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Introduction : Penser les usages artistiques des traces sonores

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Listening to sonic remnants

- ¹ A growing interest in the issue of archives from an institutional as well as an epistemological and ethical point of view has gradually emerged since the late twentieth century.¹ The 'documental turn' or 'documentary turn' has highlighted the need to reflect on new ways of exploring archives and cultural data (especially relating to artistic use) and on the dynamics of circulation, accumulation and extraction underlying their creation.² While the conservation of archives often entails a diminishing usefulness, their artistic and civic use can launch a new phase of their existence, open the way for acquiring new knowledge, and enable the rethinking of common heritage as well as the way in which we *create* our history.
- ² Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, archives as reminders, clues, evidence and testimonials have become 'objects' to be re-examined. They are at once the locus of institutions and power, but also of memory, which must be continuously reactivated. Following on from Michel Foucault's work on historiography, Jacques Derrida underlines the profound ambivalence of the archive that takes us back (sometimes unwillingly) to our darkest pasts.³ Derrida's 'postmodern' turn in archival studies

extends this debate, endowing archives with semantic and metaphorical ‘power’.⁴ While archivists have been careful to separate archives from data or collections, today the proliferation of meaning is sometimes synonymous with confusion. For historian and archivist Dietmar Schenk, this expansion could be explained by the digital revolution of the early twenty-first century.⁵

- 3 The exponential production of cultural data on social networks and other platforms raises the question of what is and is not an archive, from its use to its re-use, from its rewriting to its misappropriation. Eric Ketelaar, for his part, has shifted the focus from the ontological limits of archives to the process of *archivalization*.⁶ Sound archives, on the other hand, are a special kind of document. In the form of recorded sounds (voice, music or sound environments), their existence and knowledge of them through listening – whether individual or collective – is dependent on the use of a technological medium. One of the consequences of taking an interest in these archiving processes is recognizing that every archive is *situated*: deciding what deserves to be preserved and what doesn’t is never objective. Archives are subjective assemblages which, as Annegret Fauser reminds us, “privilege certain experiences over others”.⁷ For this reason, it is essential to listen to the voices that are audible and those that are silenced,⁸ to take into account the power relationships and technologies at work,⁹ and to question the processes of both production and dispossession of knowledge.¹⁰
- 4 As we mentioned before, archives are at once spaces of power and sites of memory.¹¹ They are “the loci of power of the present to control what the future will know of the past”.¹² As a result, artistic practices that explore sound archives have the capacity to sensitively transform our visions of the past and to produce new knowledge. As Giovanna Zapperi asserts, “artists question the authority of the document – its testimonial and objective nature – while proposing to think of art as a practice of knowledge”.¹³ The creative possibilities of sound archives are significant: reactivating the voices of the past through listening, proposing new narratives, exploring what is said and unsaid in collective memory and official history, and making the struggles of the past resonate in order to understand those of the present.¹⁴
- 5 If archives are the remnants of the ebb and flow of our stories and how they came to be, then they call on all those who work with them to reactivate them, while paying attention to the ethical and cultural gaps produced by their creative decontextualization. What do artists *do* with archives? This question, central to this *Filigrane* special issue, reveals the richly interdisciplinary tensions between archival science, historical science, and the sciences of art and creation.

Re-composing and re-creating with sound archives

- 6 The articles in this *Filigrane* special issue explore the creative potential of sound archives, often neglected by institutions responsible for the management, conservation and safekeeping of cultural heritage. What is the rationale behind the creation of sound archives? What is the link between sound archives and collective memory? To what extent do sound archives allow us access to oral histories embedded within communities? How can artists draw on sound archives to create counter-hegemonic historical narratives? What are the aesthetic, legal and political consequences of these re-uses? What are the creative processes at work in the re-use of sound archives? What links are there between re-writings of sound archives and artistic forms such as sound

documentaries, installations or soundscapes? What listening practices are derived from these artistic productions? In the first article of the issue, Loïc Bertrand explores the difference between the written archive and the sound archive, starting from the fundamental notion of listening and the passage of time. The author addresses the question of perception as constitutive of the archive, and argues that repeated listening transforms the archive and relaunches the ‘archiving process’.

- 7 The articles by Ariana Phillips-Hutton, Eugénie Tessier and Corsin Vogel explore what the archive *does* to our memories; from the referential process of identification to the reactivation of a fading history of practices, the archive, be it the fruit of a process of re-appropriation, reconstitution or re-composition, enables us to put the history of our individual and collective memories back to work. Remembering ourselves thus becomes a political and aesthetic undertaking, necessarily transhistorical, that questions creative processes and situates them in an equidistant (rather than linear) history. Ariana Phillips-Hutton explores works created from sound archives, by contemporary composers such as William Basinski (1958-), Leyland James Kirby (1974-) and Mary Kouyoumdjian (1983-). Through listening, Phillips-Hutton analyses the different ways in which the archives are used and transformed, as well as the silences and stories set forth by the works.
- 8 Eugénie Tessier, for her part, develops a critical reflection on the notion of ‘re-composing’ sound archives in the context of contemporary performances by artist Rémi Belliveau. Far from theories of reenactment, re-composing from archives is, for Tessier, a kind of transhistorical gesture that involves “displacing linear and literary conceptions of the transmission and reproduction of cultural memories, and arguing that the re-composition of musical archive(s) makes explicit the intertemporal qualities of embodied representations of the past in the present”. Here, re-composition as fictionalisation of the real becomes the place where conservation and preservation can dialogue, a condition for revisiting a history that has been or is about to be forgotten. Finally, artist and researcher Corsin Vogel presents his creative process based on the re-use of sound documents for compositions or contextualised installations. Vogel proposes a typology of sound document re-appropriation at work in his creative process, which he identifies in three categories: “a literal use of the sound archive with its original semantic content, a more abstract use through radical transformation of sound, and a mixed use, which plays with our perceptual boundaries”.
- 9 Sound archives are remnants that, as Fanny Dujardin, Bastien Lambert and David Christoffel state in their articles, need to be ‘re-grasped’ throughout their creative process – from editing to listening. For Dujardin and Lambert, the *voice* of the recorded archive is that of an *absent present*. Based on Yann Paranthoën’s singular creative gesture, Dujardin and Lambert study the archive-material, caught between two temporalities: that of recording and that of contemporary listening. Through an analysis of the radio work *On Nagra* (1987), the authors investigate what this work says about “the materiality of the archive, the symbolic and social characteristics of the recording gesture, and the memory produced by the radiophonic remnant”. The authors show the *archive-becoming*, meaning the way in which sound archives resonate in the present and how the radio medium participates in a *mise en récit* of reality. David Christoffel’s article is an artist’s text that presents and analyses one of his acousmatic works, *La voix de Foucault*, commissioned by IRCAM’s ManiFeste Festival and premiered in Paris in 2014. While describing his own creative process, the composer puts forward

an analogy between this process, which proceeds by montage, and Foucault's thinking, which Christoffel feels participates in the same kind of organisation. He makes his research-creation laboratory available to us, oscillating between precise exploration of different sources linked to available archives, compositional biases, and choice of textures and fragments. *La voix de Foucault* functions as a space where the author, the listeners, and Foucault himself meet in the present.

- 10 Richard Begin's article explores the expressive power of sound archives that produce an atmosphere haunted by ruin, disorientation, and exhaustion. Exploring works belonging to the *Dark Ambient* genre, the author offers a phenomenological exploration of the links between sound archives and musical creation. Lastly, in the interview with FLEE collective co-founder Olivier Duport, we discuss the collective's work on sound archives from what are known as 'oral tradition' musical cultures. Apart from presenting the project itself, the interview highlights FLEE's editorial, ethical and artistic approaches. Duport reflects on the essential questions that run through the project: How can the sound archives of oral musical cultures be curated? How can we make the sonic remnants and knowledge of these musical cultures widely available? How can they be restored in local areas? How can they be performed by artists from the fields of electronic, improvised and experimental music?
- 11 Although the contributors to this issue do not aim to provide exhaustive answers to all the questions that the sound archive poses to history, their articles chart a rich landscape of possible artistic uses for sound remnants: from their epistemological scope to their creative potential. As documents and materials, archives are also a common good that scientists and artists explore in order to think critically about how our memories, past and future, are formed. If the archive is a construction, a selection, a shaping, then wouldn't artistic creation based on archives give us the opportunity to experience our histories sensitively and pass them on critically to future generations by allowing them to be heard? Could our listening give silence back its voice?

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ABSTRACTS

Archives are both spaces of power and sites of memory. For this reason, artistic practices exploring sound archives have the capacity to reshape our visions of the past and produce new knowledge. The articles in this *Filigrane* special issue explore the creative possibilities of sound archives. How do artists use sound archives to propose counter-hegemonic historical narratives? What are the creative processes involved in reusing such archives? How do artists and their works reactivate the voices of the past through listening, propose new narratives, explore what is said and unsaid in collective memory and official history, and make the struggles of the past resonate in order to understand those of the present?

Les archives sont aussi bien des lieux de pouvoir que des lieux de mémoire. De ce fait, les pratiques artistiques qui explorent des archives sonores ont la capacité de transformer de façon sensible nos visions du passé et de produire de nouveaux savoirs. Les articles de ce numéro de *Filigrane* interrogent le potentiel créateur des archives sonores. Comment, à partir des archives sonores, les artistes proposent-ils ou elles des récits contre-hégémoniques de l'histoire ? Quels sont les processus de création mis en œuvre dans la réutilisation de ces archives ? Comment les artistes et leurs œuvres réactivent-ils par l'écoute les voix du passé, proposent-ils de nouveaux récits, explorent-ils les dits et non-dits de la mémoire collective et de l'histoire officielle, et font-ils résonner les luttes du passé pour comprendre celles du présent ?

INDEX

Keywords: sound archives, sound creation, interdisciplinarity, creative processes, transmedia

Mots-clés: archives sonores, création sonore, interdisciplinarité, processus créatifs, transmédiabilité

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