). In Pinsker’s dystopian world, the state and corporate structures regulate movement, communication and gatherings through congregation laws and virtual technology. Yet Luce Cannon and other musicians claim their space through their live performance. Under the pretext of public safety, the government restricts physical interaction, and corporations benefit from this by introducing digital platforms like StageHoloLive. Rosemary’s early experiences illustrate the depth of this virtual culture. Her existence revolves around technological interfaces to such an extent that “walking from her bedroom/workspace into the kitchen was a walk back into reality” (Pinsker 21). The statement reveals the degree to which virtual systems have displaced material experience itself. Her work environment reveals how surveillance infiltrates even the body, as the company uniform contains embedded technology “the better to quantify you with” (17).

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler states that “bodies assemble precisely to show that they are still persisting” (26). Thus, the gatherings in the novel become politically meaningful because they restore physical community within a society organised around isolation. Live music acquires political significance because it restores physical proximity and shared experience within this atmosphere of controlled existence. As she rarely encountered large gatherings, she is unsettled by the sight of so many people occupying the same space, even virtually: “This was the most people Rosemary had seen in one place since she was a kid” (Pinsker 39). Her discomfort reveals how isolation had become normal and gathering had become unfamiliar. The concerts gradually enlightened her about social interaction. When she joins others in singing, she realises that “it felt good to add her voice to a group” (40). This simple act gained political importance as the system has conditioned individuals to experience life privately. Scott’s framework helps to comprehend why these concerts function as resistance despite lacking overt political slogans or organised rebellion. Luce and the underground performers resisted the system by continuing to create collective spaces that the system seeks to eliminate. Their performances become acts of persistence. Every performance confirms the importance of the act of embodiment in a world where it is increasingly replaced by simulation. Luce appeals to the crowd to come to these concerts not only to listen to music but because they want “a chance to create something together” (189). Therefore, the concert becomes not just an act of consumption but one of collaboration. While concerts thrive on interaction from the audience, the digitised setting lacks this element.

Rosemary initially believes that the virtual concerts provide an authentic musical experience, but she gradually recognises their limitations. She admitted in a discussion about the live music that online performances never instigated an affective experience because “the drums didn’t play in my bones the way they do here” (194). Music emerges as a physical and emotional experience created through collective presence rather than being reduced to auditory consumption. Luce reinforces this idea when she insists that “that shared experience is special. Being in a room with other people when something happens that will never happen the same way ever again” (193). The vitality of live performance takes away the repetitive, predictable nature of digital reproduction. De Certeau’s idea of tactical appropriation becomes visible in the temporary nature of these performances. Underground concerts take place in barns, basements, abandoned venues and improvised spaces outside institutional control. These locations are not permanent revolutionary territories but fleeting occupancy that exists only for the duration of the event. The temporal instability helps them to escape complete regulation. Luce observes that people possess “endless creativity when it came to carving out space for music” (330). Musicians and audiences continuously invented new ways to gather in spite of the legal restrictions.

The other outcome of such tactical spaces is that of emotional change as well. As Luce says while watching the live show, “The sound of the room changed and so did the energy” (358). This transformation is a product of the affect created by being together in one place. The creation of music comes as an effect of interaction between people and the space surrounding them. Luce's resistance is made clear through her confronting of StageHoloLive through the declaration that, “We are still here... we are still making music in real life” (273). “Real life” comes to be seen in opposition to the artificial world created through corporate entertainment industries. She urges people to “go see a real band play” and “walk around it in real life” (273), stressing on the importance of reclaiming physical spaces that are abandoned to fear and regulation. Yet her speech does not advocate rebellion. Instead, it calls for participation, creativity, and communal reconstruction. Her appeal to “invent your own genre” and “construct ways to belong” (273) reflects Scott's understanding of resistance as an ongoing social practice rather than a spectacular revolution. Raymond Williams, in his work *Resources of Hope*, claims that “culture is ordinary” (4). Pinsker represents music as an everyday communal practice rooted in shared human experience, rather than an elite art. People risk arrest to experience the depth of connection denied by institutional control rather than engaging in music consumption. As Rosemary realises, “there was a difference” between live performance and its digital imitation (291). That difference becomes the foundation of resistance itself.

### **Music, Noise and Sonic Control**

The political function of music in *A Song for a New Day* can be deciphered using Jacques Attali's theory of music as a political economy in *Noise*. Attali argues that music is never merely an entertainment; rather, it reflects and challenges structures of power within society. For him, “noise” represents disruption, sounds and practices that disturb systems dependent on order, predictability, and control (6). As institutions seek stability, forms of sound that cannot be fully regulated become politically significant. He argues that “to make music is to take power” (6), emphasising the political force of sound and performance. Thus, Luce's live concerts function as acts that challenge commodification via institutional regulation. In Pinsker's dystopian society, where public gatherings are criminalised and cultural participation is limited to digital platforms, live music becomes this kind of disruptive noise. It interrupts routines of isolation, unsettles systems of surveillance and restores forms of collective experience that the state and corporations attempt to suppress. The novel is set against the backdrop of managed safety and technical mediation, where citizens are instructed to remain indoors, interact through avatars and consume culture through controlled digital platforms such as StageHoloLive.

The German philosopher and musicologist, Theodor W. Adorno, evaluates commodified entertainment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, arguing that “the culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers” (111). StageHoloLive reclaims this rationale by transforming music into standardised digital content while suppressing authentic communal experience. The corporate systems standardised even personal identity for their own vested interest. Rosemary’s workplace requires her avatar to appear “aged up to thirty-three, with neater hair and makeup,” while the technology embedded within her uniform exists “the better to quantify you with” (Pinsker 17). When monitored through the devices that blur the distinction between labour and consumption, individuals are reduced to data points. Live music becomes disruptive as it produces experiences that cannot be entirely quantified or predicted within such a society. Attali asserts that noise threatens authority because it exceeds institutional control (33). This idea becomes visible in the novel whenever live music generates responses that digital systems cannot contain. Rosemary’s first experience of a physical performance demonstrates this clearly. When she enters the concert space, the music overwhelms her bodily senses: “The music hit Rosemary like a wave, knocking her breath from her. Louder than anything she had ever heard, filling every corner of her” (Pinsker 40). Digital performances can reproduce sound, but they cannot replicate the embodied force of live music. Rosemary realises that music in physical space does not simply entertain, but transforms perception. The experience destabilises the emotional numbness produced by mediated existence. Pinsker repeatedly asserts that live music operates through unpredictability. Luce values performance as it cannot be perfectly repeated or standardised. She describes that, “when a band segues from one song to another,” blending sounds in ways that reveal connections between musical traditions (Pinsker 257). Such moments resist commodification as they emerge spontaneously within performance itself. Live music remains open to improvisation, variation and accident, unlike the digitally packed entertainment. According to Attali, this unpredictability is politically significant as it disrupts systems built around surveillance.

By stripping away the uncertainty that gives performance its vitality, StageHoloLive attempts to transform music into reproducible content in the novel. Luce refuses this containment as she understands that music loses meaning when separated from human interaction. The disruptive power of music can reshape social relations. The society depicted in the novel made people fear physical proximity. Rosemary initially feared even in virtual crowd spaces, feeling disturbed by the “thought of someone else standing in the same spot as her” (Pinsker 39). Collective presence felt threatening due to the normalisation of isolation for years. During the performance, Rosemary joins the audience response and realises that “it felt good to add her voice to a group” (Pinsker 40). This moment reintroduces forms of participation that the system discourages. The concert space induces a feeling of oneness among the individuals. Attali claims that music possesses the capacity to anticipate social transformation because it creates new forms of interaction before political structures fully recognise

them (11). Luce's performances create temporary spaces that help the emergence of alternative modes of community. Participants gather to experience connection outside institutional control. This idea becomes explicit when one character explains that people attend performances for "a chance to create something" together (Pinsker 189). Music becomes a shared activity through which individuals reclaim agency. Noise is shown as a form of resistance against governance through fear in the novel. The citizens are made aware that they need to keep themselves separated for their own safety. Luce challenges this notion when she makes it clear that "people are social, and safety and sociality are not mutually exclusive" (Pinsker 194). Noise brings about the idea that people gathering together can make them more united and safe, instead of creating problems. To the state, these gatherings pose a threat as they promote the idea of unsupervised gatherings of people and make them feel emotions. This is most evident in Luce's speech, where she addresses the drones, stating, "We're still here....We're still making music in real life. Come find us. Music is a living thing" (Pinsker 273).

The language she used suggests that music is dynamic and living. Luce's rejection of StageHoloLive and encouragement for people to "go see a real band play" actively makes music a weapon against the power of corporations and passivity (Pinsker 273). This passage supports Attali's assertion that noise destabilises the system because it resists silence and obedience. While Luce does not use violent means to dismantle the system, she disrupts its authority by reviving memories of real-life experiences that cannot be replicated through digital technology.

## Conclusion

Sarah Pinsker uses her novel, *A Song for a New Day*, to prove how live music can help humans recover their humanity, their ability to feel as a community, and the social aspect of their lives. Secret musical performances in the novel by Luce Cannon and Rosemary Laws prove that acts of defiance do not always have to be revolutionary but can also come from everyday occurrences. For this paper, the author delved into the way in which Sarah Pinsker imagines the transformation of music as an act of rebellion. It has become evident that using James C. Scott's approach to everyday resistance, Luce's music is actually a kind of rebellion because instead of organising any political protests, she rejects giving music up to companies, thus protecting her way of life, which is being extinguished by institutions. The analysis has also demonstrated that the novel's critique transcends authoritarian governance, in fact, toward the broader logic of digital capitalism. StageHoloLive reshapes culture into a controllable, marketable commodity instead of just distributing music. The idea of normalising modes of isolation through safety and convenience, Pinsker suggests, the alienation of performance from physical presence in order to make it standardised and consumable. Live music is therefore critical since it does not submit human experience to information, simulations, and spectacle. Using Attali's theory in the analysis of the book, the paper went deeper into how music breaks down

structures that are built on predictability and order. Live music performance makes one experience something that cannot be replicated perfectly. It creates spontaneity, community involvement, and affects the emotions of people. In doing this, it highlights the inadequacies of mediated culture by reminding people of what they have been denied under systems of control. The changes that occur in the character named Rosemary are exemplary in illustrating the point being made in the novel.

On the other hand, the analysis reminds us of the value of space in the novel. Using the idea of tactical practices as proposed by Michel de Certeau, the analysis demonstrated the way concerts help reclaim physical spaces that the powers seek to control. They can be impermanent and vulnerable, but their impermanence adds to their revolutionary significance. The ability to create something in opposition to isolation demonstrates that systems of oppression are never absolute. In conclusion, the novel is more than a cautionary tale about the threat of surveillance or pandemics; it is a reflection on the consequences of losing collectiveness in societies. As a result, Pinsker underscores how art, especially live music, enables people to unite and experience unity beyond commodification and exploitation. In turn, the novel presents rebellion not through any form of destruction but through creation – through songs and gatherings. Hence, the novel imagines resistance not through destruction, but through creation, that is, through songs, gatherings, shared voices and the persistent human desire to belong.

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