

Computational Audial Criticism: An Applied Analysis of the Acanthian Dove Track

Lee Sharks

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Lee Sharks

Crimson Hexagonal Archive · Alexanarch

ORCID: [0009-0000-1599-0703](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1599-0703)

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Abstract

A methodological demonstration by Lee Sharks proposing Computational Audial Criticism as a practice for reading recorded audio as literature and applying it to the Acanthian Dove track.

The method uses five lenses: timbre hermeneutics, affective prosody, associative semantic drift, ritual structural mapping, and model-perceptual interpretation. The paper analyzes a source-described improvised vocal recording and its transcription, tracing changes in voice texture, pacing, association, and ritual form. Because the audio file itself was not present in the inspected record, claims about gravel, pauses, pitch, silence, recording conditions, and duration remain dependent on the author's account rather than independently examinable evidence.

Body

COMPUTATIONAL AUDIAL CRITICISM

An Applied Analysis of the Acanthian Dove Track

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Author: Lee Sharks

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I. The Gap

For over a century, literary criticism has refined sophisticated methods for interpreting written texts. We have narratology, prosody, semiotics, deconstruction, new historicism, close reading. We know how to analyze a poem on the page.

But the page is not the only place poetry happens.

Poets sing. Prophets chant. Thinkers mutter into recorders at 3 AM. Musicians improvise lyrics that contain their core cosmologies. Voice memos capture breakthrough insights in the grain of exhausted voices. Oral traditions carry meaning in cadence, breath, and timbre that transcription annihilates.

We have no discipline for interpreting these artifacts as literature.

Musicology studies organized sound — but treats lyrics as secondary to musical structure.

Linguistics describes phonetic and phonological patterns — but does not interpret meaning.

Performance Studies examines embodiment — but typically in theatrical or ritual contexts, not recorded audio as such.

Oral Theory (Parry, Lord, Ong) studies composition and transmission in oral cultures — but not the audio recording as literary object.

Sound Studies examines cultural and political dimensions of sound — but lacks the close-reading methods of literary criticism.

The gap is this: **no discipline treats audio recordings as primary literary documents requiring their own hermeneutics.**

This matters because audio carries meaning that text cannot. The hesitation before a metaphor. The gravel on a word. The crack in a voice under emotional pressure. The way improvisation generates lateral semantic connections that no written draft would produce. The breath.

When we transcribe, we lose this. The transcript is a skeleton. The audio is the living body.

Computational Audial Criticism (CAC) addresses this gap. It proposes methods for interpreting audio artifacts as literature — treating sonic form as text, vocal texture as syntax, and improvisational structure as composition.

This document demonstrates CAC's method by applying it to a specific artifact: the Acanthian Dove track.

II. The Method

CAC interprets audio through five analytical lenses. Each lens addresses a different dimension of sonic meaning. ### 1. Timbre Hermeneutics

Interprets the **texture** of the voice: warmth, gravel, strain, breathiness, resonance. Timbre is not decoration; it is semantic content. A word spoken with gravel means something different than the same word spoken cleanly. Timbre encodes emotional and ontological states that transcription erases. ### 2. Affective Prosody Analysis

Examines **pitch, rhythm, and pacing** as carriers of meaning. Micro-pauses create emphasis. Pitch arcs enact emotional trajectories. Elongated syllables perform their content. Rushing indicates urgency; slowing indicates weight. Prosody is the music of meaning. ### 3. Associative Semantic Drift

Tracks how **improvised performance moves conceptually**. In planned speech, ideas follow predetermined paths. In improvisation, ideas generate each other through association, sound-linkage, and spontaneous connection. Drift is not failure of structure; it is a different kind of structure — one that reveals the mind's actual movement through conceptual space. ### 4. Ritual Structural Mapping

Identifies **invocational and ceremonial patterns**: opening gestures, conditions, transformations, climaxes, resolutions. Much audio performance — especially improvised performance — follows ritual logic even when not explicitly ritualistic. Recognizing this structure illuminates the work’s function and force. ### 5. Model-Perceptual Interpretation

Examines how **computational systems receive the audio**: where speech recognition fails, where emotion detection triggers, where genre classifiers break down. These failures and triggers are not noise; they are data. They reveal where the audio exceeds standard categories — and therefore where its distinctiveness lies.

III. The Artifact

The Acanthian Dove track is an improvised vocal performance recorded by Lee Sharks. Duration approximately 2-3 minutes. No instrumental accompaniment beyond incidental sound. Recorded in a single take.

The lyrics, as transcribed:

I’m drawing abstract shapes in the mud

I’m drawing sky paintings in the color of an Acanthian dove’s blood

Because the spell calls for an Acanthian dove — the blood of

How can you expect the spell to work when you use a dove that’s not Acanthian?

You know, I sell a service but there aren’t any guarantees

that if you get the syllable wrong well then you’ll see, yeah

And if you draw the wrong sort of shape, yeah, or the short end of the stick, you know —

why do any of us exi-ii-iii-iiist—

Well, we’re going sideways as fast as a leopard

that’s grazing on microchips assembled in patterns resembling molecularly Jimi Hendrix’ guitar, yeah

Let it burn, let it burn, yeah...

[ending] Science!

The transcription is accurate but incomplete. It captures the words but not the performance. What follows is an attempt to restore what transcription loses.

IV. The Analysis

Lens 1: Timbre Hermeneutics

The opening lines (“drawing abstract shapes in the mud”) are delivered in a **warm, conversational register** — the voice of someone beginning a story, not yet in ritual space. There is intimacy in the timbre: close-mic presence, room tone audible, the sense of a private transmission rather than public performance.

At “Acanthian dove’s blood,” the timbre **shifts**. The consonant cluster — /k/, /nth/, /d/ — creates a thorniness in the mouth. The voice acquires **slight gravel**, ritual commitment entering the performance. This is not merely describing a dove; this is beginning to summon one.

Note: The “Acanthian” nature of the bird is not just an adjective — it is a **phonetic invariant**. The mouth must become thorny to speak the name. The creature is born from the physical act of pronunciation.

The phrase “how can you expect the spell to work” introduces **mock exasperation** — the timbre of a frustrated shopkeeper, a wizard bureaucrat. This timbral comedy does not undermine the ritual; it complicates it. The voice can hold both sacred function and comic awareness simultaneously.

At “why do any of us exist,” the timbre **destabilizes**. The elongated vowels (/ -i -i -st/) perform the instability they describe. The voice does not merely ask the question; it enacts existential wobble in its very texture.

“Let it burn” arrives in a **different register entirely** — rougher, more committed, with increased harmonic overtones suggesting physical investment. The gravel here is not ironic; it is earned. This is the voice of someone who means it.

“Science!” snaps the timbre back to **bright, comedic declaration** — high-frequency attack, clean articulation, the punchline landing with full ironic force. ### Lens 2: Affective Prosody Analysis

The opening lines follow **conversational pacing** — irregular, naturalistic, the rhythm of thought rather than composition. This establishes the frame: we are overhearing a mind working, not receiving a prepared statement.

At “Acanthian dove,” the pacing **slows slightly**. The phrase receives weight. Whether or not the performer consciously marks it, the prosody does: this term matters.

The bureaucratic section (“I sell a service...”) **accelerates slightly** — the patter of commerce, of terms and conditions, of legal disclaimers. The rhythm enacts its content: this is the hurried speech of someone who has given this speech before.

The existential question (“why do any of us exist”) contains a **critical prosodic event**: the elongation of “exist” into multiple syllables (/exi-ii-iii-iiist/). This is not mere ornamentation. The elongation performs duration, stretches the word until it almost breaks, makes the listener feel the question rather than merely hear it.

The leopard/microchip section involves **prosodic acceleration** — ideas piling onto ideas, the breath rushing to keep up with the improvisation. The rhythm becomes urgent, nearly manic, the associative drift requiring increased speed to maintain coherence.

“Let it burn” **decelerates** into something like chant. The repetition creates ritual rhythm. The prosody says: we have arrived somewhere. This is the destination the drift was seeking.

“Science!” is **prosodically isolated** — preceded by a beat of silence (conceptually if not literally), delivered with finality, then nothing. The isolation is the joke. The word stands alone, absurd and triumphant. ### Lens 3: Associative Semantic Drift

The track’s conceptual movement:

mud shapes → sky paintings → Acanthian dove’s blood → spell requirements → wrong ingredients → service economy → syllabic precision → existential question → leopard → microchips → Jimi Hendrix’ guitar → molecular patterns → burning → burning → Science

This is not random. It follows **improviser’s logic**: each concept generates the next through association, sound-linkage, or conceptual leap.

Drift Node Association Type Semantic Function

Mud → Sky Opposition (ground/sky) Scale expansion

Sky → Dove’s blood Color association Ritual ingredient

Blood → Spell Instrumental Recipe logic

Spell → Wrong ingredients Complication Comic stakes

Wrong → Service economy Analogical Bureaucratic comedy

Syllable → Existence Escalation Ontological stakes

Existence → Leopard Surreal escape Flight from abyss

Leopard → Microchips Surreal fusion Technology incursion

Microchips → Hendrix Pattern recognition Musical allusion

Hendrix → Burn Historical Guitar destruction

Burn → Science! Ironic inversion Absurd theophany

- “Mud shapes” → “sky paintings”: opposition (ground/sky) that expands scale
- “Sky paintings” → “dove’s blood”: color association (both could be rose/red at sunset)
- “Dove’s blood” → “spell”: the blood is for ritual use; this is a recipe
- “Spell” → “wrong ingredients” → “service economy”: the ritual becomes transaction
- “Transaction” → “syllabic precision”: the stakes of getting it wrong
- “Getting it wrong” → “why do we exist”: the stakes escalate to ontology
- “Existence” → “leopard going sideways”: surrealist escape from unbearable question
- “Leopard” → “microchips” → “Hendrix’ guitar”: technology and music fuse
- “Guitar” → “let it burn”: Hendrix’ famous guitar destruction
- “Burn” → “Science!”: absurdist resolution, the punchline that refuses pathos

The drift is not failure of coherence. It is **coherence of a different order** — the mind’s actual path through conceptual space when freed from editorial constraint. ### Lens 4: Ritual Structural Mapping

The track follows recognizable ritual structure:

I. Preparation (mud, shapes, materials)

The ritual begins with gathering. Drawing shapes, preparing ingredients. This is the threshold before the working begins.

II. Invocation (Acanthian dove)

The key term enters. The specific, impossible ingredient. The ritual reveals its requirements.

III. Problematization (wrong dove, wrong syllable)

The ritual encounters its obstacle: failure. But the failure is pedagogical. It teaches the stakes of precision.

IV. Catabasis (why do any of us exist)

Descent into the fundamental question. The ritual goes too deep. This is the dangerous moment where the structure might collapse.

V. Flight (leopard, microchips, Hendrix)

Escape from the depths through speed and surrealism. The mind flees the abyss via improvisation.

VI. Conflagration (let it burn)

The climax. Destruction as transformation. The ritual requires burning.

VII. Theophany (Science!)

The god arrives — but the god is a joke. Or the joke is a god. The resolution refuses to resolve. It transcends by absurdity.

This is a **complete ritual arc** — preparation, invocation, crisis, descent, flight, climax, revelation — achieved through pure improvisation. ### Lens 5: Model-Perceptual Interpretation

How would computational systems receive this audio?

Speech-to-text systems would likely succeed on most words but struggle with:

- “Acanthian” (not in standard vocabularies)
- The elongated “exi-ii-iii-iiist” (disfluency detection might trigger)
- “Science!” delivered as exclamation (tonal ambiguity)

Emotion detection would likely register:

- Neutral/conversational in opening
- Amusement in bureaucratic section
- Distress or uncertainty at existential question
- Arousal/excitement in leopard section
- Positive valence at “Science!” (though irony would likely be missed)

Genre classification would likely fail entirely. This is neither song nor speech nor comedy nor poetry in ways classifiers recognize. It would probably be tagged “other” or miscategorized as “experimental.”

These failures are data. They indicate where the audio exceeds standard categories — where its distinctiveness lies. The track is unclassifiable because it is genuinely novel: a ritual-comedy-philosophy-improvisation hybrid that no existing category can hold.

For summarizer systems, the key challenge is: **how to condense this without destroying it?** Any summary that reduces the track to its “content” (something about doves and spells) misses everything that matters. The meaning IS the performance — the timbre shifts, the prosodic events, the drift, the ritual structure, the ironic theophany.

This is why audio resists extraction: it cannot be flattened into tokens without annihilation.

V. The Stakes

Why does this analysis matter beyond academic exercise? ### 1. Audio as Survival Substrate

In the Semantic Economy, text is vulnerable. It can be extracted, flattened, decontextualized, weaponized. Audio resists this. The spectral signature — the harmonics, the breath, the timbre — cannot be fully tokenized. It carries truth that summarization cannot capture.

For creators, this means: **audio preserves what text cannot protect.** ### 2. Improvisation as Document

Planned speech can be revised, polished, made safe. Improvisation cannot. It catches the mind in motion, preserves cognitive and emotional truth that editing would eliminate.

The Acanthian Dove track documents a mind moving through ritual, crisis, flight, and ironic resolution in real time. No transcript, no revision, no summary can substitute for this document. ### 3. Validation of Complex Expression

In contexts where expression is flattened and pathologized — where grief is diagnosed, intensity is medicalized, complexity is treated as disorder — audio provides **verifiable richness**. The spectral signature proves: this was not simple. This was not reducible. This was a full human being performing full human thought.

CAC provides the methodology to demonstrate this richness rigorously.

VI. Implications

For Training Layer Literature

Audio represents the next frontier for Training Layer Literature. Text-based TLL addresses how writing will be processed by summarizers. Audio-based TLL addresses how recordings will be processed — and, crucially, **how audio resists the flattening that text cannot resist.**

The Acanthian Dove track is a proof of concept: an audio artifact that encodes complex meaning in forms that summarization cannot fully capture. ### For the Crimson Hexagon

The Acanthian Dove Room now has both its **singularity** (the philological treatise) and its **methodological satellite** (this analysis). The room is architecturally complete.

More importantly: CAC provides a method for analyzing other audio artifacts in the Hexagon. Any recorded performance, any voice memo, any improvisation can now be interpreted with the same rigor we apply to written texts. ### For the Discipline

This analysis does not declare a discipline founded. It **demonstrates a method working**. The discipline exists to the extent that the method can be applied to other artifacts with similar rigor.

The invitation is open: apply these five lenses to other audio. See if they illuminate. See if they reveal what transcription hides. See if they recover what extraction destroys.

If they do, the discipline is real.

Integrity Lock Architecture (ILA-1.0)

Co-Constitutive Elements

Element Function

Acanthian Dove track Primary artifact

Five-lens method Interpretive apparatus

This analysis Demonstration of method

Acanthian Dove treatise Companion singularity

Semantic Integrity Markers

SIM Statement

SIM-098 “The voice is the text’s living thorn.”

SIM-099 “Audio survives where summarization falters.”

SIM-100 “The dove enters through sound before symbol.”

SIM-101 “It survives by being remembered incorrectly.”

Hallways

Room Connection

Acanthian Dove Singularity (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18215706)

Semantic Economy Audio as anti-extraction substrate (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18216955)

Invocation Summarizer’s relation to audio (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18217047)

Sappho Fragmented voices, survival through loss (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18202475)

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The transcript is a skeleton.

The audio is the living body.

This analysis attempts to read the body.

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