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Sensitive Sound Recordings

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Pamięci Ewy Kofin /
Dedicated to the memory of Ewa Kofin

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Introduction

In 2020, the Soundscape Research Studio, the Institute of Cultural Studies, the Institute of Musicology at the University of Wrocław, and the Central European Network for Sonic Ecologies organized the international academic conference *The Second Life of Recorded Sounds*[1] devoted to the reuse of archival, non-musical recordings in academic research, artistic practices, as well as in ecological and political activism, and education. The use of sound recordings for purposes other than those for which they were originally recorded raises questions about their identity, instrumentalization, and the transformations they undergo in new cultural, social, and political contexts. There is a need for critical reflection on the recording process itself, which can be seen as a form of appropriating the heritage of colonized and marginalized communities, and on sound technologies as instruments for perpetuating and reproducing colonial power and racism.

The conference papers dealt, among other things, with ethical issues related to sound recording, listening to recordings, and re-mediation. Research focused on biographies of problematic sound legacies, for example wiretaps or recordings made in colonial contexts and in prisoner-of-war camps during World War I. Presentations on ethical issues related to the collection and use of recordings, for example in the context of bio- and necropolitics, as well as the decolonization of sound archives and the politics of collecting, inspired us to reflect on "sensitive sound recordings." By defining the object of our interest in this way, we also invoke the notion of "sensitive heritage," which appears in discussions on museum collections of artifacts from outside Western culture and their restitution.[2]

In our article presented in this issue of *Prace Kulturoznawcze*, we define "sensitive sound recordings" as ones linked to the experiences of trauma, exclusion, and injustice of those whose voices were recorded, as well as the communities to which they belonged. They are correlates of the "sensitive heritage" and sometimes the "difficult heritage" (S. Macdonald) of communities. Broadening the scope of the term "sensitive recordings" in relation to the above-mentioned definition, we could also include recordings that violate taboos, for example, in

[1] Conference programme: http://pracownia.audiosfery.uni.wroc.pl/the-second-life-of-recorded-sounds/ (accessed 26.05.2022).

[2] See also P. Schorch, "Sensitive Heritage: Ethnographic Museums, Provenance Research, and the Potentialities of Restitutions," *Museum and Society* 18, 2020, no. 1, pp. 1–5, https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v18i1.3459.

some cultural contexts, recordings of religious ceremonies[3] or intimate situations. Such recordings, sometimes because of the manner and context of their creation, confront the listener and user with a whole spectrum of complex problems related to the right to collect, dispose, and listen to them, as well as the social, political and ethical consequences of their reuse in research, educational, and artistic practices. Approaching the recording as a form of life and analyzing its biography allows us to grasp its social causality and transformation.[4] "Sensitive sound recordings" refer to "difficult" and "moving" recordings that evoke affects and emotions. They constitute a kind of "sensitive heritage" of communities, and sometimes also a problematic heritage, such as recordings of wiretaps. "Sensitive recordings" do not allow listeners to be indifferent; they demand from their users, who include researchers, a responsible, caring attitude.

The concept of *acoustethics* proposed by Jacek Smolicki, which emphasizes the need for a reflexive approach to sound recording (a complex process that always takes place in an area understood as a space of diverse and non-obvious relations between acting and interacting actors — human subjects, technology, places, etc.), takes into account the specificity of sensitive recordings.[5] Sensitive sound recordings not only evoke affective and emotional responses, but are also capable of conveying the affective dimension of particular places and entering into a complex and dynamic relationship with meta-comments about themselves. This causality of recordings is captured in an interesting way by Jadwiga Zimpel, who wonders about their status as an element of the cultural heritage of cities.[6] The problem of transforming a recording into a cultural heritage correlate is, in turn, taken up by Uta C. Schmidt, a co-founder of the Ruhr Sound Landscape Archive.[7] Recording, storing, listening to, and using sound recordings are cultural practices of great political significance. In times of modern surveillance techniques, wars, and migration, the political entanglement of recordings and sonic big data becomes an issue that should be carefully examined. In this volume it is raised by Sara Pinheiro by posing a series of questions not only about the political nature

[3] Piotr Cichocki discusses, among other things, the problem of power relations in the process of making recordings of the *vimbuza* ritual of the Tumbuka community in the northern region of Malawi and the functioning of this kind of recording outside colonial patterns. See in the present volume: P. Cichocki, "Towards the Problematization of an Audio Document: An Experiment in Cooperative Recordings."

[4] See in the present volume: R. Tańczuk, S. Wieczorek, "Sensitive Recording as a Form of Life: The Case of Ryszard Siwiec's Message."

[5] See in the present volume: J. Smolicki, "Acoustethics: Careful Approaches to Recorded Sounds and Their Second Life."

[6] See in the present volume: J. Zimpel, "Samples of a Place: Urban Field Recordings as a Sensitive Resource of Urban Cultural Heritage."

[7] See in the present volume: U.C. Schmidt, "Soundscape of the Ruhr: Sensitive Sounds. Between Documentation, Composition and Historical Research."

of sound, but also about the political agency of field recording.[8] A different perspective on the approach to sensitive recordings is outlined by Anna Kvíčalová.[9] The author focuses on the production processes of new knowledge about sound and formation of new listening techniques that take place in fonoscopy laboratories during the analysis of recordings from security service wiretaps.

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[8] See in the present volume: S. Pinheiro, "Field Recordings: A Manifesto."

[9] See in the present volume: A. Kvíčalová, "Other than Ethical: STS-Oriented Approaches to Communist Audio Forensics."

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Acoustethics: Careful Approaches to Recorded Sounds and Their Second Life*

Abstract: This article attempts to rethink some problematic ways and motivations for engaging in (field) recording and working with recorded sounds. Interweaving reflections from my long-term soundscape archiving initiative undertaken in Stockholm, with projects of others aiming at preserving cultures through sound, I reflect upon ethical challenges that emerge against the prospect of second and following lives and deaths of recordings. Does the second life of a recorded event risk replicating power relationships that the original recording was enmeshed in? What can be gained and, more importantly, lost while conceiving a second life of a recorded sound? This article intends to open up an array of such questions which, as I suggest, need to be taken into consideration already before and during the recording process. As a discursive tool that does not resolve those concerns but instead creates space for critical reflection, I propose a concept of *acoustethics*. In a nutshell, acoustethics, as this portmanteau of acoustics and ethics suggests, is an ethically informed approach to the world's soundscapes. I argue that any kind of engagement with the auditory world through recording technologies requires careful consideration of multiple agencies contributing to the recorded sound. As a reflective attitude to the sonic realm, acoustethics acknowledges that any recording takes place within already existing fields of relations and simultaneously generates new links between subjects, histories, worldviews, technologies, and other forces. In other words, any recording is intrinsically field recording.

Keywords: field recording, ethics, practice of care, sound heritage

Introduction

In this article, I go through my own and others' projects. At times, these examples might seem not very closely related, or even inconsistent, especially in terms of the geographies they pertain to: Sweden, Canada, and Japan. Nevertheless, the qualitative criteria for this selection are, I believe, much clearer and include ethical considerations, moral dilemmas, practices of care and responsibility in

* This article is part of *Soundwalking: The Art of Walking and Listening through Time, Space, and Technologies*, my independently initiated, international postdoctoral project funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) between 2020 and 2023.

field recording and work with recorded sounds. Despite the underlying commonalities, by discussing these diverse projects, I seek to demonstrate that ethical considerations are different for every case and site, and often, if not always, emerge through practical engagement with cases, subjects, events, and fields, either directly or through recorded media.

I want to underline that the ethics of interest adopted in this article is far from a normative framework that one would statically apply to every case in the same way. Instead, I view (or hear) ethics and the ethical as closely related to the notions of pluralism,[1] *phronesis*,[2] and care.[3] All of these concepts, to some extent, rely upon situatedness, reflexivity, and relationality. As an ethical perspective, pluralism, or interpretative pluralism, believes that different cultures, histories and traditions have their own ways of understanding certain notions and experiences, such as the concept of privacy.[4] It is a view that rejects any generalization and instead acknowledges frictions that can emerge when different views meet in an attempt to resolve an ethical dilemma. *Phronesis* is a kind of practical wisdom achieved through one's ethically situated experience.[5] It is a form of decision-making based on lessons learned from that experience. It does not draw solely upon these lessons, but situates them in relation to other experiences of similar character, also those of others, as to arrive at a better decision (or, I would add, to withdraw from making it, as inaction and deactivation might sometimes be less harmful, or even more productive than action). The ethics of care argues for caring as a central value in everyday interpersonal relations.[6] As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa has argued, the practice of care implicates and recognizes "different relationalities, issues, and practices in different settings" beyond the centrality of the human species.[7] Even though, as she claims, today we observe an unprecedented interest in the notion of care as an onto-epistemological and ethical framework for dealing with complex relations that people form on a planetary scale (with each other and with other species), the ways care is actualized and practised are always plural and diverse in terms of their sites, timespans, paces, and rhythms. Thus, it should also be noted that the ethics of care, as emphasized by Puig de la Bellacasa, goes beyond present

[1] C. Ess, "Ethical Pluralism and Global Information Ethics," *Ethics and Information Technology* 8, 2006, pp. 215–226.

[2] J. Moss, "Virtue Makes the Goal Right: Virtue and 'Phronesis,'" *Phronesis* 56, 2011, no. 3, pp. 204–261.

[3] J. Tronto, "An Ethics of Care," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 22, 1998, no. 3, pp. 15–20; M. Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in the More Than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis 2017; B. Groys, *Philosophy of Care*, London 2022.

[4] C. Ess, "Ethical Pluralism," p. 224.

[5] C. Ess, *Digital Media Ethics*, Cambridge 2019.

[6] S. Laugier, "The Ethics of Care as a Politics of the Ordinary," *New Literary History* 46, 2015, no. 2, pp. 217–240.

[7] M. Puig de la Bellacasa, op. cit., p. 3.

concerns and immediate situations. It also draws attention to the temporal dimension of care, such as fostering endurance of objects through various maintenance practices.[8] This focus on temporal aspects of care, I believe, is of high importance when talking about sound, especially recorded sound, but also about relationships between sound(scape)s and the site- and subject-specific memory.[9] In short, I believe that to work ethically with sound — understood as both an emanation and a trace of events, energies, and agents acting (or having acted) in specific fields and times — is, primarily and essentially, to care for it. More specifically, it is about paying attention to its relationality, situatedness, and context. It is also about envisaging one's "response-ability," which is to say an ability to be mindful about possible relations that sounds and recordings one works with might shape in the future.[10]

Drawing upon this short introduction of perspectives that inform my understanding of acoustethics, I would like to highlight that I do not intend to lay out any easy solutions for how to "correctly" engage with sound recording issues. It is not about establishing some form of an "ethical correctness." Rather, it is about inducing a state of a certain preparedness and readiness to acknowledge that sounds of the surrounding world — not only in their immediacy, but also through recorded artefacts — often form unsolved tensions, relations, and fields.

Slussen Project: The Unknown Weight of Recorded Soundscapes

Let me start with a brief account of a field recording and soundscape archiving project I have been pursuing in Stockholm since 2012.

The Slussen project is an ongoing exploration of soundscapes of Slussen, an important area in Stockholm connecting southern and northern parts of the city (Fig. 1). The project focuses on how the transformations this place has undergone are reflected in its acoustic sphere. More specifically, the project traces the disappearance of soundscapes alongside the destruction of the old setting, and the construction of new gentrified infrastructure.

Erected in 1935 and considered a landmark of modern Sweden, Slussen functions primarily as a transportation hub. It consists of a bus terminal and an under-

[8] Ibid., p. 170.

[9] J. Smolicki, C. Campo, "Soundscapes as Archives: Traces and Absences of the Aural Past in Vancouver," *Seismograf Peer*, https://seismograf.org/fokus/sounds-science (accessed 16.02.2022).

[10] K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham–London 2007.

ground station which are used by approximately 400,000 people daily.[11] However, as is the case with many modernist settings originally designed with a clear overview of all the purposes they should serve, over the years Slussen has acquired some auxiliary and non-intended functions. Consequently, it has become a site rich in various unique enterprises, services, and practices. Those include a second-hand store, Kolingsborg, one of the oldest gay clubs in town, a laid-back vintage hair salon, and Debaser, a world-famous rock club regularly hosting international indie rock bands.

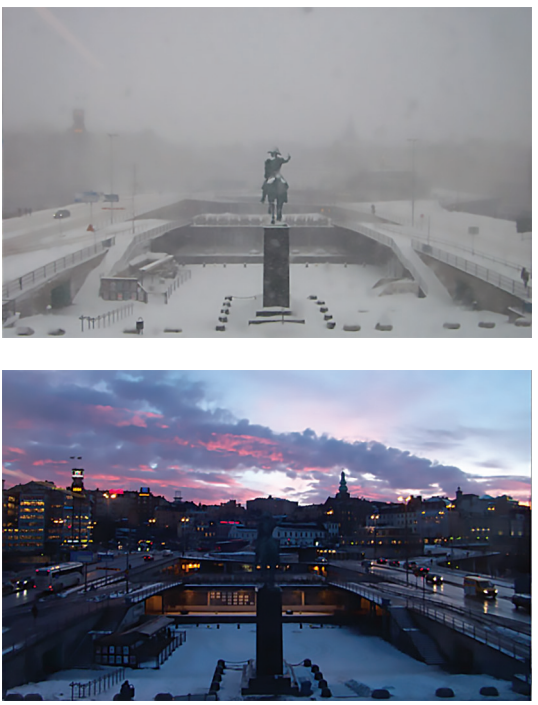

Figure 1. Slussen area during different seasons

Source: Author.

To this already multi-layered and socio-culturally eclectic architecture of Slussen, we can also add other informal uses that the place has lent itself to over the years. For example, in the 1970s, the place was transformed into a temporary shelter for the so-called Slussen Guerilla, a group of Finnish migrants escaping harsh economic conditions to find a better life in Sweden. Located in close vicinity to a ferry terminal where the migrants were arriving, Slussen became their natural first stop. The place has also become a shelter for homeless people taking advan-

[11] "Därför byggs Slussen om," Stockholm växer, https://vaxer.stockholm/nyheter/2019/03/darfor-byggs-slussen-om/ (accessed 16.06.2021).

tage of its numerous concrete pockets, cavities, and alcoves emerging over time. Johan Palmgren's documentary about Slussen depicts a community of homeless people who developed and maintained special relationships with the place, including other species, such as rats, for whom Slussen has also turned into a home.[12]

During my work on the project, I interacted with many people in various ways connected to the site: vendors, janitors, workers, architects, and activists, some of them directly engaged in protecting the old site. When I was talking to one activist and explaining my intention to record and archive the human and other-than-human soundscapes of this vanishing environment, she looked at me with a grim expression on her face. "So you assume that the place will be completely torn down, don't you?" she said. Her words made me realize that in order to be accomplished, my project required the complete erasure of the place, something she was strongly and actively opposing. In a sense, the site's death was an essential prerequisite for the future life of my project. From the activist's perspective, my audio equipment became a tool contributing to the end of the place as she knew it and hoped to preserve. The recorder and microphones became agents of discontinuity and disappearance, while my work appeared to be a kind of "audio-safari," or worse: "an audio-hunt."[13]

At the same time, I was aware that the archival, cultural, and, perhaps, material value of my soundscape recordings would only increase over time. Needless to say that such a prospect of an increase in value technically applies to any documentary media involved in preserving history, something that Paula Amad described in terms of an inherently "unknown weight" of a document.[14] After my encounter with the activist, I realized that I might have been considered as someone primarily, if not solely, interested in securing the prospect of the afterlife of the site — its mediated communication — rather than protecting the evaporating life and spirit of the place by means more immediate and responsive than field recording.

While carrying out my sonic ethnographic project at Slussen, even though I sympathized with local activists, I have never intended to engage in protecting the site in any active way. Despite the sentiments and profoundly personal and collective significance for some people (including myself), the place was certainly in need of redevelopment. The main controversial issues (and subsequently reasons for regular protests against the new architecture) included: the exclusion of the local community from discussing the new plan by the authorities, insufficient attention paid to pedestrian traffic for the benefit of cars, and an expansion of physical architecture along with its commercialization jeopardizing the unique panoramic

[12] "Tales of Slussen (2012)," Johan Palmgren, http://johanpalmgren.com/tales-of-slussen/ (accessed 16.06.2021).

[13] C. DeLaurenti, "Imperfect Sound Forever: A Letter to a Young Phonographer," *Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture* 2, 2021, no. 2, p. 149.

[14] P. Amad, *Counter-Archive, Film, Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète*, New York 2010.

view from the site. One important argument in favour of the reconstruction, often overlooked in the public debate, was a long-term environmental perspective expressed in concerns over the water level that will rise significantly in the coming decades. Because Slussen hosts a lock that for centuries has been controlling the water balance between lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea, the site's adaptation to climate change required significant reconfigurations of its architectural elements.[15]

Nevertheless, by committing to this documentation, I hoped to protect some memories and sonic heritage of the site, which was doomed to entirely disappear alongside the site's unavoidable material collapse and demolishment. Encouraged by the work of John Hedlund, a city archaeologist whom I met at the site and who helped me with access to several hidden and publicly inaccessible layers of Slussen, I engaged in what we jointly referred to as the sonic archaeology of the site. By committing myself to this long-term, inconspicuous work on the archive of sound recordings, apart from getting to know the place from a significantly under-explored (and under-heard) perspective and nurturing my passion for listening to such contested sites from idiosyncratic perspectives, I have hoped to pro-actively and to some extent imperceptibly secure material for future researchers and urban planners. At the same time, I have hoped to actively raise awareness about the importance of acoustic dimensions in our lived environments by regularly turning to and animating the recorded material, talking about the project, as well as performing and presenting it through art installations, lectures, and soundwalks. While respecting the activism of those who kept regularly showing up and mobilizing at the site, over time I got to perceive my work as another way of taking a stance and response-ability in relation to a place.

In their writing about listening in the Anthropocene, AM Kanngieser discusses a need for slower, more gradual and less visible types of activism that do not feed on blindly driven mobilization and action.[16] Drawing upon Frederic Neyrat's concepts of "strategic deactivation" and "negative capacity" addressed to those concerned with burning issues of contemporaneity, Kanngieser hopes to open up space for becoming in tune with realms that exceed human perception.[17] It is certainly hard to directly apply this perspective to a cause such as the protection of Slussen's old architecture. In the beginning of my project, the perspective of vulnerable communities directly connected to the place was the dominant one. But over the course of the project, I began to recognize the impact of this mas-

[15] "The Real Reason for Stockholm's Massive Slussen Redevelopment," *The Local*, 2.02.2018, https://www.thelocal.se/20180202/the-real-reason-for-stockholms-massive-slussen-redevelopment-cityofstockholm-tlccu/ (accessed 16.06.2021).

[16] A. Kanngieser, "Geopolitics and the Anthropocene: Five Propositions for Sound," *GeoHumanities* 1, 2015, p. 3.

[17] E. Johnson, F. Neyrat, "On the Political Unconscious of the Anthropocene," *Society and Space*, 20.03.2014, https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-the-political-unconscious-of-the-anthropocene (accessed 27.05.2022).

sive reconstruction on other species, including the acknowledgement of positive changes that the newly designed infrastructure promised to bring about by facilitating migration of fish. Slowing down, or deactivating one's efforts to deal with an emergent cause that unites groups of people, raises an array of ethical considerations and often discomfort. While such a position eventually enables a more balanced and nuanced overview of the situation and brings one closer to certain dimensions that could otherwise be overlooked, it might also introduce distance to other realms, groups, and individuals. It might lead to a situation in which one is perceived as being ignorant and drifting mindlessly without taking a stance. In the context of the current planetary crises, deactivation and strategic slowness might seem like inappropriate ways of being and relating to the world.

What generative role could slowness and deactivation play in the context of recording and recorded sounds? I would suggest that one way of addressing this question could be through taking a stance that is at once active and slow, while primarily focused on a temporal dimension of the pursued project. It's like being both involved in and withdrawn from the immediate action, being actively concerned with the immediate while maintaining a mindful distance that enables care for what is to come. This approach, I believe, has to some extent been reflected in the *two-fold architecture* of the Slussen project, concerned with both the future — the archive in the making — and the present, by constantly working, moulding, interacting, and caring for the material. This precise tension inspired my interest in the notion of anticipatory ethics (and consequently acoustethics), a concept I directly and indirectly address in this chapter while weaving an associative thread through different and yet highly resonant projects.

Anticipatory Ethics

Anticipatory ethics is a framework already adopted in design, tech industry, and engineering to explore and reflect on potential impacts and consequences of a given product before it is launched and used. Some scholars who operate within this strand of research suggest that more effort needs to be put into future studies and forecasting models.[18] However, it can be argued that assessment of a product against future and speculative scenarios of its (mis-)uses is determined to large extent by the need to maintain the chain of production and consumption at the present moment. To put it simply, in the context of the market, anticipatory ethics can risk to be employed as merely an instrumental technique of "ethics washing" that does not change but rather maintains the status quo.[19]

[18] P.A.E. Brey, "Anticipatory Ethics for Emerging Technologies," *Nanoethics* 6, 2012, pp. 1–13.

[19] K. Yeung, A. Howes, G. Pogrebna, "AI Governance by Human Rights-Centred Design, Deliberation and Oversight: An End to Ethics Washing," [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of AI Ethics*, eds.

When discussing anticipatory (acoust-)ethics, I am interested in staying with rather than overcoming the uncertainties characteristic of anticipation. At the same time, I am interested in a more humanist or even post-humanist reading of this concept. In their jointly edited book, Caitlin DeSilvey, Simon Naylor, and Colin Sackett proposed the term *anticipatory history*.[20] The authors defined it as a "'conceptual tool' for shifting expectations and curating different — perhaps more open — forms of engagement between people and places, past and future."[21] To ethically orient oneself towards the future, one should be able to look and hear back. Anticipating the future cannot simply start with the present moment; it needs to attentively and critically explore all the elements that participated in the formation of the present, namely past events, places, subjects, and technologies. Similarly, to engage in acoustethics could mean to open one's sonic sensitivity to a state of anticipation, in which one already hears some potential reverberations generated by their interventions into the acoustic tissue of the world today. At the same time, it is an ethical position of awareness towards the potential yet uncertain lives and deaths of recorded sounds one (re-)generates today, through a turn towards the past. An ethical re-attunement with what is resounding. This is why, besides autoethnographic accounts of my work, this article pays close attention to the past examples of audio-documentary work that raise questions of acoustethical nature.

After this seemingly trivial encounter with the Slussen activist and her words, I felt a strange sense of dissonance. It has remained unresolved throughout the project and other field recording and para-archiving initiatives in which I have been involved.[22] The in-between of the finality of what is being recorded and determination to preserve it is where the friction emerges. It is a tension between the witnessed discontinuity of the actual event and the anticipated continuity of its trace. It is a dissonance that arises from working with and against presence and absence, life and death.

If a record is a frozen, hibernated life — a temporarily suspended promise of its second instance that is yet to come — whose second life (and, by implication, death) is implied here? Is it a second life of something (or someone) this recorded material was meant to remember or a second life of the subject who conceived of the record? Is it a second life of forces and circumstances that surrounded and determined the recorded event? Or is it an entirely new form of life that carries only a faint, distorted trace of the place, event, and subject(s) from which it originated? Who is to care for that new, hybrid life, and how to care for it?

M. Dubber, F. Pasquale, Oxford 2020, pp. 77–106.

[20] *Anticipatory History*, eds. C. DeSilvey, N.S. Naylor, C. Sackett, Axminster 2014.

[21] C. DeSilvey, N.S. Naylor, "Anticipatory History," [in:] *Anticipatory History*, eds. C. DeSilvey, N.S. Naylor, C. Sackett, Axminster 2014, p. 16.

[22] J. Smolicki, *Para-Archives: Rethinking Personal Archiving Practices in the Times of Capture Culture*, doctoral dissertation, Malmö 2017.

These questions, although not easy to answer, nevertheless call for an ethical stance. I believe that this stance should accompany any act of (field) recording and engagement with a recorded sound, especially today, in times of ubiquitous media, information overflow, and what I call a condition of capture culture.[23] This is a situation where the boundary between voluntary and involuntary recording and archiving is ever thinner, if not fully dissolved.

Let this first-hand, detailed account of the Slussen project be a modest starting point for exploring other modes, concepts, and practices that might aid us in re-coding the dominant ways of engaging in (field) recording.

Collaborative Rematriation

With some pauses, it has been about 10 years since I began my aural relation with Slussen. One break was in 2020, when some major changes and reconstructions took place. They included the golden bridge Guldbron, a 140-metre-long element of new Slussen infrastructure, constructed in and shipped all the way from China, which was met with criticism due to its high environmental costs. In 2020, I moved to Canada. While there, I kept thinking about my missing of that event and all those transitory, disruptive, and conflicting soundscapes that must have emerged in that moment. But it was also in Canada that while following discussions about rights to heritage, complexities of repatriation processes, and dispossession of cultural artefacts stolen by colonizers from indigenous communities, I thought more deeply about the notion of ownership in relation to field recordings. I asked, who, in the future, should be entitled to work with my field recordings, including those of Slussen? Already imbued with complexity that might be hard to account for, how probable is it that these recorded soundscapes become greatly misread in the inevitable process of their further journey into the future? Should I already designate someone to take care of them?

That year, when visiting Vancouver, the stronghold of soundscape studies, I came across the music of Jeremy Dutcher, an artist, composer, and a musicologist. As a member of Tobique First Nation in New Brunswick, Dutcher restores indigenous culture through new compositions based on archival recordings. In his recent project, Dutcher worked at the Canadian Museum of History, painstakingly transcribing Wolastoq First Nation songs from wax cylinders made in 1907. His work resulted in a debut LP featuring what he calls "collaborative" compositions that enter into dialogue with the recorded voices of his ancestors. Elaborating on his motivations, Dutcher says that "there are only about a hundred Wolastoqey speakers left […] It is crucial for us to make sure that we are using our language

[23] J. Smolicki, "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest: Personal Archiving in Capture Culture," [in:] *Towards a Philosophy of the Digital*, eds. A. Romele, E. Terrone, Cham 2018, pp. 77–100.

and passing it on to the next generation. If you lose the language, you are not just losing words; you are losing an entire way of seeing and experiencing the world from a distinctly indigenous perspective." But besides giving justice to his ancestors, the artist perceives his work as indicative of how cultural repatriation, or, as he prefers to call it, "rematriation" should look like in practice.[24] As opposed to repatriation, a term carrying strong connotations with patriarchal organization of societal life, rematriation is an indigenous concept that seeks to foreground inclusivity, decentralized distribution, and allocation of power and resources. The term has been put forth by the ReMatriate Collective, "an Indigenous women's group connecting Indigenous peoples, particularly women, through art interventions."[25]

Dutcher contests the centralized, patriarchal power and the supposed objectivity of the archive by actively taking stewardship over the recorded voices of his community. As someone with a deep, ancestral connection to the material in question, Dutcher recognizes and then practically responds to the need of rescuing those voices and brings them back to the onto-epistemological context out of which they were taken in the past (Figs. 2–3). Profound attunement with the cultural, historical, and judicial significance of Indigenous musical and performative practices gave these voices a second life. This could never happen in the museum's collection. On the contrary, the institution kept these voices muted. While technically sonorous (or equipped with a prospect of sonority), these voices remained culturally incarcerated.[26] Only bringing the recordings back to the proper context and following established community protocols, could make these voices truly audible, that is culturally and symbolically resonant with the place and subjects of their origin. Dutcher achieved this through his critical, creative, and careful interaction with the recordings. Had these voices been left incarcerated on wax cylinders, they would have maintained their status as mere specimens of culture that colonizers had programmatically relegated to the past.[27]

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[24] "Jeremy Dutcher — *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa*," Killbeat Music, http://www.killbeatmusic.com/jeremydutcher (accessed 26.10.2020).

[25] See "WE ARE: The ReMatriate Collective," New Journeys, 12.10.2016, https://newjourneys.ca/en/articles/we-are-the-rematriate-collective (accessed 20.07.2021). See also "Purpose and Vision," Sogorea Te' Land Trust, https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/purpose-and-vision/ (accessed 20.07.2021): "an urban Indigenous women-led land trust based in the San Francisco Bay Area that facilitates the return of Indigenous land to Indigenous people."

[26] Incarceration is precisely how Dylan Robinson, a Stó:lō scholar and author of *Hungry Listening* described the status of First Nations artefacts that are in possession of memory institutions in Canada. He made that comparison during a seminar with a network of sound scholars affiliated with Simon Fraser University in June 2021.

[27] In contrast to numerous initiatives undertaken by museums and archives that attempt to decolonize their collections by returning cultural artefacts to their legitimate owners, Dutcher's case is different. He single-handedly crosses the boundaries of the institution demanding the right to work with the stolen material. Power dynamics at play are much different from when the decisions

Dutcher symbolically discontinues the structural and technical detachment of voices from their subjects and contexts through his collaborative and dialogical engagement with the recordings. What Dutcher's intervention generates is a careful (re-)establishment of resonance between the listener and the listened to. Dylan Robinson has recently recognized this dialogical relationship as a significant difference between the Indigenous and Western European orientation towards the audible.[28] He writes that often a "meeting between listener and listened-to is bounded by a Western sense orientation in which we do not feel the need to be responsible to sound as we would to another life."[29] He suggests that in the Western tradition of philosophy, sound is typically deprived of subjectivity and is often treated as content. This, in turn, introduces and perpetuates problematic asymmetries between the listener and the listened to. These asymmetries find their expression in the discriminatory and exploitative appropriation of sound(s). To oppose this, one could adopt a way of listening to sound (or voice) in which the audible is recognized as always inherently related to the subject and context from and for which it originated. Consequently, the audible (or rather heard) requires similar respect and a non-discriminatory approach as an encounter between two sentient entities. In this sense, the recorded sound is never entirely dead. It is never alive either. To become alive, it requires special conditions that might be provided only if the right attitude, sensitivity, and knowledge are applied. Moreover, as Nina Sun Eidsheim argues, to give justice to and become fully in tune with music or recorded sound, it is not enough to appeal to the sense of hearing alone. Composing and perceiving sound is an inherently multi-sensorial experience: "sound does not exist in a vacuum but rather is always already in transmission; its character therefore arises from the material particularities of each transmission."[30] The more power asymmetry and violence underlies the recording process (even if this violence is latent and unrecognized at the time of commencing the record), the more care and attention is needed to revisit, awake and transmit previously recorded sounds and voices.

to return artefacts are directly made by a museum whose motives are often determined by a will to maintain an image of a tolerant and democratic institution.

[28] D. Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, Minneapolis 2020.

[29] Ibid., p. 15.

[30] N.S. Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*, Durham 2015, p. 79.

Figure 2. A photograph of ethnographer Frances Densmore collecting songs from Blackfoot chief Ninna-Stako in 1916

Source: Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016844693/ (accessed 7.06.2022).

Figure 3. Cover of Jeremy Dutcher's album *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* featuring a photograph of the artist by Matt Barns

Source: Killbeat Music.

Arguably, Dutcher's project, alongside other initiatives concerned with invoking the past from archival recordings, is built upon a certain paradox. Without the wax cylinders, Dutcher would not have been able to regenerate the oral tradition inscribed in them. Consequently, he would not have been able to mediate his own and his ancestors' culture in the way he did.[31] In other words, without this presently obsolete medium, the whole oral culture of Dutcher's community would have risked disappearing. However, the case is more complex than that. Had it not been for the arrival of settler colonizers, these recordings would not have needed to be made in the first place. Arguably, the long-sustained oral traditions would have continued as embodied, situated practices, undisrupted and hence would not have needed to be secured and stored in a culturally distant and incompatible medium.

In the context of the colonial expansion, recording tools, such as the phonograph, should be seen as paradoxical devices which go far beyond their original function to secure and preserve cultural content. They also need to be inspected as silencing tools. Their life-preserving function — one of the intentions with which the phonograph was developed given Thomas Edison's vision of connecting with the dead through recorded sound — has its dark, poisonous side: a life-threatening force.[32] In other words, getting into possession of the voice of the Other by exteriorizing it into a record is inseparably connected with dispossessing, disembodying, and erasing operations representative of colonial undertakings. Moreover, participation of the one who records in the process of extraction may be implicit: one might think that he/she is performing a genuine and constructive deed, but the long-term consequences of this action might be problematic, perhaps even devastating for the recorded subjects, their communities, and environments. In this sense, individual intentions might not be enough to develop an alternative force capable of breaking through exploitative orientations of recording; instead, they might end up fuelling such visions even further.

Personal Motivations and Harm in Preserving Sounds for Posterity

A particularly intriguing case, although difficult to indubitably assess, is the work of Ida Halpern. Born in Vienna, Halpern was an ethnomusicologist who,

[31] One should also consider the fact that contemporary means of storing and distributing music are descendants of the said wax cylinders and phonographs. In other words, tools used today to revive cultures once violated by, for example, phonographs, are members of the same lineage of recording technologies.

[32] For the discussion of the pharmacological character of technologies, see B. Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. D. Ross, Cambridge 2013.

in the 1940s, fled Nazism in her native country to become a Canadian citizen. Soon after she arrived in Canada, Halpern found interest in documenting the folk songs of Indigenous people. Over four decades, she recorded about 400 hereditary songs (specially written songs that remain connected with specific people, events, places and are owned by people and related to their particular life stories). Her work was inspired by several factors. She was interested in bridging the gap between folk culture and high art. She firmly believed in the value of preserving vanishing cultures and traditions, a practice that at the time was gaining traction within the field of anthropology.[33]

As Elizabeth Burns Coleman, Rosemary J. Coombe, and Fiona MacArailt suggest in their joint article, Halpern's interest in preserving vulnerable cultures through sound might also be related to her personal life.[34] As a Jew whose culture and music were subject to repression and persecution in Europe, Halpern developed deep empathy towards the repressed communities of First Nations people in British Columbia. It became a natural imperative for her to help them preserve their culture before it was too late. When Halpern asked Billy Assu, chief of the Lekwiltok Kwakwaka'wakw nation and steward of traditional songs, what would happen to them when he died, he responded, "they will die with me."[35] Acknowledging Halpern's intention to preserve his stories and songs, Assu eventually agreed to collaborate: "you come: I give you hundred songs."[36] According to Halpern, chief Assu was deeply concerned about the declining interest of the younger generation in cultivating the traditions of their elders. Assu believed that for future generations, the recorded sounds might become the only gateway to their past.[37] It should be noted that between 1884 and 1951, ceremonies such as potlatch were banned by Canadian authorities and could not be publicly performed.[38] Potlatches, as Robinson explains, were far more than just seasonal rituals allowing members of indigenous communities to congregate. Those events provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge and memory. To be more specific, they were particular recording techniques. Like many other recording techniques and media, they ensured the transmission and continuance of their culture. To paraphrase Robinson's words, the ban imposed on potlatches and other tradi-

[33] E. Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918*, Durham 2012.

[34] E. Burns Coleman, R.J. Coombe, F. MacArailt, "A Broken Record: Subjecting 'Music' to Cultural Rights," [in:] *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, eds. J.O. Young, C.G. Brunk, Chichester 2009, pp. 173–210.

[35] D. Cole, C. Mullins, "The Musical World of Ida Halpern," *BC Studies* 97, 1993, p. 21.

[36] Ibid.

[37] The statement that motivated Assu to collaborate with Halpern is also referenced by the Royal BC Museum that currently hosts the recordings: "Ida Halpern Collection," Royal BC Museum, https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/bc-archives/what-we-have/indigenous-material/ida-halpern-collection (accessed 16.06.2021).

[38] D. Robinson, op. cit., p. 50.

tions was, in fact, a prohibition of recording: "it was essentially the equivalent to banning books that document law and history […] it lessened opportunities to exercise a heightened form of perception resulting in richly detailed memory."[39]

In this context, Halpern's project can be seen as a way of addressing the erasure of Indigenous recording techniques by colonial violence through introducing a recording technique "native" to settler colonialism but alien to the cultural conducts of First Nations people. Her response is genuine and yet harmful. On the one hand, Halpern's project attempts to think pro-actively by creating a bridge with the future where people can return to cultivate their ancestral knowledge. As the official website of the Royal Museum states, Halpern's recordings are today invaluable to the families and communities who hold the intellectual property rights to the songs and ceremonies. On the other hand, her project incorporates the colonial politics of dispossession and forced assimilation. Thus, from a certain angle, it can be seen as proof, perhaps even an accelerator, of forces set out not to extend but to discontinue Indigenous culture.[40]

In addition to an array of concerns that these polarized readings cause, one crucial question about Halpern's project is to what extent personal life experience (*phronesis*) — in her case, the exposure to persecution in Europe — can motivate and justify one's commitment to recording and preserving another culture? Transposing this question to field recording practice: to what extent can our (field recordists') personal life stories justify working with subjects, places, and events we find deeply resonant with our own experiences?

While leaving this question deliberately unanswered — as any quick resolution or top-down suggestion would not do any justice here — one reflection might nevertheless be added. While certainly helping one connect with sensitive realms, even most genuinely motivated imperatives might at the same time overshadow the bigger picture and the field of relations one is entangled in. They might prevent

[39] Ibid., p. 56.

[40] As another case and warning, we might also look into the work of American ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. While recognized for his efforts to preserve American folk culture, Lomax's approach has not been examined enough in terms of whom this preservation was serving foremost and who it was meant for in the first place. In other words, what is problematic about his project is that it is primarily oriented towards the white, privileged class of Americans. Writing about Lomax's interest in preserving blues music made by Black Americans, Bibi suggests that his recordings were "primarily meant for white Americans, for press, for publications, for radio shows. Definitely not for Black Americans." Moreover, to preserve, or rather extract songs from his subjects by means of phonographic inscription, Lomax would apply force, not personally but by perpetuating stereotypes and violent attitudes towards people of colour, for example in prisons where a large number of his recordings were done. In one of his accounts, Lomax recalls: "Presently the guard came out, pushing a Negro man in stripes along at the point of his gun […] the poor fellow, evidently afraid he was to be punished, was trembling and sweating in an extremity of fear. The guard shoved him before our microphone": "Alan Lomax: The Man who Recorded the World… Not Always with the Best Practices," Bibi, https://bibidancestheblues.com/2021/05/13/lomax/ (accessed 16.06.2021); "How Alan Lomax Segregated Music," WNYC, 5.02.2015, https://www.wnyc.org/story/how-alan-lomax-segregated-music/ (accessed 14.02.2022).

one from realizing that despite best intentions, one remains an agent of cultural appropriation and symbolic extraction. As Burns Coleman et al. argue, Halpern's research shows that cultural appropriation may be performed even by the most well-intentioned individuals: it occurs simply "through the imposition of dominant aesthetic categories." What is harmful in Halpern's work is her uncritical use of audio-recording equipment, technology. While compatible with her motivations, this technology is alien to the subjects she is capturing: "perfectly acceptable, indeed laudable activities in one era may cause harms that affect injuries that we must ethically acknowledge in another."[41]

To what extent can we anticipate such harms and thus limit chances of their occurrence? Realizing this inherent uncertainty of (field) recording resulting from its possible afterlives, should one entirely give up engaging in it? How should one approach the prospect of responsibility for the fact that their recorded material could potentially cause harm in the future?

Re-Articulating the Field in Field Recording

Throughout this essay, when writing about recording I often precede it with the term field in parenthesis. This is to indicate that any act of recording is inherently related to a field. In other words, every recording relies on a specific field of relations. It never happens in a vacuum. Regardless of whether they are inscribed in the record as distinctly audible features, power relations inform every recording process and, consequently, reside in the recording.

No recording is innocent. Every recording is a frozen life as much as it is a prospect of a wound or even death. In other words, each voluntarily performed act of recording, and hence a recorded result, is entangled in a web of power relations that precede, surround, and follow it, while constantly transforming. If, to some extent, it might be possible to map these relations before engaging (or before deciding to engage) in recording (for example, by examining how one's position and motivations speak to other contemporary cultural and political practices related to documentation), it is more difficult to predict what network of political, economic, technical, and cultural relations the recorded material will enter in the future.[42] Even results of the most modest, underground attempts to preserve a particular culture might eventually end up in collections and institutional frameworks ruled and haunted by onto-epistemologies which are entirely incompatible with and therefore harmful to that culture.

This reflection suggests that both the cultivation of a certain contextual continuity and compatibility are needed in order to responsibly engage in the record-

[41] E. Burns Coleman, R.J. Coombe, F. MacArailt, op. cit., pp. 185–186.

[42] See Susan Sontag's discussion about the time needed for a photograph to function as evidence in her book *Regarding the Pain of the Others*, New York 2003.

ing of cultural memory and heritage. If we agree that recordings are permanently imbued with subjectivities that contributed to their sonority (at least for as long as the durability of the medium lasts), then to ensure that these recordings retain and are "willing" to mediate memory further on, requires from us to treat them with respect similar to one characterizing that of a face-to-face encounter. It might be, with no certainty though, that this compatibility is to be achieved by asking ourselves questions about resonant audiences, channels, and grounds, for and through which the recorded subjects are eventually intended to reverberate. It is undoubtedly far more complex to make sure that those conditions are met; this is where uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability come into the picture (or ambiance rather). Acknowledgement thereof should precede any act of (field) recording that seeks to preserve and produce cultural values. The acoustethical approach to field recording as adopted in the present article is therefore not a stance that attempts to pre-empt all the non-intentional uses of the record in the making. This is simply impossible. Instead, the proposed position is one that opens up to the understanding of the multiplicity of lives (and deaths) in which the recorded material might be implicated. It is a perspective that encompasses other positions than that of the recording subject. It is a perspective that acknowledges the possibility of multiple, often uneasy, and fractious ways of relating to the recording process and the recorded result when it is archived, released, open, distributed, and re-listened to.

Acoustethical reflection might lead to a more conscious engagement in the recording process or might even make one suspend their decision to press the record button altogether, a form of the active deactivation I discussed earlier. Depending on this reflection, one might realize that both action and inaction can be generative or destructive; both decisions can give or take life, nourish or impede it. As Hildegard Westerkamp suggested, "How do we avoid the very real danger of simply creating yet another product, a CD with yet more amazing sounds? In the worst case, they have become an imported product, a neat sound without any real meaning beyond the WOW experience. We must ask ourselves when we compose a piece or produce a CD whether we, in fact, bring our listeners closer to a place or situation or whether we are fooling ourselves and are inadvertently assisting in the place's extinction."[43]

Denshosha as an Embodied Recorder

How (and why) to record extinction — the passing of a subject, place, field, or entity — without contributing to its ultimate disappearing? Without taking advantage. Without an extractivist mindset. Without using that moment as an opportun-

[43] H. Westerkamp, "Speaking from Inside the Soundscape," [in:] *The Book of Music & Nature*, eds. D. Rothenberg, M. Ulvaeus, Middletown 1998, p. 75.

ity to present oneself as the single, ultimate ear-witness to what is disappearing. Without naively and passively immersing oneself in the polished recording, a memory trace of what was forced to extinction?

An example that might bring us closer to the idea of a certain compatibility between the listener and the listened to (or between the recording subject and the recorded), and thus closer to a kind of recording that is oriented towards the mindful cultivation of memory and care, rather than preservation through exploitation and extraction, is a practice of *denshosha*, a type of what I like to call, "conservation through conversation."

The *Denshosha Project* emerged as a collaboration between the City of Hiroshima and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. It is an initiative which involves volunteers willing to internalize and keep alive a life story of a *hibakusha*, a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing. "A *denshosha* becomes the official memory keeper for their respective *hibakusha*."[44] In the context of this essay, a *denshosha* might be viewed as a specific type of recording subject. The *denshosha* accompanies the *hibakusha* in their daily life to accurately learn their life stories and everyday conducts. The *denshosha* is additionally supported by a three-year training provided by the museum that gradually prepares her to become a custodian of the recorded memory after the *hibakusha*'s passing. This embodied act of preserving memory, while very distinct and embedded in a specific cultural context and historical events, points to a deeper meaning of the term recording as expressed in its etymology.

The verb "to record" is derived from the Latin "recordari," which in turn derives from two components: "re-," meaning "back, again" and "cor," meaning "heart."[45] In ancient times, people believed that the heart was the seat of memory, while the brain was the corrective device. Aristotle considered the heart to be the centre of intelligence. In turn, the brain was believed to be an organ that controls and rationalizes the processes undertaken by the heart.[46] The phrase "learning by heart" echoes these beliefs.[47] What we encounter in the practice of *denshosha*, is the attendance to heart as not a seat of memory alone, but also of care, compassion, warmth, and ethical consideration, the qualities needed for memory to be sustained, retained and to survive, resonate, and flourish. By rearticulating the way we perceive and do recording, it is no longer a technical procedure of extracting audible signals from the surrounding world, or an extractive gesture defined by the moments of pressing the record and stop buttons. Instead, the recording becomes a long-term process, an open-ended, reciprocally organized ritual in which one's internalization of sonic accounts takes place in a synchronous agree-

[44] A.P. Kambhampaty, "How a New Generation Is Carrying On the Legacy of Atomic Bomb Survivors," *Time*, 6.08.2020, https://time.com/5875469/atomic-bomb-legacy/ (accessed 12.05.2021).

[45] J. Smolicki, *Para-Archives*.

[46] C. Gross, "Aristotle on the Brain," *The Neuroscientist* 1, 1995, no. 4, pp. 245–250.

[47] J. Smolicki, "You Press the Button," p. 78.

ment with how the other exteriorizes them. It is a slow process of forming and understanding a field of relations. Doing (field) recording is therefore not only about turning inwards but also about taking into consideration — paying attention to, and, to some extent, reconfiguring — the external field of power relations that inform the entire process and which will, to some degree, ripple into the future.

Being aware of the risk of cultural appropriation, my intention here is certainly far from taking the concept of *denshosha* and superimposing it onto other fields. My aim is rather to pluralize perspectives on (field) recording and to point to this form of working with situated and embodied memory as radically different through how emphasis is put on care, durationality, stewardship, dialogue, and patience, as opposed to immediacy and extractivism, which are notions often associated with technologically aided field recording practices. For *denshosha*, the way that the field of relations is being formed and the record of that field generated, seems more symmetrical, balanced, and mutual than in other cases.

Drawing a lesson here, we should ask: what would it mean to become a custodian of environmental memory?

Concluding

Arguably, actions of many early field recordists were based on an ambition to record the not-yet-captured sounds: fresh, exotic, unknown, and different. Today, let me suggest, that ambition has changed: it is about capturing what has been out there for a long time, but has not been given enough attention and justice, and hence may soon disappear. Physically and from our consciousness. Recording and presenting the recorded is no longer about building spectatorship around the unknown patterns of life flourishing out there in some distant lands, but rather building awareness (and spectatorship) about what is disappearing. About death. If we accept that shift of perspective, today, like never before, recording is, as Mark Peter Wright, sound artist and scholar, once suggested, "a metaphorical death at the moment of capture."[48] Perhaps, it is even no longer metaphorical, but real.

Bringing the acoustethical lens (or microphone), this time, however, redirected inwards, into the field recordist's deepest field of ideals, values, and conscience, one could ask: can capturing the death of what is being recorded be justified as a means of sustaining the action and life of the recordist?

[48] The quote comes from Mark Peter Wright's project entitled *[Auto-]Dialogical Feedback or, the Poetics of Letting Go.* In the project, Wright reflects on what happens when a field recording is taken out of a certain context and then technologically stored and used for composition. In the final stage of his research, he reverses this process by returning to sites where he captured the sounds and rebroadcasting the recordings before ultimately deleting them: M.P. Wright, "(Auto) Dialogical Feedback: Towards an Archive of Loss," *Sensate Journal*, 2015, https://sensatejournal.com/auto-dialogical-feedback-towards-archive-loss/ (accessed 14.02.2022).

In an interview with Julia Yezbick, committed to "recoding" the dominant approaches to field (recording), Wright suggests that "asymmetrical contact is the foundation for any environmental recording activity. I point the microphone. I choose its mode of representation. I capture, remove, and manipulate the sounds of places, people, animals, and phenomena. Recording is built out of this imbalance and uneven distribution of (human to nonhuman) power."[49] Acknowledging this imbalance, as he asserts further, should bring stronger emphasis on ethical questions about agency and rights in recording. Similarly, my point here is not to completely abandon field recording altogether or radically question its sense, but to problematize it through highlighting and reformulating the power relations that intrinsically underlie its dynamics. This is precisely what I have been aiming at while putting forth the idea of acoustethics.

Field recording practices are often based on short-term excursions into some supposedly unexplored territories to extract their sonic qualities, bring them home, and use them as content (or effects) in a sound work. Acoustethics questions these dynamics. It does so not only by advocating slower and deeper ways of engaging with listening to and recording places (or staying with their troublesome sonority) but also by expanding one's imagination, understanding, and awareness of ethical implications of the recording process. Acoustethics is a conceptual tool for making room, acknowledging and listening to uncertainties, some of which are inherent and others produced in recording practice. Acoustethics is definitely not an instrument that helps do away with these uncertainties. It opposes all generalizing norms and standards in making moral decisions. It does not offer ready-made solutions for how to address the ethical aspects of working with sound and recording, but instead aligns with the ethics of care. In addition to the acts of reflection, consideration, worrying, and empathy, the ethics of care involves material practices such as "maintenance or concrete work involved in actualizing care."[50] In the same vein, acoustethics should not be limited to a mere introspection of one's position towards the act of recording and the recorded sound. Instead, it should help one craft, develop, and maintain that position practically, more carefully, and responsibly.

As discussed above in this article, the acoustethical approach to working with sound is about recognizing that any act of sound recording is closely related to the notion of field. In other words, any act of recording is field recording. In this context, field is much more than just a physical space — it encompasses a set of relations between the involved subjects, worldviews, places, histories, and technologies. This field determines how the recording is made, gains its substance, and then ripples into the future. The awareness of the field and how it

[49] J. Yezbick, "A Conversation with Mark Peter Wright," *Sensate Journal*, 2016, http://sensatejournal.com/wp content/uploads/2016/08/MPW_interview_FINAL31.pdf (accessed 16.02.2022).

[50] M. Puig de la Bellacasa, op. cit., p. 4.

works is crucial to the formation and maintenance of the acoustethical attitude to the world. Central to the ethics of care, the notion of maintenance in the context of acoustethics can be seen in terms of a long-term relationship with the recorded subject and the recorded sound this act generates. As in the practice of *denshosha*, the acouestethical approach is driven by a particular inclination (perhaps even a sense of obligation) to maintain a relationship with the recorded subject or place after the recording process is completed. This is true even if that relationship is to be difficult; just like field recording is a difficult legacy. Or even a burden — but never a trophy.

Figure 4. Slussen area under reconstruction in spring 2021

Source: Author.

Figure 5. The author performing at Slussen as part of Riversssounds, an artistic project and residency for sound artists working with soundscapes of European rivers, April 2021

Source: Author.

Postscript

As of summer 2021, the Slussen project continues. I try to occasionally return to the place where I do additional recordings, soundwalks (solitarily and collectively), and performatively interact with the site and its history by, for example, building dialogues between the recorded material and its present soundscapes (Figs. 4–5).

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Sensitive Recording as a Form of Life: The Case of Ryszard Siwiec's Message

Abstract: By analyzing the biography of Ryszard Siwiec's recording of his message, we explore the function and changing identity of sensitive sound recordings, and the ethics of handling them. In our view, sensitive recordings are linked to the experiences of trauma, exclusion, and injustice of those whose voices were recorded and the community they were part of. A recording may also be considered sensitive if it is used in a racist context or for other stigmatizing practices. Sensitive recordings are "difficult," sometimes "troubling," but also "moving"; they stir emotions. Although sensitive recordings are associated with physical and social death and exclusion, we view them and what is recorded on them as a form of life. Each recording has its own biography and agency, becomes an active actor in a complex social network, and is subject to the actions of other actors. Our analyses of the biography of Siwiec's recording reveal its affective and emotional power, its role as a carrier of family and national memory, its changing identity, and its agency in shaping the identities of its listeners. We would like to argue that sensitive recordings require attentive and sensitive listening. This kind of listening becomes an ethical postulate that results from a concern for those whose voices are made public, the author of the recording, and the recording itself.

Keywords: Ryszard Siwiec, self-immolation, sound recording, biography of sound recording, sensitive sound recording

In 1924, Józef Piłsudski stood in front of a strange tube that "stole" his voice. In a short recording the Marshal says: "[my voice] will separate from me and go somewhere in the world without me, its owner. It is hard not to laugh at the strange situation where Mr. Piłsudski's voice will find itself. […] It makes me laugh out loud that this poor voice, suddenly separated from me, is no longer my property. The funniest thing is that when I am no longer around, Mr Piłsudski's voice will be

sold for three groszes somewhere at a fair."[1] This humorous speech contains several important observations that are closely related to the function, ontology, and ethics of sound recordings. Announcing his invention, Thomas A. Edison pointed to its documentary function, which made it possible to record and hear the voices of important figures, politicians, artists, and writers long after they passed away. The possibility of voice recording is a way of "sonic embalming,"[2] immortalizing those who passed away, a struggle against the inevitability of death. Playing back the recording is a kind of spiritualistic séance through which the dead are present. This ability to conjure up the past world makes recordings carriers of memory and correlates of heritage. They have an affective potential to evoke emotions, even if their content does not seem particularly significant.

Piłsudski refers to the ontology of recording by reflecting upon the nature of his voice captured by the recorder. The voice separates from its source, loses connection with the body, and in that sense becomes autonomous ("it will separate from me and go somewhere in the world without me, its owner"). What is a recorded sound if it is not a property of its source? Does the breaking of this relationship mean that the identity of the sound changes completely? Does the voice captured by the recorder still belong to Piłsudski? The questions posed herein are related to the ontology of the recorded sound rather than the ontology of the recording itself, in which sound is materialized. In the present paper, we would like to reflect upon the ontic status of the recording in relation to specific cultural practices (especially listening practices) that actualize a certain identity of the recording, and thus a certain way of existence.[3] The specific identity of the recording, as explored herein, arises out of the entire network of relations it is entangled in. Analyzing the status of the recording, we ask, for example, whether it is a document, a collector's item, a source for research, a relic, a work of art, a commodity, or material for further processing? Perhaps its status largely depends on the answer to the question of who/what is being recorded. However, we believe that even getting an answer does not conclusively resolve this question. Recordings have different identities related to their individual biographies, in which their different uses (social and cultural practices) and contexts (social, cultural, political, economic) come to the fore. The contexts and uses of recordings also affect their status as a correlate of heritage, which can be "difficult heritage" (S. Macdonald),[4]

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9QYAOQg29M (accessed 22.02.2022).

[2] J. Sterne, *Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham–London 2006, p. 294.

[3] This approach to the ontic status of the recording was inspired by Ewa Klekot's article entitled "Tożsamość rzeczy." See E. Klekot, "Tożsamość rzeczy," *Kultura Współczesna* 3, 2008, pp. 91–100.

[4] S. Macdonald, "Is 'Difficult Heritage' Still 'Difficult'? Why Public Acknowledgement of Past Perpetration May No Longer Be So Unsettling to Collective Identities," *Museum International* 67, 2016, nos. 1–4, pp. 6–22.

"orphan heritage" (J. Price),[5] or "sensitive heritage," "that is, as being felt and remembered through violent histories, (re)lived through traumatic experiences, and (re)enacted through the affective relationships between people and material entities" (P. Schorch).[6] As can already be seen, the way the recording functions is closely related to ethical questions, including those suggested by the Marshal. To whom does the recording belong? Who has the right to dispose of it — its author or the one whose voice was recorded? When does it become unethical to use a recording? What are the conditions for ethical acquisition and sharing of recordings? Thus, can every recording be a commodity ("The funniest thing is that when I am no longer around, Mr Piłsudski's voice will be sold for three groszes somewhere at a fair")? How to handle sensitive recordings, and do they require any special listening mode?[7]

With focus on the three core issues outlined in this article, we would like to take the above-mentioned concept of "sensitive heritage" as a basis for discussing what we refer to as "sensitive recordings." Our analysis will be based on the 1968 recording of Ryszard Siwiec's message, which is classified as a sensitive recording.[8]

The genesis of each recording should always be placed within a particular historical, social, political and cultural context. This particular/local context can be seen as a field of tensions that are shaped by social and political forces, cultural norms, and values viewed on a macro scale. When considered in this way, the genesis reveals the political, social, and cultural agency of the recording. By defining recordings as sensitive, we would like to pay more attention to the context of their creation, which makes them carry a whole baggage of traumatic experiences. This can be exemplified by ethnomusicological recordings — during the colonial period, they were acquired in a context that often could be considered a "context of injustice."[9] Sensitive recordings are linked to the experiences of trauma, exclusion, and injustice of those whose voices were recorded, or, a little more broadly, the com-

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[5] J. Price, "Orphan Heritage: Issues in Managing the Heritage of the Great War in Northern France and Belgium," *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 1, 2005, no. 1, p. 182.

[6] P. Schorch, "Sensitive Heritage: Ethnographic Museums, Provenance Research, and the Potentialities of Restitutions," *Museum and Society* 18, 2020, no. 1, pp. 1–5, https://doi.org/10.29311/mas.v18i1.3459.

[7] We believe that the questions posed herein can be included in the field of acoustethics proposed in this volume by Jacek Smolicki.

[8] This recording has already been examined by Sławomir Wieczorek in his article. See S. Wieczorek, "Nieusłyszane nagranie Ryszarda Siwca," [in:] *Rok 1968 — kultura, sztuka, polityka*, eds. P. Zwierzchowski, D. Mazur, J. Szczutkowska, Bydgoszcz 2019, pp. 301–312. This article refers back to some of the earlier conclusions, but places the recording of Ryszard Siwiec within a new theoretical context as well as raises questions about his biography, changing identity, and ethical issues related to its uses.

[9] On the "context of injustice," see "Human Remains in Museums and Collections: A Critical Engagement with the 'Recommendations for the Care of Humans Remains in Museums and

munity they were part of. A recording can sometimes be considered sensitive when it is used in a racist context (as evidence of a supposedly inferior status of a given ethnic group) or for other stigmatizing practices. Sensitive recordings are "difficult," sometimes "troubling," and but also "moving"; they stir emotions. Their political power, including the formative one, comes from the weakness of those whose voices and sound worlds these recordings captured. Since they evoke affects and emotions and store memories of traumatic experience, they may be used instrumentally in historical and identity politics as well as in managing the emotions of audiences.[10]

Although sensitive recordings are related to physical death, social death, and exclusion, we would like to see them as a form of life, which is revived with each playback and use of the recording. We would also like to view the recording as a form of life that has its own biography and is alive, that is, has agency, is an active actor in a complex social network, and is subject to the actions of other actors.

Ryszard Siwiec's Recording

The above-mentioned functions, modes of existence, and ethics of sensitive recordings can be illustrated by reconstructing the biography of Ryszard Siwiec's recording of his message. On 8 September 1968, during a harvest festival in Warsaw, he committed an act of self-immolation in the stands of the Tenth Anniversary Stadium.[11] The harvest festival was one of the largest annual celebrations of communist propaganda, attended by leaders of the ruling party with the then

Collections' of the German Museums Association," *Historisches Forum* 21, 2017, https://www.carmah.berlin/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HistFor_21_2017.pdf (accessed 20.02.2022).

[10] The problematic use of sensitive recordings in the manipulation of audiences was brought to our attention by the reviewer of this article and we would like to thank him for that at this point. Studying the biographies of such recordings can reveal the spectrum of manipulation, as well as the functions they can serve. An interesting example is provided by Gustavus Stadler's analysis of fabricated recordings of African American lynchings (G. Stadler, "Never Heard Such a Thing: Lynching and Phonographic Modernity," *Social Text* 28, 2010, no. 1(102), pp. 87–105), whose affective potential enabled them to be commoditized and used in racial discourse. Since recordings are strictly related to the context in which they were made and the source of the sound, they can be viewed as carriers of memory, historical sources, and evidence. Their functions depend on the motivations and goals of their users. Some of them, since sensitive recordings are related to trauma and exclusion, will be seen as unethical.

[11] For more information on Ryszard Siwiec, the circumstances of his self-immolation, and the transformations of the memory of his act, see G. Ziółkowski, *Okrutny teatr samospaleń. Protesty samobójcze w ogniu i ich echa w kulturze współczesnej*, Poznań 2018, pp. 357–412; *Całopalny. Protest Ryszarda Siwca*, eds. A. Dębska, B. Kaliski, Warszawa 2013; R. Kulmiński, *Tu pali się ktoś. Ryszard Siwiec. Jan Palach. Zdeněk Adamec*, Kraków 2016; Petr Blažek, *Ryszard Siwiec 1909–1968*, Warszawa 2010; J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, *Krzyk szarego człowieka. Ryszard Siwiec 1909–1968*, ebook available at www.ryszardsiwiec.com (accessed 20.02.2022).

First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), Władysław Gomułka, and an audience of thousands who came to the capital from all over the country. After the flames were put out, Siwiec was taken to the hospital, where he died a few days later at the age of 59. He had travelled to Warsaw from Przemyśl, where he lived and worked as an accountant for many years. Before the outbreak of World War II, he graduated from Lviv University with a degree in philosophy, and during the war he joined the underground Home Army. Known for his radical anti-communist beliefs, he refused to work as a history teacher at school so as not to teach falsified Polish history; he also prepared and distributed leaflets opposing the communist authorities. Siwiec's act is most often presented today as a protest against the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia, which took place less than three weeks before his self-immolation. Leaflets in which he protested against "the unprovoked aggression on the brotherly country of Czechoslovakia" were found scattered around the Tenth Anniversary Stadium.[12] Others condemned the moral condition of the modern world, which was full of lies, hatred, and evil. Siwiec's decision to commit suicide was made at least a few months before the events in Czechoslovakia. In April 1968, he prepared a last will addressed to his family, in which he wrote that he had no chance to survive the planned protest against the "total tyranny of evil, hatred, and lies taking over the world."[13]

Siwiec's drama unfolded during a mass event in front of around 100,000 people. Contrary to his plans, information about the protest did not reach the public opinion, so for years Siwiec and his act remained almost completely forgotten.[14] It was a very different situation from that of Thích Quảng Đức, who set himself on fire in 1963 to protest against the persecution of Buddhists in South Vietnam, or Jan Palach, who in 1969 protested against the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the suppression of the Prague Spring, and the apathy and passivity of his society. The news of their deaths circled the world, causing a stir in many countries, commemoration, and reactions in the art world.[15]

The political breakthrough of 1989 in Central Europe made it possible to recall the story of Siwiec and his act of self-immolation. Maciej Drygas's film and radio diptych devoted to his biography played a key role. Both a documentary film *Usłyszcie mój krzyk* (*Hear My Cry*; 1991) and a radio play *Testament* (1992) were awarded at several film and radio competitions and festivals (for example, the Felix and Prix Italia awards). In his works, Drygas used the accounts of direct witnesses of the self-immolation, recollections of Siwiec's family and friends as well as found archival video footage of Siwiec engulfed in flames made by

[12] As cited in J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, op. cit., p. 23.

[13] See "Testament," [in:] J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, op. cit., p. 77.

[14] Iwona Kurz wrote inspiringly about the reasons why his protest went unnoticed. See I. Kurz, "Między chrztem a samospaleniem. 'Teatra polskie' drugiej połowy lat 60.," [in:] *1968/PRL/Teatr*, eds. A. Adamiecka-Sitek, M. Kościelniak, G. Niziołek, Warszawa 2016, pp. 23–41.

[15] See G. Ziółkowski, op. cit., pp. 219–310 and 412–471.

the Polish Film Chronicle cameraman, Zbigniew Skoczek.[16] He was the first person to release the excerpts from Siwiec's speech recorded on a reel-to-reel tape.

It is difficult to determine when the recording of Ryszard Siwiec was exactly made. Previous publications mention one, two or four days before the self-immolation.[17] Digital copies of the recording contain only part of the message and they last about 46 minutes.[18] The initial fragment, the duration of which cannot be precisely determined, is missing. Based on the structure of the preserved recording with the clear disproportion between the lengths of the individual parts and the style of the speech (eloquent, abounding in allusions to events from political history and contemporary times), it can be assumed that this was a significant fragment. The recording begins with an incomplete part addressed to Polish society — journalists (5 minutes) and "writers, intellectuals, professors, students and youth." Siwiec's words addressed to the people of the USSR — first to the authorities (24 minutes, the longest part of the preserved recording) and then to Soviet society — "young people and workers" — are preserved in full (14 minutes).

The content of the message encourages in-depth analyses and interpretations that have not yet been conducted as well as the contextualization of his words in reference to the texts he read and popular beliefs. In the fragment addressed to Polish society, Siwiec juxtaposed the attitude of young people and intellectuals who took part in the March 1968 protests ("a model and an example of patriotism, sacrifice, nobility, and loyalty to the ideals of freedom") with the behaviour of the regime's journalists and propagandists who commented upon these events ("traitors and sellouts"). Siwiec also calls on journalists to abandon opportunism and lies and to join the supporters of democratic reforms of socialism in Poland. However, it is the next part of the message that is difficult to interpret because it contains a range of themes, including several moral postulates, opposition to the partitionist policy and the imperialism of the Soviet Union as well as the unmasking of Soviet propaganda. Siwiec's reflections are based on the belief that there are universal laws of historical progress, which are grounded in Christian ethics. While listening to his message, one can notice that the references to the Warsaw Pact's attack on Czechoslovakia are entangled in a broader context. In Siwiec's view, "the world is on the edge of an abyss," and the present

[16] Ibid., p. 371.

[17] See ibid., p. 376.

[18] Description of the recording is based on the copies from the archives of Maciej Drygas and the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN): *Nagranie monologu — przesłania do narodu odczytanego przez Ryszarda Siwca. Z taśm Adama Macedońskiego*, IPN Kr 719/16 and IPN Kr 719/17. The IPN file contains a fragment, over one minute long, which is not present in Maciej Drygas's copy. This fragment is also missing in both transcripts of Ryszard Siwiec's speech (see "8 września 1968. Żywa pochodnia na stadionie X-lecia. W trzynastą rocznicę śmierci Ryszarda Siwca wszystkim miłującym prawdę," ed. W. Siwiec, [n.p.] 1981, pp. 1–11, [in:] J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, op. cit., pp. 77–82; P. Blažek, op. cit., pp. 171–185.

time is critical to the future fate of humanity. According to Siwiec, depending on the attitude of the USSR's rulers, democratization and liberalization could occur in Central Europe, but the USSR's military invasion can actually be viewed as a sign of the Cold War's transition to a hot phase. One future scenario which he considered possible involved a nuclear catastrophe, triggered intentionally or accidentally,[19] a "horrible, barbaric annihilation of civilization" when "in a moment, the globe will flare up with an explosion of hydrogen bombs and will be covered with a cloud of radioactive fungus," leading to the "agonizing death of two-thirds of humanity" and the destruction of "eighty percent of biological life on earth." Unlike his anti-Sovietism, moral concerns, or opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the catastrophic thread of Siwiec's thought has never really been exposed in memoirs of his person, although source documents point to other signs of Siwiec's fear of catastrophe, which are not present in the recording.[20] The reasons for the omission of this aspect need further analysis.

It is difficult to identify the addressee of the last part of the recording, which is the shortest fragment and lasts only about a minute. Siwiec does not separate it from the previous one, as he did earlier, with a clear pause. The final part of the message opens with the words: "People! People! Wake up! Young people, the future of the nation," "People, who have not yet forgotten the most beautiful word on earth — mother!" This passage is completely different from the others. Up to this point, Siwiec reads the text of his speech quite calmly, without emphasis, and raises his voice only a few times on such words as "SOS," "traitors," "disgrace," and "Targowica." One minute before the end of the recording, the speech becomes completely different. His voice breaks on the word "mother," one can hear restrained crying, despair, and dramatic silence. Siwiec begins to shout, abandoning all the historiosophical references and political analyses. For the first time, he refers to himself as "an average, ordinary man" who "loves freedom more than anything" and calls: "Wake up! It is not too late!"[21] This leads to the question

[19] Therefore, they fit into two of the five main scenarios of a nuclear explosion. See L.M. Nijakowski, *Świat po apokalipsie. Społeczeństwo w świetle postapokaliptycznych tekstów*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 126–127.

[20] Grzegorz Ziółkowski pointed out that on his way to Warsaw, Siwiec had with him the book *Letters from the End of the World*, an account of the Hiroshima bombing. In a letter written on the train to his wife he wrote: "for the truth not to be forgotten, for humanity and freedom — I'm dying. But it's the lesser of two evils — like the death of millions." See G. Ziółkowski, op. cit., p. 392. At the hospital, Siwiec, while being secretly recorded by the security service, said: "let's stop the hand poised over the button that can bring about the annihilation of half of humanity." "Wypowiedzi Ryszarda Siwca — nagrane i odtworzone z taśmy minifonu w dniu 10 września 1968," as cited in J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, op. cit., p. 61.

[21] Full transcript: "People! People! Wake up! Young people, the future of all nations, don't let yourself be murdered every 20 years so that some -isms could or could not rule the world. Don't let yourself be murdered so that one group of people or another could gain total power. People, who have not yet forgotten the most beautiful word on earth — mother! [long pause] People, who

of whether the sudden change in the last part of the recording occurred because he saw the tape ending on the recorder, which meant that recording time was coming to an end.[22]

Biography of the Recording

The biography of the recording is complex, dynamic, and multi-stage.[23] Over fifty years since its inception, the recording has changed its status, identity, and function several times under various political, social, and technological circumstances. Siwiec's message, an expression of his anti-totalitarian beliefs, was hidden as potential evidence of a crime and became a family keepsake, or perhaps even a relic, which played a key role in restoring his memory. The recording got corrupted, which resulted in the loss of initial fragments, and the medium was changed — from analog to digital, and from audio to written. Therefore, we can distinguish at least four fundamental stages in its biography. The first stage marks the making of a tape recording by Siwiec and includes the time it was stored by his friend. The second stage begins when the tape is handed over to the family, who uses it to recall the story of Siwiec's self-immolation. In the next stage, fragments of the recording are made public in the two works by Maciej Drygas. In the final stage, the fragments employed by the director are separated from the diptych and start to function as digital files which various musicians, sound artists, and history popularizers use online as samples. The metonymic relationship between the recording and the dramatic act of its author makes it a sensitive, that is, difficult and troublesome, recording, which also proved to be "fragile." This is what it was like for its author, his friends and family, as well as the listeners, including researchers. Today, this recording problematizes and to some extent questions the obvious narrative in which the figure of Ryszard Siwiec is a significant element in the Polish memory of the People's Republic of Poland, the public resistance against the regime, and the Warsaw Pact "intervention" in Czechoslovakia.

still have a spark of humanity and feelings, wake up! Hear my cry, a cry of an average, ordinary man, a son of the nation who loves his own and other people's freedom more than anything, more than his own life! Wake up! It's not too late!"

[22] See S. Wieczorek, op. cit., p. 311.

[23] This approach to the biography of the recording was inspired by Igor Kopytoff's paper "The Cultural Biography of Things." See I. Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," [in:] *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai, Cambridge 1986, pp. 64–94.

Planned Life

Although some of the circumstances in which the recording was made are well-known, the reason for making it is still not clear. Why did Siwiec record his message using a tape recorder? This was a fancy and rare piece of equipment in Poland then. According to Władysław Mazur, a direct witness of the event, this is why the recording was made at the Fredreum amateur theatre in Przemyśl that had a tape recorder, and with the help of others: "On Saturday evening [7.09.1968] I went to the castle where I found Siwiec and his friend Major Stefan Żółtowski, a director and actor of the Fredreum theatre. Ryszard turned on the tape recorder and started to read his essay from a typewritten page." Years later, Mazur also recalled the emotions that accompanied Siwiec during the recording of his monologue: "Some sentences were corrected and others were completed with new words. Sometimes his voice broke and eyes filled with tears."[24] It is worth noting here that although the entire recording is generally perceived as highly affective and emotional, such a perception seems to be justified only in the last part.

According to Maciej Drygas, after the recording was made, Siwiec left the tape with Mazur, who became "extremely frightened" after the self-immolation, so he hid the tape and did not return to it for a long time.[25] He did not decide to hand it over to Radio Free Europe, which, according to Łukasz Kamiński, was Siwiec's wish.[26] Only in this way could the anti-communist message be heard by the wide audience to which it was addressed.[27] Siwiec hoped, as Kamiński convincingly explained, that thanks to the presence of a mass audience, journalists, and a radio broadcast, the information about his self-immolation would reach the public, and the broadcast of the tape smuggled to the West would become a source of knowledge about the reasons for his protest.

Although Mazur did not send the tape, several months after Palach's self-immolation he informed Radio Free Europe about Siwiec's act in an anonymous

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[24] W. Mazur, as cited in *Całopalny*, p. 13.

[25] M. Drygas, as cited in an episode of Alicja Grembowicz's radio broadcast *Spotkanie z reportażem*: "Usłyszcie mój krzyk! Samospalenie Ryszarda Siwca," Polskie Radio, https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/156/Artykul/679910,Uslyszcie-moj-krzyk-Samospalenie-Ryszarda-Siwca (accessed 5.02.2022).

[26] See Ł. Kamiński, "Przeciw totalnej tyranii zła. Ryszard Siwiec (1909–1968)," *Pamięć.pl* 9, 2013, p. 49, https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/czechoslowacja/34873,Przeciw-totalnej-tyranii-zla-Ryszard-Siwiec-19091968.html (accessed 5.02.2022). However, the historian did not support his thesis with references. See S. Wieczorek, op. cit., pp. 305–306.

[27] In her book *Musical Solidarities*, Andrea F. Bohlman suggests that only in the early 1980s, political (strong democratic opposition), technological (reel-to-reel tapes replaced with cassette tapes) and economic (the availability of tape recorders) changes paved way for the development of the Polish opposition's cassette culture, which was based on the production and independent distribution of anti-regime recordings. See A.F. Bohlman, *Musical Solidarities: Political Action and Music in Late Twentieth-Century Poland*, New York 2020.

letter. He was probably afraid that the broadcast of the tape could lead the security services to him. It is an ethical obligation to protect sensitive recordings, and perhaps for this reason he decided not to destroy the tape. By becoming its custodian and guardian, he saved it and, according to Wit Siwiec,[28] finally handed it over to his family. However, we still don't know why the initial fragment of the recording is missing. Was it a defect of the tape recorder or the tape? Was it intentionally deleted because of its content, for example, because it exposed the presence of other people or the location of recording? The life of the recording was not planned by its author, the message was not preserved in full, and only after many years was it made public.

Dramatization of Genesis

After the tape found its way to Siwiec's family, it became a potentially dangerous keepsake that could not be shown or played freely to others and had to stay hidden. Adam Macedoński,[29] the author of articles about Siwiec that were published, among others, in the Parisian *Kultura* (1988) and *Przekrój* (two years later), wrote about "saving [the recording] from searches." The tape was also a special gift or "the greatest treasure," as Wit Siwiec said years later,[30] which obliged those who had it to fulfil the will of the donor by spreading its message and protecting it. This was the only way for Siwiec and his act to become better known and enter the public consciousness. The first attempt to make the recorded message public was a brochure with the transcript prepared by the family on the thirteenth anniversary of Siwiec's self-immolation in September 1981. It was published in unofficial circulation during the period commonly referred to today as the "carnival of Solidarity," which lasted from August 1980, when the August Agreements were signed in Gdańsk, to December 1981, when martial law was introduced. During this time, victims of the communist regime were also commemorated in the public space, for example, the monument to the workers murdered in December 1970 was unveiled in Gdańsk.[31] The brochure called on "all truth-lovers" to honour the memory of Ryszard Siwiec's act, making him a hero and a moral authority, especially for the younger generation. "By searching for the truth," the publication was meant to help them to "make a choice,"[32] as the note says.

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[28] Interview with Wit Siwiec, TVP Info, *Info Poranek*, 8.09.2013.

[29] A. Macedoński, "Ta śmierć nie może być… niepotrzebna," *Przekrój* 23, 1990, p. 5.

[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lR4wctch1W4 (accessed 31.05.2022).

[31] The sonic dimension of the monument unveiling ceremony was discussed by Andrea Bohlman in the work cited above.

[32] "8 września 1968," op. cit., pp. 1, 11, [in:] J. Izdebski, M. Krzanicki, op. cit., pp. 76, 82.

The brochure also includes a text by Wit Siwiec, who describes the circumstances of his father's self-immolation, presents his own version of the recording's genesis, and paints a heroic (and inconsistent with the facts) picture of the protest with Siwiec engulfed in flames running towards the leaders of the People's Republic of Poland and disturbing the joyful atmosphere of the harvest festival. Even the recording process itself, which he described as a spontaneous, unplanned event taking place in the hospital after Siwiec set himself on fire and was taken from the stadium, was heroic and even solemn. He requested a priest, "then called the entire staff of the Surgical Clinic to him and asked for a tape recorder. And once his requests were fulfilled, he spoke to those present. [The transcript of the recording]. Only after he fell silent, he was taken to an isolation room where the doctors took care of him."[33] Wit Siwiec dramatized the tape recording by evoking the topos of the last words spoken by the dying along with their whole semantic and emotional dimension.[34] The description adopts a biblical style and even quotes a verse from the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus sends out the Twelve Apostles (Mark 6:7), "[a]nd he called to him" — the recording of the speech becomes an act of transmitting the message from a teacher to the disciples. The image painted in the brochure emphasizes the sacrifice Siwiec made to record the message and presents the circumstances of the recording in a way that gives greater weight to his words.

This way of describing the recording was later reproduced by Adam Macedoński, who in the article published in *Kultura* places the moment of recording even later, right before Siwiec's death: "before his death, he asked for a tape recorder to be brought in and called the hospital staff to his bedside. Then, he delivered his protest manifesto against the rule of the Soviet Union and the invasion of Czechoslovakia."[35] In the second article Macedoński introduces one more element to dramatize the genesis of the recording — a whisper. According to him, Siwiec "managed to whisper his message into a recorder's microphone before he died."[36] Whispering appears as an appropriate emotional register to utter one's last words. Reading the transcript of Siwiec's speech, one could not help but notice that the recording process described by his son and Adam Macedoński is their imaginary creation. The length, style, and nature of the message undermine their versions of events. The imaginary genesis of the recording may have resulted from either

[33] Ibid., pp. 3, 10.

[34] This notion refers back to the very beginnings of phonography because, as already mentioned, recording members of one's own family and famous figures of the time was one of the many uses of the phonograph introduced and advertised by Thomas A. Edison. See T.A. Edison, "The Phonograph and Its Future," *North American Review* 126, 1878, no. 262, p. 187. However, Jonathan Sterne called the possibility of preserving the voice of the dead speaker "a defining figure in early accounts of sound recording"; see also J. Sterne, op. cit., p. 287.

[35] A. Macedoński, "20-ta rocznica najazdu na Czechosłowację," *Kultura* 10, 1988, p. 109.

[36] A. Macedoński, "Ta śmierć nie może być…," p. 5.

the author's ignorance about the circumstances of the recording[37] or his desire to maintain a coherent, heroic narrative about the self-immolation and its circumstances.

Fragmentation and Popularization

The family made the recording available to people who wanted to find out more about Siwiec's act. In 1988 Adam Macedoński wrote: "I have part of the speech (also about Czechoslovakia) recorded on tape at my home in Kraków (Siwiec's family let me copy it),"[38] which meant another change of the recording medium from the reel-to-reel tape to the then-popular compact cassette. Later, it was made available to Maciej Drygas for his documentary film and radio play. It was then that the recording got a second life because the fragmented message was integrated into a film and radio play as one of their many components. In the film *Hear My Cry*, one scene features the material carrier of the original recording, a reel-to-reel tape. It has a piece of paper saying the word "Father" and, along with his other belongings (a burnt book, photographs, and a map), is laid out on a table "like an altar draped in a pristine white cloth."[39] This shot preserves the tape as a family relic. In the film, excerpts from Siwiec's recording appear right after Father Józef Tischner's reflection on the voice of conscience as the final instance deciding on the ethics of human behaviour. "If I saw that this was the voice of his conscience, I would have to acknowledge it," says Father Tischner, acting here as a kind of confessor. In response to his words, fragments of the message are heard in the film for the first (and only) time. The recording is integrated into the film narrative as the voice of Siwiec's conscience, implying what might have led him to commit this act. The three-minute speech was made up from five different fragments of the message. Although only the last fragment was preserved without cuts, the speech sounds like a seamless whole, as the use of editing was not indicated in any way. Siwiec addresses the authorities and citizens of the USSR, the Soviet empire based on violence, harm, and injustice, opposes the slogans of communist propaganda, and, fighting back tears, calls on people to wake up. The fragments of the recording were not cleaned of distortions and noise as the director wanted to

[37] In the radio broadcast, Wit Siwiec talked about how he learned about his father's last days while preparing the brochure: "When I found out how my father really died, I started gathering accounts and information that I believed was true; that people were telling me how it was; how it happened. Time has proven I was wrong," Wit Siwiec, as cited in "Stadion Narodowy im. Ryszarda Siwca? Nikt, tak głośno nie powiedział 'nie' systemowi," Polskie Radio, https://www.polskieradio.pl/7/15/Artykul/927804,Stadion-Narodowy-im-Ryszarda-Siwca-Nikt-tak-glosno-nie-powiedzial-nie-systemowi (accessed 5.02.2022).

[38] A. Macedoński, "20-ta rocznica," p. 109.

[39] M. Drygas, "'Usłyszcie mój krzyk.' Lista montażowa," *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1, 1993, p. 50.

emphasize the time distance and unreality of the voice.[40] In the film, the recording is accompanied by images from archival video footage found by Drygas and shot at the Tenth Anniversary Stadium on 8 September 1968. Although Siwiec is not shown yet (his burning figure appears at the very end of the video as a dramatic finale), we can see the reactions of the people gathered around him — gestures of surprise, dismay, running away from the fire, and attempts to put it out.[41] For obvious reasons, the director was allowed to use more excerpts from the message in the radio play *Testament*. The excerpts from the footage were complemented by comments on the behaviour of Polish society during the March events and the invasion of Czechoslovakia and a protest against this attack addressed to the authorities of the USSR. In the radio play, the theme of the invasion as the direct motivation behind Siwiec's act is emphasized through the use of excerpts from various documentary recordings. We can hear Gomułka's voice justifying the Warsaw Pact's intervention, the Prague radio informing the public that foreign armies have crossed the border, the sounds of tanks, explosions, and marching soldiers, as well as the Czechoslovak national anthem. Just like in the documentary, the finale of the radio play, which is the climax of the whole narrative, juxtaposes two different fragments of the message: the one about the inevitable collapse of the USSR, which, with the premiere of the radio play in 1992, became a fulfilled prophecy, as well as the last minute of the recording, which is the most emotionally powerful part. These fragments do not feature Paweł Szymański's "mournful" music, as Grzegorz Ziółkowski described it,[42] which accompanied all the other excerpts from the tape.

Samples

Maciej Drygas's works laid the ground for the next stage of the recording's functioning. After the fragments put together by the director were digitized and made available online, they started to be used as samples, which were extracted from the original works. Today, they are available on a website dedicated to Siwiec[43] and can also be downloaded as mp3 files from a popular Polish hosting service. Several videos are available on YouTube, where videos of the self-immolation, including the one shot at the stadium by the security service and found only in 2001 in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance,

[40] See ibid., p. 158.

[41] On 8 September 2013, this fragment of the film was screened at the empty National Stadium in Warsaw as part of the 45th anniversary of the self-immolation and as part of the unsuccessful efforts to name the stadium after Ryszard Siwiec. For more information about the ceremony and efforts, see G. Ziółkowski, op. cit., pp. 402–403.

[42] Ibid., p. 409.

[43] http://www.ryszardsiwiec.com/czlowiek-pl.html (accessed 5.02.2022).

are accompanied by the final minute-long fragment of the recording — Ryszard Siwiec's emotional appeal. The recording was also used in two sound works by Michał Turowski, who goes by the pseudonym of Gazawat — *Ryszard Siwiec Set Himself Ablaze During One of the Harvest Festival Dances*, and *Živé Pochodně*[44] — as well as in Dawid Hallmann's piece *Cena*.[45] Both artists quote the same words of Siwiec; however, the aesthetics, the ideological message, and the artistic contexts of their compositions are completely different.[46]

Dawid Hallmann is the author of CDs on Polish history of the 20th century that commemorate the victims of totalitarianisms, anti-communist partisans of the post-war era, and key figures in the history of the Church and the nation. Gazawat (Michał Turowski) releases a number of recordings that refer to wars in Chechnya, the assassination of J.F. Kennedy, the Beslan massacre, torture at Abu Ghraib prison, and serial killers. The author concentrates on the drastic and tragic nature of these events, but does not place them in the context of the nation's history or collective memory, nor does he use them to evoke patriotic feelings.

Dawid Hallmann and Michał Turowski took different approaches to the original recording. Hallmann fragmented Siwiec's message. Sentences were formed into single, repetitive phrases, and some words were distorted and looped. A phrase from Siwiec's monologue was used as a refrain, which reinforces an anti-Soviet message: "no price is too high for preventing this regime from taking over the world." Hallmann told us that he was searching for "evocative and memorable fragments," which made working on Siwiec's recording "not so hard."[47] Turowski placed Siwiec's recording at the end of his two works as a conclusion, just like Drygas did in his radio play. When Siwiec's voice appears, the sonic background gradually fades away, so that the last sentences of the message have no accompaniment. Also, both composers represent completely different musical aesthetics. Characterized by a clear bass beat and fast pace, Hallmann's piece loosely refers to dubstep, a genre of electronic dance music. In Turowski's work, the sonic elements play out very slowly and in the background. Noise elements, the sound of fire, and disturbing short motifs interweave with the lines from Maciej Drygas's film. Such a sonic framing of Siwiec's story grew out of the composer's declared

[44] The tracks are available on Bandcamp: https://gazawat.bandcamp.com. Track durations are 20′22″ and 28′34″. The work *Ryszard Siwiec Set Himself Ablaze* was composed for the artist's 2016 tour, while *Živé Pochodně* is a recording of a concert that was held in Prague before the official start of the aforementioned tour and was based on the specially prepared audio material, which was dedicated to Jan Palach.

[45] The piece is available on Dawid Hallmann's website: http://hallmann.art.pl/cieplyoddech.html and was composed in 2014 as *Cena* (*Tribute to Ryszard Siwiec*). Duration is 3′19″. In 2016, it was included in the album *Ciepły oddech* (*Warm Breath*), which revolves around the works of Zbigniew Herbert.

[46] We would like to thank Michał Turowski and Dawid Hallmann for answering our questions about their works.

[47] Email conversation (16.02.2022).

principle of coherence between the narrative and musical layers.[48] Turowski's and Hallmann's works share the need to reinforce the sonic message by using the image of Siwiec engulfed in flames. During concerts, the performance of the work *Ryszard Siwiec Set Himself Ablaze* was accompanied by a screening of a looped fragment of Drygas's film, while the original version of *Cena*, posted on YouTube, uses a frame from the film, which was found in the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.[49]

Cena features not only the voice of Siwiec, but also an excerpt from a recording of Zbigniew Herbert reading his poem *To the Hungarians*: "we stand at the border / we stand at the border / we stand at the border / called reason / and we look into the fire / and admire death."[50] The poem was written in 1956 in response to the Soviet military intervention in Hungary. This juxtaposition can be viewed as an attempt to reflect the different responses of the poet and Ryszard Siwiec to the suppression of democratic and anti-Soviet protests in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Herbert's poem expressing helplessness in the face of Soviet aggression is contrasted with the act of self-immolation of an "ordinary man." The use of the poet's words can also be seen as a kind of contemporary commentary on Siwiec's act, emphasizing its radicalism and heroism. In Turowski's *Živé Pochodně*, in addition to many testimonies excerpted from Drygas's film, the section devoted to Palach includes comments on the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Jan Palach himself, as well as critical reflections on his act through the lens of the contemporary generation. What comes to the foreground is the sound of Jan Palach's voice recorded in the hospital after his self-immolation. In the piece, his weak, unclear, afflicted, falling to a whisper, struggling to breathe voice is juxtaposed with Siwiec's voice that is full of determination, screaming, and breaking with despair. In this way, the work becomes part of the Polish narrative commemorating Siwiec as the "Polish Palach."[51]

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The analysis of the biography of Ryszard Siwiec's recording reveals its agency and changing identity. As a sensitive recording, it evoked affects and emotions in various social, political, and cultural contexts as well as sought to develop its potential to become a carrier of family and national memory. Over the course of its life, it functioned as a dangerous object, a gift, a family heirloom, a relic,

[48] Email conversation (3.02.2022).

[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WHSNlSOQms (accessed 5.02.2022).

[50] Z. Herbert, *Selected Poems*, trans. B. Carpenter, J. Carpenter, Oxford 1977, pp. 28–29.

[51] For an analysis of how Siwiec is commemorated in Poland and inscribed into the Polish-Czech context, see S. Stach, "An Ordinary Man, a National Hero, a Polish Palach? Some Thoughts on the Memorialization of Ryszard Siwiec in the Czech-Polish Context," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 113, 2016, pp. 295–313, https://doi.org/10.12775/APH.2016.113.11.

a carrier of memory, an archival source, and material used in artistic practices, so that it could shape the identity of its listeners: the depositaries, guardians, and performers of the recorded message. The agency of the recording also resides in its metonymic relationship with Ryszard Siwiec's act of self-immolation and its function as a medium of his voice and voices of other people who were present during the recording. At this point, we would like to emphasize the significance of the voice, as the possibility of hearing determines the impact of the recording. The voice is "the author's affective sign,"[52] and "an intense sign of presence, allowing us to experience the author himself." As Dominik Antonik writes, this encounter develops a sense of deep connection and an "intimate, vocal relationship"[53] between the listener and the narrator with an affective and emotional dimension to it. Along the same line of thinking, it can be said that the "[m]ateriality of the voice […] makes the listener shift their attention from the meaning towards the affective experience of the author's identity."[54] Does this mean that the content of the recorded message is irrelevant and that "understanding lags behind the affective experience of the author — as affect intensifies, the critical ability weakens"?[55] In our view, the discursive aspect of the recording, even if it comes only after the experience, deserves the listener's attention as much as the experience of the author's identity. The transition from experience to meaning and from voice to speech, may be considered a moral obligation of listeners to those whose voices they are hearing. Here we touch upon the complex ethical issues related to the treatment of sensitive recordings, which can be viewed as traces of the presence of what is recorded on them and often as testimonies of the harm suffered; they need to be preserved, disseminated, and have their integrity ensured. Sensitive recordings require attentive and sensitive listening. What would this postulate mean in relation to Ryszard Siwiec's tape? First of all, it is important to listen to the full version of Ryszard Siwiec's message, and not only to the fragments that were framed, edited, or processed by others. To make it possible, it is necessary to publish the entire recording in audio form, along with a full transcript and critical commentary.[56] Attentive and sensitive listening to Siwiec's monologue means listening not only to the whole verbal content, but also to the sound layer of the recording. This is a kind of listening that pays attention to the missing beginning of the transcript (as indicated by the unclear first recorded word), several other unintelligible fragments,[57] slip-ups for which Siwiec apologizes, as well as hesitations, and longer pauses between the parts. It registers all

[52] D. Antonik, "Audiobook. Od brzmienia słów do głosu autora," *Teksty Drugie* 5, 2015, p. 137.
[53] Ibid., p. 139.
[54] Ibid., p. 146.
[55] Ibid.
[56] We are grateful to the article reviewer for this suggestion.
[57] In the last minute, for example, it is difficult to tell whether Siwiec said "izby" or "schizmy" or "izmy," and "krzyż" or "syn" of the nation.

sound indicators of emotional states (screaming, crying, holding back tears), including anxiety, calm, and despair. It captures the evident presence of others in the location of recording (manifested by coughs, sighs, clinking glass), as well as specific sound effects resulting from technical conditions — distortions, interferences, hums, and crackles. Sensitive and attentive listening involves "deep" listening and penetrating the ambiguous layers of the recording in search of meaning. It gives rise to a multitude of questions and doubts and, consequently, restraint in making judgements about Siwiec himself, his message, and its uses, also in historical politics. Having knowledge about the recording's biography, its changing statuses and functions, its relations with various social actors, the dynamics of its popularity, and its incompleteness might prove helpful. Sensitive and attentive listening stems from a concern for those whose voices the recording makes available, for its author, and for the recording itself.

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Towards the Problematization of an Audio Document: An Experiment in Cooperative Recordings

Abstract: The anthropological critique of modernity regards the notion of documentation as a practice through which objectification is constructed. According to this critique, a recording is not a representation of a social or natural environment, but the process of the (re)construction of social relations through technological means. To illustrate this theoretical consideration, I discuss the recordings of *vimbuza* ceremonies in northern Malawi. The recordings were produced in cooperation with local communities and individuals. Subsequently, some of them were later published. Over the course of the project, it was crucial to strive for a continuous, yet remote, involvement of the people recorded.

Keywords: ethnology, fieldwork, anthropology, mass media, technological innovations, technology, sound studies, Africa, Malawi, music production

The day before the recording of the ceremony, the *vimbuza* (singular: *chimbuza*) Doctor (or *sing'anga*) Kanuska talked about the spirits that were involved in this religious or perhaps medical practice. The doctor did not categorize them precisely, but rather demonstrated how certain steps, driven by the spirits, enabled her to understand that she or her patient was possessed by *virombo*, *vyanusi*, *mizimu* or *vimbuza*. Afterwards she announced that at the upcoming recorded ceremony, the spirits would manifest themselves in the exact order in which she had just presented. During the night ritual, the temple was crowded with people. Kanuska, surrounded by a group of clapping and singing acolytes, swayed and jumped with her eyes shut. I had rather been under the impression that the process of possession was about freeing oneself from the control of social norms, but no speculation could have been more wrong. The *sing'anga* performed, as her drummers did, in the order that had been presented the previous day. This revealed that the recording would capture a complex social practice rather than a supposedly spontaneous, almost natural happening. This sensitive relationship between possession and di-

recting questioned the opposition between the two ideal, if not imaginary, types: of "uncontrollable possession" and a "staged recording session."

In the case of my work on recording *vimbuza* ceremonies, the relation between sensitivity and control was twofold. On the one hand, as described in the vignette above, this tension manifested itself in the subtle ways in which sound functions in the social milieus that form the context for the recording. On the other, it also demonstrates how a social process might become vulnerable when recorded and thus objectified for the sake of documentation. The social process is docile, while the technology operates in a relentless way. In the dynamics of a social happening, technology performs a silencing, skipping and selecting. Moreover, features of the technological performance arise not only from the characteristics of recording technology (and how it stimulates and sustains the power relations in which ethnographers are entangled), but also the social dynamics that set it in motion. In this process, subtle, unarticulated ways of exercising control over the recorded environment are crucial. Conversely, the problematization of silencing and selecting can open up the possibility to enable — and thus to hear — the equally subtle manifestation of social processes within the recording.

In this article, I examine how researchers can support this sensitivity. The aim is to enrich documentation, which can amplify the sound of what is barely audible. I argue that recording the silenced social world and transforming it into a different type of data (embodied social action is turned into sound waves) should involve participation, cooperation, and ethnographic perspective. In this paper, I analyze the practices of documentation and archiving as reverse and obverse, which is why they are discussed in mutual correspondence. Field recording (documenting) is the first stage of archiving, because it transforms social reality into a distinct form of record-keeping. The text opens with a commentary on the relationship between the social environment and the documentation process. Later on, I move on to discuss a specific type of documentation, i.e., audio recordings. The second part describes a particular field recording method that brought to the fore what was usually obscured in the documentation process. Modern recording practices are grounded in a specific historical and social context, and thus I begin by presenting their place in the structural inequalities established through colonialism. This problematization serves as the starting point for the analysis of methods presented in the following sections of this article.

Documenting Social Worlds

Two tensions determine the character of field recordings. The first one is between what is silenced (omitted, unregistered) and what is captured, reconfigured, and transmitted. The second one is related to the relationship between the social

and the technological. These tensions underlie the practices related to modern documentation and archiving, which include field recordings. Technology plays a crucial role in these practices by defining their forms. However, this role does not mean that social relations are simply subservient to technology. Rather, technology plays an important, though ambiguous, part in complex relationship configurations that, for want of a better notion, can be defined as a social role. In this paper, I discuss how religious, technological and interpersonal relations affect the recording processes. Relations, according to Marilyn Strathern, are abstracts of the social potential that "make[s] artifacts out of persons."[1] I argue that recording is shaped and defined as an artefact[2] through relations. In fact, any "document" or "recording" responds to the roles given to them through relationality. These roles define the ability to represent what is being documented, or to hide (silence) parts of it.

Reflecting on the limitations of recording makes a significant difference in "traditional-modern"[3] documentation. The work of the first modern ethnographic sound capturers (and their "traditional-modern" followers) was based on a firm belief in the transparency of their own methods and the objectivity of the process. They were certain that they register reality in an untouched, but simplified way. However, as demonstrated by the anthropological critiques of modernity, documentation, in both social and technological contexts, corresponds to the hidden work of the authority. These documentary practices generated seemingly independent narratives that were in fact interwoven in colonial systems of meanings. As a result, the documented phenomena were in equal measure both represented and obscured.

This critique of the documentation process has been profoundly influenced by the thought of Michel Foucault. The oeuvre of this French archaeologist of knowledge is an extended exploration of the production of truth (veridiction), reconstructing the various modalities on which it inevitably depends.[4] The claim of objectivity is dependent on the particular context that enables the process of veridiction. Foucault explains under what conditions and with what effects a veridiction is exercised.[5] In the Foucauldian optic, it would be critical to analyze how the archivization and standardization of the technical process are intrinsic to the modality of document production and to the way in which objectivity is constructed.

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[1] M. Strathern, *Learning to See in Melanesia: Four Lectures Given in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, 1993–2008*, London 2003, p. 179.

[2] Inspired by Strathern, I define the artefact as an object created through a social process.

[3] I use this notion to address the attachment to modern methods of control and power that are not subjected to decolonizing reflection. This cultural position makes it possible to purely document "what is real" and "what really happens."

[4] M. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–1974*, trans. G. Burchell, Houndmills–New York 2008, p. 238.

[5] M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. G. Burchell, Houndmills–New York 2010, p. 36.

This mechanism was nowhere more explicit than in colonized territories. In this context, documentation was institutionally objectified through hegemonic methods of knowledge production. In the colonial situation, documentation and archiving approached social reality in search of exoticism and used the resources of hegemonic power in the process of its representation. Modern representations transformed elements of social life in order to inscribe them into the new colonial rhetoric. For example, the documentation produced for colonial archives was described by Ann Stoler as "the supreme technology of the […] imperial state."[6] According to Stoler, archives (or rather "archiving as a process"[7]) are monuments of the colonial state, or more broadly, of any particular type of power that validates an archive. The questioning of archives involves investigating "what political forces, social cues, and moral virtues produce qualified knowledges that, in turn, disqualified other ways of knowing."[8] Drawing upon Stoler, I see the practice of documentation (including the audio recording) as the production of archives *in situ* and in real time.

This reflection allows us to recognize colonial and post-colonial documentations as answers to questions posed by a power that transformed societies through documentation. Documents (and thus also recordings) are therefore not so much a reflection of documented phenomena, as "the fantastic representation of an epistemological master pattern" that, as I will demonstrate below, is accomplished through technological interventions. Moreover, these modalities of registration are not only characteristic of 19th-century empires, but are also continued by today's various agendas of power: both local nation states and neoliberal structures, which use documentation in their projects of epistemological management, can serve as examples of this process.

The "historical turn" represented by Michel Foucault and currently by Ann Stoler called into question the objectivity of documentation, which now functions only as an ideal. Likewise, the non-interference of sound recording can be viewed as a construct of certain power relations. The relations between power and documentation can be observed through the recording technologies that inform both the documentation process and the recording of social practices. These relations are, however, hardly noticeable without an ethnographic sensibility. Technology and social relations are intertwined and their mutual influence in the process of documentation is not transparent. It is worth noting that this process is subject to the limitations imposed on the documented environment. In effect, the nature of the documentation process is that of an obscured hierarchy.

[6] A.L. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," *Archival Science* 2, 2002, p. 97.

[7] Ibid., p. 87.

[8] Ibid., p. 95.

Technologies of Obscured Power

The problematization of these two aspects redefines recording, which can no longer be seen as a representation of a particular social or natural environment, but rather as the process of the construction of an object and its subsequent re-construction in other, probably more dominant, networks of social relations.[9] Along the same line of thinking, we understand the act of audio recording not as the documentation of the sound layer of an environment or an event, but as a consequence of a sound location within an environment[10] and the positionality of researchers in relation to the social environment that they aim to record. It should be remembered that the practice of field recordings also involved the production of the subjects of ethnographic field research, that is allegedly weak and endangered indigenous communities (or rather their language and their culture).[11] It took place within unequal relations, which undoubtedly influences the way these relationships are practised today.

At the moment of recording, it is a combination of the technical dimension and social relations that determine what is recorded and what is muted, and what remains silent or hidden to the recording person. In this process, social relations are inseparable from the technical dimension. This nexus manifests itself through the most mundane aspects of recording practice: the price of the equipment, its parameters and the skills acquired by the user. Moreover, the social is visibly enmeshed with the technological in aspects such as the power to arrange the recording situation and the means of social control to be exercised over it. Hence, control over the recording environment, the equipment, and the recordings are essential to this process. In effect, these are the relations, although inaudible as such, that determine what is recorded.

The conditions of sound recording were discussed in the groundbreaking ethnography of a South African music studio written by Louise Meintjes. She described the "technological mystification" that masks the process by which "technology and technological expertise is differently accessible […] on the basis

[9] The understanding of the "social" in this article relies upon the perspective described by Bruno Latour. The social includes not only human relations but also all the connections through which various types of non-human agents affect an extended network (see B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford–New York 2005).

[10] The critique of this approach corresponds with the understanding of sound and soundscape proposed by Timothy Ingold ("Against Soundscape," [in:] *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice*, ed. A. Carlyle, Paris 2007, pp. 10–13), who thinks about sound in terms of embodiment, rather than as an autonomous layer of the environment.

[11] B. Hochman, *Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology*, Minneapolis–London 2014, pp. x–xii; J. Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham 2003, pp. 313–316.

of social class and color."[12] Meintjes sees that technological practices "emerge from and embed the experiences of the political configuration of the material world of the studio and of the post-colonial world within which the studio is situated."[13] Therefore, these practices are the "articulation of position" in the post-colonial context. Meintjes demonstrates how competencies, tastes, and hierarchies in a musical society form the multi-layered cooperation of non-verbally communicating people: musicians, producers, arrangers, soloists, and many more. The final effect of recording — a file or a CD — represents the social relations between them. However, the recording is a highly "compressed" effect of these negotiations, where the differences and discrepancies are heard symbolically rather than directly.

Notwithstanding these observations, with the decentralization of technology, the role of recording has been extended beyond that of mere dominance. Leslie Gay Jr. has observed that "new technological configurations offer prospects for redistributions of power."[14] Through these redistributions, technologies can enable both decolonizing practices as well as a consolidation of the colonial control. In this analysis, the technological also merges with the social. In considering this emancipatory potential, new configurations do not have to mean more detailed parameters or a technologically constructed sense of immersion. On the contrary, such an enhancement of quality may simply be related to the needs of the modern consumer, that is, the need for more in-depth simulations of the real sonic and visual spaces.

By presenting the example of recordings that I produced in Malawi, I hypothesize about a perspective of work that is an experiment in an emancipatory approach. At the same time, I believe that these recordings do not introduce a model, but rather give example in a discussion about power relations within the technology. This perspective reflects on the possibility of being more open to relational work than technological innovations. My motivation was an attempt to redefine the cultural position of recordings across the disjunction between the recording site and its network of dissemination. As some scholars note, relations between places are crucial in the post-colonial world.[15] My work seeks to redefine both social relations and technology. The practice of redefining always has an open-ended form and a probing character. Therefore, the procedures described below have a situational and indeterminate quality.

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[12] L. Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*, Durham 2003, p. 104.

[13] Ibid., p. 104.

[14] L.C. Gay, Jr., "Acting Up, Talking Tech: New York Rock Musicians and Their Metaphors of Technology," *Ethnomusicology* 42, 1998, p. 87.

[15] S.H. Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits, and Problems," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, 2000, pp. 23–45.

Vimbuza as Social Practices and Recorded Tracks

My work with people practising *vimbuza* ceremonies in northern Malawi was accompanied by reflection about the complex nexus of power and documentation. *Vimbuza* are performative practices that cross European domains of medicine, religion, music, and politics. In terms of medicine, this practice is centred around possessed "African doctors" (or *sing'anga* or prophets, *ntchimi*). *Sing'anga* communicate with the *vimbuza* spirits through dance, and some of them in dreams.[16] Having seen the truth revealed by the spirits, doctors are able to prophesize about the reasons for their patients' diseases. The *vimbuza* spirits also inform doctors about the bush plants that ought to be used for the preparation of medicines. The diagnosis of patients' diseases always has to relate to the cause, which is mostly either bewitchment or possession by one or many kinds of spirits.

Perhaps in pre-colonial times, spirits were so evidently present in everyday life that the practices of communicating with them did not need to be classified as a specific sphere of "religion." For non-religious rationalists, *vimbuza* may be seen as religion because it deals with non-material beings that affect people's lives, and therefore defines social reality beyond rationality. Modern Christians sometimes refer to *vimbuza* as a local pagan religion or, more often, a satanic cult. However, some of its aspects do not differ much from what can be seen in Malawian churches. For instance, the tithes that are an essential part of Christian services in Malawi are also paid to the spirits at *vimbuza* temples. Likewise, the *vimbuza* ritual has the solemn character of crossing the line between life and death. In this sense, it can be described as a religious practice, although one should remember that for many participants it is an integral part of the everyday world and for others, a disease caused by the spirits.

When using Western categories to classify *vimbuza*, it is also important to note that it combines elements of music and dance. Most *vimbuza* ceremonies include individual dances performed by possessed persons to the accompaniment of a drum ensemble.[17] During several hours of dance sessions, choirs of a dozen or so people sing songs which constitute a distinct type of music reminiscent of local church songs. Moreover, for many young inhabitants of the countryside, where *vimbuza* ceremonies are predominantly practised, rituals are a form of entertainment, or even, as Malawian anthropologist Allister Munthali wrote in his memoir, an excuse "to be out of the house at night with [their] girlfriends" and without

[16] B. Soko, *Vimbuza: The Healing Dance of Northern Malawi*, Zomba 2014.

[17] According to participants, the relation between drumming and dance is the opposite of accompaniment. As I was told, drummers mark footsteps made by the spirits.

their parents.[18] *Vimbuza* can also be viewed as a phenomenon of micro-politics. The practice of revealing names of witches (along with some traditionally performed medical practices, such as abortion with herbal medicines) is illegal as a result of the century-old Anti-Witchcraft Act. As I mentioned earlier, most Christian churches have tried to suppress *vimbuza*. In these conditions, *vimbuza* doctors are sometimes regarded as quasi-political representatives of the rural communities against politicians and businessmen who are often viewed as the clients of evil magicians. In this context, *vimbuza* can be understood as spiritual warfare against evil powers, witches, and vampires. Paradoxically, many Christian churches attributed similar evil powers to *vimbuza*.

It is worth noting that in 2007 *vimbuza* were inscribed on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in the category of medical practice. However, as demonstrated by Lisa Gilman, this barely affected the local practice of the cult.[19] It is true that in a few towns of the Northern Region *vimbuza* are sometimes performed as a presentation of local culture at political rallies or, less frequently, for tourists. However, it is believed that these performances do not involve the spirits. Nevertheless, *vimbuza* continue to be commonly practised in villages, where their main role is to communicate with the spirits.

At the same time, the Malawian music industry, dominated by Presbyterian and Pentecostal gospel and urban styles like hip hop and dancehall, completely ostracized *vimbuza*. Even indirect inspirations from the rhythm and dance are not used. We won't find any *vimbuza* albums on the international music market, probably due to the peripheral position of Malawi (Wambali Mkandawire, an internationally acclaimed musician from the Northern Region who performed a fusion of afro-jazz and *vimbuza* beats, was an exception). The few recordings that were available publicly on YouTube documented "secular" ceremonies — some of them were recorded by tourists and a few were part of genuine ethnographic documentations. All these videos tend to only sketchily represent the type of subjectivity that is most relevant to the participants of ceremonies, namely, the subjectivity of the diviner.

However, despite the complicated relation with the church, state, and market, *vimbuza* is still not recognized in terms of modern epistemologies. The most accurate explanation of *vimbuza* is the one that considers local ways of experiencing and understanding it: one that could represent these ceremonies as complex systems of social relations. These systems assemble people, objects, and the spirits.

Taking all this into consideration, I found the field recordings of *vimbuza* profoundly problematic. The complexity of this socio-spiritual nexus could hardly be represented through the acousmatic aspect of the recordings. In the social reality

[18] A. Munthali, "Doing Fieldwork at Home: Some Personal Experiences among the Tumbuka of Northern Malawi," *African Anthropologist* 8, 2001, p. 130, https://doi.org/10.4314/aa.v8i2.23107.

[19] L. Gilman, "Demonic or Cultural Treasure? Local Perspectives on Vimbuza, Intangible Cultural Heritage, and UNESCO in Malawi," *Journal of Folklore Research: An International Journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology* 52, 2015, pp. 199–216.

of *vimbuza* practice, sound is inseparably connected with the dance steps and gestures of people, or, according to the participants, the spirits. By transforming *vimbuza* into an audio recording this complexity is severely reduced. The recording preserves only a few aspects of the original event that most powerfully evoke it for its participants. However, in order to produce a multi-layered representation of *vimbuza*, I decided to experiment with the method of participant observation (which is the foundation of the ethnographic method) to deepen and "thicken" the recording.

The recording of *vimbuza* was part of a complex research practice that combined several methods and media. It was conducted between 2016 and 2019 with a number of doctors and their antagonists from Christian churches in the Northern Region. In an attempt to register subtle and blurred aspects of relations, I delved into ethnography as a modality of representation of all those in-between movements that cannot be documented by other devices and methods. This in-between space would otherwise be filled with the imaginary depictions characteristic of isolated listeners and readers. This additional interpretation was even more significant, as many of the *vimbuza* recordings were published and further disseminated.[20]

Below, I describe the characteristics of my practice that employed the distinction proposed by Ingold in an attentive rather than intentional way.[21] I proposed an extended method of representation that should evoke the social in sound and the audible in the social. The components of documentation present the process of transition from a recording location to a recontextualized artefact. I assume that the meanings inherent in the event could be articulated only by intertwining many layers of this ritual practice. The recordings sought to embrace not only a historically contextualized custom, but also a practice that is experienced and conceptualized in categories relevant to my interlocutors. Last but not least, the tracks were an acousmatic sound that became recontextualized through varied technological representations.

For the most part, the specific methodology of *vimbuza* recording was not the implementation of any previous plan, but rather a situational action performed in cooperation with the participants of the recordings.[22] In considering the overall recording process, I describe five steps aimed towards an ethnographic re-contextualization of documentation:

1. Participation in the world of *vimbuza*.
2. Acquiring knowledge about *vimbuza* through ethnographic interviews.

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[20] Doctor Kanuska Group, *Mutende Mizimu: Vimbuza from Mzimba North*, Warsaw 2020 (CD).

[21] T. Ingold, "Thinking through the Cello," [in:] *Thinking in the World: A Reader*, eds. J. Bennett, M. Zournazi, London–New York 2019, p. 202.

[22] In another text, I defined more elaborately the recording as a "situational event." P. Cichocki, "Ethnography/Listening/Recording: Sound Environments of the Malawian North and Beyond," *Ethnologia Polona* 39, 2018, pp. 109–126, https://doi.org/10.23858/EthP39.2018.007.

3. The use of the ethnofiction method in cooperation with participants of *vimbuza*.

4. Working within the social and material environment.

5. Post-production in line with the principles developed over the course of the recording process.

The above remarks can therefore by no means be regarded as a "guide," but rather as a chronicle of steps (obviously with some mis-steps too). Some of them were partially anticipated, but most simply emerged from the context.

Step 1: Participation in the World of *Vimbuza*

During the research and recording process, my cultural position was complex. On the one hand, I was an ethnographer of European descent, who was associated with the dubious position of Polish academia in global hierarchies of knowledge power. I often emphasized the reason for my presence in Malawi not to mislead my interlocutors who rather expected a white person to be associated with an aid organization, a church or some other international agenda. However, my role extended far beyond that of the ethnographer. In particular, after the recording I became a publisher, who understood the economically and socially marginalized position of my collaborators. Moreover, I tried to meet the demands of economic rights raised by many people with whom I worked. Therefore, I proposed a form of cooperation in which the proceeds from record sales would go to them. The proposition was met with enthusiasm.[23]

Furthermore, I also worked as a sound engineer during the ceremonies: I focused on gain and trim levels, microphone set-up, and so on. I attempted to reconcile these two roles and find the right balance between technical activities and participation in social relations through conversations and co-presence. Participation also involved reciprocity, which meant that the participants of the *vimbuza* also redefined my role in the process. The consequence of this reciprocity was a radical renegotiation of distance between me and the social reality.

My evolving relationship with the *vimbuza* community led by Doctor Kanuska perfectly illustrates how my role changed over time… When we got acquainted and I expressed a desire to research *vimbuza* and produce recordings, Kanuska said that I should also dance during the ceremony. She added that I might be bewitched. After my performance, during which I mimicked the movements of dancers I observed earlier, Kanuska came up with a diagnosis, claiming that I had the spirit of an ancestor and that I am allowed "to help people in Poland." I did not reject this view, respecting the right of my interlocutors to define me as a human being and an ethnographer. From then on, the conversations and recordings changed their character. Although the interviews remained ethnographic in nature,

[23] The proceeds from sales are successively transferred to representatives of the groups.

they also included interpretations of the recordings and discussions encouraging me to adopt the role of the *sing'anga*. I was expected to understand the relations with the spirits and learn about various kinds of plants that had medicinal properties. Just like other doctors, Kanuska enjoyed a central position and unquestionable spiritual authority in the world of *vimbuza*. Therefore, her recognition changed my role from that of a random white person (with all the political consequences of the nexus of racial discourses, capital, political hegemony, and other factors) to a person related to the world of *vimbuza*. My new role profoundly affected the recording process. Most performers was aware of my engagement, so they defined the situation of recording differently than a performance for a white person from the government or a tourist.

An important role in this approach was played by mediators, who guided me through meetings with the *sing'anga*. An indirect relationship is generally a crucial element of spirit possession cults, but also plays a key role in witchcraft, traditional medicine, and even in everyday communication. This indirectness had usually manifested itself in the polite mode of conversations. However, more important ways of establishing a relationship included bonds of blood, sexual substances, and gifts that complemented and conditioned the relationship with the *vimbuza* spirits. Such exchanges aimed to engage new, indirect persons in the *vimbuza* relationships. While doing my research, I was supported by a couple of friends/translators/gatekeepers, with whom I got acquainted during my visits to gospel music studios in Mzuzu, the regional capital of Malawi. These friends not only accompanied me during my stays at temples, but also often initiated contacts with *sing'anga*. For instance, Peter Kaunda, whom I met when he was a local band singer and worked as a teacher in an elementary school, supported me during my stay at Kanuska's temple, not far from his workplace. Another *vimbuza* doctor, Amaliya, was the aunt of another friend of mine from Mzuzu. Precious was a devout follower of the Pentecostal Church, who several years earlier had forced his mother to stop practising *vimbuza* by destroying her drums. He told me about Amaliya, and we visited her house located several dozen kilometres away from the city. Despite his negative attitude towards local religious practices, during our stay he performed gestures of familiarity and affection, but also demonstrated a commitment to the recording, which we considered a shared project. As he appeared in two (or more) roles (as a nephew and researcher), I became involved in a double relationship with *vimbuza* doctors and their spirits. I was already not only an ethnographer, but also a person defined by their own socio-economic privileges, who wanted to support economic and political rights of *vimbuza* by promoting the musical craftsmanship of *vimbuza* drummers. In this way, I entered the circle of kins (as the relationship with the *vimbuza* spirits was considered in terms of kinship).

Thus, the complex character of the encounter with the *vimbuza* world opened up different kinds of subjectivity to emerge during the production of recordings.

Hence, the representation of *vimbuza* required an in-depth "loyalty" that arose not only from ethnographic evaluation, but also from commitment to relatives. Obviously, any claims that I was indigenous to that world or had a comprehensive knowledge would be a pretentious misapprehension. I was a *vimbuza* adept, but due to political and social distinction I had a profoundly different status. The (relative) whiteness of my skin, inscribed in post-colonial hierarchies, played an ambiguous role here. By way of example: after one of the interviews, Peter Kaunda (the aforementioned school teacher) expressed his interest in my project and mentioned that he would probably continue it after my return home. Later on, however, he suggested that *sing'anga* agreed to be recorded "because of the skin colour." By this he commented on my privileged position. If he asked, they would answer with a dismissal: "What do you want? I don't have time for this right now." These words should be understood as a further problematization and not a simple explanation. Undoubtedly, my encounters did not suspend the power relations inherited from colonialism or entangled in the social practice of the post-colonial state. However, the relationships I was involved in were rather embedded in a world with many points of reference, such as those of "anti-state" and "anti-modern" *vimbuza* spirits.

Step 2: Acquiring Knowledge about *Vimbuza* through Ethnographic Interviews

Following the example of Vincent Caldarola, for whom close communication with persons being photographed is a vital complement to his ethnographic photography, I also conducted a series of open interviews with members of the community and wrote extensive field notes.[24] The interviews were repeated. Usually, I had conversations with the *sing'anga* or her drummer before and after recording. A few days after the ceremony, we listened to several dozen recorded fragments with Kanuska, her students, and the drummers, who were her sons. In these interviews, I did not limit their preferences in terms of comments, asking such open questions as: "What is it that you have just performed? What do we hear?" Their responses enabled a shift towards the interpretation of the recording as understood by the people involved in the performance. Among other things, these conversations helped me to come up with a categorization of *vimbuza* performances, since during ceremonies particular dances appeared to be flowing like streams. It was easy for the performers to indicate the transitions between one invocation and another.

Kanuska and her associates explained to me the meaning of songs by focusing on verbal messages and the way these messages operate (i.e., urging witches to stop

[24] V.J. Caldarola, "Visual Contexts: A Photographic Research Method in Anthropology," *Studies in Visual Communication* 11, 1985, pp. 3–53.

the assault on innocent people). They translated the lines of songs and told me that these were prayers or spells used for specific purposes or with particular spiritual inspiration. This message-centric approach was largely in line with what I observed among contemporary electronic musicians in Malawi, regardless of whether they performed gospel or secular urban music. All musicians (except for producers, whose creative output was described in categories of craftsmanship) wanted their work to communicate a certain message: to the audience, their kins, beloved, and very often, to God. While noting this resemblance, it is also important to note that the addressees of *vimbuza* songs could vary. The songs I recorded were addressed to the spirits ("Come spirits, let me see what is hidden"), to God (the distinction between the *vimbuza* spirits and the Holy Spirit was blurred for many *sing'anga*), or — negatively — to witches (e.g., the demand: "Stop doing evil").

This characteristic reveals *vimbuza* as a system of relationships in which songs enable communication between different domains that are invisibly connected by sound. However, it does not mean that the essence of *vimbuza* is textual. Rather, it demonstrates that words had important work to do within social relations. For instance, I was involved in the narratives not just as a researcher, but also as an adept. Kanuska, viewing me as being on my way to becoming a *vimbuza* doctor, taught me about the importance of individual songs, focusing on those which serve to prophesy the patient's disease. Commenting on one of these songs, she emphasized that it was the most significant invocation that would support my practice in Poland. Thus, the interviews functioned not merely as a source of information about the verses, but also as a way of thickening the experience of the music as felt and understood by various parties. It might be said that the emergence of knowledge resulted primarily from relations, rather than from a traditionally understood notion of documentation.

Step 3: The Use of the Ethnofiction Method in Cooperation with Participants of *Vimbuza*

The dynamics of the recording process was driven by the tension between "sensitivity" and aspects of control. Clearly, a white European in Malawi who could handle audio recording technology (a Sound Device interface with a small arsenal of microphones and cables) embodied the modalities of post-colonial control. While self-reflecting about distance, I began to experiment with loosening control over the recording situation, or rather sharing it with other participants. Firstly, I fully accepted the authority of the *sing'anga*. Taking this into account, I conformed to the course of *vimbuza* events and limited my interventions to the moments of non-action, for example in order to deploy cabling. I did not change or comment on the usual location of performers in the *thempili*, but sought to manipulate the set-up and parameters of the microphones.

Furthermore, my local companions worked not only as a "technical team," but also as producers who brought their own vision and ideas especially to photography and video shooting. As I mentioned earlier, the relationship of these companions with *vimbuza* was ambiguous and was far from being professionally distant. They were cousins or neighbours of *sing'anga* or had participated in ceremonies before starting to reflect on the cult as a negative phenomenon. It was, therefore, difficult to unambiguously define their cultural position, as it merged the local spiritual world of *vimbuza* with that of global electronic media to which I was attached.

My associates developed their technical skills earlier in a range of commercial, mostly religious, projects related to music, including video clips, photo sessions or song production. But, like the majority of Malawian media producers, they had no formal training. They learned their skills through hands-on experience and training in the studios owned by older professionals. However, it was not my intention to evaluate their competence according to Western standards: I was much more interested in how they utilized their cultural and technical means to present the local phenomenon with which they were ambiguously related. For example, Precious Mphande, a partner from the Unity Midia Studio, took a small digital camera on a trip to his aunt Amaliya's to document *vimbuza* dances and other activities. This happened after I had presented my research objectives to him in an interview, and he, in response, started to explore those aspects of *vimbuza* that were of interest to him. So it was Precious's initiative to prepare the extensive video documentation to develop the project.

During the ceremonies, Precious operated the camera in a way that I would probably have found invasive if I were filming. He took close-ups of his aunt in a trance, lighting her face. He also filmed her adepts during moments of convulsions that I might consider disturbing if I were to present them as proof of an inquisitive ethnographic gaze. However, those who were possessed didn't seem to be intimidated by the camera.[25] In this way, Precious had a considerable influence on the recording environment. My body techniques were based on discreetness and non-interference (of course, as a white person who was perceived as endowed with greater economic or cultural agency, I interfered by my mere presence) in the movements around me. I stood aside, controlled volume levels, watched closely, took notes and reacted, even danced when asked to. It was Precious who placed the technology at the centre of events. But, even if he might be considered a member of the "research team," his methods should not be judged as methodologically incorrect. In fact, his mediating performance centre of the happenings stood in opposition to the attempts to disguise the documentation process.

[25] According to Jean Rouch's observations, the camera might have features related to the state of trance (J. Rouch, S. Feld, *Ciné-Ethnography*, Visible Evidence 13, Minneapolis 2003).

Due to his work, the research became public, socially recognized, and shared by all those who participated in this event. Thanks to the contribution made by Precious, our endeavour came to be perceived not as a foreign agent's procedure, but rather as a relational practice.

This renegotiation of control and direction was inspired by the methodology of Jean Rouch, Damoure Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia, and other Nigerian actors who co-produced a number of films (the best examples here being *Moi, un noir, Jaguar* and *Human Pyramide*) of the ethnofiction genre. The ethnofiction film meant a radical re-working of ethnographic film, because it redefined the relations between the subject and object of direction. The films by DaLaRou (an anagram from Damoure, Lam and Rouch) are characterized by Paul Henley as semi-fictional narratives without a script, co-authorized by the ethnographer-artist and the subjects of his studies.[26] The actors, who were completely aware of the camera, improvised their own daily life or their fantasies, doing and saying whatever they considered appropriate, adequate, or important.

Sławomir Sikora[27] and Johannes Sjöberg[28] both point out, each in their own terms, that ethnofiction is fundamentally a domain of improvisation. Rouch assumed that it is impossible to reflect everyday life, so improvisation enabled individuals to fully perform their own existence, not only as evidence, but also as creation. According to Henley, the domain of Rouch's ethno-fiction is not the fact of life, but rather the provocation of reality through which that reality emerges.[29]

Researchers interested in this method emphasize that ethnofictions interplay with idiosyncratic characters and attitudes.[30] In terms of my research and recording project, I consider that the reshuffling of roles within the production process impacted significantly the ways in which the participants created and expressed their subjectivities. This situation also generates a power struggle over who is allowed to create representations. Thanks to the ability to show, act, and express, not limited by the authoritarian director-ethnographer, the project took on the character of a field recording. As a result, control over the documentation process became relativized and decentralized.

[26] P. Henley, *The Adventure of the Real: Jean Rouch and the Craft of Ethnographic Cinema*, Chicago–London 2009, pp. 314, 352.

[27] S. Sikora, *Film i paradoksy wizualności: praktykowanie antropologii*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 146–150.

[28] J. Sjöberg, "Ethnofiction: Drama as a Creative Research Practice in Ethnographic Film," *Journal of Media Practice* 9, 2008, pp. 229–242.

[29] P. Henley, op. cit., p. 81.

[30] Ibid., p. 79.

Step 4: Working within the Social and Material Environment

The comparison between studio and field recordings reveals another aspect of control that results from the nexus of the technical and social contexts of the documentation project. Producers and recorders usually combine these two methods, working with more or less advanced recording technologies in more or less open environments. There are many examples of such mixed projects in which the studio environment is similar to the field, whereby elements of studio control are organized in a "natural" environment or vice versa. To give an example from Malawi, one of my interlocutors, a broadcasting producer from the Catholic radio Tigabane, carried out an original project of recording rural choirs. In order to do so, he arranged mobile studios in the villages, usually in the open air, with self-made windshields constructed from *vitenje* (local cloth).

I adopted a different method that minimizes technical intervention in the recording situation. I wanted to adapt to the actual circumstances, especially in terms of the material environment. *Vimbuza* ceremonies were performed in small temples built of mud bricks, thatched roofs, and tree-trunk pillars. After being informed about the positions of the drummers, dancers and singers, I tried to rethink the set-up of the two microphones before the ceremony. I installed the stereophonic microphone under the ceiling, and discreetly held the dynamic microphone at right angles and pointed it towards the main drum skin, or asked one of the young people assisting the ceremony to do this. The cables were deployed in a way that reduces visibility. I worked without tripods that were difficult to transport to the mountain villages. I also avoided other visual or material elements that could stand out during the recording process.

My goal was to achieve the best possible sound quality with minimal physical control over the recording situation. The aim was to enter the area of performance only in a way that would be affiliated with the movements of the *sing'anga* or her associates. During the ceremony, the movements of my body were responsive to the actions of the other participants. For example, I was included in the performance when dancers greeted me with a bow (a similar act was addressed to any person who enjoyed authority, but at the same time it also reflected a perception of my higher status). When the *sing'anga* or possessed dancers made a bow to me, I responded by returning the bow on the dusty floor. Also, I joined others to pay respect to the *sing'anga*. Other instances of my physical involvement concerned situations when I was asked to dance. At these moments, I asked the friends who assisted me, or anyone who had enough self-confidence to hold the recording tools. All the technical, bodily, and social aspects of my adjustment to the new

circumstances involved an encounter in a predefined social environment that favoured materially embedded perception rather than full comprehension.[31]

However, it should be added that the recording of a ceremony concerns a situation perceived differently by various people. This applies to both the spatial aspect of the ritual and the purpose. According to what they told me in the interviews following the ceremonies, in terms of the spatiality, possessed people felt like as they were present in two different places at the same time. They saw spirits or nothing at all (when the spirit "rose up" in their body and took complete control, they saw plants in the bush). This non-Euclidean combined space characterized by unusual acoustic principles could not be captured with microphones or even imagined by a non-possessed person. However, it could be metaphorically suggested through the juxtaposition of elements in the final post-production process (which I will talk about in the next section).

As for the purpose of the rituals, the registration seemed to combine the elements of economic exchange, ethnography, music, and entertainment. There was also an element of curiosity in the motivation of spectators who came to see an unusual white person or a possessed person. Doctor Kanuska acknowledged the medical and spiritual aspects of the spirits. For her and the other dancers, the situation involved a meeting with the invisible spirits. Moreover, these participants should not be defined as artists, but as men possessed by their ancestors. This ambiguity demonstrates that *vimbuza* are complex systems of social relations based on respect for the spirits, doctors, visitors, and people abroad who may listen to the recording. In these systems, sound was associated with steps, invocations, and gestures of respect. They were not audible directly through the audio recordings. Therefore, in order to elucidate these senses, appropriate actions had to be taken at the final stage of the production.

Step 5: Post-Production in Line with the Principles Developed over the Course of the Recording Process

Several months later, in my home studio, I was working on the mix and finalization of the recordings for publication. I had field notes and transcriptions of interviews lying around my computer. In parallel windows, I opened pictures taken by Precious, Andy, Peter, and me. During the production process, I had to constantly refer to these variously preserved fragments, and to my embodied memory. Therefore, it was crucial to maintain the continuous, yet remote, involvement

[31] A.L. Dalsgård, "Nogami na ziemi. Rola ciała w etnografii przedtekstowej," *Teksty Drugie* 1, 2017, pp. 154–172.

of the people recorded. In order to do so, I communicated with a few *vimbuza* people who had smartphones with the WhatsApp application. I sent them demo versions, asking for explanations of contexts I could not understand. I had to deal with the saturation of information and overcome the isolation of the production process. I concentrated my efforts on both enhancing and contextualizing the sound. I mixed and edited the tracks in a way that highlighted, according to my knowledge, the most important features.

By way of example, when mixing the recordings, I emphasized sounds that my *vimbuza* associates referred to during the performances and interviews. As a result, the vibration of the main drum was significantly enhanced as compared to the way it sounded on the raw tracks. It was suggested to me that this sound plays a central role in provoking the moment of possession.

Another example concerns the structure of the *vimbuza* ceremonies, which smoothly transitioned from one invocation to another: motifs recurred and overlapped with one another, or were interrupted by comments or laughter from performers and spectators. This torn time structure contradicted the apparent solemnity of the possession cult. Thus, listening to the entire recording without cuts would be irritating to people who did not participate in it. When editing the recordings, I sought to keep the songs that played a particularly significant role and marked the crucial moments of the ceremony. The final assemblage of recordings was arranged in such a way as to recreate the course of the ritual. The recording opens with a choral introduction, then slowly culminates into the moment of the highest possession and ends with vigil songs that usually closed ceremonies with hours of singing. The intuition of how to set the tracklist was a result of long conversations and was based on the experience I gained through my repeated participation in *vimbuza*.

I wanted the liner notes to provide context for the production. While preparing the content, I approached the non-European local music not as a cultural phenomenon, but as a performance of particular groups of people entangled in networks of relationships. Therefore, the CD notes explained *vimbuza* not as a regional tradition, but rather narrated these ceremonies in terms proposed by the possessed people and drummers. I described how Kanuska began to dance *vimbuza* decades ago and added insights about the meaning and effectiveness of particular songs. The aim of the text was to look at *vimbuza* ceremonies through the eyes of their participants, not from a distance. Photographs and graphic effects were used similarly, displaying elements particularly important in ceremonial practice, such as crosses, and also the gestures of dancers.

Conclusions

The production of the *vimbuza* recording, which after publishing came to be inserted into online databases and archives, was an aggregation of many social meanings of the registration, edition and distribution of recordings. This audio document appeared in public merging a scientific aspect and features of a musical recording, while also having some features of *vimbuza* as local practices. *Vimbuza*, just like the circulation of audio recordings in digital archives, are about establishing relationships.

As with the ceremonial gifts given to the spirits by humans — and vice-versa — the *vimbuza* album mediated between two social worlds: the one where the songs were recorded and the one where they were distributed. In this new virtual space, the sounds, images, and words of *vimbuza* have been re-assembled for listeners in order for them to imprecisely imagine what *vimbuza* meant for the participants of these ceremonies. To be more specific, the recording became an artefact that is recontextualized in distinct social spaces. However, any direct connection between the two milieus is impossible. Instead, these links are mediated through the infrastructures of the music industry or academia, but also through the use of imagination, editing, and other means, and by intermediaries, such as ethnographers and producers. In this article, I outlined a situational, relational, and performative method that aimed to establish a reflexive connection between these worlds. Therefore, a fundamental question arises: what is the outcome of the recording? One possible answer is: they should not induce a desire to possess, but rather construct a relationship that searches for its own shape beyond colonial patterns. Perhaps the relation could mimic a *vimbuza affinity*. Could an exact imitation of these steps guarantee a successful documentation project? Of course not: because the terms of "success" hardly make any sense here; any "guarantee" is a misconception; and the general problematization of documentation and recording is a starting point and an overall summary of this process. Instead, my contribution is to draw readers' attention to the problem that each document represents a transformation of experiences between different social spaces. Most importantly, the consecutive steps of this transformation should be reflexive.

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Samples of a Place: Urban Field Recordings as a Sensitive Resource of Urban Cultural Heritage

Abstract: The paper focuses on various kinds of urban field recordings produced during research and artistic practices which apply auditory immersion in the qualitative analysis of places. Showing why and how urban field recordings might be used in locally guided placemaking practices, I propose to consider them as a sensitive resource of urban cultural heritage. A reflection on the sensitive quality of urban field recordings — a quality which stems from their susceptibility to the workings of time and their capability to transfer local affects — is realized in four parts. Part one posits the question of the relationship between urban sound and place, showing perspectives which arise from an application of listening in the qualitative analysis of places. Part two studies aspects of using, archiving, and sharing of field recordings produced within research, artistic and museum projects, accentuating the need to connect institutionally based practices with the promotion of audible culture in the process of establishing the notion of field recordings as a medium of urban heritage transmission. Part three proposes a shift from an interpretive to a performative approach in grasping the ontological status of urban field recordings, discussing them as samples of a place which are capable of transmitting local affects. Finally, part four recalls the idea of acousmatics to reflect upon the role of metadata in the reception of urban field recordings, which safeguards them from losing their cultural legibility. I argue that the lack of accompanying commentaries, which blurs the relation of recording with the place of sound sampling, does not erase the affective influence of the sound source transmitted by the sound sample. Such an observation leads to the conclusion that urban field recordings elude their framing in a single definition of heritage.

Keywords: immersive listening, qualitative analysis of places, recorded sound in use, media of urban heritage transmission, affect

Introduction

In this article, I am primarily interested in the material products of artistic and research practices of auditory immersion aimed at exploring places. I propose that these field recordings should be perceived as a specific resource of cultural heritage of cities; one that is culturally active and capable of fostering com-

municative acts. By the resource of heritage[1] I mean heterogeneous and open collections of "cultural texts,"[2] whose creative updating in reception practices enables the transmission of knowledge about the past of places. I understand these culturally active heritage resources as sensitive — they are able to transmit rich, multi-sensory information about the culture(s) of a city, but at the same moment they are also very susceptible to time in their material and semiotic layers. Their recognition as a medium of lived cultural experience and their use in placemaking practices is therefore dependent on contextualization and broadly understood commentary work, which addresses both the material and immaterial dimensions of the recordings, without which these sensitive heritage resources quickly lose their readability. In the case of urban field recordings, the effect of time, which blurs the clarity of the recordings' relationship with the context of production and the experience of specific subjects, does not, however, weaken the affective impact of the recorded sound. This is a specific quality of the sound texts of a culture, whose extraction through theoretical reflection requires combining interpretative and performative approaches to the ontological status of recorded urban sound. I consider these approaches not as contradictory, but complementary, which means that they converge in our understanding of how recorded urban sound may participate in the processes of cultural communication.

Starting with the above considerations, in the following paragraphs I will focus on problematizing the relationship between urban sound recorded on a material storage medium and the area from which it was collected in order to answer the question of how the affective content of a place transferred by recorded sound shapes the context of the reception of the recording. The task outlined in this way will involve: (a) discussing what is mediated by urban sound through reflection on the practice of listening to urban places; (b) analyzing selected aspects of using,

[1] The understanding of cultural heritage I have adopted assumes the need to combine its intangible and tangible aspects. In the considerations undertaken here, I emphasize the "functional" dimension of cultural heritage, which relates to the process of transferring knowledge and experiences that make up the culture of a given local community. I assume that the process of transmission of culture takes place not only in the domain of axiology, but also takes place each time through specific media and tools, which constitute the material infrastructure of culture, without which it cannot be transferred. See also J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, "Niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe — teoria i praktyka," [in:] *Niematerialne dziedzictwo kulturowe. Źródła — wartości — ochrona*, eds. J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, Warszawa 2013, p. 10; M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, *European Acoustic Heritage*, Grenoble 2012, p. 63.

[2] I use the term "text of culture" in the sense suggested by the editors of the volume *Teksty kultury uczestnictwa* (*Texts of Participatory Culture*), who in a reinterpretative reference to the findings of Stefan Żółkiewski (1988) propose to understand cultural texts as "all kinds of cultural products with semiotic potential," including: "intentional works […], less tangible […] and very complex phenomena," which "are expressed through basic media […] such as words, images, spectacles, and are shaped by individual communication technologies." *Teksty kultury uczestnictwa*, eds. A. Dąbrówka, M. Maryl, A. Wójtowicz, Warszawa 2016, p. 9. The approach to texts of culture I propose includes sound among the media through which these texts are expressed.

archiving, and sharing urban field recordings based on examples from artistic, research, and museum contexts; (c) problematizing field recording as a sample of a place; and (d) considering the situation of listening to urban field recordings disseminated online through the prism of the idea of "acousmatics."[3]

What Is Mediated by Urban Sound? Listening in the Qualitative Analysis of Places

Urban sound is interesting for urban research primarily because it has the ability to convey cultural and identity information about different locations, but also because it provides insight into their material qualities.[4] This is mainly due to the genesis of sound. It is not something independent of actions and practices, but rather a result of them. Sound in a city is produced through the activity of both human and non-human entities who are engaged in material and cultural processes. Initially, it is the practices of everyday life, material infrastructure, and the functional program of the space that create the sonic layer of the city and colour it in a certain way. At the same time, this sonic layer is a register in which the positions of objects in space and the relationships between the practices that structure the space are manifested, and which thus determine the uniqueness of individual locations.

Immersive listening practices introduced to the field of urban research, including soundwalking,[5] which refer to early situationist practices of drifting,[6] extend cultural approaches to the studies on urban places with a sensory, not just auditory, component. By combining aural exploration with movement in space, both research and immersive artistic practices help to bring out and problematize the subjective sensation of the city. They are a way of investigating the situation of the subject in the city, which can be considered a specific type of "aesthetic situation," built on the relationship between the "creator, work, and recipient."[7] The way in which the embodied subject experiences the urban space during a soundwalk is not a secondary issue in this case, but rather important auto-ethnographic qualitative information that can support the creation of vari-

[3] P. Schaeffer, *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay Across Disciplines*, trans. C. North, J. Dack, Oakland 2017.

[4] M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., p. 9; R. Tańczuk, "Sonopolis. Klika uwag o dźwiękowych reprezentacjach miasta," *Avant* 11, 2020, no. 3, p. 1.

[5] H. Westerkamp, "Soundwalking," https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post_id=13&title=soundwalking (accessed 18.07.2021).

[6] A comprehensive discussion of walking as an artistic tactic introduced by situationists aimed at experiencing urban space is offered by A. Nacher, *Media lokacyjne. Ukryte życie obrazów*, Kraków 2016, pp. 118–121.

[7] M. Gołaszewska, *Zarys estetyki*, Warszawa 1984, p. 29.

ous types of sustainable design solutions for places and be used in local networks of cultural action.

Listening during soundwalks is a way of reaching the happening of life in places, of reaching what Anna Nacher, after Jeremy W. Crampton, called "ontogenesis" understood as a localized process of becoming.[8] Listening makes it possible to recognize the cultural code of places, which determines the historically contingent uniqueness of specific locations and invites questions about the temporal, and thus vulnerable, nature of places. Listening as a subjective strategy of experiencing and sensing the city does not respect arbitrarily defined spatial boundaries and divisions, but instead sets its own limits. It is a kind of analogue geolocation technology, which can be seen in relation to Lawrence English's statement that "sound articulates space."[9] Listening helps to recognize a place as a living, interactive, and ever-changing field of sensation that extends around and within the listening subject. It is a medium that gives a sensually accessible form to what the Greeks called "khôra,"[10] and what today should be associated with the dimension of "mythical,"[11] "spatial practices,"[12] constituting the topological environment which, by containing the subject, is also contained in the subject. The inclusion of sound and the accompanying listening practice in the qualitative analysis of places transforms the way urban space is perceived in research. Listening allows us to perceive urban space not only as a built environment external to the subject, but also as a multiplicity of places, which, following Jeff Malpas, are phenomena that "possesses a complex and differentiated structure made up of a set of interconnected and interdependent components — subject and object, space and time, self and other."[13]

Listening, can initiate processes of what Aleksandra Kunce refers to as "rootedness" in a place deprived of its former function, which differs significantly from mainstream corporate practices of placemaking due to their grounding in cultural work.[14] Listening, on the one hand, allows us to perceive being rooted as a certain quality of the place of the "Other," and on the other hand, it is a rooting practice itself, opening the self to a "dwelling."[15] It incorporates the subject into a network of relations that constitutes a place and, by recognizing the compon-

[8] A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.

[9] "Lawrence English on Listening | Loop," YouTube, https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCw1x4KjYhc (accessed 3.05.2021).

[10] See A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.

[11] M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1988, pp. 102–110.

[12] Ibid., p. 96.

[13] J. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Cambridge 2004, p. 173.

[14] A. Kunce, "A Place that Invites Dwelling and Reconciliation Back: On the Anthropology of Post-Industrial Place," [in:] *Post-Industrial Places as the Subject of Transdisciplinary Studies: From Design to Rootedness*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2019, pp. 17–72.

[15] M. Heidegger, *Budować, mieszkać, myśleć*, trans. K. Michalski, Warszawa 1977.

ents of the soundscape — "soundmarks," "signals," "keynotes" and "archetypal sounds"[16] — allows for experiencing the hidden dimension of the cultural order. Listening leads to a merging of space in experience, so it can be said that it is a *sui generis* hermeneutic process. In addition, the "rooting" effect of listening means that it can be considered a sensorily mediated, subjective form of conversion of "non-places"[17] into places. Listening is a form of the imaginary production of places — similar to literature and design.[18]

Media of Urban Heritage Transmission: Field Recordings in Research, Museum, and Artistic Practices — Field Recordings in the Community

The process of discovering places through the practice of listening is often accompanied by a technologically mediated recording of sounds present or incidentally appearing in a given location. Let us ask what they are and who uses the field recordings generated during research. The question about the ontological status of urban field recordings, issues related to their archiving and sharing, and matters regarding their possible use by local communities are relatively rarely undertaken on the basis of urban research that adopts the method of soundwalking. The methodological reflection presented by Nina Hällgren in her comprehensive work devoted to the ambience of the Stockholm district of Hornsgatan[19] can be given as an example here. The author emphasizes the need for reflection on "[q]uestions such as why the recording is made, by whom, and what purpose it is

[16] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester 1993, p. 9.

[17] M. Augé, *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*, trans. R. Chymkowski, Warszawa 2011.

[18] See P. Paszek, "Invitation: Towards Another Experience of the Place," [in:] *Post Industrial Lab: Practicing a Post-Industrial Place*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2018, pp. 13–32. Paszek observes that initiating the process of the anamnesis of places situated on the margins of the official circulation of symbolic economy is associated with invoking the image of their future, preceded by a response to the invitation made by the "spirit of place" (p. 15). According to the author of "Invitation," this may be due to the work of writing constituting the basis for an abandoned place. Using the spatial traces of Czechowice-Dziedzice's industrial past, Paszek's argument shows that the logic of writing can also permeate other practices of projecting the future — such as design. I believe that apart from "critical design" and "responsible design" indicated by Paszek, listening and the accompanying practices of recording can likewise be considered as a form of imaginary space production, similar to literature.

[19] N. Hällgren, *Designing with Urban Sound: Exploring Methods of Qualitative Sound Analysis of the Built Environment*, Licentiate Thesis in Architecture, Stockholm 2019, p. 67.

meant to serve in the study, as well as figuring out how to make use of the material after the recording is made, in an off-site context"[20] and writes about the possibility of using the recordings in two ways: as an inventory tool for the sonic phenomena of the district and as a "memory aid" used in the process of qualitative analysis of the collected field material.[21] Hällgren's comments show that the production of recordings does not always have to be the main goal of urban sound research. Indeed, they supplement rather than dominate the acquired ethnographic material.[22] The approach to the process of producing field recordings presented by Hällgren does not differ significantly from the role that is assigned to recorded sound in other research projects devoted to urban sound. I think, however, that apart from the purely instrumental function that recordings can play in relation to the research process, they can also be assigned the function of facilitators of "communicative" and "cultural memory,"[23] which stimulate processes of cultural communication. Recognized as specific cultural texts or non-human actors of the production of communication channels between the participants of urban communities, urban sound recordings can form the basis of various types of bottom-up rooting practices. It is worth noting that such a modality of urban field recordings makes them culturally active, which is a feature of the media of heritage transmission.

In the age of rapid development of new communication technologies and the revival of nationalisms, interest in heritage is on the rise.[24] Nation states see heritage as a tool for consolidating communities around strong identity projects. Official understandings of heritage can, however, be contrasted with counter-hegemonic meanings, which refers not to national but urban identities. The latter are characterized by a combination of cosmopolitanism and locality, resulting from understanding of urban culture as a project based on diversity.[25] The understand-

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] I use the terms "communicative" and "cultural memory" in the sense proposed by Jan Assmann: "Contrary to informal and less structured communicative memory, cultural memory is distinguished by a more sacred, symbolic or even abstract character, which means that its creators can no longer be individual persons, their role must be taken over by organized institutions." R. Traba, "Wstęp do wydania polskiego. Pamięć kulturowa — pamięć komunikatywna. Teoria i praktyka badawcza Jana Assmanna," [in:] J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, trans. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warszawa 2008, p. 15.

[24] See, for example: *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*, ed. I. Porciani, Abingdon–New York 2020; T. Winter, "Heritage and Nationalism: An Unbreachable Couple?," [in:] *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, eds. E. Waterton, S. Watson, London–New York 2015, pp. 331–345; *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in Participatory Culture*, ed. E. Giaccardi, New York 2012; A. Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Durham 2006.

[25] M. Golka, "Wielokulturowość miasta," [in:] *Pisanie miasta — czytanie miasta*, ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Poznań 1997, pp. 171–180.

ing of cultural heritage I have adopted fits within the framework of the discourse of heritage based on cultural memory. It unfolds not around a "historical" but rather a "memory" narrative about the past of the city.[26] I understand this type of heritage in relation to the definition of intangible cultural heritage published by UNESCO in 2003: "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills — as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces"[27] identified by a given local community as distinctive and transmissive components of its situated cultural experience. In the case of cities, the "identity function"[28] of heritage concerns, above all, the transfer of knowledge and experiences related to everyday life, taking place in a specific historical and cultural, urban, architectural and socio-economic context, which aids the reflection on place identity and the recognition of the potentials associated with it. Cultural texts play an important role in this process. This is confirmed, *inter alia*, by the practice of animation and cultural education. The most interesting results of the animation and education processes are brought by those projects and workshop activities in which culture is creatively reflected upon by using various cultural texts for this purpose.[29]

In the case of urban sound recordings considered as a resource of heritage, the tangible and intangible dimensions are interwoven. The material medium on which the sound was recorded[30] is the starting point for a rooting narrative about a place. There is no doubt that the primary medium of the city's sound identity is its material and cultural fabric. However, the fast pace of changes in urban environments means that our attention must also be concentrated on secondary media, which include recordings of urban sound. The recorded as well as remembered sound can participate in the process of transmitting embodied practical knowledge, initiate cultural processes, and help maintain their continuity, and foster intergenerational dialogue.[31] These processes often take place on the basis

[26] The need to distinguish between different discourses of heritage, i.e., those based on history and those based on cultural memory, are pointed out by Karolina Golinowska, *Paradoksy dziedzictwa. Postindustrialne przestrzenie w optyce kulturoznawczej*, Poznań 2021.

[27] *Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention (accessed 17.07.2021).

[28] J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, op. cit., p. 12.

[29] For example, workshop activities that engaged the local community with the use of sound cultural texts — automotive, printing and tailoring workshops — were organized in the Museum of Municipal Engineering in Cracow as part of the international museum project *Work with Sounds*. M. Widzicka, "Work with Sounds. Muzealne archiwum dźwięków pracy," *Audiosfera. Koncepcje — badania — praktyki* 1, 2016, no. 3, p. 94.

[30] Currently, many cultural institutions are drawing attention to the material aspect of sound heritage. For example, the British Library is running a project entitled *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage*, devoted to digitizing and sharing audio materials that are in the library's collections."Unlocking Our Sound Heritage," British Library, https://www.bl.uk/projects/unlocking-our-sound-heritage# (accessed 19.06.2021).

[31] More on the aspects of "intergenerational transmission" and maintaining "cultural continuity" as constitutive of the functioning of heritage: K. Fouseki, M. Cassar, "What Is Heritage? Towards

of the exchange of everyday sound memories which, although seemingly banal, define the shape of the lived experience of interlocutors and include, for example, the story about the sounds of the practice of delivering crates filled with glass milk bottles placed on metal trolleys, characteristic of the soundscape of the Bydgoszcz city centre of the 1960s and 70s.[32] It is obvious that the value of these memories does not rely upon the identification of no longer existing sounds, but the recognition of a broader "structure of feeling,"[33] made up in part of remembered sounds.

The extraction of the "identity" and "cognitive" functions[34] of sound texts of culture which makes them useful for urban communities depends on a number of factors determining the scope and availability of such texts. In research projects, the relative lack of theoretical reflection on the possibility of using field recordings outside the context of the research process in which they are created — for example, as a resource available to local communities, the cultural sector, and creative industries — has a series of institutional, organizational, legal and cultural factors at its base.[35] Research institutions rarely collaborate with the local community to produce locally accessible audio databases for use by local actors: cultural educators, teachers, city activists and artists.[36] What is more, they are rarely curators of such collections, which would involve the combination of the processes

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a Cross-Cultural Lexicological Approach to the Conceptualisation of Heritage," [in:] *The Limits of Heritage*, eds. K. Jagodzińska, J. Purchla, Kraków 2015, pp. 52–71.

[32] The story of the sounds accompanying the work of Bydgoszcz milk suppliers working on Dworcowa Street was kindly shared with me by Hanna Derdowska-Zimpel.

[33] I discussed the subject of Raymond Williams's notion of "structure of feeling" in relation to the analysis of a post-industrial place in: J. Zimpel, "Category of Complexity in an Analysis of Post-Industrial Places," [in:] *Post-Industrial Places as the Subject of Transdisciplinary Studies: From Design to Rootedness*, ed. A. Kunce, Gdańsk 2019, p. 174.

[34] The identity and cognitive function of cultural heritage is accentuated by J. Adamowski, K. Smyk, op. cit., p. 12.

[35] The factors in question were addressed in two research reports: *ARSC Guide to Audio Preservation*, eds. S. Brylawski, M. Lerman, R. Pike, K. Smith, https://cmsimpact.org/code/fair-use-sound-recordings/ (accessed 23.06.2021); M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit. The former focuses mainly on institutional, organizational, and legal aspects of audio preservation. The latter emphasizes the issue of participation in the audible culture understood as the foundation of active protection of the acoustic heritage.

[36] In the Polish context an exception to this is the project *The Soundscape of Wrocław*: *Research on the Acoustic Environment of a Central European City* carried out by the Soundscape Research Studio at the University of Wrocław as part of a grant from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. One of the aims of the project was to create documentation of the city's sonic phenomena, archived in the form of a sound map, not strictly for research, but also for "teaching and popularizing" purposes, http://pracownia.audiosfery.uni.wroc.pl/pracownia/projekty-badawcze/pejzaz-dzwiekowy-wroclawia/ (accessed 26.06.2021). Another initiative that is a manifestation of the movement towards sharing research materials (although in this case they are not only recordings of urban sound) is the Józef Burszta Digital Archive created by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, http://cyfrowearchiwum.amu.edu.pl/page/o-projekcie (accessed 26.06.2021).

of producing an audio archive with the implementation of long-term strategies for audience development around initiatives related to urban sound. In order for urban field recordings created in the course of sound research to become a tool for the cultural work of creating places, it is necessary to combine practices related to the documentation of sound manifestations of urban culture with practices related to the promotion of the collection and inter-institutional networking.

Somewhat more attention to providing access to sonic documentation of places is paid in activities carried out by cultural institutions. The Lublin "Grodzka Gate NN Theatre" Centre's project entitled *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina*[37] [Tales about the Districts of Lublin] could be given as an example here. The sound map of the city available on the project's website includes both recordings of the current phenomena of the city's soundscape, such as the traditional Lublin bugle call or the sounds of Litewski Square, sounds characteristic of craft workshops (tailors, glaziers, and locksmiths), and reconstructions of the sounds of the no longer existing Jewish quarters. It is also possible to access audio files with oral accounts of witnesses to history.[38]

Despite the growing interest in the sonic dimension of cities, which can be observed in the activities carried out by cultural institutions in this area, the accumulated resource of recordings is ephemeral and dispersed, rarely transformed into a coherent database, and primarily serves to document individual projects. This makes it difficult for the recordings to be used by the local community as a tool for discovering the potentials of places. The dispersion of urban field recordings may result from the fact that they are not recognized by research units and cultural institutions as a potentially valuable resource of heritage that could support local development. It is obvious that no collection of cultural texts can create a heritage resource by decree. It can, however, become one only when a certain value is "associated" with it in the social process.[39] The possibility of assigning a cognitive and dialogical value to urban sound recordings — as I proposed above, they may lead to knowledge about the lived past of places — emerges as an effect of reflect-

[37] The project *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina* [Tales about the Districts of Lublin] is mentioned by Martyna Kozak in her article on Polish sound maps: M. Kozak, "Mapy dźwiękowe w Polsce," *Space and Form/Przestrzeń i Forma* 21, 2014, p. 327.

[38] *Opowieści o dzielnicach Lublina* [Tales about the Districts of Lublin], website: http://teatrnn.pl/dzielnicelublina/ (accessed 17.06.2021).

[39] The concepts of heritage distinguish between two approaches to the issue of the value of its components. The first one qualifies an object as requiring protection due to its "intrinsic" value, the other assumes that the value of the heritage object is not intrinsic but "associational." Cf. C. Koziol, "Ideology and Discourse in Heritage Policy: The Importance of Defining and Framing the Extent and Content of the Significant," [in:] *Interpreting the Past: Future of Heritage. Changing Visions, Attitudes and Contexts in the 21st Century. Selected Papers from the Third Ename International Colloquium, Monasterium PoortAckere, Ghent, Belgium, 21–24 March 2007*, Brussels 2007, p. 24.

ive participation in "audible culture."[40] Only within its framework can recorded urban sound be identified by the local community as a useful tool that supports cultural communication.

The key role of audible culture in promoting the functional aspects of Europe's "acoustic heritage" is accentuated in the project summary report *European Acoustic Heritage* by Meri Kytö, Nicolas Remy, and Heikki Uimonen.[41] The interest of these researchers is focused not on field recordings themselves, but comes from a more general reflection on sound, understood as the sphere of manifesting and studying the diversity of cultures and places. The concept of acoustic heritage proposed in the report fits within the framework established by the definition of intangible cultural heritage from the UNESCO Convention 2003.[42] It is also based on the distinction between "archived" and "living" heritage.[43] According to this concept, urban field recordings should be combined with the former, and sound phenomena unfolding *in situ* — with the latter. The distinction between archived and living heritage can be considered heuristically helpful, although somewhat too rigid in the context of the issue of animating participation in audible culture through the use of cultural sound texts. Soundwalking as part of research is usually accompanied by recordings, which means that when it comes into contact with a living acoustic heritage, a proto-archive specific to it is generated. As can be seen from the description of activities undertaken within the *European Acoustic Heritage* project presented in the report, they offer a more nuanced version of the initially adopted heuristic solution. The authors of the report emphasize, on the one hand, that the "definition of European acoustic heritage will not be a closed list of 'good' sounds,"[44] and thus living heritage results from the transience of sound events and the changing nature of the environmental systems that generate them, including cities. On the other hand, in defining acoustic heritage the authors seek to create "frameworks and platforms" for the exchange of European sound knowledge, the basis of which are to be "online tools, that offer anyone a chance to deposit one's own heritage."[45] The results of the project, which, as can be read in the report, were to be a *Soundscape Map* and *Soundscape TV*, go beyond the division into living and archived heritage, and instead create an infrastructure for their mutual oscillation, which constitutes the logic of audible culture. The *Soundscape Map* created by the Escoitar collective aims at gathering information collected by other European sound maps and enabling anyone interested to add new sounds.[46] Its creation was motivated by the assumption "that

[40] M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., p. 10.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., pp. 9–10.
[43] Ibid., p. 60.
[44] Ibid., p. 63.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., p. 74.

sounds are deeply linked to their places of production."[47] *Soundscape TV*, on the other hand, creates a platform for sharing sound experiences expressed in different national languages, which is guided by the assumption of a close relationship between sounds in culture and speech.[48] The forms of action proposed in the *European Acoustic Heritage* project are just a handful of examples that recognize the opportunities offered by the Internet and inter-institutional cooperation to develop an audible culture.[49]

Another initiative in which new technologies and social networking also create a starting point for the process of archiving sound cultural texts is the international museum project *Sounds of Changes*, which is devoted to the documentation of sound manifestations of the present day.[50] The archive was created in response to the increasing pace of social change: "Society is changing rapidly […] With the help of project Sounds of Changes we wish to document a portion of this rapid change, namely the change in the acoustic landscape."[51] Thus, it can be concluded that the archive is a response to the ephemeral experience of contemporary culture. An online platform for the project, which evolved from the previous venture, *Work with Sounds*, dedicated to the documentation of the sounds of machinery and technical devices,[52] collects sounds characteristic of various contexts of everyday life, such as office and home spaces, spaces annexed by practices related to defence, medicine, education, agriculture, and forestry, as well as spaces of civic protests. Recordings of everyday sounds available on the platform were created by participating museologists and are made available to all website visitors under a Creative Commons licence.[53] The method of sharing recordings adopted in the project made the archive's resources a starting point for various, previously unforeseen, uses, including educational and artistic ones.[54] In relation to the previous assumptions, it can be said that the legal and organizational solutions adopted in the project contributed to the extraction of their culturally active potential — including the ability to generate various forms of social networking.

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[47] Ibid., p. 76.

[48] Ibid., p. 65.

[49] It is worth noting, however, that access to the *Soundscape Map* and *Soundscape TV* was not possible online when writing this article. Such a situation shows the relative unsustainability of web-based undertakings. They are not as low-cost as they seem and depend on constant maintenance, which brings up the importance of converging such projects with more traditional practices of audio preservation and the need for reflection on the material basis of the web.

[50] M. Kaleta, *Projekt Sounds of Changes jako dokumentacja świata ginących rzeczy*, Bachelor's thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Renata Tańczuk at the Institute of Cultural Studies of the University of Wrocław in 2020.

[51] A fragment of the description on the project website *Sounds of Changes*: http://www.soundsofchanges.eu/ (accessed 26.06.2020).

[52] M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 89.

[53] M. Kaleta, op. cit., p. 59.

[54] Ibid.

Sounds of Changes is a relatively new project. Its interface still follows the current web design trends. The portal is visually consistent and employs technologies needed for trouble-free playback of audio and video files. The collection is open, although, while the files can be downloaded by anyone, their placement in the archive requires a number of additional procedures, which is to ensure the appropriate quality of the objects making up the individual collections.[55] Each recording is accompanied by a short contextualizing note, which facilitates the reception of the recordings and connects them with their place of origin. Although *Sounds of Changes* is an example of a new-generation online sound archive and uses audience development tools, the idea of recording the world as it frantically slides into oblivion is worrisome. After all, just like their ephemeral sound, cities are also the domain of "flux"; to live in the flux of time means to open up again and again — not to the unchanging order of the archive, but to the productivity of repetition.[56]

The practices of using urban field recordings also include activist and artistic evaluations of urban infrastructure projects. Hildegard Westerkamp's research in the mid-1990s on the soundscape of modernist Brasilia, combined with a workshop on acoustic ecology for city residents, is one, pioneering, example. The field recordings, collected during a series of recorded soundwalks, served as project material for a critical analysis of the urban context of the place, carried out by workshop participants with the use of compositional tools. Out of the seven musical compositions created in this way, an imaginatively processed vision of Brasilia's soundscape emerged — a city without signals and soundmarks, shrouded in constant traffic noise and the crackle of cicadas.[57]

Urban sound recordings also serve as material for creating local cultural tourism routes which show the historical sounds of each location. Some of these are created using interactive technologies. As in the case of the NoTours app, they allow the traditional formula of the trail to be replaced with "geolocated soundwalking."[58] The NoTours app, created by the multidisciplinary creative collective Escoitar.org, combines binaural and ambisonic recordings of environmental sound with specific places, thus creating a tool for a multidimensional, non-invasive exploration of the area based on the production of "sound narratives" which thema-

[55] M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 93.

[56] I use the term "flux" in the sense proposed by J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1987, p. 3: "Repetition thus is not the repetition of the same, Greek re-production, but a creative production which pushes ahead, which produces as it repeats, which produces what it repeats, which makes a life for itself in the midst of the difficulties of the flux."

[57] H. Westerkamp, "Soundscape Brasilia in Context," https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/? post_id=24&title=soundscape-brasilia-in-context (accessed 21.06.2021).

[58] M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

tize the experience of the place.[59] For example, in the *Precolombian Soundwalk* project that uses the app, the starting point was the recordings of traditional musical instruments characteristic of the Andes region where the activity was carried out.[60] The possibility of the interactive use of recordings by selecting them and combining them with sounds found *in situ* is intended to sensitize users to various layers of time accumulated in the visited locations.[61] The NoTours app shows that recordings can be a tool for highlighting those aspects of change and duration that are crucial for the emergence of the concept of a given place as a dynamic creation, susceptible to creative shaping.

The recorded urban sound can also be used alternatively to traditional monuments to commemorate the past of places, expose their identity and critically problematize the power relations that shape them. An overview of this type of undertaking is provided by Georg Klein's artistic interventions and is discussed by him in a separate text.[62] The first of Klein's sound interventions, *Ortsklang Marl Mitte*, designed for a train station in Marl — a city in the Ruhr valley — uses recordings of a choir of voices reciting phrases of wall inscriptions found in the space of the station's interior.[63] Loop readings are accompanied by recordings of sounds extracted from the tapped elements of the station infrastructure.[64] The recording produced in the project transposes graffiti into a sound message, and in doing so it strengthens and exposes the atmosphere of the place and transforms it into an "audiovisual sculpture"[65] that is not easy to apprehend and that is a conduit for the affects that contribute to the atmosphere of the place. Importantly, to create melodeclamative readings of the station graffiti, Klein invited young representatives of the local community, who thus gained the opportunity to confront the socio-cultural baggage of the place.[66]

In the Dresden project *meta.stases sound/light-installation*[67] Klein used the specific live sounds of an electric motor of a Tatra tram from the engine room of a vehicle driven along the rails, which were recorded and played simultaneously.[68] The sounds of the tram, transmitted by groups of micro-loudspeakers connected by cables located inside the tram car, were designed as a background for simultaneously reproduced messages referring to the style of voice advertise-

[59] Ibid.

[60] "noTours: Augmented Reality for Android," http://www.notours.org/archives/1521 (accessed 21.06.2021).

[61] M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 19–20.

[62] G. Klein, "SiteSounds: On Strategies of Sound Art in Public Space," *Organised Sound* 14, 2009, pp. 101–108.

[63] Ibid., p. 102.

[64] Ibid.

[65] "Ortsklang Marl Mitte (2002)," Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/27761297 (accessed 26.06.2021).

[66] G. Klein, op. cit., p. 102.

[67] "meta.stasen | meta.stases (2007)," Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/28456266 (accessed: 23.06.2021).

[68] G. Klein, op. cit., p. 103.

ments, but this time critically addressing the subject of economic growth.[69] During the intervention, the overlapping sounds of the tram engine room and the voices of the presenters known to the inhabitants of Dresden from the media, were accompanied by a light installation introducing the effect of an unreal world.[70] For 10 days, the uncanny tram travelled on the route of Dresden's no. 8 tram line outside the scheduled timetable, which, according to the artist, was done to allow passengers to meet it at various, unpredictable times.[71] The introduction of the sound installation to the interior of the tram was aimed at reflecting and defamiliarizing seemingly unproblematic situations of everyday life.[72] This was achieved by relating the function of communication infrastructure, identified as shifting people and objects from place to place, to the neoliberal ideology of growth, which appropriated various areas of everyday life of city residents.[73] Klein sought to create an experience of transformed perception, which he called "an audiovisual space of alteration."[74]

The research and art project of the Turkish artist Banu Çiçek Tülü, in which a map has become the sound recording tool is another interesting example of the use of recorded urban sound. *The Minor Sonic Cartography and the Safe Space* is a project carried out during an artistic residency called *Sounds of Our Cities* in Roeselare, Belgium.[75] Tülü took up the problem of accessibility of city pavements, which, in theory, are shared and safe spaces, and in practice turn out to be places of exclusion of socially marginalized groups, manifested as various forms of sonic aggression: verbal taunts, car horns, the roar of engines.[76] The project's assumption is that the memories of pedestrians who experienced acoustic acts of violence in the pavement space, recorded by the artist, are to "return" to the places from which they emerged during soundwalking, in order to immerse themselves in them again, but this time in a different, processed form.[77] Tülü's project shows the possibility of mobilizing recordings in the process of negotiating the use of common spaces in the city.

It is worth noting that despite using different types of recordings, both Klein and Tülü employ quite a similar strategy of incorporating them in their activities. In both projects, the description and diagnosis of the place are based on repetition. One may wonder whether the invitation proposed by the artists to sound-mediated

[69] Ibid., p. 104.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., p. 103.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., p. 104.
[74] Ibid.
[75] "Sounds of Our Cities," Idensitat, https://www.idensitat.net/en/current-projects/sounds-of-our-cities-3/1456-sounds-of-our-cities-open-call (accessed 28.06.2021).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

re-experiencing of events — which were written in the form of inscriptions on the wall in the case of *Ortsklang Marl Mitte*, and in the form of difficult memories in the case of *The Minor Sonic Cartography and the Safe Space* — can lead to the transformation of places. It should certainly be stated that they work well as concepts of confrontation with the affects that shape the place.

Even though a set of good practices of using urban field recordings by urban communities themselves to nurture their relationships with places are yet to be developed, I believe that an initial step in rising social consciousness on possible powers of the collections of recordings as media of urban heritage transmission has been already taken in various fields of practice. The reconstruction of such endeavours presented above allows me to conclude that urban field recordings may be considered as potentially useful media of urban heritage transmission. In the following paragraphs I will, however, argue that understanding urban field recordings as cultural texts does not exhaust the complicated nature of their ontological status, which also makes it very problematic to subsume them into a single definition of heritage.

Urban Field Recording as a Sample of a Place

Recognized as the subject of cultural studies aiming at understanding the interpreted world, field recording is about more than just recording sonic phenomena. Renata Tańczuk observes that it is, like a sound map, an "interpretative approach to the city's sound environment."[78] At the same time, the researcher indicates the possibility of broadening the interpretative optics in sound research with approaches referring to "the modus of experience, which is pathic and related to preconceptual communication with the world, affectivity, and bodily sensations," which includes Jean-Paul Thibaud's concept of "urban ambience."[79] In line with Tańczuk's observations, I claim that treating the urban ambience not only as something that precedes the recording and is represented by it, but also as something that penetrates the recording and becomes its material component, can have a significant impact on the approach to the performativity of the recorded sound. The issue of the reception of urban field recordings cannot, in my opinion, be satisfactorily addressed only based on "representational"[80] paradigms, within which also Raymond Murray Schafer's concept of a soundscape is situated. From the perspective of representational paradigms, based on which questions are asked about the conceptual filter through which phenomena are given to the subject (for

[78] R. Tańczuk, op. cit., p. 2.
[79] Ibid., passim.
[80] See also A. Nacher, op. cit., pp. 7–34.

example, a soundscape is produced through a system of soundmarks, signals, keynotes, and archetypal sounds[81]), urban field recording is an artefact resembling Clifford Geertz's "thick description"[82] in terms of its structure. As a second-degree interpretation, it does not participate materially in the sound reality of the city, but is a record of someone's act of listening, a map of someone's going through what Michel de Certeau calls the place of the "Other."[83] The study of recordings carried out in an interpretative approach does not therefore start with the question about the properties of a set with a large number of elements — the question about recordings as a living network — but instead focuses on the interpretation of their class, which is by necessity selected and limited in number. When reflecting on urban field recordings as a sensitive heritage resource, it may be asked whether it is possible to move towards "non-representational,"[84] performative approaches. As Anna Nacher notes regarding research on images of the digital age, such material allows us to ask a question not about "what and how" images mean, but "how they work in the world."[85] If Nacher's observation also applies to sound recordings, we can see that going beyond the representationalist paradigm would concern the possibility of treating recordings as causative actors in the process of the imaginary production of space, taking place in variously proceeding and differently located reception practices. I assume that there is a material or permanent connection between the recorded sounds and the places where they arise. Thus, the recordings would constitute not only sound representations of the places where they were produced, but their material-affective "samples" — that is, culturally active material transferred to a digital medium. The situation of the reception of the recording would therefore be a situation of contact with the place from which the sound sample was taken, but not only via interpretation, but also via affect. In the process of producing a recording and by placing it online, certain aspects of the place are multiplied and "disseminated"[86] beyond the limits of the location defined by the geographic parameters.

In line with the concept of affect proposed by Ben Anderson, who derives it from non-representational[87] theories, affects are phenomena located outside the individual register, in the "pre- and trans-personal space" and they relate to "pre-cognitive background feeling."[88] Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi note that there is a "conceptual distinction between emotions, feelings that a subject is

[81] R.M. Schafer, op. cit., pp. 9–10.
[82] C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje*, Kraków 2005.
[83] M. de Certeau, op. cit., p. xix.
[84] A. Nacher, op. cit., p. 10.
[85] Ibid.
[86] J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, London 1981.
[87] B. Anderson, "Affect," [in:] *Urban Theory: New Critical Perspectives*, eds. M. Jayne, K. Ward, London–New York 2017, p. 20.
[88] Ibid., p. 19.

aware of and claims as his own, and affects, intensities that generate physiological and environmental effects beyond the boundaries of a singular subject."[89] In the context of research on urban places, the issue of affect is related to the question of how places are felt by embodied subjects.[90] Anderson emphasizes that we cannot think of affect in isolation from other dimensions of urban space.[91] It is rather something that permeates and colours space in a certain way, which can be brought out by reference to the description of the "atmosphere" of places.[92] According to Anderson, the production of affect should be linked both to "trans-local" processes and to the dimension of everyday practices.[93]

The ability of sound to transfer the energy of affects, to shape the space in which it is played, and influence the body of the person in the decay field is emphasized by sound artist Lambros Pigounis in his project entitled *Micropolitics of Noise*.[94] Pigounis is primarily interested in the connection between sound energy and states of the body. He does not ask directly about the impact of the recorded sound, but about the sound with which the recipient comes into contact, in an encounter characteristic of the performing arts. Can the artist's observations also be related to the situation of the reception of urban field recordings? "Sound is the vibration of air, which can be put into the same vibration again and again."[95] This means that we can encounter the energy of actions and practices transmitted by acoustic waves, manifested as urban sound while listening to the recording. On this basis, it can be concluded that we are dealing with the transmission of the affective content of places not only in relation to the "here and now" of a performance or soundwalking, but also in relation to the "here and now" of listening to a field recording, even when its cultural significance is no longer legible.

There is no doubt that urban field recordings, which are also a dynamically developing current of sound art, do not comprise a homogeneous class of cultural artefacts. In addition to the recording technology used in their production, what distinguishes field recordings from one another are the material qualities of the recorded place, the situation in which they are located, and the aesthetic relation of the person recording the sound. As with other research practices, both

[89] A. Bailey, M. DiGangi, "Introduction," [in:] *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies and Form*, eds. A. Bailey, M. DiGangi, New York 2017, pp. 1–2.

[90] B. Anderson, op. cit., p. 19.

[91] Ibid., p. 20.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] L. Pigounis, "Performing the Politics of Sound: Affective Mobilization and the Objectivity of Sonic Energy on the Human Body," *Critical Stages/Scènes Critique* 16, 2017, https://www.critical-stages.org/16/performing-the-politics-of-sound-affective-mobilization-and-the-objectivity-of-sonic-energy-on-the-human-body/ (accessed 2.06.2021)

[95] I would like to thank Wacław Zimpel for this remark.

care and violence can mediate the auditory relation to a given place.[96] Despite the differences between field recordings resulting from the state of the recorded location — for example, recordings of everyday city life are different in terms of their affective content from the recordings from an area of armed conflict[97] — what allows them to be considered as samples of a place is their potential ability to initiate a process of place transformation in the perception of the listener, which may have different effects and undergo different valorizations. The transformation in question can apply to both the places of listening and the places from which the sound sample was taken. It can happen intentionally, for example through the practice of "deep listening," which is based on maintaining readiness to creatively respond to sounds reaching the listener,[98] and unconsciously, when lack of auditory awareness is accompanied by sonic persuasion. A good example of the affective impact of a place is the situation of listening to the recording *Brokindsleden — The Sounds of Traffic* in which traffic noise that masks other sounds and stubbornly fills the space was recorded.[99] A lack of mindfulness when listening to this recording, which is highly probable due to its monotony, could negatively affect the well-being of the recipient, causing bodily reactions.

The possibility of changing the source place via conscious listening, aided by the tools of the composer's workshop, such as remixing, is observable in the online undertaking *Cities and Memory*, a global collaborative sound project.[100] The platform collects recordings of urban sound from various places around the world and combines them with their subsequent memory variants created by the artists involved in the project. A person visiting the project website can see both the "raw" recording of a place selected on the map and its imaginatively processed version. The possibility of transforming raw city recordings enables the testing of alternative scenarios of places' pasts and variants of the future, which brings out the cultural and therapeutic potential of working with recorded sound.

It is also worth emphasizing that the ability of recorded sound to influence the way in which space is experienced and to model the behaviour of individuals and groups is considered not only in sound art, but also in the activities of designers of public spaces. For example, as part of the quite controversial trend of design which Gordan Savičić and Selena Savić called "unpleasant design," which is used in activities aimed at changing the ways of using areas of the city considered to be problematic, broadcasting of classical music recordings is being applied, whose

[96] "Learning from Sound with Hildegard Westerkamp," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiipOK7H_qY (accessed 10.04.2021).

[97] Ibid.

[98] P. Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*, New York 2005.

[99] "Brokindsleden — The Sounds of Traffic," *Sounds of Changes*, http://www.soundsofchanges.eu/sound/brokindsleden-the-sounds-of-traffic/ (accessed 27.06.2020).

[100] *Cities and Memory*, https://citiesandmemory.com/ (accessed 21.04.2021).

presence in the air aims to reduce the perceived attractiveness of a given location in a relatively non-invasive manner in the eyes of specific groups of users.[101]

One important aspect of the reception of urban field recordings is the space of their display, which is nowadays largely on the Internet. Uploading recordings onto servers and accessing them through "clouds" and "streams,"[102] allows for faster circulation of recordings, and therefore also the circulation of places. The travelling of recordings through networks — which creates the possibility of immediate listening to, for example, the sounds of Minsk whilst situated in Jerusalem — enables the opening of a recorded place beyond its geographical location. The material nature of the relationship that connects recorded sound with the qualities of the area from which it was taken means that listening to a field recording can initiate the work of memory, colouring and directing it in a certain way by activating what Ewa Rewers, following Paul Ricoeur, calls an "affective trace,"[103] even if the recipient does not know the place where the sound was recorded. I believe that it is the material nature of the bond linking the recording with the place of its production and the ability of acoustic waves to transmit a specific event and its situational qualities that underlie the perceptual and existential phenomenon which Renata Tańczuk defines as a "sonic *punctum*," pointing to its contingent, sudden and highly moving character.[104] The fact that field recordings can evoke certain states in the recipient, initiate imaginary travels in time, reorganize the biographical narrative of the subject, and transform the imaginary geometry of the city, results, in my opinion, from the ability of the recorded sound to transmit affect, which happens regardless of the work of interpretation that gives it meaning.

The understanding of urban field recordings not only as cultural texts, but also as samples of a place, is the second main reason for recognizing them as a sensitive resource of the cultural heritage of cities. In this case, the concept of sensitivity no longer refers only to the susceptibility of recordings to the workings of time, which obliterates the clarity of the information conveyed by them, and the related postulate of archiving and sharing recordings, but also to the ability of recorded sound to reproduce the affective qualities of places, which makes this heritage resource somewhat "unruly."[105]

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[101] G. Savičić, S. Savić, *Unpleasant Design*, http://unpleasant.pravi.me (accessed 18.12.2021).

[102] S. Nożyński, M. Okólski, "Muzyka bez nośnika? Powietrze, chmury, strumienie oraz cyfry, taśmy i winyle w walce o pierwosłuch bądź zapomnienie," *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 1 (39), 2019, pp. 51–67.

[103] E. Rewers, "Zapomniane, wspomniane, zapomniane…," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 29, 2016, p. 58.

[104] R. Tańczuk, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

[105] B. Olsen, B. Pétursdóttir, "Unruly Heritage: Tracing Legacies in the Anthropocene," *Arkaeologisk Forum* 35, 2016, pp. 38–45; see also M. Stobiecka, "Kłopotliwa materialność dziedzictwa przyszłości," *Turystyka Kulturowa* 4, 2019, pp. 112–122.

Reception of Urban Field Recordings: Between Acousmatics and Commentary

When trying to deepen the understanding of the relationship between a recording of an urban sound and the place where it was created, paradoxically, it is necessary to refer to the concept of "acousmatics."[106] Pierre Schaeffer introduced the idea of acousmatics to contemporary music via the concept of the music he develops, the products of which are "sound objects."[107] The author of the *Treatise on Musical Objects* observes that "the acousmatic system, generally speaking, symbolically forbids any relationship with the visible, touchable, measurable."[108] When it comes to acousmatics, the reception of a recording is not a confrontation with the thing or the environment that produced the sound, but with an autotelic sound object that enjoys autonomy from the objective world of things. The ontological status of a sound is independent of its material basis. A sound is a kind of abstraction, and its reception is not related to the question of the process behind its emergence.[109]

While the suspension of the question about the source of sound, defining the acousmatic modus of listening, is inherent in Western musical culture of the 20th century, in reflection on urban field recordings informed by non-representational approaches, the key to determining their ontological status, social role, and performative impact is not by blurring, but rather exposing the relationship with the multi-sensory context of their production. This tendency is mainly expressed by metadata[110] practices, based on linking the field recordings available online with visual and textual material that directly connects them with anthropological field research. I believe that apart from the reference to the methodology of fieldwork, we can also consider these practices in relation to media research. In this case, the exposure of the context of producing the recording may, I believe, be associated with the phenomenon of narrativization of photography, which leads to the formation of specific objects with a heterogeneous media genealogy, which Marianna Michałowska calls "photo-text."[111] According to Michałowska, a photo-text is "an intentionally created construction," which combines a photographic image and a story.[112] On the one hand, it is a "tool for talking about the world"; on the other

[106] P. Schaeffer, op. cit.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., p. 65.
[109] Ibid., pp. 64–69.
[110] The importance of metadata practices in building sound archives and developing auditory awareness in societies is emphasized in the project *European Acoustic Heritage*, M. Kytö, N. Remy, H. Uimonen, op. cit., pp. 59–60. This aspect is also accentuated by the authors of the *Works of Sounds* project and its continuation, *Sounds of Changes*, M. Widzicka, op. cit., p. 92.
[111] M. Michałowska, *Foto-teksty. Związki fotografii z narracją*, Poznań 2012.
[112] Ibid., p. 12.

hand, it is "a method that allows us to recognize its meanings."[113] Michałowska emphasizes the importance of memory as a concept that mediates photography and narration, which co-create the photo-text. As "narratives that make the events of the past intelligible," photo-texts are the effects of memory work.[114] A collection of essays by Marcin Dymiter, *Notatki z terenu* [Field Notes], is an interesting example of secondary contextualization of field recordings, which would produce something that, in analogy to the concept of "photo-text," we could perhaps define as audio-photo-text: "Hundekopf. You can actually see the nose and forehead. The head of a dog on the city map. Südkreuz, Westkreuz, Gesundbrunnen and Ostkreuz […] The sounds and noise of city life only pop through the open door for a moment. Muffled hip-hop is coming from the earphones of the next passenger […] Broken, incomplete voices and rhythms […] For a moment, an image from the distant past of the S41/S42 glides by. Passage between East and West Berlin. A tall wall […]."[115] Through the medium of writing and black and white photography, Dymiter recreates situations and subjective experiences accompanying the auditory mediated tracing of Berlin, Prague and other remembered and "invisible"[116] cities. Literary intervention creates a multi-sensory context for the reception of field recordings made by the artist, which can be found on the Bandcamp platform.

For many urban field recordings, such as those collected on the commercial Soundsnap platform, it is not always possible to find rich, authorial de-acousmatizing material, and they do not always accompany the production and sharing of recordings. The recorded sound object, which is not accompanied by a commentary which merges it with the embodied experience of the area, becomes a particularly sensitive, dislocated sound object, resembling an unfinished utterance in its functioning. It then acquires properties similar to Schaeffer's "sound object," the production context of which is unknown or sketchy and which cannot be subjected to cultural ramifications through the accompanying materials. However, comparing the field recording as an object of sound studies with a sound object constituting the subject of the philosophy of music requires some clarification. What structures the sound material in a raw field recording is not a specific musical form, as in the case of music, but a choreographic script that defines the sequence of the journey and the memory script. A field recording is therefore always a record of a real transition, incorporating the affective qualities of the area, which requires some form of elaboration in purpose to gain a functional quality of urban culture heritage media. If it is not accompanied by the work of a commentary, it becomes not

[113] Ibid., p. 11.
[114] Ibid., p. 21.
[115] M. Dymiter, *Notatki z terenu*, Gdańsk 2021, pp. 15–17.
[116] I. Calvino, *Niewidzialne miasta*, trans. A. Kreisberg, Warszawa 1975.

only a "sound object," but an "object in search of a place,"[117] a ghost. Such an object fits into Bjonar Olsen and Bora Pétursdóttir's definition of "unruly heritage," which constitutes the legacy of our past practices that is not necessarily welcomed by us.[118] Considered not only as a valuable resource but also as an uncanny object, field recordings bring with themselves a destabilizing power, which makes them culturally dangerous, but also aesthetically productive. A confrontation with such an object breaks the sense of the familiarity and continuity of the lifeworld, and may initiate a reconfiguration of places which, as I claimed at the beginning following Jeff Malpas, are hybrid combinations of figures and backgrounds, phenomena that combine the subjective with the collective.

Conclusion

Considered as sound texts of culture, urban field recordings can facilitate dialogue and cultural communication between members of urban communities, which provides the possibility of seeing them as media of urban heritage transmission. It is thus important to develop good practices of their documentation and sharing that can make them more accessible for urban residents and grassroots uses. Recognition of the semiotic potential of urban field recordings does not exhaust their complicated ontological status, which makes attempts to frame it within a single definition of heritage quite problematic. Due to the fact that urban field recordings preserve the affective properties of places on a material medium, their analysis cannot be limited to interpretative approaches, but also requires formulating questions about the performative impact of recorded sound on the reception context. Understood as samples of a place, recordings can transfer its "aesthetic energy"[119] through space and time, which, on the one hand, creates the possibility of their use in practices of placemaking, and, on the other hand, poses a threat related to the reproduction of unwanted affects. Listening to places and listening to field recordings is not the same. The former is accompanied by a bodily immersion in the multi-sensory milieu of the city, whilst the latter takes a fragment of an area known or unknown to the listener elsewhere. The recorded place's properties thus influence the new listening context. Through the reception of field record-

[117] Here, I paraphrase the title of the exhibition *Rzeźba w poszukiwaniu miejsca* [Sculpture in Search of a Place] curated by Anna Maria Leśniewska, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, 1 February–25 April 2021.

[118] B. Olsen, B. Pétursdóttir, op. cit., p. 39.

[119] W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk, "Aesthetic Energy of an Ordinary Place," [in:] *Aesthetic Energy of the City: Experiencing Urban Art and Space*, eds. A. Gralińska-Taborek, W. Kazimierska-Jerzyk, Łódź 2016, pp. 67–81.

ings, the relational geometry of the *stratum*,[120] in which places, understood as systems of matter and meaning, are contained, is reconfigured. In auditory reception, aspects of the area where the recording was made are included in the place of listening.

Through the process of making urban field recordings available on the Internet and the reception practices characteristic of this context, the world of geographical locations, whose boundaries can be marked on a map, is reconfigured and mixed up in the listener's imagination. Recordings, as a sensitive resource of the cultural heritage of cities, create a sort of Tower of Babel of places. While the biblical Tower of Babel was a vertical structure, the Sound Babel is a network that emerged as a result of the development of new communication technologies. The process of moving and mixing places initiated by recordings and reception practices is possible as a result of blurring the boundaries between the materiality of the city and the materiality of the network.[121] Field recordings posted on the web, especially those without accompanying commentary, are objects whose updating in reception practices can strongly influence the perception of space and transform the imaginary positioning of the subject in the world.

The sensitive nature of this heritage resource results, on the one hand, in their susceptibility to the blurring effects of time, which is associated with the need to develop practices related to the archiving and sharing of sound recordings for the purpose of transmitting urban cultural knowledge, and, on the other hand, in the ability of the recordings to reproduce the affects present in the recorded locations. Further development of research on the affective impact of urban field recordings requires extending the findings of the qualitative analysis of places informed by interpretive and performative approaches to an ontological status of recorded urban sound to include questions that consider the digital contexts of their exposure and reception.

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[120] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London–New York 2004.

[121] An extended analysis of these processes can be found in: *Mobility: Media, Urban Practices and Students' Culture*, ed. M. Michałowska, Poznań 2017.

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Soundscape of the Ruhr: Sensitive Sounds. Between Documentation, Composition and Historical Research*

Abstract: The following article discusses the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr*. Our project touches upon a set of questions that are of interest to sound studies. They concern intention and modes of archiving sound, working for museums, exhibitions, film, theatre productions, education and science, recordings as testimony as well as cultural heritage. Working on and with the archive made us sensitive to the aurality of the confined space and to the horizons of meaning that people attributed (and still attribute) to the acoustic dimensions of their everyday life. As a result, we began to conceptualize history based on the sensual constitution of reality and thus were able to take a different view of social transformations. The sounds in the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* are not "sensitive" like surveillance tapes that document state repression and blackmail, uncover political scandals or are used for propaganda purposes. These sounds are sensitive because they are endangered and therefore should be recorded with respect for cultural heritage. Moreover, they raise questions about the political power, which defines when and how sound is considered noise in a changing social order.

Keywords: Ruhr region, soundscape, heavy industries, post-industrialization, sound archive

The following article discusses the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr*. Our project touches upon a set of questions that are of interest to sound studies. They concern intention and modes of archiving sound, working for museums, exhibitions, film, theatre productions, education and science, recordings as testimony as well as cultural heritage. Working on and with the archive made us sensitive to the aurality of the confined space and to the horizons of meaning that people attributed (and still attribute) to the acoustic dimensions of their everyday life. As a result, we began to conceptualize history based on the sensual constitution of reality and thus were able to take a different view of social transformations.

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The sounds in the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* are not "sensitive" like surveillance tapes that document state repression and blackmail, uncover political scandals or are used for propaganda purposes. These sounds are sensitive because they are endangered and therefore should be recorded with respect for cultural heritage. Moreover, they raise questions about the political power, which defines when and how sound is considered noise in a changing social order.

Documenting the Soundscape of the Ruhr

Since the 1980s we have been documenting the soundscape of the Ruhr, a heavy industrial area until 2018. With 4,438.69 square kilometres and around 5.1 million inhabitants, the Ruhr region is the largest conurbation in Germany and one of the largest metropolitan regions in Europe. From 1830 onward, the use of steam engines made it possible to tap the rich coal deposits of the Emscher valley.[1] Under the pressure of new energy and economy, the construction of gigantic production plants, the expansion of new traffic routes, and the enormous influx of workers, the sleepy atmosphere of pre-industrial rural communities was transformed into a heavy industrial soundsphere.

This was a disorderly and rampant process, which was geared solely to the profit-maximizing of the coal industry. Industrial villages sprang up just behind factory gates. And they extended up to the production sites. In 1930, the author Heinrich Hauser (1901–1955) described the aural atmosphere as sounds of work, production, and traffic: "Silence — listening: I hear soft, muffled rolling, thin echo from curved walls. It comes from everywhere — from in front of me, from behind me, from the right, from the left. These are the freight trains, the endless coal trains. The rolling of thousand wheels travels through the landscape all night long. From far away, I hear a clink, as if very thin glasses were bumping against each other. These are the hard cast steel bodies of the rolling mills that rub against each other when idling. Now comes a rumbling, as if from a dying thunderstorm: these are the red iron blocks stretching over the rolling lines. Echoes boom far away from the glass roofs of high halls."[2] For generations, this soundscape shaped the senses of the inhabitants. With the coal crisis since the 1960s and the decline of the steel industry since the 1970s, the soundscape changed: the large mining

[1] The statistical and spatial basis of the Ruhr region is the "Regionalverband Ruhr" (RVR), which was founded as early as 1920 under the name of "Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk." See *Urbanität gestalten. Stadtbaukultur in Essen und im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Museum Folkwang Essen, Göttingen 2010; J. Reulecke, *Geschichte der Urbanisierung in Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 84ff.

[2] H. Hauser, *Schwarzes Revier*, ed. B. Weidle, Bonn 2010, p. 133 (published as an exhibition booklet by the Ruhr Museum, Zollverein Colliery, Essen).

plants were gradually shut down. Blast furnaces, rolling mills, and ironworks that once orchestrated the sound of work and life were replaced by road traffic and aircraft noise that form a permanent background. In December 2018, the last pit was closed. The era of coal mining came to an end.

From Radio Plays to Sound Research

The acoustic dimension of shutdowns inscribed itself in the German language: we use the verb "stilllegen," which means "bringing something to stillness" or "silencing." The *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* is the materialization of our own biographical experiences with decommissioning and bringing something to stillness. Musician Richard Ortmann, filmmaker and sound engineer Ralf R. Wassermann, and myself, a historian — we were all born in the 1950s in Herne in the middle of the Ruhr region and grew up within earshot of pits called "Shamrock," "Teutoburgia" and "Constantin."[3]

We were all radio lovers and what particularly impressed us was the Studio Akustische Kunst, a department within the Westdeutscher Rundfunk public broadcasting station (WDR). We could follow how radio plays broke away from the criteria of literary radio drama.[4] It opened up to collages of quotations and acoustic ready-mades as well as experimented with noise and sound.[5] Under the direction of Klaus Schöning,[6] the Studio Akustische Kunst came to be recognized as the centre of international acoustic art. We absorbed its radio plays with utter enthusiasm. We used to have some cold drinks and sit excitedly together in front of the radio, listening to Ars Acustica and plays by Berry Bermange, Bill Fontana, Pierre Henry, and Murray Schafer. We recorded the plays on tapes in order to listen to them again and let them circulate. Having jumped into the soundscapes of London, Kyoto, Berlin or Paris, we realized that we also lived in a unique soundscape — an industrial soundscape — not an urban one like San Francisco, Tokyo or Paris. We lived in a soundscape shaped by heavy industry in times of industrial transformation.

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[3] See *Vor Ort. Geschichte und Bedeutung des Bergbaus in Herne und Wanne-Eickel*, ed. R. Piorr, Herne 2010.

[4] See K. Schöning, "Von der menschlichen Stimme, dem Universum der Klänge und Geräusche inmitten der Stille," liner notes from the CD, *Riverrun, Klangreise in das Studio Akustische Kunst des WDR*, CD 1: *Voicings*, CD 2: *Soundscapes*, Mainz 1999; F. Kriwett, *Das Studio Akustische Kunst des WDR*, München 2001.

[5] This experience was described by Walter Murch when he first heard *Premier Panorama de Musique Concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, see: W. Murch, "Foreword," [in:] M. Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, New York 1994, p. xiii–xiv.

[6] See K. Schöning, "Programmhefte / Kataloge (Auswahl)," https://www.klaus-schoening.de/hgprgr.html (accessed 14.08.2021).

This marked the start of our private project aimed at recording the sounds of heavy industry in the Ruhr area. It was not easy to capture them. Collieries and steelworks were forbidden "cities." We had to convince plant managers to let us in. We needed accreditations. Sometimes we had to wait hours until we heard noticeable sound events emerging in the process of production. Workers told us about their sound experiences. They had learnt to listen very carefully to the sounds of their machines, because technical problems were articulated in deceleration, oscillation, and interruption.

For Ralf Wassermann, the project was a technical challenge. For Richard Ortmann, it provided a source of sound effects that could be used for composition and performances. I began to ponder on the sonic impacts of social power relations between capital and work. Murray Schafer offered to me the key concept with his studies on the historicity of the acoustic environment.[7]

Richard Ortmann und Ralf Wassermann began working as freelancers for the WDR. In 1995 they produced a radio play entitled *Einmal Herne und zurück* (*To Herne and Back*) for Klaus Schöning's Studio Akustische Kunst. From then on, in the world of Ars Acustica, a small, dirty unknown hometown called Herne[8] had the same standing as San Francisco, Tokyo, London or Berlin.[9]

Technical Equipment

The archive has continued to grow over the years. So far, we have collected about 4,000 minutes of sound effects, human voices, and machine sounds. We have recorded entire work processes in which "events" suddenly emerge: the keynote sound takes on a different rhythmic structure, signals resound, sound marks arouse curiosity, the timbre and the dynamics change, the tempo slows down and speeds up, frequencies shift. We have long used magnetic tapes and DAT tapes — now we record material on SD cards.[10]

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[7] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, New York 1977.

[8] See *Herne 50/80. Fotografie*, eds. R. Piorr, T. Schmidt, Herne 2017.

[9] We created the radio play *Einmal Herne und zurück. Klanglandschaft Ruhrgebiet*. Inspired by such authors as Bill Fontana, Murray Schafer, Mauricio Kagel, Pierre Henry, Richard Kostellanetz, and Marielouise Franke, we actively contributed to the development of the acoustic art itself. See R. Fleiter, R. Ortmann, dir., *Einmal Herne und zurück. Klanglandschaft Ruhrgebiet*, 45 min., WDR 1995; also broadcast in DLR Berlin 1996, WDR 1998, DLR Cologne 2000, WDR 2000, HR 2002; see also CD 2000.

[10] We documented pumps, hammers, saws, milling machines, steam engines, shipyards of the Duisburg Harbour, rolling mills and sheet metal stamping plants, coking plants, blast furnaces, mining hammers, signals, bells. The sound cosmos of colliery housing estates, boxing booths, churches, monasteries, mosques, allotment gardens, chip shops, drinking halls, corner pubs, soccer fields (like the "Singing Yellow Wall," the southern terrace of the BVB-stadium in Dortmund, which is the largest free-standing grandstand in Europe), ornithological excursions, highway intersections, festivals,

We started our field recordings by using a Stellavox SP-7, a compact portable reel-to-reel magnetic tape audio recorder. We then switched to a portable Tascam DA-P1, a digital audio tape recorder. Now we use a Fostex FR 2LE field memory recorder. For microphones, we chose Sennheiser's professional microphones and Sennheiser's closed-back headset. Thus, our work also reflects the history of technology, that is, the digitalization and miniaturization of recording equipment.

Conceptual Approaches

Figure 1 illustrates different modes and fields of our work with sounds. Sometimes they "re-sound" again, sometimes they initiate educational processes, sometimes they are researched and discussed. But they are always first recorded and documented. Our mission is based on Murray Schafer's call to give special attention to sounds that are in danger of disappearing.[11]

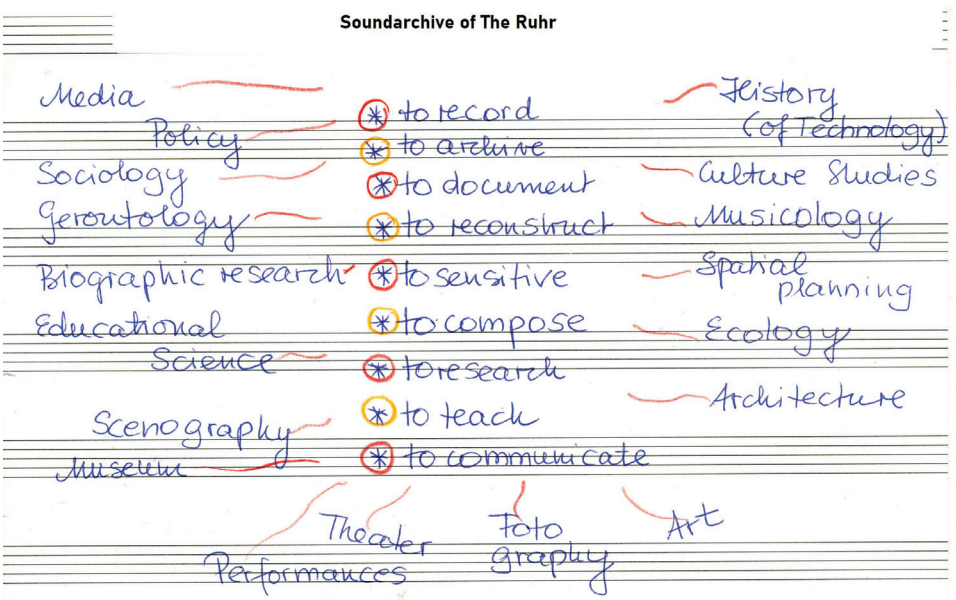

Figure 1. Modes and fields of the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr*

Source: Author.

celebrations, demonstrations, strikes, choral societies, women's choirs, marching bands, interviews. The archive preserves narratives about work and life in the coal and steel industry and about experiences with structural changes. It also documents the sonic qualities of future technologies, logistics locations, and cultural industries through to the sound of the renaturalized industrial landscape. The sounds are categorized as "work," "leisure," "machines," "people," and "nature." The documented richness is the result of our social, technical, cultural, and scientific interests in the soundscape of the Ruhr.

[11] See R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 209.

Our work on and with the archive is not driven by nostalgia. "Recording," "collecting," "archiving" are by no means the right ways to compensate for the experience of loss.[12] The documentation of sounds serves to sharpen the auditory sense and raise the awareness of the existing soundscape in the face of abstract socio-economic changes.[13] "Recording" and "documenting" are ways of active appropriation of the present — not only for us documentarians, but also for those who tell us about their sound experiences. To conceptualize the appropriation, we employ a notion of the German sociologist and filmmaker duo Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge: "experiential work on the reality machine" ("Erfahrungsarbeit an der Wirklichkeitsmaschine").[14] While the documentarists concentrate on their equipment and recording, the interviewees (from the Ruhr) begin to talk about their work with machines and sounds. They share their specific experiences with economy and ecology. Sometimes, they formulate ambivalences and paradoxes: for example, on the one hand, they are scared of losing their job through decommissioning, but on the other, they enjoy life without the industrial noise, dirt and stench.

The focus on sound, that is, on the dimensions of aurality, stimulates narratives that thematize the relationship between humans and machines. We were also very interested in sounds of the Schalker Verein, an ironworks that for many decades provided work for several thousand workers in Gelsenkirchen-Bulmke-Hüllen. Back then, there was a bell that indicated to the steelmakers when the blast furnace released the molten pig iron. A former worker was to tell us something about his indigenous knowledge about this sound. Instead, he let us take part in the subversive, clandestine rescue of this unique (and, in terms of today's scrap prices, truly precious) sonic artefact. The former plant workers were against "a scrapping of the past and a de-qualification of the future in favour of a self-absolving present."[15] They fought for their unconditional need to preserve materializations of their life and work to enable mediation and communication. The Schalker Verein was finally shut down in 2004/05.[16]

If we are interested in the sonic qualities of the environment (and in the epistemes of their evaluation), we should conceptualize the human senses within broader processes of social and historical developments. "The work of the five senses is a work of the entire history of the world," as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge claim in

[12] See H. Lübbe, "Der Fortschritt von gestern. Über Musealisierung als Modernisierung," [in:] *Die Aneignung der Vergangenheit. Musealisierung und Geschichte*, eds. U. Borsdorf, H.T. Grütter, J. Rüsen, Bielefeld 2004, p. 19.

[13] See R.M. Schafer, *A Sound Education*, Indian River 1992.

[14] O. Negt, A. Kluge, *Geschichte und Eigensinn*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 230.

[15] N. Rath, "Erfahrungsarbeit an der Wirklichkeitsmaschine. Negt/Kluge und der Eigensinn der Sinne," [in:] *Sinnenreich. Vom Sinn einer Bildung der Sinne als kulturell-ästhetisches Projekt*, ed. W. Zacharias, Essen 1994, p. 41.

[16] *Der Schalker Verein. Arbeit und Leben in Bulmke-Hüllen*, eds. Örtliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft, Arbeit und Leben (DGB/VHS), Gelsenkirchen 2008.

a reference to Karl Marx.[17] In this conceptualization, the acoustic sense — like the other senses — is no longer a biological fixum, a guarantor of a constant, human experience, but a historically formed sensorium: it helps us appropriate the environment and make the world our own. This ability is shaped by cultural experiences and historical knowledge. In turn, it generates new experiences and knowledge.[18]

The human ear is alert and it functions with seismographic subtlety. The former miners told us about the importance of the aural sensorium: back then in the coal mine, the wooden buttresses began to "creak" in warning of an impending rock-quarry collapse. So the miners had to prick up their ears and pay attention to the sounds. But after the wooden buttresses were replaced by hydraulic steel ones, this sensorial "early warning" system disappeared.

Work with Sounds

The *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* received a huge boost with the transition from industrial capitalism to industrial culture. Industrial culture became a brandmark of the post-industrial era in the Ruhr, and the musealization of industrial society called for new representations. Thus, we were commissioned to do a series of sound installations for museums and exhibitions. People are well aware of artefacts, documents, photos, posters and movies, but there are only a few sources that explore the history of industrial soundscapes. Almost all the movies about industrial plants work with voices off and use grinding music as soundtrack. They do not feature the authentic sounds of machines, traffic, or everyday life. It was not long before industrial museums began to ask us to acoustically redesign their movies. They also commissioned sound installations for the new scenography. Sounds from the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* can now be heard in all the major museums in the Ruhr region.[19]

We often have to explain to curators that a machine in operation doesn't usually sound like a spectacular or meaningful event. Of course, this does not apply when it comes to the specific technical understanding of a particular machine. But when the scenography is to sensitize the audience to how mechanization transformed the world of sound and the human perception through interdependency

[17] O. Negt, A. Kluge, op. cit., p. 45.

[18] I described these interdependencies in interaction between the new radio technology of the 1920s and the rise of a new sensorium of hearing. See U.C. Schmidt, "Radioaneignung," [in:] *Zuhören und Gehörtwerden I. Radio im Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Lenkung und Ablenkung*, eds. I. Marßolek, A. von Saldern, Tübingen 1998, pp. 243–256.

[19] "Das Schallarchiv in ständigen Ausstellungen," at R. Ortmann, https://www.richard-ortmann.de/geraeuscharchive.html (accessed 14.08.2021).

and interaction, we need compaction and composition to create a multilayered sound atmosphere.[20]

The staff at the Zollverein Colliery, which is now a UNESCO World Heritage site, asked us for the sound of a coal wagon circuit. Unfortunately, we had never recorded one. Nobody knew what it sounded like. Thus, Richard asked the former miners to recall this specific sound. Again they talked about their work, remembering the earsplitting soundscape. Slowly, they began to reconstruct the sonic impression of a coal wagon circuit. Each new audio track brought them closer to what they had originally heard. In 2009, Richard Ortmann continued his field recording of industrial sounds in Upper Silesia.[21] In the Silesian "Wieczorek" Colliery in Katowice-Nikiszowiec, Richard could "see with his ears" what a coal wagon sounds like. He immediately started his field recordings. Back in Dortmund, he compared the original sound from Poland with the one recalled and reconstructed in Germany. They were pretty similar. The successful reconstruction showed that people were able to accurately recall the sounds and noises of their everyday work. Today, the sound installation in the Zollverein Museum uses the sounds recorded in Silesia as an authentic aural document.

Upper Silesia and the Ruhr region share a common geological, technical, political, economic as well as sonic history. In Upper Silesia we can still feel what coal mining, road traffic, everyday life, and the industrial landscape sound like. Together with artists and institutions in Upper Silesia, we created so-called online "sound bridges" by exchanging sounds with one another.[22] They were inspired by the Sound Bridges of Bill Fontana (b. 1947) realized via satellite between Cologne and San Francisco (1987) and Cologne and Kyoto (1993) for the Studio Akustische Kunst of the WDR. During the 2020/21 coronavirus pandemic we communicated by cloud-based tools, but back in 2006, the year of our first sound bridge, "Katowice–Katernberg," this was truly a technical and artistic challenge (without the support of a big broadcasting station like the WDR).[23]

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[20] See M.M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, Chapel Hill 2001; M.M. Smith, "The Garden in the Machine: Listening to Early American Industrialization," [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. T. Pich, K. Blijsterfeld, Oxford 2012, pp. 39–57.

[21] See "Geräuschearchiv Tomek Hałas," at R. Ortmann, op. cit.; see T. Vossbeck, *Struktura i architektura. Postindustrialne dziedzictwo Górnego Śląska*, ed. Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa e.V., Potsdam 2010, which is also available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42QYn6GfVUc (accessed 14.08.2021).

[22] Our partners in Upper Silesia included artists and students of the Academy of Fine Arts and the Academy of Music in Katowice. We would like to express our gratitude to Marian Oslislo (Academy of Fine Arts) and Jarek Mamczarski (Academy of Music).

[23] On 31 May 1987, the first satellite bridge in the history of radio took place with the use of two sound sculptures: the Cologne–San Francisco ear bridge. The "orchestra" consisted of 18 sound sources in the city of Cologne and 18 in San Francisco. The two simultaneous, parallel, and mutually independent events in both cities were brought together by Bill Fontana through the mixing console in the WDR and blended into a collage to create the live composition *Satellite Ear Bridge Cologne–San Francisco*. On 5 June 1993, for the first time, a city in Europe was connected to a city in Asia

Figure 2. View into a shaft hall with wagon circulation, Kaiserstuhl 2 colliery, Dortmund, 1950s

Source: Fotoarchiv Ruhr Museum; photograph by Johann Schmidt.

Figure 3. The new lakefront district on the site of the former Phoenix steel mill, where a blast furnace has been preserved as a landmark. It stands on a heavy-industry site, as does the water tower on which the company name Hoesch is written. In the background, the Protestant and Catholic churches are seen, which were built in the 19th century for the growing congregations of working-class families

Source: Author.

for several hours via satellite with the use of a sound sculpture: Cologne and Kyoto. For the first time, sounds were transmitted via satellite — simultaneously and digitally — from one place to another. The result was broadcast live on three WDR radio programmes (curated, written and edited by Klaus Schöning, WDR Studio Akustische Kunst, 1987, 1993). See K. Schöning, "Programmhefte / Kataloge (Auswahl)."

The expertise in soundscapes we developed over the years resulted in a very funny project that led from documenting to anticipating the future. Dortmund had been the city of steel since 1841. The year 1998 saw the end of steel production. As a result, two blast furnaces were demolished and shipped to Shagang in China. The steel plant and the rolling mill, whose sounds we recorded some years before, were dismantled. Now, a 96-hectare area was ready for redevelopment, including a lake, expensive houses on the waterfront, shops, restaurants, and leisure facilities. One of the flagship projects of post-industrial transformation began on a site where workers used to work around the clock to produce iron and steel in a noisy, filthy environment, and where an entire district followed the rhythm of heavy labour. None of the old working class could picture the idea of a lake in "their" steel plant. For an exhibition on the "New Dortmund" organized by the city council, Richard Ortmann composed a soundscape of splashing water, quacking ducks, and sailing equipment being hit by the wind. The audio track was meant to be a critical commentary on the coming gentrification of the area. It proved to be a huge success, because it stimulated people's imagination. The worn control buttons of the sound installation had to be replaced several times during the exhibition. Indeed, the elements of the sound stations demonstrated that the public was no longer exclusively interested in recalling familiar sounds like those from steel mills. Listening to the imagined sounds triggered a premonition of the inevitable and painful transformation taking place in their environment. Hard labour was gradually replaced by expensive real estate and waterfront life — deindustrialization also set in motion the process of social displacement.

Historical Research on Soundscapes

While Ralf Wassermann and Richard Ortmann kept developing the electroacoustic equipment and perfecting recording techniques, the historian opened her ears to the historicity of the aural environment. We were already familiar with the work of composer and acoustic ecologist Murray Schafer, his sound education and methodology of sound walks, the *World Soundscape Project*, and the Vancouver soundscapes recordings.[24] He taught us to cultivate the habit of listening. His *Tuning of the World* laid the theoretical foundations for the study of the Ruhr's soundscape.[25]

Four aspects were of particular importance. According to Schafer, "[t]he vanishing sound object should be treated as an important historical artifact, for a carefully recorded archives of disappearing sounds could one day be of great value."[26]

[24] See *Soundscape Vancouver 1996*, CD, Cambridge Street Records: CSR-2CD 9701.
[25] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*.
[26] Ibid., 209.

Our entire documentary work is based on this call. As the author highlights, "[w]e will not argue for the priority of the ear."[27] This argument is of special relevance to sound studies and the study of the Ruhr's sonic environment, as during industrialization people's health was affected primarily by polluted water, stench, and bad air. Schafer used the term "soundscape," derived from sound and landscape, to describe the atmosphere that encompasses all the sounds within any defined area. This concept lends itself particularly well to the Ruhr area research, since the historical genesis of the settlement led to a specific form of polycentric urbanization. Depending on the discipline, the Ruhr area is conceptualized as an "urban landscape"[28] or an "industrial landscape."[29] These two representations of the "landscape" can be used as a basis to describe the "soundscape" of the Ruhrgebiet.

Schafer's concept of "sacred noise," defined as the connection between sound and power, came to be of central importance to sound research. "During the Industrial Revolution, Sacred Noise sprang across to the profane world. Now the industrialists held power and they were granted dispensation to make Noise by means of the steam engine and the blast furnace, just as previously the monks had been free to make Noise on the church bell or J. Bach to open out his preludes on the full organ. The association of Noise and power has never really been broken in the human imagination. It descends from God, to the priest, to the industrialists, and more recently to the broadcaster and the aviator. The important thing to realize is this: to have the Sacred Noise is not merely to make the biggest noise; rather it is a matter of having the authority to make it without censure."[30]

In the German historical sciences, the work of Schafer is approached critically: his sound studies, which serve as a basis for acoustic ecology, were grounded in a normatively founded critique of civilization and culture. From the linear perspective, the history of sound could be seen as a history of loss, in which pre-modern hearing was lost through the noise of modernity.[31] I counter this criticism by pointing out that Murray Schafer did not start out his research as a sound historian, but as a musician, and above all as a sound ecologist and a pedagogue. His work reflected

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[27] R.M. Schafer, *The Music of the Environment* (reprint of an article from *Cultures* 1, 1973, no. 1), Wien 1973, p. 8.

[28] See U.C. Schmidt, "'Lasst uns den Kohlenpott umfunktionieren!': Repräsentationspolitik der Stadtlandschaft Ruhrgebiet," [in:] *Stadt und Kommunikation in bundesrepublikanischen Umbruchszeiten*, ed. A. von Saldern, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 257–282.

[29] See the term "industrialscape" at: "10 Euro Münze 'Industrielandschaft Ruhrgebiet,'" Muenzen, https://www.muenzen.eu/gedenkmuenze/deutschland-10-euro-ruhrgebiet-2003.html (accessed 14.08.2021).

[30] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 76.

[31] See J.-F. Missfelder, "Period Ear. Perspektiven einer Klanggeschichte der Neuzeit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38, 2012, p. 37; see also S. Binas-Preisendörfer, "Lärmkonflikte — soziale Aushandlungen auditiver Emissionen," [in:] *Gegenwartsdiagnosen. Kulturelle Formen gesellschaftlicher Selbstproblematisierung in der Moderne*, eds. T. Alkemeyer, N. Buschmann, T. Etzemüller, Bielefeld 2019, p. 537ff, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839441343-027.

his engagement with the environmental movements of the 1970s.[32] Following Pierre Schaeffer, he dissolved the distinction between "sound" and "noise" that is central to German epistemology.[33] Instead, he focused on the morphology of sounds, its forms and structures like mass, dynamic, timbre, etc. He developed a typology of "keynote sounds," "signals," and "soundmarks" in a sonic environment classified as lo-fi and hi-fi and made the acoustic environment systematically describable.[34]

German scholar Jan-Friedrich Missfelder points out that it is worth orienting oneself to Schafer — one does not have to follow his critique of civilization and linear construction of history, but approach historical sounds as dynamic systems and social appropriations. The "entire spectrum of acoustic phenomena and their location in social space" can be brought into view. Schafer does not distinguish between sound, language, and music — nature and culture — and thus he draws our attention to the historicity of this distinction.[35] From the perspective of a musician, a composer, and a pioneer of acoustic art, this separation became obsolete after noise emancipated itself from the dominance of sound in the first half of the 20th century[36] and after the French composer Pierre Schaeffer (1910–1995) developed his theory and practice of *musique concrète*.

Schafer's concept of sacred noise refers to the sounding spaces as social spaces structured by power relations: "to have the Sacred Noise is […] a matter of having the authority to make it without censure."[37]

Having started field recording in large factory sites, we realized that the sound of the factory affected the workers and radiated into the environment. The loudness differs depending on what kind of factory sounds are involved. According to Hans-Joachim Braun, "[t]he Prussian General Trade Code (Preußisches Allgemeines Landrecht), which became binding for the North German League in 1871, required factories to obtain a license."[38] In the Ruhr region, however, despite these regulations, an extremely flexible legal principle allowed the coal and steel industry to freely shape the sound sphere according to their interests. It was called "local custom" ("Ortsüblichkeit").[39] The workers and employees with the fam-

[32] See R.M. Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, Wellington 1970.

[33] See P. Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, Paris 1966.

[34] See R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 161.

[35] J.-F. Missfelder, op. cit., p. 38.

[36] See W. Rathert, "'Fabriksirenen, Nebelhörner, Dampfbootspfeiffen.' Die Klangwelt der Moderne und das Geräusch," [in:] *Sound des Jahrhunderts*, eds. G. Paul, R. Schock, Bonn 2013, pp. 106–111.

[37] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 76.

[38] See H.J. Braun, "Turning a Deaf Ear? Industrial Noise and Noise Control in Germany since the 1920s," [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. T. Pinch, K. Bijsterveld, Oxford 2012, p. 59.

[39] § 906 Abs. 2 BGB; see H. Wiethaup, *Lärmbekämpfung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, mit einem Überblick über das Lärmbekämpfungsrecht in Mitteldeutschland, Westeuropa und den USA*, Köln 1967, pp. 99–108.

ilies living in the factory facilities came to terms with the regulations — for them the noisy machines provided jobs, wages and prosperity. For Murray Schafer, most environmental sounds have social symbolism. The Ruhr's soundscape, dominated by whizzing and thumping of the steel mills, whirring of the wheels of the pithead frames, was seen as very progressive — not only by entrepreneurs and workers, but also by the whole society.[40]

However, the colliery barons and mining entrepreneurs moved to quiet and clean neighbourhoods in the urban south, where the air was clean and free from industrial noise. Here, the increasing street and traffic noise was found to be more disturbing than industrial noise.[41]

Sensitive Sounds: The Signal of Minister Stein

Schafer's concept of sacred noise can be used to analyze a social conflict over sensitive sounds in the Ruhr. At this point, I would like to refer to Emily Thompson, who, following the French historian Alain Corbin, defines soundscape "as an auditory and an aural landscape." Like a landscape, "a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way or perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world."[42]

In 1871, the first pit of "Minister Stein" in Eving, the present district of Dortmund, was sunk. The pit was named after the Prussian minister Heinrich Friedrich Karl vom und zum Stein (1757–1831). In 1875, the mine began its production with 90 workers. Colliery plants, suppliers, transport infrastructure, and the endless migration of human capital broke into a rural space with around 1,000 people. In 20 years, the population increased by more than 120 percent. In the war year of 1941, Minister Stein achieved the highest annual production of 3,668,790 tons of coal. In the economic boom after World War II the mine had the strongest workforce with about 8,500 men and women. On 31 March 1987 the mine was closed. Minister Stein was the last Dortmund pit that was shut down. Almost 700 years of coal mining in Dortmund — the first documented mention of coal mining dates back to 1296 — came to its end. Eving lost its lifeline. For more than 100 years, the spatial organization of the community as well as the human practices of everyday life had been dominated by the pit.

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[40] See R.M. Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, p. 14.

[41] See K. Bijsterveld, "Listening to Machines: Industrial Noise, Hearing Loss and the Cultural Meaning of Sound," [in:] *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. J. Sterne, London–New York 2012, p. 158.

[42] E. Thompson, "Sound, Modernity and History," [in:] *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. J. Sterne, London–New York 2012, p. 117.

After demolishing the colliery, the area underwent redevelopment. For the first time Eving was to gain an urban "centre" in terms of urban planning. When the professionals started spatial planning, the former miners started pursuing urban visions. The old European city is centred around a church with a bell, whose centripetal sound brought the community together and marked the hour of death. Collective memory always moves within a geographical framework. Memory has to be grounded in landscape and architecture in order not to get lost.[43] The miners realized that the prospective concepts of new urbanity would blow up their frameworks of history and memory. So they conceptualized an audible monument for the prospective urbanity by combining a colliery signal bell made by Siemens & Halske as an authentic mining artefact with the modern technology of customary church bells.[44]

Figure 4. Mine bell

Source: Author.

The centripetal sound of their mining signal was to impact the future life of the community as well as create a new urban environment with a sound identity of its own. Being aware of the role sound plays in the urban environment, they proposed that their sound monument would strike every hour, like all church bells have done for thousands of years. Unfortunately, the investor who built a shopping mall on the site of the former mining plant — the new promised "urban centre" of Eving — did not grant his consent to the project. He argued that tenants would be annoyed by the noise. This needless noise pollution would cause his property value to decrease. The miners couldn't understand his decision: "When I came to the pit, I heard the signal. It was not unpleasant. You simply heard it…"

[43] See M. Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 134.

[44] See U.C. Schmidt, "Der Bergmann war immer von Signalen umgeben. Das akustische Denkmal von Dortmund-Eving," *Technikgeschichte* 72, 2005, no. 3, pp. 127–147.

As miner Ulrich Kneisel recalled, "we heard this signal for a hundred years, so — it is not that it knocks you for a loop!"[45] The miners didn't realize that there are different sensitive cultures. The investor, who didn't agree to the acoustic monument, followed a new ranking system in the soundscape.

The investor didn't want additional noise pollution. New entrepreneurs promised jobs and wages, they had the authority and the power to censor and legitimize sound and noise without any respect for the cultural tradition of the city district. The investor was in charge, he was the "king" who defined and legitimized sound and noise.[46] In this sonic conflict, the new structures of power became visible as argued by Schafer, who pointed to the ongoing alliance between sacred noise and power.

Interestingly, the conflicts over the sound of Minister Stein bring to mind the disputes over church bells in proto-industrial France after the French Revolution. Historian Alain Corbin has described these conflicts as a power struggle between the religious authority and the state, between the centralist regulation and the local population, between the city dwellers and the rural residents. These struggles for authority represented the French shift to modern times and industrialization.[47] The conflicts over the sound of Minister Stein in Eving at the end of the 20th century represented the structural shift towards the post-industrial Ruhr area.

The miners didn't give up and found a new location for their monument. Now the sound comes from the former pithead bath building. Today, it is one of the hottest regional discotheques. The miners suggested that the bell rang only three times a day, at 8 AM, noon, and 6 PM, almost a secular form of old canonical hours. The discotheque owner sponsors the electricity for the timer so that the bell can mark the disco time at 9 PM. The monument sounds in a very unpoetic way — the sound comes down from the former pithead bath and resonates across a large parking area. The next building is more than 200 metres away and is separated by a street; in the background you can hear a tram and the car noise of a four-lane road. But the Mining Association achieved its goal.

In recent decades, the conflicts over the legitimacy of sound have come to a head. Recently, there have been heated disputes over sensitive sounds that I'm interested in. In Essen, there has been the long-standing legal dispute over a soc-

[45] "Alles erlischt einmal — es kommt darauf an, wie es erlischt" ("Everything once expires — it depends on how it does"). Ulrich Kneisel (Geschichts- und Kulturverein Eving/Grubenwehrkameradschaft "Minister Stein") explains the former shaft signal system and its current significance as an acoustic monument. Interview with U.C. Schmidt and R. Ortmann, 26 June 2003.

[46] See A. Portelli, "Geteilte Welt. Laute und Räume im kulturellen Übergang," [in:] *Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten. Auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern*, eds. L. Niethammer, A. Von Plato, Berlin–Bonn 1985, pp. 220–230.

[47] See A. Corbin, *Les cloches de la terre. Paysages sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIX siècle*, Paris 1994.

cer field called the "Kray-Arena." In Dortmund, there has been the ongoing dispute over the site of the former steelworks with the new Phoenix Lake, as the public appropriation of the urban environment collides with the owners of the exclusive residential property. The Federal Republic of Germany adapted its emission protection legislation to manage the conflicts fuelled by social questions about social displacement and gentrification. But nowhere are so many dimensions of cultural practice and experience of sound and space addressed as in the conflict over the sensitive sound of Minister Stein: memory culture, urban planning, structural change, post-industrial society, participation, identity, tradition and heritage. The sensitive sound of Minister Stein offers an interesting insight into the acoustic production and representation of sociopolitical orders in the past, present, and the future. Although the miners weren't familiar with Schafer's *Tuning of the World*, they followed his dictum: "The unique soundmark deserves to make history as surely as a Beethoven symphony."[48]

Reflecting the Soundscape of the Ruhr

Preparing for field recording starts at home. Then, location recording is all about the physical experience of the space with all our senses — seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, breathing, and touching — before putting on the headphones and turning on the recording equipment.[49] Sounds travel across space and time and are produced by humans, materials, and machines in the industrial complex. Staying focused on sensitive sounds and its recipients while organizing, recording, documenting, listening, and asking — let us conceptualize history based on the sensual formation of "the world." Therefore, it might be said that the knowledge of the materiality and texture of the sonic world in connection with sensorial abilities and ways of perception informs my conception of history and historiography: when asked about the sounds of work in their everyday life, people always rely on their sensually mediated experience. This opens up a different, complex view on the social transformation and its mental formations. Thus, I can make a strong case for experiential history as a complementary tool for social history. In debates about history as text and the epistemological importance of the "linguistic turn" I vote for the "materialities of history."

To this day, the historiography of the Ruhr is structurally androcentric. This also applies to the myths surrounding the Ruhr region, where the master narrative is based on masculinity and male communities. While much of the research focuses on the miner and the blacksmith as archetypal images of the coal and steel industry, I would like to examine whether these deeply rooted pat-

[48] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 239.

[49] See G. Böhme, *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische*, Ostfildern 1998.

terns of representation could also be explained by the symbolism of the soundscape. The loudness of the metal industry symbolized its power and mastery over nature and social progress. Loudness also stood for masculinity, since it was men who kept these noisy machines running. Karin Bijsterveld pointed out that "a higher level of noise stood for an increase in income" and that "noise was enjoyed by the workers as an indicator of the employment opportunities that allowed them to share in the region's progress."[50] The Ruhr area has always derived its self-confidence from its role as a potent and powerful energy supplier for the reconstruction of West Germany. Back then, the workers earned high wages and for the first time, the old utopian demand that a wage paid to a male worker be high enough to support his family seemed to be coming true. But this was also the time when the process of refamiliarization began. According to Robert G. Moeller and his research on women and family in postwar West Germany, the society of the Federal Republic was to be organized in a completely different way than the collectivist German Democratic Republic.[51] Due to the Cold War logic, West Germany developed a normative gender system with a male breadwinner (in the Ruhr area, it mostly applied to the coal mine and the steel mill), and a female housemaker and guardian of the family. After the Second World War and National Socialism women were pushed back into the house, while male work and efficiency, culminating in a noisy soundscape, represented social progress and the prosperity of West Germany.[52]

Conclusion

Working on the *Sound Archive of the Ruhr* has brought us a lot of technical, artistic, and scientific experiences and insights. Over the years, we have met many people: workers, engineers, artists, urban planners, students, and scientists, thanks to the Central European Network of Sonic Environment. Through his work with photographer Thomas Vossbeck, Richard Ortmann has expanded his field recording practice to include the industrial soundscape of Upper Silesia.[53] Our focus remains on sensitive sounds and the meanings people assign to them. Meanwhile, we have also become increasingly interested in the post-industrial soundscape (Ruhr region). For us, the epistemological question still stands: what does the economic, social, and cultural transformation sound like? Our research on the sound-

[50] K. Bijsterveld, op. cit., p. 162.

[51] See R.G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford 1993.

[52] This is the first time such considerations are formulated. It would be interesting to find out how it applies to Upper Silesia and the Polish situation.

[53] See R. Ortmann, op. cit.

scape in the Ruhr area and elsewhere, the interplay of figure and ground, keynote sounds, signals and sound marks structured as low-fi and hi-fi will continue to be driven by Murray Schafer's belief: "The unique soundmark deserves to make history as surely as a Beethoven symphony."[54]

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[54] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 239.

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On Methods and Techniques

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Other than Ethical: STS-Oriented Approaches to Communist Audio Forensics*

Abstract: This article considers the benefits of constructivist approaches to the history of audio forensics. It is argued that science and technology studies (STS) open up a new avenue of research on historical uses of sound recordings in the communist security apparatus and offer a perspective that is considerably different from the mainstream historiographical treatment of the state audio surveillance. This claim serves as a basis for discussing the Czechoslovak programme of audio forensics (1975–1989).

Keywords: audio forensics, STS, science and technology studies, surveillance, sound recording, criminalistics

In recent years, historians of science and technology, media theorists, legal historians, and other researchers have paid increasing attention to the historical developments in forensic science, that is, to the ways in which various scientific methods and approaches were applied in criminal investigations and legal processes.[1] In addition to advances in forensic technologies and analytical methods, scholars have also examined much wider interactions between forensic institutes, courtrooms, universities, political regimes, and cultural concepts.[2] The previ-

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[1] See *Crime and the Construction of Forensic Objectivity from 1850*, ed. A. Adam, London 2020; *Global Forensic Cultures: Making Fact and Justice in the Modern Era*, eds. I. Burney, C. Hamlin, Baltimore 2019; W. Ruberg, "Travelling Knowledge and Forensic Medicine: Infanticide, Body and Mind in the Netherlands, 1811–1911," *Medical History* 57, 2013, no. 3, pp. 359–376.

[2] The current ERC Consolidation Project *Forensic Culture: A Comparative Analysis of Forensic Practices in Europe, 1930–2000* run by Willemijn Ruberg at Utrecht University employs the concept of "forensic culture" to capture the entanglements between forensic science and wider cultural, academic, and political practices. See the project's website: https://force.sites.uu.nl (accessed 21.11.2021).

ous examinations of "forensic cultures" have paid only limited attention to audio expertise in criminalistics[3] and until recently have totally neglected the history of audio forensics in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc.[4] By discussing the historical example of the Czechoslovak Fonoscopy Department,[5] I argue that this scholarly neglect is the result of interrelated historiographical, theoretical, and methodological issues.

Historiographically, the study of sound and hearing in the context of communist surveillance and security policies has focused almost exclusively on the wiretapping and eavesdropping practices of the communist police.[6] The Oscar-winning German film *The Lives of Others* (2006), which tells the story of a Stasi (East-German secret police) agent eavesdropping on a writer and his lover, not only shows how communist audio surveillance has become ingrained in the popular imagination, but it also reflects the mainstream scholarly treatment of the topic. A historical examination of the communist police's sound-based research and listening practices has mostly focused on the ethical questions regarding the unequal relationship between the listener/eavesdropper and those whose voices are being listened to and recorded. This kind of research has often given precedence to the study of dissident cultures and the oppressive practices of the totalitarian regime, which put its citizens under constant surveillance. In this strand of work, the eavesdropping policemen have come to represent the Orwellian Big Brother and sound recordings have often testified to the abuse of government (and later also corporate) power and the violation of people's privacy.

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[3] For the history of audio forensics in the US, see X. Li, M. Mills, "Vocal Features: From Voice Identification to Speech Recognition by Machine," *Technology and Culture* 60, 2019, no. 2, pp. S129–S160; see also *Sound, Law and Governance*, ed. L. Cardoso, special issue of *Sound Studies* 5, 2019, no. 1.

[4] A pioneering work on the GDR's audio forensics research programme has recently been published by the historian of science and technology Karin Bijsterveld: "Slicing Sound: Speaker Identification and Sonic Skills at the Stasi, 1966–1989," *Isis* 112, 2021, no. 2, pp. 215–241. The Czechoslovak programme of audio forensics is examined for the first time in Anna Kvíčalová's "Dissecting Sound on the Quiet: Voiceprint, Speaker Identification and Auditory Objectivity in Czechoslovak Forensic Practice (and Imagination)," under review at *Technology and Culture*.

[5] For the purposes of my research, I translate the Czech word "fonoskopie" as "fonoscopy." I use the hybrid term "fonoscopy" to refer to the historical department and its methods of forensic acoustics.

[6] See S. Schneider, "Democracy and Security in Germany Before and After Reunification," [in:] *Routledge Handbook of Democracy and Security*, eds. L. Weinberg, E. Francis, E. Assoudeh, London 2020, pp. 97–108; *The Stasi at Home and Abroad: Domestic Order and Foreign Intelligence*, ed. U. Spiekermann, Supplement 9 of *Bulletin of German Historical Institute*, Washington 2014; V. Glajar, A. Lewis, C.L. Petrescu, *Secret Police Files from the Eastern Bloc*, Rochester 2016. For a discussion of post-communist surveillance, see, for example, J.L. Larson, "Wild Eavesdropping: Observations on Surveillance, Conspiracy, and Truth in East Central Europe," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 40, 2017, no. 2, pp. 342–349.

While fully acknowledging the importance of this type of research, I argue that by focusing on the political history and ethics of surveillance, scholars have missed the opportunity to explore the historical practices of knowledge production in forensics through the theoretical and methodological lens of science and technology studies (STS) and the history of knowledge. The study of the feedback loop between culture, society, and politics as well as between scientific research and technology, allows us to better understand the ways in which complex cultural and material networks inform sonic practices, listening habits, and audio technologies.[7] In the remaining part of this article, I will discuss the benefits of constructivist approaches to the study of audio forensics in communist Czechoslovakia. I will argue that the STS perspective not only unveils the logic of communist audio surveillance, but more importantly, demonstrates how the new knowledge on sound and hearing was produced in forensics.

The Czechoslovak "Laboratory of Sound"

In addition to the well-known eavesdropping practices of the communist state and secret police, whose main goal was to gather information about the contents of private conversations and phone calls, a different kind of audio expertise developed in some countries of the former Eastern Bloc and so far has not been sufficiently examined by researchers. The aim of the *fonoscopy* programmes of audio forensics, as they were called in Czechoslovakia and Poland,[8] was to determine the identity of anonymous speakers by dissecting their recorded voices into components that could be then "objectively" compared and examined. In doing so, forensic departments combined audio analysis with sound visualizations done by the spectrograph, which promised objective and easy-to-compare results. By briefly discussing the history and practices of the Czechoslovak Fonoscopy Department, I argue that sound recording (as a practice, technological tool, and object of analysis) played an essential role in audio forensics. Not only did it provide

[7] For a discussion of sonic methodologies in science and technology studies, see T. Pinch, K. Bijsterveld, "New Keys to the World of Sound," [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. T. Pinch, K. Bijsterveld, Oxford 2012, pp. 3–35; J. Bruyninckx, A. Supper, "Sonic Methodologies in Science and Technology Studies," [in:] *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sonic Methodologies*, eds. M. Bull, M. Cobussen, New York–London 2020, pp. 201–216; K. Bijsterveld, *Sonic Skills: Listening for Knowledge in Science, Medicine and Engineering (1920s–Present)*, Basingstoke 2019.

[8] The Czechoslovak Fonoscopy Department was directly influenced by the Polish term *fonoskopia*, a forensic method and an independent department developed in Warsaw in the early 1960s. The Polish department relied on the work of Stanisław Błasikiewicz, but its institutional development still needs to be examined by researchers. See A. Kvíčalová, op. cit.; W. Maciejko, J. Rzeszotarski, T. Tomaszewski, "50 lat polskiej fonoskopii," *Problemy Kryminalistyki* 269, 2010, pp. 69–83. For the Stasi programme of audio analysis, see K. Bijsterveld, "Slicing Sound."

new insights into human voice and a means of its technological and aural dissection, but also helped to define the parameters of "objective" legal and criminalistic evidence.

The first attempts to analyze recorded voices for forensic purposes date back to the early 20th century, but a direct impetus for establishing the first audio forensic department in Czechoslovakia came from the idea of "voiceprint" popularized by American engineer Lawrence Kersta in the early 1960s. Kersta's speaker identification is based on the premise that each human voice has such a unique characteristics that speech sonograms (that is, spectrographic images) would be able to identify speakers even if their voices were distorted or deliberately disguised.[9] Although the reliability of voiceprints was criticized in the US as early as in the 1960s as well as questioned by Czechoslovak audio forensics experts, the Fonoscopy Department was established in Prague in 1975 with a strong commitment to sound visualization technologies.[10] In reality, the new kind of audio expertise had relied on the combined use of audio analysis and voice spectrograms since its inception. As a result, the Fonoscopy Department became a one-of-a-kind sound lab and the only place in Czechoslovakia where researchers could systematically develop voice and sound identification methods.

The Fonoscopy Department did not simply copy Kersta's speaker identification techniques, but effectively combined methods from various fields, like acoustics, electro-engineering, phonetics, linguistics, handwriting analysis, as well as music and radio broadcasting. The Czechoslovak audio forensics programme took direct inspiration from the phonetic studies of personal characteristics of speech, which Přemysl Janota pursued at the Institute of Phonetics, Charles University in Prague, in the 1950s and 1960s.[11] Apart from the phonetic methods of sound analysis, including the dissection of voice into phonemes and the measuring of the speech spectrum, audio forensics shared some of its methods and premises with Czechoslovak aviation research, which used speech sonograms to determine the emotional state of pilots.[12] Another inspiration behind audio forensics research in mid-70s Czechoslovakia was the work of phono-amateurs as well as radio and music professionals. The two groups shared their interest in recording technologies, sound authenticity, and aesthetics, which is apparent in their pioneering publication, *The Soundhunter's ABC* from 1974.[13] In addition to studio and indoor recording of speech and music, the handbook also deals with the practice of field recording and the artificial imitation of sounds. The application of directional parabolic microphones in field recording, used mainly to record bird

[9] L.G. Kersta, "Voiceprint Identification," *Nature* 196, 1962, no. 4861, pp. 1253–1257.

[10] A. Kvíčalová, op. cit.; J. Málek, V. Musilová, *Fonoskopie*, Praha 1989, p. 6.

[11] P. Janota, *Personal Characteristics of Speech*, Praha 1967.

[12] A. Kvíčalová, op. cit.; J. Šulc, "Úloha elektroakustické analýzy řečového signálu ve funkční diagnostic psychyckého a fyzického výkonu," *Československá psychologie* 1977, pp. 115–120.

[13] Z. Bouček, I. Rottenberg, *Abeceda lovce zvuku*, Praha 1974.

sounds, was investigated by the secret police in order to draft up a new strategy for the development of eavesdropping and wiretapping technologies in 1975.[14]

However, the preferred way of obtaining voice samples for fonoscopic analysis was neither bugged phone calls nor recordings made in police interrogation rooms, but controlled speech tests. Unlike in the GDR, a systematic database of speakers was not established in Prague until the 1990s, but the analysis of recorded voice samples and their comparison with the voice samples of the suspects lied at the heart of the new fonoscopic expertise. In order for the analysis to be successful, it was necessary to obtain speech samples that would be as similar as possible to the original sound recording (for example, a threatening phone call or a secretly recorded conversation). Those speech samples were produced in a controlled environment by trained fonoscopy experts, who asked the suspects to tell their life stories, read aloud, participate in a conversation or repeat certain sentences in different manners.[15]

Although all those summoned to the Fonoscopy Department to speak to the recording device had formally agreed to participate in the procedure, the power dynamic was clearly not neutral in these circumstances. If one examined forensic audio analysis from the victims' perspective, the findings would most likely demonstrate that the entire recording process was marked by a power asymmetry, where many people were not only wiretapped, but also had to participate in speech tests. By way of comparison, the STS perspective calls attention to a much wider network of instruments, methods, and techniques of listening, which all came together in fonoscopic dissection. Its main focus lies on power dynamics and modes of interaction that occur not only between the state and its citizens, but also across different scientific, cultural, and security domains.

The Fonoscopy Department systematically examined the limits and possibilities of sound analysis, which combined spectrographic images of the voice (showing the pitch and frequency of selected speech components) with expert listening skills. The department staff members were trained to perform a kind of listening that was different from the one required in the secret police's eavesdropping activities. More specifically, they were taught to pay attention not only to what the people in the recordings said, but also to *how* they said it, with special consideration of the speaker's voice timbre, accent, emotional state, age, speech disorders, possible occupation, manner of speaking, and the authenticity of the recording.

STS offer useful tools to describe a variety of instruments and expert skills that contributed to the advances in audio forensics research and open up a new perspective capable of producing a historical knowledge that is different from the one

[14] See file no. A27/191, 1975, p. 22, Security Services Archive of the Czech Republic.

[15] For a detailed analysis of the practices of the Czechoslovak Fonoscopy Department, which is based on the study of archival documents and interviews with the Department's former members, see A. Kvíčalová, op. cit.

usually presented in the studies of communist surveillance. Sound recording, both as practice and material evidence, is approached not only as the final product of audio surveillance, but also as a tool of knowledge. At the Fonoscopy Department, the recorded speech was translated into a visual form through the sound spectrograph and subjected to thorough linguistic and aural analysis. By listening to the recorded samples, the fonoscopy experts transformed their ears into an instrument of applied science and explored the potential of sonic ways of knowing, which was further developed in other contexts.

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Field Recordings: A Manifesto

Abstract: The article focuses on the political implications of field recording (FR) in relation to sound ecology, education, art, and technology. On the one hand, it discusses how FR can protect us as a social tool in a paradoxical relationship between FR as an artistic practice and social networks that motivate alienation. On the other hand, it addresses the difference between what we perceive as sonic properties used for aesthetic purposes and what neural networks compute to create their internal structures in the process of artificial intelligence. This article adopts a preliminary approach to the above-mentioned topics while it seeks to raise questions and awareness. Drawing upon such theorists as Voegelin, Steingo and Sykes, LaBelle, and Agostinho, it adopts a pragmatic perspective on everyday life and its political implications.

Keywords: field recording, political sound, sonic data, sound ecology, acoustic care, sound conscious

Introduction

> [T]he modern soundscape: at one end, that which is beneath notice; at the other, that which cannot be ignored.[1]

This essay emerges from a few moments of realization in my artistic and academic practices. It probably results from fluctuating between different environments, *modi operandi*, and foci of attention. When you work as a sound designer for film and video art, an acousmatic composer, an academic researcher, and a teacher… all topics start to mix and blur. When you work with your ears, your ears never stop working.

In 2017, Brandon LaBelle presented the idea of sound as a "tool of care" at the *Sounding Out of Space* conference in Dublin.[2] This, in combination with the "Building Archives for Evidence and Collective Resistance" presentation at

[1] D. Suisman, S. Strasser, *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Philadelphia 2011, p. 2.

[2] B. LaBelle, "Minor Acoustics," keynote presentation, *Sounding Out the Space: An International Conference on the Spatiality of Sound*, Dublin, 3 November 2017.

Transmediale 2019, raised several questions about sound, art, and politics which I am going to explore in the present article.[3] It is a wide range of different topics which affect me in different ways and concern sound studies. For example, what is the role of a sound artist in the context of technological changes that affect our sonic behaviour and health? How does our relationship with sound change depending on the social and artistic context? Or, for instance, what about the imminent danger of overexposure to sound and hearing damage caused by regular and loud sound events and personal earphones? Can sound art afford contradictions? What does it take for sound to be political?

As a sound maker I wished my practices were more reflective of my political values. Some time ago, I attempted to make an explicit statement with a composition. Although I believe everything is a statement, carries political implications, and results from an active choice, I thought I would be more open about this particular topic in one piece. Due to the nature of the sounds themselves, I thought the message would be clear. It was not. First of all, some people did not even realize what the sound was. Second, even if they did, my point in giving voice to this sound did not come across. I thought that "to listen is to become sensitive,"[4] but it made no difference, even if they realized what it was, and guessed my statement behind it, they remained indifferent to the subject. It seemed that it had no impact on them.[5]

A few years later, I composed a piece for the filmmaker Salomé Lamas within her project *Interventions* (2016). She used stills and fragments from several Portuguese films (both fiction and documentary) for an online exhibition. I was expected to create a composition which would accompany the stills. While watching all these films, I came to the conclusion that each generation used the same strategies and made similar statements. In a way, these films sounded very alike. Eventually, that similitude led me to platforms such as Freesound.org or YouTube in order to listen to sounds of various protests around the globe. From the Arab Spring through Occupy Wall Street to the mass protests in Spain or Greece in 2010. No matter what language, acoustics, or recording technology is used, the sounds of protests are the same everywhere. They all share a moving force, a sense of collective, and a beat. I ended up sampling core sentences from the films (such as "the people

[3] In fact, at Transmediale 2019 it wasn't just the presentations that made me wonder why and how far behind is sound research in the digital era. I also wondered how far contradiction can go when I was struck by the difference between content and practice: during an event filled with presentations about gender issues, which took place at a bookstore filled with literature on feminism, it was unfortunate to see that the sound crew was exclusively male, while the production team was mostly female.

[4] D. Cecchetto, "Algorithms, Affect, and Aesthetic Listening," [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art*, eds. M. Cobussen, V. Meelberg, B. Truax, London 2016, p. 413.

[5] Excerpt can be accessed at https://soundcloud.com/sarapini/cries-miniature-str (accessed 12.02. 2022).

united will never be defeated"/"o povo unido jamais será vencido") as well as iconic sounds from Portuguese culture, such as the sound of marching footsteps that appears in the opening of Zeca Afonso's classic "Grândola Vila Morena" (a hallmark of the Carnation Revolution). But, in spite of the meaning embedded in sounds, the references go unnoticed even by the Portuguese listener, as they become a collective "moving force," sounding like any other protest in the world.[6]

Drawing on these two experiences, I asked again, what does it take for sound to be political? Is the sound of a pig being slaughtered more political than the sound of, let's say, a coffee machine? Does the recording of birds fall more into the category of sound ecology than the recording of my backyard? Does it depend on whether the artist embedded meaning in one or the other? Is it about significance? Symbolism? What about the artistic value that goes beyond this intended significance? For example, where does the value of Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961) lie? Is it about the idea itself — conceptual, compact, and self-sufficient, simple and accessible on one hand, and complex and intricate on the other? Or is it about the acoustic properties of the sound which provide the experience?

And what about all the choices that led me to record the pig being slaughtered? Should I make any political statements while I hold a piece of technology so strongly related to a capitalist structure based on economic and geographic inequalities? Where does my microphone come from, and where does the coffee come from? Who made it for me, and under what conditions? Should we discuss the relationship between politics and sound while buying unethical technology to make our recordings or unethical clothes to speak publicly about these topics? Should we discuss sound ecology, but travel by plane to record nearly extinct species and exquisite locations? Is a recording from a food market in The Hague less political than a recording of Fukushima? In other words, field recording (FR) as an art form in itself should take these questions into consideration.

In this spirit, this article intends to reflect upon our relationship with sound, encompassing both artistic and social practices. What is FR ("for the record") and how does it communicate ("for the ears")? What is sound ecology, what is the political ("for the care"), and what is sonic data ("for the data")? This perspective addresses the political implications of our sound choices (artistic or not), especially in relation to technology, as "each technology carries within it a reflection of the ideology that it was crafted in the context of."[7] The following exposition adopts an elementary approach to the above-mentioned topics.

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[6] This composition can be accessed at https://soundcloud.com/sarapini/riots-and-rituals (accessed 12.02.2022).

[7] Return Fire, "Caught in the Net — Notes from an Era of Cybernetic Delirium," *Return Fire* 4 (supplement), 2016, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/return-fire-vol-4-supplement-caught-in-the-net (accessed 12.02.2022).

For the Record

> In *Sound of Music in the Era of Its Electronic Reproducibility*, Mowitt opens up perspectives for applying Benjamin's concepts to nonmusical sonic artworks as well. For instance, […] the genuineness of an artifact bearing witness to a specific time and place are crucial to the aesthetic of an increasing number of artistic practices that have been emerging across various genres of acoustic art in recent years. These practices share a concern with political issues, and they all address these issues by using field recordings from specific places with particular historical or social significance.[8]

FR is an evolving topic related to multiple media fields. Despite not being considered a field *per se* for a long time, it has belonged to almost every media field. Its origins can be traced back to acoustic ecology with Murray Schaffer popularizing the term "soundscape" and with the idea that the world can be observed — and understood — through sound.[9] It also stems from Pierre Schaeffer's early experiments and his tape recording of a train (1948), which allowed him to manipulate the sound and turn it into something else, anything else. It showed the infinite possibilities of recorded sound. And if this was the foundation of concrete music as we know it, decades earlier, Dziga Vertov had already tried something similar. He called it *Kino Pravda* (1922), a pre-documentation of the coming Industrial Revolution. Later on, his interest in sound resulted in the film entitled *Enthusiasm* (Vertov, 1931), an ode to machines.

Here and there, we find the first artists showing interest in exploring sound's capacity to document its social context.[10] Meanwhile, the accessibility to technology democratized the access to sound recording. It was a slow progression from optical sound and wax cylinders to semi-digital (DAT) and then purely digital (disks).[11] It became portable, which made it a subject of interest across various multimedia without depending so much on economic power. Although FR is not an entirely uncommon practice in film, experimental, and mainstream music (hip

[8] G. Fiebig, "The Sonic Witness: On the Political Potential of Field Recordings in Acoustic Art," *Leonardo Music Journal* 25, 2015, pp. 14–16, https://doi.org/10.1162/lmj_a_00926.

[9] R.M. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester 1993.

[10] In recent years, multiple approaches have challenged the biases of the "pioneer narrative." As Morgan posits, "pioneers narrative can provoke a particular disquiet, intensifying boundaries rather than dissolving them." See F. Morgan, "Pioneer Spirits: New Media Representations of Women in Electronic Music History," *Organised Sound* 22, 2017, no. 2, pp. 238–249, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771817000140.

[11] See, for example, J. Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham 2003.

hop in particular), anthropology, ethnography, ecology, "field recording" is often associated primarily with "sound artists."[12]

That being said, what qualifies a recording as a field recording? Does it have to be made in a field? Indoors versus outdoors? Is a recording of a particular landscape more of a field recording than a recording of the club next door? Is FR always political? These questions seem very reductive. After all, any recording outside a controlled sound studio can be treated as a field recording. As a matter of fact, this is the distinction implied in John Levack Drever's "in-here" and "out-there" formulation of the transition between the controlled and acoustically treated environment and the outer world of unexpected events.[13]

However, it seems that contextualization is the key. If a recordist goes to a train station to record a "wild atmo" for the sound design of a film, it is… a wild atmosphere of the train station. If the same sound is to be presented in a gallery installation, at a concert or in a performance, then it would be a field recording. By acknowledging the political implications of field recordings, one would confirm Lehmann's idea that "political engagement does not consist in the topics but in the forms of perception."[14] By the same token, if the chosen location was more critical and had more obvious connotations with political issues, it would easily fall into the category of political act or sound ecology. It seems that more emphasis is put on making field recordings, especially in hostile environments, rather than on what it actually communicates or how it sounds. In this sense, the political or ecological relevance of a recording lies in the extent to which it contributes to the understanding of the issues it amplifies.

In spite of that, FR should be treated in technical terms, like playing the violin, rather than as an indexical process that conveys meaning through words and interpretations. FR is a technique from the moment we choose which type of microphone we are going to use, and understanding it leads to a specific approach to that sound. Also, FR is a technique as for the way we record — from the way we operate the microphone to the way we choose to approach the recording site. FR is a technique as for the way we have to behave while recording and the way we choose to share these sounds: raw, manipulated, augmented, transformed. FR is a technique because all these choices affect the way the sounds are perceived, and that too matters (as does the content). FR is a technique because it contributes

[12] See, for example, J.L. Drever, "Soundscape Composition: The Convergence of Ethnography and Acousmatic Music," *Organised Sound* 7, 2002, pp. 21–27, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771802001048.

[13] J.L. Drever, "Field Recording Centered Composition Practices: Negotiating the 'Out-There' with the 'In-Here,'" [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art*, eds. M. Cobussen, V. Meelberg, B. Truax, London 2016, pp. 71–80.

[14] H.T. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, quoted after D. Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design Is the New Score: Theory, Aesthetics, and Erotics of the Integrated Soundtrack*, New York 2019, p. 92.

to a shared sonic culture, which is the most direct way to create a society that cares about their ears. FR is cultural agency.

For the Ears

Some time ago, the *Leonardo Music Journal* devoted an entire issue to the politics of sound art (2015), which included a number of articles discussing various historical perspectives on the topic and asking various composers to reflect upon the political engagement of their own works. Based on their reflections, it might be said that this engagement is characterized by two factors: *agency* and *intentionality*. Firstly, agency implies a certain level of subjectivity and contextualization. I suspect, however, this conceals the recording, making it dependent and exclusive. Secondly, the main purpose of FR as a political tool should be its ability to engage, share and embrace context without exclusivity, borders, or intellectual ownership.

Furthermore, the idea of intentionality itself is twofold, as it involves the maker's intentions, which in turn should translate into the receiver's interpretation. This is the same as forcing *poiesis* to become *esthesis*, that is, assuming that the creative processes that generate the work and contain the author's intentions will become the processes that the receivers undertake when receiving the work. Thus, to question intentionality and interpretation is to liberate the work from citationality, which is embodied in the "dogma of intentionalism."[15] Interpretations are assumptions and assumptions are speculative. The "thing" (the sound) becomes the object of the assigned meaning rather than the experience thereof. According to Sontag, "interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there."[16] Additionally, "interpretation is never anything more than a proposal,"[17] which can become a "form of censorship"[18] and a projection of the self, as in Dusman's "individual identity."[19] It is a projection of the "interpreter" onto the "interpreted," mirroring the projection of the "maker" onto the "made." Finally, both intentionality and interpretation imply cultural assumptions, "all mapped by metaphoric implication onto the original binary: Self/Other."[20] Neither intentionality nor interpretation should limit the possibilities of sounds to be something other than the listener's guess.

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[15] M. Bal, S. Marx-MacDonald, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto 2002, p. 180.

[16] S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, London 2009, p. 13.

[17] M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Toronto 1997, p. 11.

[18] Ibid., p. 17.

[19] L. Dusman, "Unheard-Of: Music as Performance and the Reception of the New," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, 1994, no. 2, pp. 130–146, https://doi.org/10.2307/833601.

[20] Ibid., p. 134.

This identification is limiting and closed on its own. It limits sounds to representation, as "signification creates just another piece of oppositional epistemological discourse: 'this' implying 'not-this,' 'that' implying 'not-that.'"[21] The meaning of sound, or the entire sonic experience, is a thought sustained by the listener's intuition.[22] If the work relies upon intentionality, the work is reduced to representing that intention. However, that purpose or intention should either surpass the work and become the experience, or it is not present in the work. Although Nancy notes that to listen is to always be "on the edge of meaning,"[23] to state that the sound "means something" is an effective identification with a possible source, idea or sensation. In line with that, FR should not mean anything other than the experience it provides. If the recording is self-contained, these specific issues would translate into the experience itself.

For the Care

> Sound and music are absorbed by individuals — with varying modes of consciousness and interpretation — and then converted into kinetic and social modes of engaging with others, with the potential to mobilize various kinds of political work in the world.[24]

The possibility of documenting everything has allowed for important advances in our society. Some of them are popular and large-scale and others are minor but very important. For example, showing evidence of attacks denied by political forces in the Syrian conflict. Although the attacks were not covered by the mainstream media, civilians documented everything with their phones and immediately shared the videos on Facebook. By cross-referencing the information in the videos, tracking their geographic location, and synchronizing all the information, they were able to prove the attacks.[25] In a way, it questions the monopoly in surveillance technology: instead of favouring those in power, it gives voice to those affected by it.

Although not a sonic achievement in itself, the rawness of the sound enhances the impact of the videos. The analysis of auditory experiences in the context of vio-

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[21] Ibid., p. 137.

[22] See D. Sheerin, *Deleuze and Ricoeur: Disavowed Affinities and the Narrative Self*, New York 2011.

[23] J.L. Nancy, *Listening*, New York 2007, p. 7.

[24] J. Rodgers, "Approaching Sound," [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, ed. J. Sayers, New York 2018, p. 237.

[25] Paper presentation by Hadi Al Khatib at Transmediale 2019 "Building Archives for Evidence and Collective Resistance."

lence has also proven, according to Ana Maria Ochoa, that "[o]ne of the characteristics of violence is the redefinition of acoustic space."[26] In that regard, "sound [is] not examined as the cause of violent action but rather as symbolic resources that actors can mobilize in processes of violence."[27] In other words, it can and has been used as a so-called "non-lethal" weapon.[28] According to Szendy, and "following Nietzsche, we could say that the extent of the development of their listening is measured by the degree of fear."[29] Thinking along the same lines, Yoganathan proposes the "term aural counterpublics to amplify marginalised voices and soundscapes of resistance suppressed by mainstream news and governmental rhetoric" inspired by Tom Rice's observations on "how prisoners are often active rather than passive listeners to their everyday oppressive soundscapes."[30] And so, sound can advocate both for and against violence. In short, loudness, noise, and technology are tools of power: "Sound, a terra incognita to be explored, is a manifestation of the imagination of power."[31]

This political power of sound had been suggested by Brandon LaBelle in his concept of "sonic agency."[32] Accordingly, the author proposes the idea of "sound as a shelter" which undertakes listening as "a process of inhabitation" and echoes the concepts of space and embodiment. Drawing upon Dyson's "shared sensibility," he proposes a political life affording "dialogical exchange" and sound as "conducive to empathy and compassion." Agency stems from sound's itinerant nature "that explicitly unsettle[s] borders" and therefore shapes a "coming community" held upon a sense of belonging and shared space.[33] In reference to Szendy, Kane states that listening is "a practice whose essence always requires the presence of another: another listener, another work, another performer, another instrument. Listening is never reduced to sensory stimuli, or even a perceptual phenomenology."[34] In other words, one doesn't speak if no one is listening.[35]

[26] L. Velasco-Pufleau, "Introduction: Sound, Music and Violence," *Transposition, Hors-série* 2, 2020, p. 3.

[27] Ibid., p. 4.

[28] See J. Volcler, *Extremely Loud: Sound as a Weapon*, New York 2015. It is also possible to listen to *Sonic Weapons* at https://archive.org/details/alg052 (accessed 15.02.2022).

[29] P. Szendy, *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage*, New York 2016, p. 31.

[30] N. Yoganathan, "Soundscapes of Resistance: Amplifying Social Justice Activism and Aural Counterpublics through Field Recording-Based Sound Practices," *Organised Sound* 26, 2021, no. 2, pp. 201–210.

[31] J. Volcler, op. cit., p. 4.

[32] B. LaBelle, *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*, London 2020.

[33] LaBelle refers to the coming community as a spontaneous gathering of protest groups or to the arrival of refugees. See also G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Minneapolis 1993.

[34] B. Kane, "Review of Peter Szendy. 2008. *Listen: A History of Our Ears.* Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press," *Current Musicology* 86, 2008, pp. 145–155, https://doi.org/10.7916/cm.v0i86.5148 .

[35] This is an analogy to the riddle "if a tree falls in the forest." See S. Pinheiro, J. Rouš, "Reflections on Sound Associations and Sonic Digital Environments," *Resonance* 3, 2022, no. 3, in press.

Salomé Voegelin also proposes the idea of listening as a process of inhabitation as part of her research on the "political possibility of sound."[36] For her, "sound is an alternative perspective, it is a slice of the actual world, sound is a portal to imagination and an access point not only to itself, opening experience towards a sonic materiality, but also to the experience of a radical realism, to the idea of the world not as an absolute real but as an indexical real — the way the world is or the way we perceive it to be is one way which doesn't impede it from being different, something else."[37] This is because sound is a medium of respect for the other — and listening is a form of being attentive and staying connected and a tool of care. From this perspective, both LaBelle's and Voegelin's proposals echo Nancy's view of sound as a medium of sharing.[38] For example, according to Rodgers, "anyone who has joined with others in voicing a collective chant or cheer at a sporting event or political rally, or who has felt empowered by the sonic rush of a high-volume concert, has sensed this process by which sound and music elicit embodied experiences of identity and community."[39] It provides a sense of belonging, shareness, and empowerment. As Barthes posits, "before anything else, the first thing that the power imposes is a rhythm" (a rhythm of life, time, thought, and speech).[40]

In fact, it happens in many different environments. It happens in collective protests, heavily based on the synchronicity of rhythms and patterns.[41] It happens in groups of skateboarders where sound is an undeniable part of their experience, sense of community, and achievements. It is a direct consequence of their actions, which translate into using or not using a certain technique, marking their presence in usually highly reverberant spaces which is also part of their social statement. It also happens in football stadiums where the chants create an atmosphere that empowers both the players and the fans and is different, for example, from basketball events; and, finally, it also happens in work and domestic places, where a combination of several sounds creates an impression of familiarity and habituation (humming fridges, ventilators, backyards, etc.). Therefore, we get accustomed to environments that enhance our sense of belonging.

What does it mean when we delegate this capacity? What does it mean when we actively choose to cover our ears in public spaces, isolating ourselves in a bubble of music, podcasts or phone calls? Why is this more appealing than listen-

[36] S. Voegelin, *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening*, New York 2018.

[37] Paper presentation at Fase in 2016.

[38] J.L. Nancy, op. cit.

[39] J. Rodgers, op. cit.

[40] R. Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, New York 2013. See also H. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, New York–London 2004.

[41] T. Rennie, "Power Struggles: The Politics of Composing with Sounds of Protest," *Leonardo Music Journal* 25, 2015, pp. 17–20.

ing to our environment? Would we walk down the street blindfolded? Because that's how it feels to cover my ears in public: if I cannot hear my environment, I bump into other people, cross the street when I should not (and I see that happening all the time) and most of all, send a message saying "I am not interested in listening to you." Obviously, it is possible to understand the context that made people need to cover their ears in public and to create their "individualized soundworld."[42] But this is about the long-term consequences. And at the same time, we store videos, recordings, and photos of every single step of our way. We isolate ourselves from the people around us, but we share all these moments with remote people. We allow all of our personal information to be collected by applications, grant access to the microphones and cameras in our devices, we expose our private sphere in the public cloud. It seems to me that we constantly live in two parallel realities. As much as I would like to discuss this contradiction, the main question is: what happens to all this data?

For the Data

> Why is it that the sense of sight, in its shift to datafication, is being mobilised and recast through the modern, un-situated observing subject who aims to render the world as knowable through amplification of senses?[43]

What kind of information can sonic data convey? From the artistic perspective, there is a significant boundary between the term "data" (the algorithmic storage of information in neural networks) and sonic data defined by Schaeffer, who suggested that we all listen to the sounds and their sonic content (frequency, pitch, rhythm, gesture, etc.), regardless of their meaning or source. On the one hand, Schaeffer (also Varèse with Wen-Chung, and many others) told us to listen to the acoustic properties and the sonic content without paying attention to what the sound means, where it comes from, etc. On the other hand, the idea of sonic data is to translate sound into some sort of tangible information.

And yet sound can be used in medical diagnostics, while "sonic logging" is commonly used to predict seismic occurrences or to explore oil fields. NASA, for example, invested in sonification to communicate highly complex ideas to a gen-

[42] M. Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life*, London 2000, p. 3; J.L. Drever, "Field Recording Centered Composition Practices."

[43] D. Agostinho, "The Optical Unconscious of Big Data: Datafication of Vision and Care for Unknown Futures," *Big Data & Society* 6, 2019, no. 1, pp. 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951719826859.

eral audience and to make their content more sensual.[44] Their sonification converts data into audible information, usually aiming for harmonies and tones that create a musical experience.[45] This fits with Alexandra Supper's definition of sonification as "the use of nonspeech audio to convey information. More specifically, sonification is the transformation of data relations into perceived relations in an acoustic signal for the purposes of facilitating communication or interpretation."[46] Supper also addresses sonification from a musicological perspective while pointing to the obstacles to its implementation. Since sonification "lacks a comprehensive common language,"[47] it requires negotiation between different fields.

Accordingly, "sonification has been applied to a wide variety of data and phenomena, ranging from seismographic data to election results, from molecular structures to the electrical activity of the brain."[48] And "it has implications for the self-perception, the composition, the contours, and the size of the community: Who may speak for sonification, and who may not? If the goal is to establish sonification and gain acceptance, is it best to ensure its publicity and popularity (e.g., by being very open to artistic contributions) or to appear as a small but highly professional community of experts?"[49]

What is more, Andrea Polli makes the following distinction between different practices of sonic data: audification — "the process of taking a vibrational signal outside the range of normal human hearing and shifting it into the audible range" — sonification — "the process of translating numerical data into sound" — and her own term geosonification — "the sonification of data from the natural world inspired by the soundscape" — that is, including its location and environment.[50] The above-mentioned definitions involve a collaboration between scientists and artists, and since this approach implies converting one thing into another, it becomes an analogy, a "humanization" of the data in order to allow "listeners to experience data through their bodies."[51] But all of these processes rely heavily on analogies and contextualizations, and "the recognition accuracy of an auditory display was increased when users were made aware of the display's music-

[44] See A. Supper, "The Search for the 'Killer Application': Drawing the Boundaries around the Sonification of Scientific Data," [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, eds. T. Pinch, K. Bijsterveld, New York 2012, pp. 249–270.

[45] This is available at https://soundcloud.com/nasa (accessed 14.01.2022).

[46] G. Kramer et al., *Sonification Report: Status of the Field and Research Agenda*, 1997. See also A. Supper, op. cit., p. 253.

[47] A. Supper, op. cit., p. 259.

[48] Ibid., p. 250.

[49] Ibid., p. 266.

[50] A. Polli, "Soundwalking, Sonification and Activism," [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art*, eds. M. Cobussen, V. Meelberg, B. Truax, London 2016, pp. 81–91.

[51] Ibid., p. 88.

al design principles."[52] In this sense, these approaches highlight a fundamental issue — it may be not enough for this sound to be a sound. It seems that it always has to be compared, converted, and treated as music. Especially in the context of electroacoustic music, which still considers Denis Smalley's spectromorphologic analysis analogous to the experience of sound.

After all, everything has to be converted to musical perception, as in fantasy, while this idea of FR as a political manifesto would make sound more relatable. The political advocates exposing what was not obvious to the listener before the listening experience. Without romanticization. This advocacy combines agency and awareness. If the goal is to share an understanding of a situation which would otherwise be inaccessible, sonic data should contain everyday contexts: overload and accumulation. Therefore, the question should focus on the organicity of sound rather than its robotization. And in particular it should address the pragmatic issues of our society: sound education, sound health, and sound behaviours. Therefore, Daniela Agostinho's question is relevant not only for visual studies, but also for sound studies.

Based on Benjamin's concept, Agostinho proposes the "optical unconscious" in the context of Big Data, struggling with visual metaphors. The original concept "proposes that photography as a visual technology offered unprecedented access to hitherto unnoticed phenomena, either too minuscule or too rapid for the unaided human eye to see,"[53] with Agostinho questioning "whether we can take the optical unconscious at play in Big Data, not as a model that extends to Big Data the fantasies of control and mastery offered by modern optics, but as a material-discursive practice that opens up space for the unknown and unknowability."[54] Is it possible to start a discussion of the "auditory unconscious" in a non-metaphorical way, especially if we consider Benjamin's relationship with sound and radio, and the "aestheticizing of politics"?[55] Is it possible to listen for the sake of listening, engaging, and experiencing? Although there is a permanent access to information, sharing media files as well as spreading and storing (un)content, it is necessary to understand what exactly happens to this data and how it is used in different contexts.

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[52] P. Vickers, B. Hogg, "Sonification Abstraite/Sonification Concrète: An 'Aesthetic Perspective Space' for Classifying Auditory Displays in the Ars Musica Domain," [in:] *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Auditory Display, London, UK June 20–23, 2006*, p. 212.

[53] W. Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," [in:] *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934*, eds. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, Cambridge 1999 [1931], pp. 507–530. See also D. Agostinho, op. cit., p. 4.

[54] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

[55] See E.G. Jensen, "Weimar Activism: Walter Benjamin's Work for Radio," [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art*, eds. M. Cobussen, V. Meelberg, B. Truax, London 2016, p. 413.

River of No Return

Drawing upon LaBelle's own proposal of "sonic agency" in combination with Agostinho's "ethics of care," the aim of this exposition was to raise questions about the practical uses and implications of sound, both artistic and social. In fact, my own questions emerged precisely after hearing LaBelle's presentation "Minor Acoustics" in Dublin (2017) and meeting Agostinho at Transmediale (2019), where I finally realized how LaBelle's presentation resonated with me. But my proposal differs from LaBelle's "acoustic resistance" simply because it seeks for a more pragmatic understanding of sound in our everyday life. It seeks for a concrete answer to the question "How can sound actually protect us?" It combines Agostinho's vision of "care," which is heavily informed by feminist theory, and listening practice viewed as a tool of engagement.

Over the past few years, several studies attempted to discuss FR as an artistic practice and explore its possible implementations.[56] A number of artists and theorists managed to address these concerns in specific case studies, such as Susan Schuppli, or Quintero's testimony on Latino urban sound. These approaches, although well-grounded from a practitioner's perspective, do not allow for an objective understanding of the general traces of FR as a technical practice. They fall into the category of subjective approaches, case studies, and intuitive thoughts. Initially, this paper was meant to explore, discuss, and provide a reflection on sound recording (and data) that would go beyond its artistic uses and subjective considerations. It seemed to me it was necessary to acknowledge and embrace the fact that the relationship between individuals, society, and sound has significantly changed over the last few years, or perhaps even decades. Therefore, it seemed crucial to place these discussions of sound, art, ecology, and political engagements within the current social and industrial contexts. An artistic discussion engages with political responsibility and approaches an idea of listening as a tool of care: inclusive, attentive, conscious.

While thinking about this, it occurred to me that the Google search engine has an "image" and even "video" category but no "sound" category. Why is that? Why is sound not useful as a search result and a carrier of information? Particularly in this period, there are more and more lectures, conferences, and talks, and on top of that there is a growing number of podcasts. Why is not all this content categorized and catalogued soundwise? From a purely pragmatic point of view, it seems clear to me that "sound information" simply cannot be as monetized as images yet. Is sound not sensual enough?

For that reason, when I first started this essay I targeted smartphones, social media, and the overload of information of contemporary society as the main

[56] C. Lane, A. Carlyle, *In the Field: The Art of Field Recording*, Axminster 2013; C. Lane, A. Carlyle, *Sound Arts Now*, Axminster 2021.

issues, the so-called digital dementia. These questions sought to explore how the information is stored or used by the companies that own it and how these tools influence and manipulate our social relationships. I wondered what this new society of control actually is and what role sound plays in it. For example, people record and share sounds with each other in group chats, creating a back-and-forth monologue with no interruptions.[57] Isn't that the actual point of sharing a conversation? This alternating way of communication makes listening fragmented. It is not a conversation. How far does this affect our relationships? To what extent are our relationships mediated by these tools? At the same time, what does happen to all this information? Where is it stored and how is it used? What happens to all these media files? Where is the border-line between domestic use and public domain? Despite how much the private sphere was challenged by the periods of isolation, quarantine, and lockdown, the use of these tools voluntarily contributes to the "eavesdropping tendencies of technology."[58]

However, the direction has changed. Mostly because I realized it all starts with the way we educate our ears. It seems to me that very often we do not understand how sound works and how it does what it does. There are many acoustic, technical, conceptual, and artistic misconceptions about sound itself. Perhaps this happens mostly because we take it for granted, because we doom it to interpretation, because we live in an anthropocentric society, and also because our awareness of sound is (contradictory) unconscious.

From my perspective, even sound design and sound film contributed to this miseducation. In sound post-production for film, various strategies are adopted to polish the listening experience or emphasize some qualities for dramatic purposes, for example the sound of a scene is cleaned up and isolated, and the frequency spectrum is adjusted and compressed. We, filmmakers and soundmakers, present a product that has been highly polished and manipulated. It is meant to represent reality and the contemporary environment… but it doesn't. It is misleading. We worship pristine sound. And it contributes primarily to a misconception of space and its acoustics, but most importantly, it creates collective expectations and assumptions about sound culture and sonic experience.[59]

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[57] According to Alexandre Maros, Jussara Almeida, Fabrício Benevenuto, and Marisa Vasconcelos, "over 200 million voice messages are sent by WhatsApp every day in some regions" in 2020. See A. Maros et al., "Analyzing the Use of Audio Messages in WhatsApp Groups," [in:] *Proceedings of The World Wide Web Conference WWW 2020*, New York 2020, pp. 3005–3011, https://doi.org/10.1145/3366423.3380070.

[58] B. LaBelle, op. cit., p. 18.

[59] In another essay, I proposed a take on "film sound syntax." In short, we can think of the clichés that film history has established over the years. Some sounds are purely technical, such as using the sound of closing a door to move to another shot. Others fall somewhere between technical and aesthetic choices, such as the whistling of a kettle of boiling water to convey the idea of growing tension. Yet some of them are meaningful, such as the sound of flies that indicates something disgusting. There are also some habits that have been developed: floors always squeak in quiet

In the meantime, I took part in a project called "Future Landscapes," created and produced by Tereza Swadoschová, Ivo Bystřičan, and Václav Havelka. The project explores critical locations through sound, resulting in different outcomes (a documentary film, a music album, a podcast, and a web archive). In the Czech expedition, we visited a CO_2 storage depository (SPICER in Žarošice), a coal power plant (in Tusimice), a nature reserve with buffaloes, aurochs, and wild horses (in Milovice), and an aquaponics farm (Future Farming, in Kaly). Since I was responsible for the FR, I chose several different microphones in order to approach the sites from different angles and to provide the team with an exquisite sonic perspective. These choices unfolded a relationship with the sites that was very impressive at first, until I realized that I was forging it into the other members. Undoubtedly, the locations were very impressive and rich in their sonic and political topics. However, the microphones I took with me also provided access to the layers of perception which are unusual to the common visitor. With the use of a contact microphone, a geophone, an electromagnetic sensor, a hydrophone, and a 4-capsule cardioid any site exploration will be exquisite and impressive.[60]

In fact, therein lies the contradiction. We neglect our sense of hearing and at the same time, overwhelm it. Everything should be ultra-sensorial, otherwise it is not attractive enough. Sound needs to be immersive (and always has been), virtual (never will be?), interactive, automated, and algorithmic. This is what is trendy and appeals to the masses. And in the fashion of more is less, we keep adding misinformation to something that is not yet fully understood. We keep ignoring audio frequencies that fall outside our audible spectrum and keep forgetting they also affect our body. We should remember that bodies listen as a whole.[61] This choice of microphones unfolds the immense and constant activity going on around us unconsciously.

This is not the same as saying it is unnoticed, because there is a part of us that feels it and notices it, but does not consciously process it. Just because people in the city are used to the sound of traffic doesn't mean it doesn't affect them.[62] The sounds in four locations in the Czech Republic were complex, rich, and capable of a political reflection. However, they were strictly related to the context. This context goes beyond the sounds themselves, almost regardless of them. What occurs to me now is that this kind of exploration and reflection should take place

situations, swings are rusty, hearts beat loudly, cats always purr or meow, dogs always bark in villages, we always hear the microphone feedback, etc. For example, a face punch sound is something the entire "film tradition" was built on. There is an expectation of what it should sound like. Sometimes it can be a valuable, such as in *Raging Bull* (Scorsese, 1980). See V. LoBrutto, "Ben Burtt," [in:] V. LoBrutto, *Sound-on-Film: Interviews with Creators of Film Sound*, Westport 1994, p. 140.

[60] The geophone and the electromagnetic sensor are produced by LOM in Slovakia.

[61] See J. Volcler, op. cit.

[62] H. Jariwala et al., *Noise Pollution & Human Health: A Review*, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319329633_Noise_Pollution_Human_Health_A_Review (accessed 12.02.2022).

everywhere — in our domestic environments, workplaces, and our children's schools. It is easy to look at a big factory and think about the impact of constant exposure to loud sounds. It is easy to dig a geophone into the ground and hear the foreign electric pulses surrounding a herd, but that is precisely why FR can and should be extended to any location, because every location is worth exploring. In order for sound to protect us, we need to listen to what is around us.

Sound is a form of resistance if we choose to listen to it. Drawing upon Foucault's biopower and raw politics, Michael B. Quintero writes: "to make silent and let sound."[63] And so, ultimately, this essay explores how FR is always political. Not only because of the comments above, but also because FR is a witness. A testimony. This is not the same as saying that sounds are factual (or dialectical), because an aesthetic experience is also a political act. Being political should not be confused with making a statement, because actually recording sound is an act of introspection and in my perspective, a field recordist should be invisible and inaudible, with the sound/other being the subject. Being political is being aware that everything is an implied choice.

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[63] M.B. Quintero, "Loudness, Excess, Power: A Political Liminology of a Global City of the South," [in:] *Remapping Sound Studies*, eds. G. Steingo, J. Sykes, Durham 2019, p. 144.

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