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Living/Reviving Documents, Collections, Archives, and Atlases of Music and Listening. Notes on Christian Marclay's Work

Elena Biserna

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The work of New York-based artist Christian Marclay spans performance, assemblage, video, found footage, ready-made, photography and urban projects, often translating and transitioning between media or reworking the same project in different languages. Nevertheless, despite this wide range of media, most of his projects share a common *modus operandi*: appropriation, accumulation, re-use, montage, remix, and intertextuality are always central elements of his practice. From this point of view, as Jennifer González has argued, “to the degree that nearly all of Marclay's works rely upon readymade images, objects or texts, they can also be called 'archival.’”ⁱ

Beginning from these observations, in this article I explore Marclay's multilayered investigations of notions such as archive, collection, atlas, and document as well as the construction of histories and counter-histories of listening and music in his practice. My aim is to suggest that Marclay's work on the archive often goes beyond processes of accumulation, re-use and montage of found objects, images, records, etc. to address the principles and ontology of the archive and of the document itself, while simultaneously exploring (minor) histories of musical practice and listening and their representation.

On one hand, I emphasize the way that the artist's work over the decades has continually explored relationships between music and popular visual culture, the space of (social, cultural) production, circulation and reception of sound as well as slippages between performance, the ephemeral nature of acoustic events and their reproduction on storage media or the ways they are visually, linguistically and symbolically represented. His work thus interrogates sound and music not so much as aesthetic materials in themselves, but rather as elements that come into play more broadly in culture, society, and history.

On the other hand, this article also discusses specific series of works in an effort to map how Marclay interrogates documents, collections, archives and atlases throughout his practice, arguing that their fixedness, stability and closeness are radically questioned and redefined through liveness every time they are addressed. In other words, although many of Marclay's projects have taken the form of collections, archival structures and *dispositifs* or were generated by intervening in existing collections, he constantly reanimates and revives these formal, technical and discursive structures.

First and foremost, Marclay's practice appears to be rooted in a continuous reflection on the status of the audio document itself, a reflection that was initiated at the very beginning of his career.

Giving New Life to Records

During his studies in Boston in 1979, Marclay founded the duo The Bachelors, even (an homage to Marcel Duchamp) starting playing records on turntables. Marclay lacked a formal musical education and was thus unable to play any instruments but, struck by the sound of a

damaged Batman record he found on the street, he decided to experiment with manipulating live records. Recorded sound and audio storage media became his main sources for musical performances. In these concerts he reused and reorganized into new combinations and narratives diverse records from disparate genres, effectively fracturing their temporal linearity, original meanings and associations by using techniques such as scratching, reversing the direction of rotation or changing the playback speed, as well as acting directly on the physical records by scraping, painting, adding labels, etc.

This approach located Marclay at the origins of turntablism, a practice that has become increasingly popular in recent years and that he continues to develop even in his most recent performances, often in collaboration with other musicians. At the same time, Marclay established a place for himself in the more longstanding practice of using recordings as musical materials (a tradition stretching from John Cage to *musique concrète*ⁱⁱ).

However, these turntable performances transformed listening and playing into producing, collapsed any separation between art and mass culture and deconstructed the modern notion of “author creator.”ⁱⁱⁱ This propensity for appropriation, manipulation, and postproduction – to borrow a famous term from Nicolas Bourriaud^{iv} – was quite widespread in the late 1970s and 1980s and characterized an entire range of music and art practice, from hip hop culture and the emerging New York Dj scene to the deconstructive investigations of mass-media images carried out by the artists revolving around the Artists Space and Metro Pictures Gallery, such as Robert Longo, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine.

Nevertheless, there is a specific aspect of Marclay's work that distinguishes it in this context: namely, a powerful orientation toward liveness that also involves a reflection on the status of the record medium and recording more generally. As a matter of fact, his practice is characterized by a strong performativity: it rarely involves studio recordings or releases, instead adhering to the live dimension. In terms of artistic influences, Marclay has often cited Duchamp, *Nouveau réalisme*, Pop Art and performance art; as far as music is concerned, however, his roots lie not so much in “high” music experimentation but rather in the punk and post-punk scene he got to know while studying in New York. Just as Marclay's first experiments with the turntable evoked the rejection of virtuosity and technique so characteristic of the punk scene, he has also been inspired by the direct confrontation with the public, physical energy and atmosphere of the concerts he attended in the clubs of the Big Apple.^v The common foundation of these elements is that they require a physical presence in the here-now and cannot be reproduced on recordings.^{vi}

These are the elements Marclay draws on in interrogating the very ontology of recording technology and its relationship to performance, a concern that has become one of the core foci of his thinking. Indeed, the artist has described one of his works – *Ghost (I Don't Live Today)* – as follows:

Ghost was also dealing with the absence of the performer – the absence or death of the performer because of the recording technology. I was playing these records, going through the motions with my surrogate guitar [...] I was bringing back to life these recordings, putting back the music in a live situation.^{vii}

Ghost is a performance enacted in 1985 at The Kitchen in New York, in honor of Jimi Hendrix. For this performance, the artist manipulated a collection of Hendrix's records with his “phonoguitar” – a modified wearable turntable – while re-enacting his famous stage movements and legendary performativity against a background consisting of projected film footage of Hendrix himself.^{viii}

For Marclay, “Recorded sound is dead sound, in the sense that it's not live anymore. The music is embalmed. I'm trying to bring it back to life through my art.” Sound storage media

are thus interpreted as a sort of tomb that preserves the remnants of irretrievably lost sounds, voices and events – the turntable can replay them, but they consist of no more than ghostly presences. From Marclay’s perspective, rather than re-enacting a presence, the playback of a recording embodies an absence: the absence of the body and situation that produced them. Therefore turntablism is a means for bringing music back to life, recovering its processual nature and restoring a direct and bodily encounter with the public, thereby reviving music from the “corpse” state that it acquires when fixed on a record.

Questioning Inscriptions

In his essay introducing the exhibition *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, curator Okwui Enwezor reflects on the relationship between photography and archive and argues that every photograph is *a priori* an archival object thanks to its “capacity for mechanical inscription and the order or direct reference that links the photograph with the indisputable fact of its subject's existence.” Similarly, the art historian Charles Merewether speaks of the way photography produces an “archival effect” by “transferring the world to image.”^{xix}

Phonography (literally, “sound writing”) offers multiple auditory analogies to photography’s ability to document and preserve the real, saving it from its ephemeral nature and the passage of time. Although sound storage media are intrinsically temporal in a way that photography is not, when the phonograph first appeared at the end of the 19th Century it was perceived precisely through a photographic model.^x Again, when the first reel-to-reel recorders were commercialized, the marketing strategies presented sound recording as an equivalent to photography: just as the camera allowed people to create their own photographic albums, the recorders were conceived of as mnemonic tools capable of storing and retrieving family “sound albums” and “aural souvenirs.”^{xxi}

In cultural terms, the possibility to conceive of a sound or musical archive, to retain the traces of the past and reproduce them while preserving and organizing memories of them are all intimately linked to inscription and, subsequently, recording technology. It is only through the ability to fix sound and acoustic events on a storage medium, separating them from their space-time context, that these events become inscribable, memorizable and archivable sources. So, if the camera is “literally an archiving machine” as Enwezor claims, we might say the same of the first phonographs and tape recorders.

Indeed, audio recordings have often been interpreted as transparent documents of past sound events, a sort of “time capsule”; for instance, the Hungarian writer and film critic Béla Balázs has stated: “What we hear [...] is not an image of the sound, but the sound itself which the sound camera has recorded and reproduced again [...] there is no difference in dimension and reality between the original sound and the recorded and reproduced sound.”^{xxii}

It is precisely this understanding of recording that Marclay's work aims to destabilize, calling into question sound conservation devices and interrogating the relationship among recording, past, present and future.

In the same year he made *Ghost*, in fact, Marclay also created *Record without a cover*, one of his best-known and most discussed works. This is a self-produced and self-released 33 rpm that, as tautologically stated in the title, comes with no cover and the instruction “do not store in a protective package.” One side of the record contains a recording of about 20 minutes of a performance by the artist on multiple turntables in New York while the second side is empty. The vulnerable and unprotected surface of the record is thus conceived of as a repository for marks, dust, scratches and fingerprints caused by any manipulation, use, or movement of the

record itself after its production in a process that gradually accumulates the ravages of time. *Record without a cover* thereby brings the fixity of the audio document back to the ephemeral, procedural, temporary and improvised nature of performance, transforming the sound storage medium into a precarious palimpsest, constantly reshaped by its own history. This work creates a short circuit between the recording and the object's history following distribution which is intended to remain engraved on the record's surface. It is as if *Record without a cover*, embracing a critical and postmodern approach to the archival document, affirms that the document is not a neutral, transparent and objective repository of the past event that it seeks to store, but rather a "construction" inevitably tied to its history and materiality. As the French historian Jacques Le Goff has argued, the document is "first of all the result of a conscious and unconscious montage of the history, time and society that produced it, but also of the following ages during which it continued to live."^{xiii} It is precisely this "following history" that seems to most interest Marclay:

The record is supposed to be a stable reproduction of time, but it's not. Time and sound become elusive again through the mechanical failure. Technology captures sound and stamps it on these disks. They then begin lives of their own. Within those lives, technological cracks – defects – occur. That's when it gets interesting for me, when technology fails.^{xiv}

Record without a cover challenges the transparency and status of the record as a document and technology of memory, highlighting its materiality and historicity and conferring on it an individual life determined by usage. The medium becomes present, opaque, visible and material. Any transparency is obstructed by the emphasis placed on the sound of the storage medium itself during the playback, which prevents any illusory identification between performance and mechanical reproduction (an idea that finds its live counterpart in turntablism).^{xv}

Culturally, people listening to records are focused on the music itself and tend to ignore any "noise" that may interfere with the transmission of the message. On the contrary, Marclay places us face to face with the materiality of the artifact and its history in a sort of media archeology that conceptualizes the record – to use the words of the German media theorist Wolfgang Ernst – as "a different kind of 'archive', not cultural historical, but cultural-technological."^{xvi} While the artists gathered around the Metro Pictures Gallery in that period were questioning the status of the mass media image, approaching it "less as a physical trace or indexical imprint of reality and more as a coded construction that produces reality effects,"^{xvii} we might argue that Marclay was doing the same thing with records, taking a critical approach to the medium and its mnemonic and documentary value, exposing its "construction" and questioning any possible "reality" or "archival effect."

This way of approaching recording devices and focus on the principles of trace and inscription continued and became particularly evident in Marclay's subsequent work, specifically in several installations made with vinyl records, CDs and tapes (as well as multiple photographs and photograms by the artist^{xviii}). In *Footsteps* (1989) in particular, the artist covered the surface of the exhibition space floor with 3,500 records. Each record contained a recording of the sounds of the artist's footsteps mixed with those of tap dancers. The public was invited to walk on the floor, "engraving" their steps directly onto the records, some of which were later signed and sold as individual works. *Footsteps* takes the music practice conceptualized by László Moholy-Nagy in the 1920s, involving converting the gramophone from an apparatus of reproduction to one of production by engraving directly the surface of records, and expands it to a collective, improvised, and random dimension.^{xix} The piece thus contests the fixity of the record by turning it – as with *Record without a cover* and turntables performances – into a rewritable, precarious, and thoroughly *living* medium.

However, for Marclay the record is not only a medium to be questioned (and revived), it is also a symbol of our commodity-based culture and of the reification and industrial production of music: a collectible object par excellence.

Collecting

The Sounds of Christmas is an annual in-progress project initiated in 1999 at Art Pace in San Antonio, Texas, and subsequently presented each year during the Christmas period in institutions such as the New Museum in New York (2000), the Tate Modern in London (2004), and the MOCAD Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2009). This piece consists of the public presentation of an encyclopedic collection of approximately 1,200 Christmas music albums collected by Marclay over the years.

In the installation, the records are displayed in freely accessible showcases like in a record store or library and classified according to musical genres (from rock to country western, from rap to children's music), explicitly drawing on the display and organizational principles characteristic of the archive's material structure and techniques.

However, the records are not merely objects fetishistically collected and presented as an autonomous whole; rather, they are the base materials for the real focus of the project: a series of performances by Marclay as well as different DJs invited to create live remixes of the collection. In addition, the collection is cataloged in a database and the installation is completed with images of the record covers and footage of previous performances projected on video screens.

This project thereby follows the "quasi-archival logic" and "architecture" mentioned by Hal Foster in his fundamental essay *An Archival Impulse*.^{xx} At the same time, it also becomes a self-archiving process: the screens in the exhibition space double the collection of records by displaying not only the collection itself but also the collection catalog (that Victor I. Stoichita defines as "the collection as a pure concept"^{xxi}); at the same time, by showing the documentation of the performances enacted in different exhibition spaces in previous years, the screens also create an in-progress archive of the project itself.

Marclay's "collecting impulse" is also evident in a series of works he produced starting in the late 1980s using photos found in magazines, mass media, or at flea markets and then combined into typologies representing or evoking specific sound and music practices. *Amplification* (1995) is probably the most monumental installation of this kind. It was set up in the 18th Century Church of San Stae in Venice for the 46th Biennale.^{xxii} The space of the nave was occupied by six suspended large-scale reproductions of old found photographs on semi-transparent cloth. The pictures represented people playing in domestic environments: non-professional, amateur musicians singing or playing the flute, guitar, piano or accordion in everyday contexts. In this piece, Marclay establishes an analogy between photographic enlargement and sound amplification through the title while at the same time investigating the cultural micro-history of amateur musical production and consumption by discovering and reusing private, personal and abandoned sources. These visual recordings, with their ghostly appearance and the evanescence of the material on which they are printed, stimulate the imagination and invite the visitor to mentally "listen."

In the following decade, Marclay produced several projects that instead departed from his photographic practice. Here, photography was once again used as a sort of diaristic practice allowing him to immortalize the encounter with objects and visual forms in the environment and to produce series that function as annotations and mnemonic aid without any formalistic purpose. One of these, *Zoom Zoom* (2008), is a series of photographs exhibited in the form of

a slide projection depicting onomatopoeic expressions found on album covers, signs and shop windows as well as product labels from candies, sprays, bottles, etc. Another one, *Shuffle* (2007), is a collection of 75 photos of musical notations found on diverse everyday objects: cups, writing on walls, textiles, tattoos, and so on.

Marclay's collections also took the form of object series in *Box Set* (2008-10), an assortment of boxes of different sizes, materials, and origins decorated with musical motifs, or *Pret-à-Porter* (2010), a collection of different kinds of clothing decorated with notations.

In all these pieces we once again find the core principle of the artist's performances: as Stoichita claims, "Every collection requires a montage. Selecting/putting together (the only, fatally ambivalent way of translating the verb *colligere*) are the operations that govern its genesis."^{xxiii} However, Marclay does not limit himself to presenting his collections. Rather, as in *The Sounds of Christmas*, he also uses them as the basis for live performances, effectively transforming these photographic and objects series into musical scores.^{xxiv} In fact, *Zoom Zoom* is also the score for a vocal performance written for the singer Shelley Hirsch. During the live show, the singer improvises with her voice in response to the images that Marclay selects and picks up. Likewise, the notations printed on the boxes that make up *Box Set* are played live by an individual performer, who is permitted to freely organize their sequence, but has to play them as literally as possible in order of size. In *Pret-a-Porter*, two models wear and change the clothes, while musicians read the music and improvise following their sequence of dressing and undressing. *Shuffle* goes beyond these other pieces to evoke Fluxus event scores by asking the general viewer to follow the instructions and improvise freely, thus imbuing him or her with the performative attitude: as a matter of fact, this piece was released as a box of playing cards that can be shuffled, sorted, and then used as the basis for improvisation. As the instructions specify, "This deck of cards can be used as a musical score. Shuffle the deck and draw your cards. Create a sequence using as many or as few of the cards as you wish. Play alone or with others. Invent your own rules. Sounds may be generated or simply imagined."^{xxv}

All of these projects bring to the surface the collecting drive that constitutes the foundation of Marclay's turntables performances and video works as well, an impulse that also dominates a significant segment of contemporary artistic practice.^{xxvi} In Marclay's work, however, the collection is never an end in itself; rather, it is most often put into play once again, becoming a platform for generative translations, interpretations, performances that bring the artist's archive to life and grant it a new ephemeral and living dimension. Secondly, these works appear to be characterized by a desire to use photographs and artifacts organized into collections as traces of the presence of music and sound in the sphere of culture, society, mass media, collective imagination as well as the fabric of everyday life while also investigating the way they are visually, symbolically and linguistically represented. These found objects and images, gathered and placed into relationship one with another, begin to also recount the kind of private or public micro-histories of music and listening practices that are often overlooked in the writing of History. The photos found or taken by the artist thus acquire the "ethnographic meaning" described by Enwezor: they become sources for observing how the members and institutions of a society relate to music, for interrogating the codes of representation governing music production and consumption in the cultural sphere.

Michel de Certeau has argued that:

In history, everything begin with the gesture of putting aside, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects in "documents." This new cultural distribution is the first task. In reality, it consist in producing such documents by dint of copying, transcribing, or photographing these objects, simultaneously changing their locus and their status.^{xxvii}

From this point of view, we might argue that Marclay “produces” documents of a (minor) history by gathering found objects and images, photographing excerpts of reality, or transcribing notations. And, it might be added, by displaying paintings, drawings and artifacts, as I will describe below.

Intervening in Collections

Other of Marclay's pieces are, in fact, direct interventions in existing archives or museum collections.^{xxviii} The first of these large-scale projects is *Accompagnement Musical*, which was created in 1995 at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva. For this piece the artist surveyed the collections, deposits and archives contained in different civic museums throughout the city, then selected and gathered around 400 artworks and artifacts of varying natures, origins, and ages (ancient or modern paintings, prints, drawings, various musical instruments, pieces of furniture decorated with embroidered tapestries, instrument cases, etc.) somehow related to the history of music and its representation, which were then reinstalled in the exhibition halls. The display was absolutely chaotic, personal and non-didactic: it combined heterogeneous objects arranged according to personal associations; it juxtaposed artifacts from different periods and distinct cultural areas; it amassed paintings and objects by placing them on the floor, on furniture and easels, or in glass cases.

The artist later created other pieces of this kind at Villa Merkel, Galerie der Stadt Esslingen (*Helvetia Sounds*, 1997), the Kunsthaus Zurich (*Arranged and Conducted*, 1997), and the Whitney Museum in New York (*Pictures at an Exhibition*, 1997) by searching out paintings, photographs, images and prints focused on music production and sound events in the collections of these museums. In the exhibitions in Zurich and New York, the artist arranged these representations one after the other without any interruption, in a dense interplay that almost completely covered the walls of the exhibition space; these installations, reminiscent of 17th Century collections, called for an intertextual reading, an “imaginary sonorization” based on the internal relationships among the paintings that had been placed in close dialogue with one another. Seats decorated with musical motif-patterned fabric were then placed in front of the walls so the audience could sit, like at a concert, and admire the silent symphony enacted by the assemblage.

Also these works rely on what can be considered the main guiding principle of Marclay's *modus operandi*, namely montage and remix. The artist himself has underlined the parallel between his performances on turntables and his interventions in collections:

DJ-ing and curating are the same thing for me; it's about bringing different things together so that you can listen or look at them in relationship to one another. [...] It's a sort of DJ-ing with the museum collection. The viewers of this show are asked to become listeners by projecting their own sound and images. I find these recent projects – working with collections – very satisfying, because they are very close to my way of making music.^{xxix}

At the same time, however, these interventions can also be interpreted as a reflection on the dominant theme of the artist's work – the historical and cultural production and reception of music and the way these are represented and visually translated – through engagement with the collections of museums (as institutions devoted to preserving and presenting historical memory) and documents (as representations and artifacts related to this history). Marclay delves into museum collections to locate historical traces of the history of music representation, production and reception, to investigate the historical and cultural instances that are the foundation of each collection, and to re-present the sources according to personal

taxonomies and criteria. In de Certeau's terms, then, Marclay transforms "objects" into "documents," creating a "corpus," and thus setting the stage for the writing of a minor history of listening and musical practices by "changing their locus and their status."^{xxx}

This is the same strategy that Enwezor identifies in artistic problematizations of the archive: "the creation of another archival structure as a means of establishing an archaeological relationship to history, evidence, information, and data that will give rise to its own interpretative categories."^{xxxi} Although Marclay's role in this work may be likened to that of the "artist-curator" (as the artist himself suggests in the statement cited above), in reality he also comes close to the role of the "artist-archivist" through a strategy that problematizes the presentation and interpretation of documents and archival materials.^{xxxii}

Orchestrating Ephemeral Atlases

The term "atlas" designates a collection of geographic maps and, from the end of the 18th Century onward, by extension all systematic collections of images related to specific sciences such as botany, anatomy or astronomy. The key characteristic of atlases is their completeness and the fact that they are designed to offer a precise, all-encompassing and exhaustive vision. Moreover, according to Georges Didi-Huberman, montage is not only the specific means of producing the atlas, it is also the form of knowledge and epistemology characteristic of this kind of structure.^{xxxiii}

Drawing on these initial observations, some collective large-scale performance projects that Marclay has organized since the early 1990s would seem to take the atlas as an implicit organizational principle, reworking it through ephemerality and temporaneity.

Berlin Mix (1993) is the first of these projects. In the hall of an abandoned tram-shed in the Moabit area, the artist gathered a group of more than 180 musicians representing all the different musical genres present in the city: rock and funk bands, choirs, opera singers, accordion players, hip hop DJs, samba bands, individual musicians, ensembles of classical music, a Klezmer duo, traditional musicians of Berlin's main ethnic groups, etc. The artist then stood on a podium to direct the participants, using cardboard signs and walkie-talkies to indicate the points where each group should start to play their own personal repertoire and thereby creating a live mix. This collaborative experiment was then repeated a few years later in Switzerland, in 1996, in the historic center of Fribourg. Entitled *Swiss Mix*, the event involved more than 200 musicians representing all the musical genres found in the territory of Switzerland.

Berlin Mix and *Swiss Mix* once again illustrate Marclay's interest in the overall "situation" created by the musical performance, his interest in music as a social as well as cultural form, as a common space and a shared physical experience. As the artist explains,

In these performances I bring people together, audiences and musicians from very different backgrounds, who play different kinds of music, and who, under normal conditions, would never play together. I like forcing a mix, not only with the music, but with the people; music is only one part of the event. The important part is having all these people under the same roof making sounds together. Music is not the only purpose of the performance, the social gathering is as important.^{xxxiv}

However, these events can also be interpreted as collective, temporary, and ephemeral atlases of the musical production in a newly-reunited city such as Berlin or a multicultural nation such as Switzerland. Indeed, they follow some of the principles of formal organization characteristic of the atlas: namely, the will to propose an all-encompassing vision, and the

multiplicity, discontinuity and heterogeneity of the elements that are orchestrated as well as the “paradoxical homogeneity of their simultaneous presence” during the performance.^{xxxv}

As Didi-Huberman has repeatedly noted, the atlas is a “visual form of knowledge” based on the montage of heterogeneous elements wherein dissimilarities create “configurations” and “unperceived orders of coherence” through analogies and correspondences that make it possible to reinterpret the world. According to the French philosopher and art historian, this quality makes atlases different from archives in that the atlas is “an exposition of differences, where the archive drowns the differences in a volume that cannot be exposed to sight.”^{xxxvi}

Moreover, the archive does not select or expose; rather, it places the viewer in front of its totality, a totality that is impossible to embrace. Didi-Huberman therefore views the atlas as the “becoming-sight” or “becoming-knowledge” of the archive.^{xxxvii}

From this perspective, Marclay's *Berlin* and *Swiss Mix* can be considered display *dispositifs* that propose an open, collective, and time-based form of knowledge about the musical production of an area, engaging with dissimilarities through montage. At the same time, these projects exist only in the here and now and are organized according to principles which are not only temporary but also improvised and process-based. Therefore, they take the very logic of the archive, based on the document and the storing of historical knowledge, and cast it into crisis.

It is no coincidence that Marclay built his musical atlases through the ephemeral and performative dimension of a live performance: as I have argued, his investigation revolves around a deconstructive attitude toward audio documents, a need to re-enact and revive collections of records, photographs and objects, and a strong interest in the specificities of the live situation as opposed to the private and individual experience of listening to records.

The English word “record” comes from the Anglo-French “recorder”, “to recall”, and is currently used in the sense both of “document” and “testimony” as well as “audio storage media”, in relation to vinyl records in particular. “Memory is our own recording device,” Marclay stated, directly comparing – as did Sigmund Freud in *A Note Upon The Mystic Writing-Pad* – mnemonic processes to inscription devices.^{xxxviii}

It is precisely this polysemy that constitutes a pivotal point for his work. Indeed, he engages in a continuous material and conceptual exploration of the ways music and sound are present in history, memory, collective imagination, popular culture, and social and cultural practices. This exploration employs various means of investigating, deconstructing, reconstructing, excavating, collecting and re-actualizing (personal and public) documents and records, constantly reflecting on the implications of recording devices for the transmission of sound experiences as well as the slippages between records and the element we might identify as the crucial urgency of his work (as well as the ontology of music before the advent of sound recording and reproduction technologies): liveness.

Notes

ⁱ Jennifer González, “Overtures,” in Jennifer González, Kim Gordon, Matthew Higgs, *Christian Marclay*, Phaidon, London-New York 2005, p. 56.

ⁱⁱ The first aesthetic practice programmatically based on the manipulation of sound recordings comes from Pierre Schaeffer – the founder, along with Pierre Henry, of the Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète (later renamed GRM-Groupe de Recherches Musicales). In the second half of the 1940s, Schaeffer began investigating the possibilities offered by the phonograph and finally composed *Cinq Études de Bruit* (1948). However, Marclay's and Schaeffer's use of recordings are completely different. First of all, the recordings used in *musique concrète* are not sources of cultural origin but everyday found sounds mixed with instrumental parts. Secondly, *musique concrète's* aim is to sever any relationship with the real and reject any

- extra-aesthetic reference: sound, in Schaeffer's hands, is transformed into "objet sonore," becoming independent of its source and context. This is meant to favor what Schaeffer called "reduced listening," that is (as explained by theorist and composer Michel Chion) "the listening mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning." The emphasis is thus on the phenomenological and perceptual quality of pure sound rather than the extra-sonic references of the sources used. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision. Sound on Screen*, Columbia University Press, New York 1990, p. 29.
- iii Especially in more recent years, this tendency to remix and manipulate cultural objects has also found expression in Marclay's video production: several of these pieces use popular cinema as an archive of collective media imagination through which to analyze our relationship with music and sound. *Video-Quartet* (2002), in particular, is a multi-channel installation composed of four horizontal wall projections; it orchestrates approximately 700 sequences taken from documentaries and mainstream movies (extracts selected because their content is linked to music and sound production or consumption), and re-organizes them in a structure following a musical score. See: Matthew Higgs, "Video-Quartet (2002)," in Jennifer González, Kim Gordon, Matthew Higgs, cit., pp. 84-91; Rosalind Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition," in *October*, no. 116, Spring 2006, pp. 55-62.
- iv Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, Lukas & Sternberg, New York 2002.
- v Regarding the relationship between Marclay and punk aesthetics, see Emma Lavigne, "A Walk on the Wild Side. Fragments d'une esthétique punk," in *Christian Marclay. Replay*, Cité de la musique-Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris 2007, pp. 80-94.
- vi As the artist has stated: "I've never identified with serious music – contemporary classical music or whatever – because it's a language I can't express myself in. I can't read or write music. The first thing that had a creative impact on me was not this kind of music, through Cage and Fluxus were influential. It was the Sex Pistols and DNA – the really raw energy of punk. It was more than just music; it was very physical. It's not music that translates well on recordings, because being there, the loudness, being part of the event and the performance was really important. I was more interested in the process"; "Kim Gordon in conversation with Christian Marclay," in Jennifer González, Kim Gordon, Matthew Higgs, cit., p. 13.
- vii Scott Macaulay, "Interview with Christian Marclay," in Lee Morrisey (ed.), *The Kitchen Turns Twenty: A Retrospective Anthology*, The Kitchen, New York 1992, pp. 65-74.
- viii The performance was documented in a video while the audio recording has been released in record form on the occasion of the exhibition *Audio: Une proposition de Francis Baudevin* at Cabinet des estampes, Genève, in 2006.
- ix Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument*, Steidl/International Center of Photography, New York 2008, pp. 11-12; Charles Merewether, "Archives of the Fallen," in Id. (ed.), *The Archive*, MIT Press-Whitechapel, London-New York 2006, p. 160.
- x See in particular the essay "Poétique de l'enregistrement," where Nathalie Boulouch connects the invention of the phonograph at the end of 19th Century to a photographic model of storing memory: Nathalie Boulouch, "Poétique de l'enregistrement," in *Christian Marclay. Snap!*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon-Geneve-Rennes 2009, pp. 37-42.
- xi See Karin Bijsterveld, Annelies Jacobs, "Storing Sound Souvenirs: The Multi-Sited Domestication of the Tape Recorder," in Karin Bijsterveld, José van Dijck (eds.), *Sound Souvenirs. Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2009, pp. 25-42.
- xii Bela Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, Dover, New York 1970.
- xiii Jacques Le Goff: "Documento/monumento," in *Enciclopedia*, Einaudi, Torino 1978, p. 46 (my translation).
- xiv Christian Marclay, "Interview Cut-Up 1991-2004," in Jennifer González, Kim Gordon, Matthew Higgs, cit., p. 121. Marclay often returns to the obsolescence and precariousness of sound storage media: "We think that with these new technologies we can record things, capture things and keep them for future generations, but those archives are becoming less and less permanent. I actually enjoy that tension, because ultimately nothing is permanent and we have this arrogance to think that we're going to keep things forever. [...] You can actually work with that process of disappearance and underline it, give it a presence instead of pretending that it's not there;" quoted in Jennifer González, cit., p. 63.
- xv As Jean-Pierre Criqui noted, Erwin Panowsky was already reflecting as early as 1939 on the specificity of sound reproduction when discussing a "specific acoustic of the gramophone" which was completely other than the live performance: "Un bon disque pour gramophone est 'bon', non pas dans la mesure où il me fait croire que Caruso chante dans la pièce d'à côté, mais dans la mesure où il me communique l'intention musicale de son chant, en traduisant pour ainsi dire le maximum concevable de 'sons' carusiens dans une sphère d'altérité radicale, celle de l'acoustique spécifique du gramophone"; Jean-Pierre Criqui, "Le monde selon Christian Marclay," in *Christian Marclay: Replay*, cit., p. 71.

- xvi Wolfgang Ernst, "Media Archaeography. Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media," in Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, University of California Press, 2011, p. 250.
- xvii Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Arte dal 1900. Modernismo, antimodernismo, postmodernismo*, Zanichelli, Milano 2006, p. 586 (my translation).
- xviii For a survey of Marclay's photographic practice, see the exhibition catalogue *Christian Marclay. Snap!*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon-Genève-Rennes 2009; in particular, the essay: Clément Chéroux, "Photo-phonographie de Christian Marclay," pp. 17-34.
- xix László Moholy-Nagy, "Production-Reproduction" [1922], in Id., *Painting, Photography, Film*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1969.
- xx Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," in *October*, no. 110, Fall 2004, pp. 3-22.
- xxi Victor I. Stoichita, *L'invenzione del quardo. Arte, artefici e artigiani nella pittura europea*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1998, p. 111 (my translation).
- xxii See Russell Ferguson (ed.), Christian Marclay, *Amplification*, Chiesa di San Stae, Biennale di Venezia 1995.
- xxiii Victor I. Stoichita, cit., p. 110 (my translation).
- xxiv The exhibition *Christian Marclay: Festival* held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2010 highlighted this fact by focusing on the artist's works conceived as scores. In addition to presenting several of Marclay's collections, the exhibition was expanded into a real festival through a daily lineup of live performances. It presented, among other works, *Shuffle*, *Zoom Zoom*, *Box Set*, and *Ephemera* both as collections and as visual scores to be performed on a regular basis. See *Christian Marclay: Festival*, exhibition catalogue, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 2010.
- xxv Christian Marclay, *Shuffle*, Aperture Foundation, New York 2007. Marclay's photographic scores do not require any specific knowledge of musical language, but rather a great freedom of imagination, interpretation and translation. In this sense they extend the tradition of graphic notation initiated by composers such as Earle Brown and John Cage through the non-virtuous and everyday nature of Fluxus performance instructions or George Brecht's event cards, which also refer back to Marcel Duchamp's random compositions such as *Erratum Musical*. Regarding Fluxus event scores, see Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," in *October*, no. 95, Winter 2001, pp. 54-89.
- xxvi See, among other publications: Elio Grazioli, *La collezione come forma d'arte*, Johan & Levi, Milan 2012.
- xxvii Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York 1988, p. 72.
- xxviii For a detailed account of all Marclay's projects in existing collections and archives (some of which are not described in this article), see Jennifer González, cit., pp. 56-60.
- xxix Christian Marclay, "Interview Cut-Up 1991-2004," cit., p. 126.
- xxx Michel de Certeau, cit., pp. 72-73.
- xxxi Okwui Enwezor, cit., p. 18.
- xxxii Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", cit.
- xxxiii Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Éd. de Minuit, Paris 2002; Id. (ed), *Atlas - How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, exhibition catalogue, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid 2010.
- xxxiv Quoted in Jennifer González, cit., p. 79.
- xxxv I have borrowed the expression used by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in relationship to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*: "the extreme temporal and spatial heterogeneity of the Atlas's subjects is juxtaposed with the paradoxical homogeneity of their simultaneous presence in the space of the photographic;" Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive," in *October*, vol. 88, Spring 1999, p. 124.
- xxxvi Georges Didi-Huberman (ed.), cit.
- xxxvii Ivi, p. 187.
- xxxviii Quoted in Rahma Khazam, "Jumpcut Jockey," in *The Wire*, no. 195, May 2000, p. 31; Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon The Mystic Writing-Pad," [1925] in Charles Merewether (ed.), cit., pp. 20-24.