RESOUNDING THE VOICE

On repurposing the archival material of voice, from analogue to digital.

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INTRODUCTION

“Music is the art of the hope for resonance: a sense that does not make sense except because of its resounding in itself.”\(^1\)

Resound - from Latin resonare - is to ‘sound again’, it is a sound loud enough to reverberate or a place to be filled with a sound. When we resound the archive, we listen again to the voice resounding “in the external or internal space”\(^2\). In Listening (2007), French philosopher Jean Luc Nancy explores the behaviour of the resounding, and states that sound is “made of referrals: it spreads in space, where it resounds while still resounding in me”\(^3\), referring to itself.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the practice of resounding the archival material of voice, when translating the sound object from analogue to digital. I am focussing on the voice, as spoken word, when the archival object has been temporarily overlooked but preserved.

How can the archival voice refer to itself over time with the artistic practice of resounding?

Exploring the strategies of sound artists as they resound the archival voice, I will analyse how they extract, treat and transmit the semantics of the spoken voice. I have anchored my research on three works, exploring their aesthetic principles: the fragmented voice in Christian Zanési’s Arkheion and in particular Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer (1996); the sonic mise-en-scène in Wajid Yaseen’s Tape Letters (2018); and the direct carving of voice in my resounding of Barbara Hepworth, The Sculptor Speaks (2020).

Nurturing a singular relationship with the past voice-object, the above sound artists bring into existence a sonic portrait when resounding the archival voice. Zanési is engaging with the archived voice of Pierre Schaeffer - his professor of composition - and the legacy of musique concrète whilst Yaseen is representing the voices of the Pakistan community in Great Britain through a multimedia suite, based on the discovery of cassette tapes. I conducted interviews with both practitioners. My resounding of Hepworth’s voice takes its source from a 1961 tape, which I unearthed at the British Library. The intention is to survey the properties of the resounding, examine my relationship to the word I chose to identify my approach, and question its purpose.

\(^2\) ibid., p.8.
\(^3\) ibid., p.7.
1. SOUND. Sounding the voice.

What are the preconditions for resounding?

In the age of ‘technological reproducibility’\textsuperscript{4} - since the recorder itself is an archiving machine - every recording is a priori an archival object, which can potentially resound anew in space and time. To resound, the voice must have been first captured, then stored in a physical container to be held in public or personal archives.

1.1 The voice captured

From the moment, we are born we try to use our voice to make sense of the world aurally. Our voice emission is ephemeral, it is a breathing substance in movement, a living material whose vibration is transmitted through the air. The particles vibrate and collide with one another in a wave pattern as sound waves. When recorded, the reverberating voice becomes entrapped in space and time: a disembodied voice captured on a carrier. The voice, objectified, no longer refers to itself - to its source - but becomes a distinct sound object, which can be played back at a later stage.

The first significant voice recording was made in 1860, by French typographer Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, who captured a rendition of the French folksong \textit{Au clair de la lune}\textsuperscript{5}. Specialist of early sound media preservation, Patrick Feaster states that De Martinville is today credited “with creating the oldest records of aerial sound waves”\textsuperscript{6} with his phonautograph.\textsuperscript{7} Paradoxically these recordings as airborne sounds onto paper were to be studied visually, and never intended to be played back. De Martinville’s sound recordings have since been recognised as humanity’s first recordings of its own voice, celebrated as the patrimony of all mankind. Once the voice has been fixed onto media, that media – the sound object - is to be stored somewhere. Feaster states that:

\begin{quote}
[De Martinville] shared a common goal with the sound archives proper of the early twentieth century when he submitted phonautograms for institutional safekeeping - like them, he sought to validate the study of records of sound, to explore the limits of what could be learned from them, and to preserve the evidence for future consultation.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{5} \textit{By the Light of the Moon}.


\textsuperscript{7} a device that recorded sound visually, to study sound vibrations graphically.

\textsuperscript{8} ibid., Feaster, p. S16.
1.2 Stored, archived and digitised

Sound archiving emerged initially to keep the legacy of the voice of politicians. French researcher Bruno Bossis traces the early use of phonographic recordings with the aim of preservation to the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna (1899) and Berlin (1902), followed by the creation in France of the Archives of the Spoken Word9 (1911) - a landmark in the archiving history - founded by French linguist Ferdinand Brunot. Bossis tells us that the archives’ principal aim was to collect recordings of notable voices as well as the result of ethnographic collects in regional counties.10

Former British Library curator, Marie-Laure Manigand notes that even though recorded sounds were introduced over a century ago, it was only in 1955 that the national collection of recordings was established as the British Institute of Recorded Sound (BIRS), thanks to Patrick Saul’s vision and perseverance11. In 1983, BIRS became a nationally-funded department of the British Library under its current name National Sound Archive (NSA).12 Across the channel, the National Audio-visual Institute13 (INA) was founded in 1975, hosting the Groupe de Recherche Musicale – GRM14 ever since.

From analogue to digital era, voice-objects have become voice-digits. The emergence of digital preservation has greatly contributed to the transmission of our sound patrimony, facilitating access for the public and researchers. I could easily access the audio content of the 1961 Barbara Hepworth’s open reel tape at the British Library because the content had been digitised from its analogue state.

However, digitisation is a durational process, which requires a constant update of formats, as they become obsolete. Head of Technical Services at the British Library’s Sound & Vision Will Prentice states that “if we want our audio heritage preserved sustainably, we need to digitise, and we need to rethink the archival paradigm.”15 Prentice points out the rapid technology evolution, and the vast amount of archival material that keeps accumulating whilst current formats die. Underlining our responsibility in transmitting our sound heritage, Prentice emphasises the need to convert the audio to file-formatted digital data and stresses that “this should be done in multiple copies, in multiple locations, and on multiple storage types.”16

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9 Les Archives de la Parole morphed into the museum of speech and gesture in 1928 and in 1938 it became Phonothèque Nationale, to include phonographic editions.
13 Institut National de l’Audiovisuel - a repository of all French radio and television audio-visual archives.
14 Groupe de Recherche Musicale founded in 1958 by Pierre Schaeffer.
16 Ibid., Prentice.
Digitisation and the ubiquity of digital tools inevitably raise questions. At a time where we are individually daily generating vast quantity of data with our hands-on devices, we can wonder what will remain of our audio-visual footages, messages, photos. What to do with all the voices from the past? Besides how much more data can we carry on storing, and is it sustainable?

We tend to forget that data is being held physically in servers all around the world. The accumulation of data raises concerns such as: the ownership of data, its intangibility - as it can so easily be lost - and finally our state of interpassivity\(^\text{17}\) in facing the digital content through the online experience. We are now creating the archives of the future with our portable devices as we are all archiving to a certain extent, in personal archives, clouds or hard disks, but are we curating?

We are not all equipped with curatorial tools to carefully manage the content we produce as opposed to archivists whose skills lie in contextualising and identifying what makes the material valuable and to whom. Besides, this is a lengthy process, which we happily set aside for later. We think the content we produce is worth keeping in a safe place but we almost never find the time to return to it.

As media theorist Neil Postman puts it:

> “Technocracy filled the air with the promise of new freedoms and new forms of social organisation. Technocracy also speeded up the world (...) And this meant that there was no time to look back or to contemplate what was being lost.”\(^\text{18}\)

And this is where the artist steps in, zooming in and out, magnifying the archival material from another era. Once the voice is archived - shelved or digitised - it becomes a sound object in-waiting, which can at a later stage be reconsidered by the artist, curator or investigative journalist. The artist is claiming the time “to contemplate what was being lost”\(^\text{19}\). By reconsidering the found archival material, the artist reanimates the archival voice, re-evaluates its content, and reveals a new dimension through a newly opened line of communication with the past.

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\(^{19}\) ibid., p.45.
1.3 The voice unearthed

From its ‘in-waiting’ status, the voice is then unearthed, taken out of the box. In my work *The Sculptor Speaks* (2020), the voice of Barbara Hepworth was to a certain extent overlooked since 1961, in-waiting for a new space to resonate.

When we reflect on heritage preservation what often comes to mind are the buildings, made of concrete, but how about the concrete sounds?

PHD researcher at the University of Brighton, Anna Celeste Edmonds calls herself a ‘caretaker’: she is taking care of neglected buildings, thus reviving a lost past. With *Songs of the Sea*, she is resounding the buildings of Brunswick Square, Hove with the support of Echoes - an app which provides GPS locative immersive audio experiences. Edmonds states that buildings become ruined by losing their purpose over time, and so to repurpose the sites, she is working with her voice as a tool for exploration and engagement of heritage. What can be said of a site applies to a work of art. “All the works of the past must be reinvested or disappear”, states artist Asger Jorn in his essay ‘Diverted Painting’ (1959). If not “reinvested” the original work when archived becomes dusty, if not forgotten.

The practice of *resounding* is linked to the recovery of a sound material from the past (discarded vinyls, attic stored cassettes, archived tapes), similar to an archaeological find. Through the recovery and analysis of these sound materials, we can then study the human experience. The field of acoustic archaeology - archaeoacoustic - is concerned with examining the acoustics of archaeological sites by re-enacting the sound environment of the past landscape using digital modelling. Researcher Miriam Kolar defines the field of archaeoacoustics as “re-sounding silenced places and objects”. This applies to the silenced voice-objects: the *resounding*, as a sound practice that consists in unearthing the sound-objects, and re-enacting the voices of the past.

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22. Founding member of the avant-garde movement COBRA and the Situationist International.
24. The study of sound in the ancient world.
2. RESOUND. Resounding the archival voice.

When engaging with the archival material, sound artists have developed aesthetic principles to resound and re-contextualise the archives. These principles are mostly informed by fine arts, with the practice of appropriation – that is using pre-existing objects or images.

2.1 How did archival documents morph into aesthetic principles?

At the beginning of the 20th century, visual artists began to repurpose found and discarded materials. Pablo Picasso and George Braque’s collaborative experiments brought “a new pictorial construction and a new kind of art-making” with the practice of ‘collage’. Notable examples of cut and paste include Picasso’s *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), and Braque’s first ‘papier collé’, *Fruit Dish, and Glass* (1912).

The Dada pioneers made use of found objects - the *readymades* - which they re-contextualise to function as a work of art: Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven picked a rusted iron ring off the street for *Enduring Ornament* (c. 1913); Marcel Duchamp conceived *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), and *Bottle Rack* (1914). In 1918, Kurt Schwitters produced his first abstract collages with the *Merz Pictures* series - Merz being a “nonsense word invented to describe his collage and assemblage works based on scavenged scrap materials” leading to his monumental three-dimensional assemblage in his own Hannover flat, *Merzbau* (1933).

Fig. 1: *Enduring Ornament*, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1913.

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The extensive use of collage and mixed media was taken up by the Surrealist movement. Notable examples include Max Ernst’s *Dadaville* (c.1924), which uses an oil painted plaster and cork on canvas; Claude Cahun’s *Unavowed confessions*[^30] (1930), a series of photomontage collaging symbols; Meret Oppenheim’s *Object* (1936)^[^31], taking the domestic symbolism of a cup and saucer by covering it in fur; and Salvador Dali’s *Lobster Telephone* (1936), a humorous collision of the two objects.

In the late 1950s, the use of banal objects found in everyday life appears in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, for instance in *Bed* (1955) - from his series of ‘Combine’[^32] - in which he re-uses a well-worn pillow and quilt; and Jasper Johns’s *Flag* (1954–1955), a collage of paper, encaustic oil and fabric[^33]. Rauschenberg and Johns precipitated the 1960s Pop Art movement, with Andy Warhol’s notable appropriation of objects in his series *Campbell’s Soup Can* (1961).

Researcher Ernst van Alphen traces back to the 1960s the increasing use of archival principles by visual artists, “to inform, structure and shape their works”[^34]. The art of gleaning the archives has been explored vastly in contemporary art, since the art world “caught archive fever”[^35].

In 2008, Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor assembled the exhibition *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, at the International Center of Photography, New York. The exhibition presented works by leading contemporary artists such as Christian Boltanski, Tacita Dean, Sherrie Levine, and Andy Warhol who use archival documents in their practice of photography and moving image. In the foreword for the exhibition monograph, Enwezor states that:

> *Archive Fever}*[^36] explores the ways in which artists have appropriated, interpreted, reconfigured, and interrogated archival structures and archival materials. The principle vehicles of these artistic practices – photography and film – are also pre-eminent forms of archival material.”[^37]

Enwezor underlines how appropriation “was at the forefront of the postmodernist dialectic in contemporary art that sought to obliterate the space between an original and its copy”[^38]. That obliterated space raises questions of originality and authorship, when analysing the new work born from the existing one. In sound, the emergence of the digital sampling in the 1980s accelerated and crystallised the issue of authorship and copyright. If we could appropriate a found object, we could

[^30]: *Aveux non Avenus*.
[^38]: Ibid., p.42
appropriate a sound-object. Recycling the recordings of the past is at the core of plunderphonics - a term coined by John Oswald in 1985 - that is the practice of making new music out of previously existing recordings.

Answering to the question on how to deal with the vast quantity of music by composers of the past, Chris Cutler answers that:

Until 1877, when the first sound recording was made, sound was a thing predicated on its own immediate disappearance; today it is increasingly an object that will outlast its makers and consumers. It declines to disappear, causing a great weight of dead music to press upon the living. What to do with it? An organic response has been to recycle, an answer strenuously resisted by traditional music thinking.

In ‘Plunderphonia’ (1994), Cutler compares visual and sound practice in terms of importation of readymade materials, and concludes that in the visual arts, “montage, collage, borrowing, bricolage have been endemic”. However, in the sound world, Cutler states that we had to wait for John Cage with Imaginary Landscape No1 (1939) to bring a gramophone record into a public performance. For Cutler, composers have been slow to exploit recordings mainly due to difficulties escaping their roots in music notation; unlike Pierre Schaeffer who, from a radio engineer background, exploited the potential of recordings in the compositional process.

In 1948, Schaeffer makes his first concrète pieces by manipulating records. French researcher Bruno Bossis states that the first encounter of Schaeffer ‘s musique concrète with voice is with Study No5, the saucepan study (1948), a piece conceived from discarded outtakes of renown French actor Sacha Guitry. On the process, Schaeffer explains that:

the inclusion of vocal elements has tempted me for a long time (...) There are still old forgotten records lying around in a studio. The one that comes to hand contains the wonderful voice of Sacha Guitry (...) But the recording has been interrupted by the continuity girl’s coughing, which explains why the record was rejected.
I will now explore the *resounding* aesthetic principles of three works based on pre-existing recordings: the fragmented voice in Christian Zanési’s *Arkheion* (1996); the sonic mise en scène in Wajid Yaseen’s *Tape Letters* (2018); and the direct carving of voice in my resounding of *The Sculptor Speaks* (2020) - three sonic portraiture. I will investigate how these artists nurture a singular relationship with the past voice-objects. American multidisciplinary artist Renée Green in ‘Survival: Ruminations on Archival Lacunae’ (2002) asks:

> how can a relationship with the past exist in which memory functions as an active process, allowing continual reconsideration, rather than as a form of entombment, to which archives and museums are sometimes compared?\(^{45}\)

2.2 Christian Zanési: *Arkheion*, an existential excavation site

The content of this chapter was gathered from a conversation with French composer and former artistic director of GRM Christian Zanési.46

a) Archives and transmission


I will focus on examining *Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer* (1996) because of the compositional lineage established with Zanési, as a former student of Schaeffer.

*Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer* is a 16 mn composition that sits at the border of electroacoustic and radiophonic composition, a sonic portrait as an homage to the musique concrète founder. Zanési applies directly the principles of musique concrète to Schaeffer’s voice, engaging with his legacy, at its core the manipulation of the recorded material - in this case the voice. Zanési explains how he treated the meaning of the voice as a ‘sound object’, and underlines the necessity to listen to the voice-object, to identify its musical structure, rhythm, height and speed. In the composition, when Schaeffer is heard saying “it is the first time that we could isolate [a sound] with a record player”47, Zanési demonstrates the isolation of the voice material itself. Following Schaeffer’s instructions “avoid what is figurative”48, Zanési steps away from the representational by processing the original crackles from the archival tapes, amplifying them to form an incandescent abstract texture.

Zanési underlines the importance of his work environment - the radio studio at GRM - when composing *Arkheion* as he was spending a great deal of time listening to many recorded voices of the past.49 By working with archives, Zanési’s intention was “to transmit Schaeffer’s experience of musique concrète - initially proposed in 1948 - still relevant today: making music from the recorded sound.”50

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47 “c’est la première fois, même avec un tourne disque, qu’on pouvait isoler”.
48 “éviter ce qui est figurative”.
Founded in 1958 by Schaeffer\textsuperscript{51}, the GRM later joined ORTF\textsuperscript{52}, the national agency providing public radio and television in France. In 1975, following the dismantlement of ORTF, GRM integrates INA, the National Audiovisual Institute\textsuperscript{53}, a repository of all French radio and television audio-visual archives.

With the merger of INA-GRM - a built-in transmission body - Pierre Schaeffer consolidates the relationship between the archives and musique concrète. The repurposing and manipulation of the audio signal - from fragments of recordings - is linked to the preservation of sound material in the first place.

The practice of resounding the recording can be envisaged as a perpetual reconsideration and transmission: Pierre Schaeffer reworks Guitry's voice in 1948, and in 1996 Schaeffer himself is being resounded by Zanési. The resounding of archives acts as a recognition of lineage through sound.

b) Musique concrète: recuperation and détournement

Christian Zanési states that "in the DNA of musique concrète, there are two key components: recuperation and détournement".\textsuperscript{54}

The recuperation of sound came from the recuperation of the support itself. Zanési reveals that there used to be a recycling bin located in the GRM studio at Maison de La Radio. Radio engineers used to record on soft wax records but these records were not soft at all, they were stiff with no possibility of re-cutting. When the recording had failed, it was discarded. Eventually the accumulation of discarded records would be sent back to the factory, to be melted again, and another disk was made from it. If we could recycle records, we could recycle the audio content too. From the recycling bin, Schaeffer fetched a discarded record with the voice of Sacha Guitry and made his notable piece No5, the saucepan study (1948)\textsuperscript{55}.

Détournement is “the appropriation of existing words, images, or sounds in new, often critical configurations”\textsuperscript{56} - developed by the Letterist International, then championed by the 1950s movement of Situationist International\textsuperscript{57}. As examples of détournement, Zanési cites the influence of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades on sound experimentation, and the technical détournement of the record player with Le sillon fermé\textsuperscript{58} - a technique developed by Pierre Schaeffer. Hijacking the original tool for

\textsuperscript{51} GRM was previously GRMC, Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète, co-founded with Pierre Henry, 1951.
\textsuperscript{52} Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.
\textsuperscript{53} Institut national de l'audiovisuel
\textsuperscript{54} “dans l'ADN de la musique concrète, il y a deux éléments: la récupération et le détournement”.
\textsuperscript{55} Étude No 5, Étude aux Casseroles.
\textsuperscript{57} with for central figure French theorist Guy Debord.
\textsuperscript{58} locked groove technique creating repetitive patterns, with the needle falling in the same spiral like a cutting error.
another purpose, Schaeffer created repetitive patterns from the needle falling endlessly in the same spiral, like a cutting error.

Zanési underlines the major discrepancy between the practice of fine art and music in the interwar period. When musique concrète emerges in the late 1940s, it immediately connects with modernity: here comes a radical sound movement in synch with the latest innovative developments in art. The core principles of borrowing and rerouting sounds place musique concrète ahead of the instrumental music of the time, far too obsessed with musical structuralism in its notation. With musique concrète, composers experiment applying fine art techniques to sound, working with its plasticity as a malleable and expandable material.

c) The fragmented voices of Pierre Schaeffer

Zanési reveals that Arkheion stems from the experience of aging. Surveying fifty years of archives, Zanési thought he could reconstitute a text using Schaeffer’s voice from over the years: to hear a voice that ages over one same discourse. The outcome could have been astonishing: an aging voice, contrasting with the grain of the recording getting younger through time. This fascinating idea was abandoned for two reasons, first the microphones in the 1950s were already of good quality, second Schaeffer’s voice did not age enough to sustain Zanési ’s original conceptual idea. However, the idea of multiplicity remained through the title ‘Les Voix’ referring to the many voices and characters of Pierre Schaeffer: the professor he knew through his studentship; the colleague at Maison de La Radio; the director of institution, the writer, composer, broadcaster…

Zanési’s intention was “to scatter” the voice and present the several facets of Pierre Schaeffer. Zanési was hoping that through the prisms of all these fragmented voices a more faithful portrait would emerge. The voice fragments were sourced from various tapes and records with a spirit of collage - the aesthetic of fragmentation fitting the required narrative of multiplicity. As previously discussed, fragmentation in art emerged at the beginning of the early 20th century with collage experiments; sound practitioners joining the cut and paste technique much later, as the audio technology was not yet available for it.

59 “éclater”.
d) Liberation from authorship


When Zanési began working with Stockhausen’s voice, the issue of copyright was raised by his colleagues. Zanési felt conflicted, “one only knows what the project is about, once the work is done”; he could not approach Stockhausen to request authorisation. This issue completely blocked his creative process, confirming John Oswald’s notable motto, “if creativity is a field, copyright is the fence”.60 And so, to liberate himself in the compositional process when reworking the iconic voice, Zanési conditioned himself in believing that Stockhausen was dead.

Zanési reveals that in the early days of musique concrète, the concept of sacred oeuvre was quite vague. At GRM, Schaeffer would often ask Pierre Henry to re-arrange some of his pieces according to the needs of a production, operating with a lack of reverence, a simple *bricolage* approach. The historical dimension did not matter much at the time; archives were kept but there was not yet an identified strategy of archival preservation, the process was mostly utilitarian. It is François Bayle - composer, in charge of GRM in 1966 - who carried out the task of organising the works, making the legacy of GRM sustain the years.

e) Zanési and the studio: an existential excavation site

“The studio is a heuristic place”61, states Christian Zanési. It is a workplace fostering a hands-on approach to self-discovery. What is revealed for Zanési is a new understanding of himself, “a new awareness”62: the compositional process as an existential quest. However, working from archives was also disturbing, leading Zanési to question his own impermanence throughout the archival research.

In the field of history, the heuristic designates the science that allows the historian, to research and prioritise the documents used in a research project - here a work of art. This practice based on historical documents is related to the archivist practice. With *Arkheion*, Zanési is reorganising the sound archives of two historical figures crossing the border from sound-artist to artist-archaeologist. In the search of discovery, the studio stands as an existential archaeological site in which the composer excavates, surveys and analyses voice signals, with a view to learn more about the past and himself.

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61 “Le studio est un endroit de l’heuristique”.
62 “Une prise de conscience nouvelle”.

Zanési insists on the importance of keeping awareness\(^{63}\) in the studio, and states that “we must prey for sounds, like a hunter”. Maintaining an on-the-edge attitude is key whilst welcoming serendipity for when, in a rare mystic moment, “the spirit manifests itself\(^{64}\). Zanési proclaims that “the archives are in movement”\(^{65}\), and adds that “we often believe that a work from the past - an archive - is fixed for ever. However, what is not fixed is the context”. The archival voice, a moving entity, evolves accordingly to context and time, like a ghost. Jacques Derrida states that the cinema is “the art of allowing ghosts to come back”\(^{66}\); so is the practice of resounding the archival voice. From De Martinville’ s oldest records of serial sound waves to the digital transmission of audio signal, the practice of resounding lets the voice of the past speak again - play back. The resounding as an “hauntological”\(^{67}\) process is liberating the magnetic presence of the archival voices. Curator and producer, Al Cameron states that “media technologies are related from the start to the idea of ghost returning”\(^{68}\). Phonograph inventor and spiritualist Thomas Edison saw the phonograph as a use to capture the voices of the dead - their waveform as a disembodied voice - haunting us. Drawing from Derrida’ s philosophical concept of hauntology, Al Cameron explains that:

> We have invented a time where it is no longer about going forward to the future, with chronology, but that maybe we are now going back, it is a return of the ghost – the voice of the dead - but it is also a new reappearance.\(^{69}\)

With *Arkheion*, Zanési activates the reappearance of Schaeffer and Stockhausen, and establishes the compositional process of resounding the archives as an existential quest.

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\(^{63}\) “être aux aguets”.

\(^{64}\) “comme si l'esprit se manifestait”.

\(^{65}\) “les archives sont en movement”.


\(^{67}\) a portmanteau of haunting and ontology, introduced by J. Derrida in his 1993 book *Spectres of Marx*.


\(^{69}\) Ibid., Cameron.
2.3 Wajid Yaseen: *Tape Letters*, the resounding as social sculpture

The content of this chapter was gathered from a conversation with British sound artist Wajid Yaseen.\(^{70}\)

Examining the archive art phenomenon at the turn of the 21\(^{st}\) Century, researcher Sara Callahan highlights key notions when working from archives: the need to construct or evaluate a mutual narrative; a quest for historical truth-claims; and the performativity of the archive, considered to change, “from a fixed indexical trace with a direct link to a frozen past, toward a performative, active site”.\(^{71}\) I will explore how Wajid Yaseen activates the archive into a performative archive in action.

\(\text{a)}\) Migration on tape

Led by Yaseen with the collective Modus Arts\(^{72}\), *Tape Letters* (2018) is a project that sets:

to unearth, archive and *re/present* to the public a portrait of the cultural heritage of Pakistani immigrants who settled in Britain between 1960-1980, commenting on their experiences of migration and identity as revealed through their use of audio cassette tapes as a mode of long-distance communication.\(^{73}\)

The term “*re/present*” operates on two levels, the presentation anew of the recovered cassettes and the representation of the Pakistani community through a multimedia suite: an online platform, an app and a sound installation. *Tape Letters* draws from Yaseen’s family personal archives. His late father dedicated himself to crafting homemade cassettes, on which he performed and recorded devotional hymns - *na’at*.\(^{74}\) Rummaging through the substantial sound legacy left by his father, Yaseen found another cassette, marked with somebody else’s name. On this cassette, a message had been recorded by a relative. This was the cassette that would ripple into the restoring force of *Tape Letters*, a *resounding* tale of “migration on tape”.\(^{75}\)

The arrival of the Philips cassette tapes in 1963 and domestic tape recorders provided an affordable mode of communication: cassettes could be sent between families who would gather, and listen to the entire conversation of relatives from home. The cassettes served as a carrier of narrative, a valuable

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\(^{70}\) via skype, 30 April 2020. See Appendix II, p.54.


\(^{74}\) poetry in praise of the Islamic prophet, Muhammad.

\(^{75}\) See *Tape Letters*, [https://www.tapeletters.com/](https://www.tapeletters.com/), (accessed 1 September 2019).
document, behaving - as Yaseen states - as an accomplished “sonographic snapshot” of the migratory experience.

With *Tape Letters*, Yaseen evaluates his cultural heritage and identity for the first time - as a British Manchester-born. Yaseen recalls how “the experiences around the partition\(^{76}\) leading to the largest mass migration in modern history was shielded from us”.

**b) Sonic mise en scène and re-enactment**

In *The Archival Impulse* (2004), art historian Hal Foster looks at the contemporary phenomenon of artists-as-archivists at work internationally in contemporary art, and states that:

> archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favour the installation format.\(^{77}\)

With *Tape Letters* installed at the People’s History Museum in Manchester\(^{78}\), the cassettes are *resounding* in space from their stored status. Yaseen explains that the exhibition was a combined visual and sonic gallery: a display of interactive screen monitors, the actual cassettes, and the surround sound installation consisting of a set of eight speakers.

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\(^{76}\) partition of India, 1947.


For the surround sound installation, six sound pieces were created from the cassettes and their translations, as well as from interviews and field recordings.  

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 3:** Surround set-up. *Tape Letters*, People’s History Museum, Manchester, 2018.

There are two strands of dissemination: the reconsideration and *resounding* of the original cassettes, and the re-collection on the process and experience of making and exchanging these cassettes - as ‘stories’, which are also available on the app.

The main concern for Yaseen when dealing with the sonic material was related to its language and its understanding across a broad audience. The exhibition had to represent the Potwari\(^{80}\) language but also be accessible to non-speakers. The eight-channel surround set up allows for a multi-language presentation isolating the narrative voices in a sonic mise-en-scène. For each sound vignettes, Yaseen conceived an astute method of weaving languages, mostly Potwari - occasionally Urdu\(^{81}\) - with English, by re-enacting, and staging the narrative across the installation space, across the years. By doing so Yaseen reactivates the archive into a performative-archive. Researcher Ernst van Alphen states that the archives are no longer considered to be the passive guardians of an inherited legacy but instead active agents that shape personal identity and social and cultural memory.\(^{82}\)

\(^{79}\) exchange of emails, 9 September 2019.

\(^{80}\) Potwari can also be spelt *Pathwari*, *Pothohari*, *Potowari*. Spoken in the far north of Punjab, as well as in most of the Pakistani territory of Azad Kashmir and in western areas of the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

\(^{81}\) the official national language of Pakistan.

With *Brought Them Back*, Yaseen stages a dialogue between father and son. Yaseen interviewed Mohammed Zareen on his listening experience and “recording behaviour in response to the cassettes he received from his family in Pakistan.”\(^8^3\) The interview was then transcribed, and translated from Potwari to English, for his son to recite in English. This multi-facets content is then diffused over the eight speakers in a circle, splitting between the interviewer’s questions - Yaseen - placed in two speakers, the interviewee’s voice - the father - in three speakers and the son’s recitations, in the remaining three speakers. The son’s voice - Northern, working-class, British Pakistani - reveals the migratory journey, how migration moulds the voice, and “how the primary language tends to differ between parent and offspring”\(^8^4\). The migration tale is subtly encoded and revealed through re-enactment, and through the sound spatialisation of the installation.

*Lett Me Listen* is based on a correspondence of a hundred of cassettes between Asim and Asma - at the time engaged but separated by distance. Two decades later, the two lovers - now married and living in Bradford - have re-enacted their own words from Urdu to English. In the installation, both Urdu and English versions are paired to convey a multi-dimensional portray of their relationship and journey over time and continent - an enduring love.

*Something Else Happened* is based on the communication of two sisters via cassettes. The original content - from Zareena’s cassette - is played through the eight speakers, then it is simultaneously re-enacted in English by her daughter, whose accent is Canadian, revealing again the morphing effect of migration on language. The piece then expands with recitations of the same audio clip by acclaimed Pakistani poet Ehsan Akbar, Yaseen’s son, and various extended family members, with the voices alternating through various speakers. The multi-diffusion set up is adequate to transmit multiple voice-signals, but also to transfer and share memories through re-enactment and recitation.

*The Spaces Between* is informed by the inherent errors of home-cassette making due to the mechanical gestures associated with the cassette controls, and “includes all the mistakes taken from several cassettes in the *Tape Letters* archive.”\(^8^5\)

With *Markets are Markets*, Yaseen captured field recordings from open-air markets in Pakistan and in the U.K., and then collided the two for the exhibition. Starting from the audio similarities of the two recordings, the sound of the Pakistani market gradually fades out to leave the British market.

From these recovered archival materials - a memory material re-assembled - Wajid Yaseen is operating as an artist-anthropologist juxtaposing the past and the present, relocating the audio signal in time and space. The memory is being reconstructed from the archives to evaluate the mutual British-Pakistani

83 *Tape Letters* sound installation handout.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
narrative. When working from archives, the question of authenticity to the original material is at the centre of the resounding practice. For Yaseen, the main concern was to transmit the message, too much digital treatment on the voice itself would have lessened the impact of the veracity he is looking for. The linearity of the original object - the cassette as a letter - its narrative and sense of embodiment had to be maintained. “It has to feel real” emphasises Yaseen.

c) The sonic writing of language, a social sculpture

As well as the behaviour of sounds as a resonance in a sound space, Wajid Yaseen is interested in the social context of sound.

When Yaseen began to survey the body of cassettes, what was revealed was that the language Potwari was thoroughly present. Potwari is a transitional language that sits between Punjabi and Hindko, it is a mountain language transmitted orally with no written tradition. Most of the people who speak this language come from an underprivileged social background, mostly illiterate; as opposed to the more privileged Urdu speakers. Yaseen underlines the importance of publicising the language itself - Potwari - through the installation as a stand to Urdu being invariably the language of public events in Pakistan, so that the Potwari community can hear in the public space their own language diffused.

The Tape Letters cassettes do not only build a transmission bridge across continent, as long distance emissive between families, they allow the community to correspond by writing and printing sonically their words: cassette as sonic writing, a communication devoid of class privilege - the written authority. Sound artist Thor Magnusson has researched extensively sonic writing, that is “when our machines begin to write sound, and sonic writing shifts from symbols (theories and notes) to signals (grooves, magnetism, digits)”. For our purpose, with the use of the cassette recorder, the sonic writing shifts from symbols - language writing systems and vocabulary bases - to signals - the magnetic tape of the cassettes. Yaseen states that “the activity of making these home-cassettes is a working-class phenomenon”. He explains that some of the Urdu speakers Pakistanis - well educated - involved in collecting the material for Tape Letters were not that emotionally affected by the project, and did not grasp how significant it is in contributing to portray the Pakistani society beyond its class inequality.

Yaseen’s Tape Letters shares a common denominator with Audio Arts, whose goal was to aurally represent the artists’ voices. Founded by William Furlong and Barry Barker, Audio Arts (1973-2004) was a sound magazine of recorded interviews with artists in a series of cassette editions. Art historian Mel

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86 the official national language of Pakistan.
Gooding, in ‘Audio Arts: The Archive as a Work of Art’ (2010), underlines the importance of transmission through the aural space. Gooding states that “the written and printed word has been much privileged in the discourses of art” for its relative permanence and easy dissemination, but inevitably belongs to the educated elites, whereas with sound - a primary medium - “we are touched by it: it enters us by way of physical sense”.

Resounding these cassettes contributes to the aural transmission of the ‘printed’ voice, when knowledge and heritage is transmitted beyond the printed format. The resounding functions here as a social sculpture: from the accumulative sound objects to the multi-language and multi-directional transmissions, it is a transformative-tool of society, shaping the British-Pakistani cultural heritage.

Joseph Beuys created the term social sculpture to embody his understanding of art's potential to “mould and shape the world in which we live: sculpture as an evolutionary process; everyone an artist.” For Beuys, the social sculptor is an artist who creates structures in society using language, thoughts, actions, and objects. Here the objects are sound objects - tape letters - with Yaseen as social sculptor. By re-enacting the archived messages, the protagonists from the cassettes become part of the active artistic process themselves, as re-creators of the self. As Ernst van Alphen puts it, “archives are no longer passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested.

Concerned with the transmission for future generations, Yaseen has embedded in his aesthetic practice a preservation strategy. From the pilot version produced in 2018, twenty cassettes and forty interviews have so far been collected from donations, with the plan to take Tape Letters nationwide in 2021, by expanding the search and acquisition of cassettes, collecting further interviews, and re-exhibiting. Partnering with the Bishopsgate Institute Library in London, Wajid Yaseen is assembling from the donated surviving cassettes, an archive-in-action, which will expand and breathe once more cassettes are unearthed.

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89 ibid., p.8.
90 a theory developed by the artist Joseph Beuys in the 1970s.
93 at the time of this interview.
The works of Christian Zanési and Wajid Yaseen demonstrate two distinct approaches on the temporal level, one posits a fragmented arrangement of the voice; the other a linear restitution of narrative. Representing the voice of the past, is at the core of both endeavours. Zanési is plundering from various archives with the technique - inherent to musique concrète - of collaging and carving the recorded voice material; Yaseen is presenting the original sound object, re-contextualised and exhibited in its entity and continuity. However, their practice is linked by a common feature, the necessity of transmitting the message.

The resounding practice can be envisaged as an homage: to the voice of the icon - Zanési with Schaeffer - and an homage to the anonymous voices - Yaseen with the Pakistani community in *Tape Letters*. When the resounding of archives becomes a public recognition of lineage and identity through sound.
2.4 Olivia Louvel: *The Sculptor Speaks*, direct carving

The intention is now to explore my relationship with the term *resounding*, which I chose to define my practice when reworking a 1961 tape by British sculptor Barbara Hepworth.

![Image: Original 1961 tape, The Sculptor Speaks.](image)

Recorded by Hepworth herself in her workshop in St Ives, the tape’s initial purpose was for a pre-recorded talk with slides for the British Council. Having unearthed the tape at the British Library, I have designed for it a complete new sound environment using Hepworth’s voice as a major element in the composition, carving directly her voice. Hepworth’s voice temporarily muted, in-waiting for a new carrier, is now sounding again into a new space. *The Sculptor Speaks* (2020) was premiered in its first iteration on Resonance Extra, on the 10th of January\(^95\), followed by an audio-visual iteration, published online.\(^96\)

a) Direct carving and temporal linearity

It is perhaps because I mostly work in the concrete, manipulating sound fragments, from a musique concrète lineage that I have embarked on *resounding* this tape.

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In my resounding, the whole original material is being reworked. The link to the original purpose is not dissimulated. When Andy Warhol reworks the imagery of icon Marilyn in *Marilyn Monroe* (1967) with a series of screen-prints portfolios, each portrait has a singular coloured background. I could have fragmented Barbara Hepworth’s voice as a collage, but I chose to maintain the linearity of the original material over a renewed background.

My practice is built upon a long-standing exploration of the voice, sung or spoken, and its manipulation through digital technology. Working with AudioSculpt⁹⁷, and GRM Tools Evolution⁹⁸, I have sculpted the voice directly on its graphical representation. Applying principles of sculpture to Hepworth’s voice to manipulate its texture, I have carved directly her voice as material. Introduced by Constantin Brancusi and adopted by Barbara Hepworth, ‘direct carving’⁹⁹ is an approach where the actual process of carving suggests the final form. The carved sculpture is no longer based on a preconceived model, but is leading to simple forms, exposing the material itself, resulting often in the abstract.

The voice of Barbara Hepworth is incredibly melodic. Her Yorkshire accent had faded in favour of a BBC received pronunciation, which can perhaps appear dated. The question was how far do I allow the abstraction of the words. The message conveyed - a formidable insight on her creative process- needed to be transmitted. I constantly negotiated between the semantic voice and the emergence of an abstracted voice - a sculptural entity.

The compositional process of *resounding* is inevitably at the centre of a tension, oscillating between preserving the archival material and, touching it to manipulate it, intercepting the audio signal with my digital tools.

b) The *resounding*, a transformative-tool

This digital manipulation operates “a changed status”⁹⁰ to the original sound object. Curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud has championed such practice under the term of “postproduction”. Bourriaud observes that:

> since the early nineties, an ever-increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of pre-existing works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products.⁹¹

Bourriaud emphasises how it is no longer a matter of elaborating a work of art from a raw material but a matter of working with objects already in circulation on the cultural market: objects informing other

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The practice of *resounding* performs a metamorphose and a relocation of audio signal in time and space. Hepworth’s voice is sounding from one site - her art studio in St Ives - to then resound into another one - the digital realm, from 1961 to 2020. The tape recorded by Hepworth in 1961 lost its purpose once its original role - which was to accompany a pre-recorded talk - was served. By repurposing it, the analogue tape is brought to the digital waves via new carriers - the radio Resonance Extra and the online platform Vimeo - thus morphing into a fluid, dematerialised digital entity.

c) Transmission of signal, transmission of heritage

By repurposing the archival material, the artists, curators or investigative journalists are not just releasing the voice physically into the air, they are making the archival voice relevant for a new audience, re-evaluating and re-contextualising the archival document. The practice of *resounding* deals simultaneously with the temporal and spatial transmission of audio signal, and the transmission of cultural heritage and knowledge. In ‘Art and the Archive’ (2006), art historian Charles Merewether emphasises that:

> one of the defining characteristics of the modern era has been the increasing significance given to the archive as the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored and recovered.\(^{103}\)

Merewether explains that the study of archive was compared by Michel Foucault, in ‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’ (1969) to the practice of learning about the past through its material remains.\(^ {104}\) In *resounding* the voice of such iconic figure, my purpose is to broaden our experience and understanding of Barbara Hepworth’s legacy through an aural investigation: voice as sonic documentation. Curator Helena Bonett argues that “artists’ legacies are not fixed entities with circumscribed arenas of knowledge, but are in constant flux and in continual contact with diverse epistemologies and ontologies”.\(^ {105}\) With Barbara Hepworth’s tape resounded, we access a distinct dimension to sense her legacy: the dimension of the aural.

\(^{102}\) ibid., p.7.


\(^{104}\) ibid., p.11.

2.5 Resounding, terminology and use

Why did I choose the term *resound*, and not *remake* or *remix* to define my practice?

The term *resounding* is a reworking of the original sound material but one could argue so does the remix or the remake. When remixing a piece, the artist is often given by the composer the elements that constitute the work, as individual tracks - audio stems - that is all the sound layers. Remixing is reworking those individual elements in a new fashion. The technique linked to the dance genre often consists in increasing the speed by adding beats. The term *remix* was not suitable to define my practice. The word *remake* is often used in the context of moving image, see the many remakes of *King Kong* since its 1933 version, or the remake of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* by French artist Pierre Huyghe - *Remake* (1995) shot in a Paris building with amateur actors. The above techniques - resound, remix, remake - take their source from the post-production technology, which has allowed us to reorganise sounds, and visuals, operating a process of re-examination of the work. The term *resounding* is appropriate to the sound art practice that consists in unearthing an overlooked sound-object - like in Yaseen’s *Tape Letters* and my work - restoring it, and making it sound again through a new carrier, in a new sound space, physical or digital.

Who uses the term *resounding* to define their sound practice?

Denis Smalley named his electroacoustic composition for six-channels, *Resounding* (2004). Known for developing the concept of *spectromorphology*, Smalley explains that the title refers to “the notion of re-sounding, as heard in the cyclic rhythms of resonances, prolonged, decaying, or sent travelling through the listening space”, and that “the idea of sounding again is also reflected in the formal progress of the piece, which focuses on the return of materials in changed surroundings.” Beyond the sonic property of the *resounding* as a resonant space, we find that the word *resounding* is mostly used in the context of site-embodiment. Vocalist and sound artist Viv Corringham identifies her extended forms of soundwalk - *Urban Song Paths* (2003) - as a place *resounding*. With *The Two Rivers Project* (2003), her *resounding* consists in relocating and translating the route of a waterway – the Kaluli song path from Papua, New Guinea - into a contemporary urban situation, two London rivers.

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108 the shaping of sound-spectra through time.
artists David Chapman and Louise Wilson are reanimating the Scottish estate in *Re-sounding Falkland* (2011). Sounding out the hidden place, they have listened and recorded the Estate’s sounds with their auditory instruments, to recreate the sounds of the estate through a six-part audio piece. In *Resoundings: Prelude – The Ayahs Home* (2018), Cathy Lane is resounding the ‘un-sound’ voice of the Ayahs community - Indian female domestic servants who looked after British children on the long sea crossing from India - to investigate some of the mechanisms by which their stories have been muted. The Ayahs Home acted as a refuge, as once in Great Britain their employment was often brutally terminated leaving them in a precarious situation. The piece is a single-channel video installation with stereo composed sound, drawing from archival records, images and interviews. Bill Fontana defines his practice as *resoundings*. In *Sound Island* (1994), his practice consists in relocating the sound from one site - the Normandy sea shore - to resound in another - the Arc de Triomphe, Paris. Fontana treats the architectural structure of the monument by overlaying the sound of the sea, broadcast to loudspeakers, hidden on the facade’s monument. The sounds of perpetual moving water are cancelling the frequencies of the traffic, thus creating the illusion that the cars circling the Place de l’Étoile are silent.

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113 in Hackney, East London.


2.6 Resounding the archival voice. Other strategies

In the following section, I have categorised - as a non-exhaustive list - other works, which repurpose, and resound the archival voice as spoken word.

a) Détournement

The Situationist International defined détournement as “a negation of the value of the previous organisation of expression” from which arises “a new genre of creation at a higher level”.\[117]\ The plundering aesthetic strategy is undertaken here as a political stance with the appropriation of existing voices in new, critical configurations.

Notable examples of détournement of the political speech include Trevor Wishart’s Two Women (1998), in which he uses digital manipulation to distort the political speech of Margaret Thatcher - particularly in Stentor; Cassette Boy’s The Parker Tapes (2002), an “anarchic example of plunderphonics”\[118]\ by the British duo who hijack the archival political speeches to entice parody.

Other examples of détournement as critic include Negativland’s Escape from Noise (1987), in which the experimental collective crafts short satirical vignettes of consumerism and pop culture; Christian Marclay’s His Master’s Voice (1997), a turntablism critic of televangelism; Paul Hardcastle’s 19 (1985), in which he delivers an anti-war message, by sampling documentary and news reports from America’s Vietnam War.\[119]\

b) The archival voice is the message

The archival voice is here used for the significance of its original political message as agitprop sampling. Notable examples in Hip-Hop include Grandmaster Flash & The Furious 5’s The King (1988), a rework of Martin Luther King’s 1963 “I have a dream” speech; and Wu-Tang Clan’s Never Let Go (2014), also with Luther King’s speech\[120]\.

Examples in the genre of experimental include René Lussier’s La Visite De Charles De Gaulle; De Gaulle - Revisité (1989), blending De Gaulle’s manifesto for a free Quebec with erupting guitars used as a sound

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source

and Lisa Whistlecroft’s *For the Railways* (1996), with the recorded voice of Lenin telling how the railway will carry oil to the factories and food to the people.

**c) Documenting strategy**

This strategy consists in unearthing, and resounding the archival voice, thus contributing to the dissemination of information to reconstruct the societal narrative.

Notable examples in multi-channels installations include Nye Parry’s *Boomtown* (1998), which uses archive interviews to examine the personal and social histories of some of the inhabitants of Oldham

Susan Hiller’s *Witness* (2000), a sculptural set-up of hundreds of piezo speakers documenting testimonies from all over the world of witnesses describing their encounter with UFOs; Cathy Lane’s *Hidden Lives 2 – The House of Memory* (2001), which uses oral history material related to childhood and childhood games from the Hackney Archives and Hackney Museum.

Examples in stereo format include Pamela Z’s *Geekspeak* (1996), in which she utilises material from various “interviews with computer engineers discussing their own geekiness”; AGF’s *Unknown Russian astronaut* (2018), composed from the recovered 1961 recording of a female astronaut, moment before the Soviet space craft is destroyed attempting re-entry.

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123 See https://www.nyeparry.com/boomtown/, (accessed 30 July 2020)


3. CONCLUSION

The practice of resounding the voice is linked to the reconsideration of the archive, public or personal. The sound artist takes the time to contemplate the past sound-object - what was lost, and builds an active relationship with the archive, no longer static. The resounding consists in unearthing the sound-object, and by restoring it, making it sound again through a new carrier, in a new sound space, physical or digital. The term resounding is appropriate to the field of sound art, and to hybrid practices that not only deal with the spatial resonance dimension, but also with the technological resounding of the archival voice - a voice unheard or temporarily overlooked. It is a transformative practice whose properties consist of changing the original status of the archive with manipulations; morphing and relocating the audio signal in time and space; and as such, re-contextualising the archival document for a new audience. However, the link to the original purpose is not entirely dissimulated, the original voice refers to itself. The archival voice behaves as a moving entity, evolving according to time and context.

I have examined three key works and their aesthetic principles: the fragmentation in Christian Zanési’s Arkheion - in particular Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer (1996); the social sculpture and mise-en-scène in Wajid Yaseen’s Tape Letters (2018); and the direct carving of voice in my resounding of Barbara Hepworth, The Sculptor Speaks (2020). Zanési applies directly the principles of musique concrète to Schaeffer’s voice, engaging with his legacy, with at its core the manipulation of the recorded material. Yaseen’s Tape Letters represents the Pakistan community through a performative-archive. By resounding Barbara Hepworth’s archival tape, I am broadening our understanding of her legacy through an aural investigation.

The above explorations highlight how the practice of resounding deals simultaneously with the temporo-spatial transmission of audio signal, and the transmission of heritage and knowledge. The resounding operates on various temporal levels: a fragmented approach with Zanési; a continuum narrative in Yaseen’s multiple re-enactments of the archival voice; and in my resounding, the manipulation of the original archival material is envisaged as a continuous entity.

The works explored are concerned with transmitting the message of the voice: an homage to the iconic voice - Zanési with the tandem Schaeffer-Stockhausen, my audio-visual piece on Barbara Hepworth; and an homage to the ‘anonymous’ voices, the Potwari speakers in Yaseen’s Tape Letters. Resounding the archival voice becomes a recognition of lineage and identity in sound.
The practice of *resounding* is the art of liberating the magnetic presence of the voices from the past sound-objects: it is a re-appearance of the voice - morphed and fluid - operating in the field of the aural transmission. *Resounding* the archive: a resonance anew.
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Figure 1: *Enduring Ornament*, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1913.

Figure 2: Interactive monitors. *Tape Letters*, People’s History Museum, Manchester, 2018.
Photographer unknown ©Wajid Yaseen.

Figure 3: Surround set-up. *Tape Letters*, People’s History Museum, Manchester, 2018.
Photographer unknown ©Wajid Yaseen.

Figure 4: original 1961 tape, *The Sculptor Speaks*.
Photographer Stephen Clearly ©British Library.

Supervised by Dr Kersten Glandien. 14 September 2020.
7. APPENDIX

Appendix I


O.L. : C’est ma thèse de master, que je base sur le travail à partir d’archives et de voix. Je recherche le resounding - re-sonner à nouveau - un mot que j’emplois pour décrire le travail sur la sculpteur Barbara Hepworth...Une bande des années 1960 que je sonorise. Et donc concernant ma recherche contextuelle votre travail Arkheion avec les archives s’inscrit dedans, est vraiment pertinent…On fait quelque chose de nouveau et on se rend compte en creusant que d’autres se sont aventurés au même endroit. J’ai réécouter vos interviews et en particulier celle avec Thomas Baumgartner sur France Culture.

C.Z. : Oui je l’aime beaucoup Thomas.

O.L. : On repart dans le temps puisque Arkheion est un projet que vous avez conçu en 1996, vous travaillez alors avec une icône, Pierre Schaeffer – que vous avez bien sur côtoyé, votre professeur au conservatoire…et donc ma première question, est-ce que vous avez eu une appréhension à travailler avec la voix d’une icône ?

C.Z. : Avec Pierre Schaeffer c’était difficile ; c’était plus facile avec Stockhausen parce qu’il était plus éloigné. En fait j’ai mis un certain temps à trouver l’idée pour faire cet Arkheion. Ça s’appelle Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer parce que je connaissais plusieurs personnages. Je le connaissais par les archives, mes rencontres, j’avais passé pas mal de temps en studio avec lui aussi donc je connaissais le professeur, le directeur élémentaire d’institution, le comédien, le pédagogue, et finalement l’idée c’était - différemment à mon travail sur Stockhausen qui était basé sur une seule interview - c’était d’écouter et de présenter plusieurs personnages en me disant que par le prisme de tous ces personnages peut être apparaîtrait un portrait fidèle.

O.L. : Vous avez donc utilisé plusieurs sources ? Parce que vous parlez beaucoup de la rencontre avec un son mais en fait vous êtes allé [pour Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer] à la rencontre de ce son, en cherchant dans les archives ?

C.Z. : J’avais eu une idée plusieurs années en amont, une sorte d’expérience sur le vieillissement et je m’étais dit tient on a cinquante ans d’archives et si je reconstituais un texte, un peu Schaefferien, en prenant sa voix année après année, peut-être que j’obtiendrais quelque chose d’étonnant, une voix qui vieillit et finalement des enregistrements qui rajeunissent. Quand j’ai démarré ce travail je me suis rendu compte que ça ne fonctionnait pas, parce que un, les micros dans les années 1950 étaient tout à fait correct et deux, la voix de Schaeffer a peu évolué, ou n’a pas évolué suffisamment pour faire quelque chose d’édifiant, pour que le concept traverse. J’avais un assistant je lui avais dit « sors moi les archives de 1948-49 puis je ferais un montage ». Je veux entendre une voix qui vieillit dans un seul propos. Et finalement ça ne l’a pas fait. Donc je connaissais bien certaines archives, une fois que j’ai eu l’idée j’ai pu ensuite avancer sur ces questions de compositions, ce qui est le sujet qui m’intéresse le plus, au-delà même de l’idée de l’œuvre, parce qu’on peut avoir une bonne idée et totalement rater.

O.L. : Et ces voix elles sont à partir de vinyles, de bandes ?

C.Z. : Un peu de tout. J’ai pris tout ce que je pouvais trouver.
O.L : Dans un esprit de collage ? Comme vous aviez dit ?

C.Z : Ah c’est Stockhausen qui dit ça !

O.L : Je me demandais si c’était votre voix ? Mais non c’est bien sa voix, son français est remarquable.

C.Z : Oui c’est Stockhausen qui dit ça parce qu’il a une théorie Stockhausen - qui peut se discuter, c’est la sienne - il a la théorie suivante, c’est que les artistes - d’une manière ou d’une autre - anticipent l’époque à venir et qu’on peut regarder l’art pas simplement comme des réalisations d’objet vivant mais comme des prémonitions. Et Stockhausen disait que le début du siècle pour les artistes était marqué par la fragmentation et le collage et que ça annonçait une société fragmentée.

O.L : La fragmentation qui vient des arts plastiques, les readymades de Duchamp...

C.Z : Oui tout à fait.

O.L : Et le son se l’est approprié après...

C.Z : Parce que pour le son il fallait avoir le support technologique. On pouvait sampler mais c’était difficile. Donc cette envie de collage, c’est aussi le surréalisme et au-delà même de la performance, de la nouveauté artistique, cela [la fragmentation] annonce quelque chose de social et ça c’est très intéressant. Mais avec Schaeffer, il y avait de ma part plus quelque chose d’affectueux.

Par contre j’ai fait une expérience, chaque œuvre au fond a été pour moi l’occasion d’une connaissance nouvelle, de prendre conscience de quelque chose. L’autre jour j’ai fait une rencontre avec les étudiants au cursus de composition de l’IrCAM, et je me disais qu’est-ce que je vais bien pouvoir leur raconter, ils me disent de parler de ma musique, ça me gênait un peu, je n’aime pas trop l’idée de model. Mais finalement j’ai perçu que chaque musique que j’ai faite dans ma vie, c’est une prise de conscience nouvelle, de quelque chose de très important. Donc je peux faire un tracé et dire cette œuvre là, ce qu’elle m’a apportée...Et donc la question des Arkheion c’est qu’est-ce que cela m’a apporté ?

Je compose d’une manière organique, c’est à dire j’essaie de composer aussi bien verticalement qu’horizontalement, que tout est en interactivité, donc il y a des sons qui envoient le moteur ou d’autres qui sont assujettis. Mais ce qui est intéressant c’est de changer les fonctions, d’une manière logique. Et je me disais au sujet des Arkheion que finalement j’ai traité le sens, les mots ou la voix, à la fois comme un objet sonore – un objet rythmique ou mélodique. Je pensais que le sens était réservé à ceux qui parlent le français et que cette œuvre écoulée par quelqu’un, qui ne comprenait pas le français perdit une dimension essentielle. Hors une fois, j’ai fait un concert en Allemagne où ça avait été programmé - donc j’y croyais moitié - et finalement l’œuvre a eu un remarquable accueil. Donc je me suis dit il y a quelque chose qui se transcende.

Cette dimension-là, un d’une part la voix même si on ne comprend pas ce qu’elle dit, il s’en dégage quelque chose de profondément humain, une force et donc il y a un type d’émotion qui peut passer. Et aussi une autre chose universelle, c’est la construction musicale. Donc pour moi cela a été une prise de conscience très intéressante, j’étais très étonné de la réaction très positive du public.

O.L : Quand on travaille avec la voix, une problématique qui se pose c’est comment négocier entre la nécessité de transmettre le message et l’envie que la voix parte dans une autre dimension, plus abstraite, plus textural et pouvoir avoir cette liberté. Peut-être qu’avec Arkheion la liberté que vous avez eu c’est que parce que vous avez travaillé à partir de différentes sources, il y a moins de contrainte alors que moi ma contrainte [The Sculptor Speaks] est que la bande existe déjà dans sa continuité et que j’ai quelque part envie de la maintenir dans sa durée.
C.Z : Il faut écouter cette voix comme un objet sonore pour en repérer la structure musicale et je veux parler de rythme, de hauteur, vitesse. J’ai travaillé récemment sur une pièce - faut que je la reprenne parce que la première partie j’ai des doutes - cela s’appelle Détournement Chorale. J’ai pris une série x et j’ai enregistré les dialogues dans les cinq langues proposées, qui sont très faciles à synchroniser, en espérant avoir un effet de chœur, puisque les dialogues sont synchronisés à l’image. Donc j’ai enregistré, français, anglais, allemand, portugais, espagnol que je mets ensemble pour avoir des effets de cœur et je me suis rendu compte qu’évidemment les langues ne sont pas vraiment synchronisées - parce que certains mots il faut deux syllabes pour une syllabe dans une autre langue - ce qui est synchronisé, c’est le sentiment.

O.L : C’est ce dont vous parliez, cette chose qui est en dehors du sens, de ce qui se transmet au-delà.

C.Z : On entend une douceur, on entend l’énerverement, la peur, la joie et cette chose l’est au-delà même du sens... Donc j’ai obtenu des chœurs comme avec du sentiment, j’ai fait des chœurs de femmes, d’hommes. Parfois j’utilise les cinq voix, des fois que deux comme un duo, ou une seule, comme un solo. Sur la palette c’est infini.

O.L : C’est une œuvre qui va paraître prochainement ?

C.Z : Oui je dois reprendre quelques trucs. Il y a un endroit, la troisième partie où j’ai obtenu cet effet choral, j’y suis arrivé, il y a une partie qui est plus rythmique et une première partie qui est plus sonore. Et j’ai utilisé plusieurs modalités de production. Certaines parties je les ai jouées avec Live [Ableton] pour avoir quelque chose d’assez gestuel, proche du corps, en prenant des fragments mais en jouant avec une APC40 [ableton performance controller]. D’autres parties sont très composées, son à son, j’ai joué avec des tas de truc, mais je voudrais y revenir, je suis encore en dessous de ce que ça pourrait être. Je crois que l’idée elle est trop riche pour...

O.L : Ça prend du temps pour gagner en maturité...Il faut parfois laisser reposer et y revenir.

C.Z : Alors oui mais c’est difficile de revenir si c’est trop tard...Il faut trouver le bon moment mais ça fait partie du processus créatif. Charlie Chaplin il avait acquis les moyens, il tournait une scène cinquante fois pour avoir le bon gag, mais c’était compliqué parce qu’il fallait qu’il développe le film, le regarde et qu’il le refasse ce n’est pas comme aujourd’hui avec le témoin vidéo... Et donc les artistes quand ils ont la possibilité de revenir sur leur travail, ils le font.

O.L : Vous travaillez chez vous ou au GRM ?

C.Z : Chez moi mais je vais de temps en temps au GRM pour avoir des copains qui me disent si c’est trop fort ou pas parce que j’ai des doutes, je suis un peu faible d’oreilles, donc je vais me faire valider quelques options que j’ai prises en studio, moins pour avoir de belles enceintes que pour avoir des copains qui écoutent, un retour pour moi c’est très important. Parce qu’à un moment on ne sait pas si on est trop fort ou pas assez fort et je crois que les structures comme le GRM – il y en a d’autres – dont on prédisait la fin inéluctable dans les années 1990s parce que le home studio était apparu et que donc on avait plus besoin de ces endroits-là, c’était une très mauvaise analyse. Ce genre de structures, ce sont des lieux d’expertise, des lieux de rencontre avec d’autres musiciens, d’autres compositeurs sinon chacun est dans son home-studio.

O.L : Dans mes recherches ce que je trouve flagrant c’est que dès le démarrage le GRM s’inscrit dans les archives, puisqu’ il est d’abord héberge à l’ORTF puis après à l’INA.
C.Z : C'est Schaeffer qui crée les liens.

O.L : Donc c'est ça, dès le départ un son enregistré va être potentiellement retravaillé. Et cela s'inscrit dès le départ...

C.Z : Oui tout à fait...À un moment donné j'ai dirigé la nouvelle édition des œuvres de Pierre Schaeffer, le nouveau coffret...

O.L : Ah c'est pour Peter Rehberg, les recollections ?

C.Z : Non c'est un coffret rouge édité par le GRM ; les recollections c'est autre chose... Et je me suis repenché vraiment sur toutes les œuvres du début et j'étais assez embarrassé... Parce que par exemple les Études de Bruit, il y avait cinq ou six versions différentes alors j'ai demandé conseil à Pierre Henry qui lui m'a dit « Christian il faut prendre les plus longues ». Pourquoi ? J'ai demandé conseils à quelques amis autour, chacun hésitait... Donc je vais prendre la responsabilité du choix et je vais prendre celle qui me plait le plus, c'est très subjectif et j'ai travaillé comme ça. Ce que je suis en train de dire c'est qu'au tout début de la musique concrète, le concept d'œuvre était très flottant. Schaeffer retaillait ses trucs ou demandait à Pierre Henry de retailler les trucs en fonction des circonstances, ce n'était pas l'œuvre sacralisée. Ils n'étaient pas dans l'histoire les gars - les archives et tout ça - on gardait les trucs mais c'était pas encore dans un concept de préservation, c'était purement utilitaire comme un compositeur qui met dans une armoire sans trop s'en soucier.

C'est François Bayle qui, s'agissant de la musique concrète, a commencé le premier gros travail de mise en ordre. Par contre le concept d'archives c'est donc un concept moderne pour l'audiovisuel publique et c'est un concept qui est apparu avec le temps.

Encore fallait-il créer une institution...

O.L : Oui c'est comme l'idée dans votre pièce, ce « je bricole, je prends des sons », il y a un côté irrévérencieux...

C.Z : Très simple finalement.

O.L : C'est comme un ouvrier, on a nos outils, on fait du son, on prend ce qu'il y a. Ce que j'ai découvert aussi avec la pièce Étude aux Casseroles avec la voix de Guitry, le disque qui traîne comme ça que Schaeffer réutilise... Quelque part vous faites la même chose avec sa voix, il y a une transmission qui continue.

C.Z : Dans l'ADN de la musique concrète il y a deux éléments, c'est la récupération et le détournement. En ce sens c'est un mouvement qui rejoint...

O.L : Les situationnistes...

C.Z : Oui les situationnistes mais aussi ... j'ai des trous de mémoire...

O.L : Les surréalistes ?

C.Z : Non avant, on en a parlé tout à l'heure...

O.L : Duchamp.

C.Z : Oui voila !
En ce sens la musique concrète raccorde avec la modernité. Parce qu’il y avait un gros écart entre, je pense, les musiciens et les plasticiens. Mais la musique concrète raccorde.

O.L : Bien sûr... la plasticité du son.

C.Z : Ça c’est le détournement. Mais il y a aussi ‘le sillon fermé’, c’est un détournement technique, c’est à dire qu’on utilise l’outil pour quoi il n’avait pas été prévu, c’est typiquement un détournement technique et il y a aussi la récupération, à cause du support. À l’époque on enregistrait sur des disques, on disait qu’ils étaient souples mais ils n’étaient pas souples du tout - moi j’en ai des vieux disques ils étaient durs mais il étaient tendres on pouvait graver - si bien que si on faisait un enregistrement le disque partait, comme disait Schaeffer « au rebut ». En fait ils n’étaient pas jetés, ils étaient récupérés, renvoyés à l’usine on faisait fondre la couche, c’était pas du vinyle à l’époque c’était... Je ne sais pas quoi, on gardait [inaudible] de métal et on remettait une couche, on refaisait un disque vierge, c’était pas cassé, jeté comme on ferait avec des Cds.

O.L : Le recyclage était déjà là.

C.Z : Donc il y avait dans les studios de la radio une sorte de poubelle qui recueillait ces disques là et donc vous arriviez dans un studio, il n’était pas difficile de prendre quelque chose et c’est comme ça que Schaeffer a retrouvé la voix de Sacha Guitry où la prise est ratée parce que la speakerine se met à tousser en plein milieu et c’est justement la toux qui l’intéresse. Là on est vraiment dans la récupération. Et la récupération c’est aussi un mouvement de l’art du 20ème siècle. Et les artistes ont travaillé vraiment sur ce concept-là. Il y a des gens qui sont allés très loin dans cette idée-là. Donc la musique concrète quand elle apparaît, finalement elle est raccord avec la modernité des arts plastiques complètement, beaucoup plus que la musique instrumentale, qui elle recherche finalement un raffinement de l’écriture par une forme de structuralisme.

O.L : La notation.

C.Z : Oui la notation et le structuralisme musicale. La musique concrète finalement elle est plus plastique et à mon avis c’est aussi ça une des grandes audaces de Pierre Schaeffer que d’avoir appelé ses premiers essais, musique, c’était pas du tout évident, il aurait pu appeler ça, sonique. Si bien que cette simple appellation, qui était gonflée, elle a attiré à lui des musiciens et pas des plasticiens. La musique concrète eut été différencée si ça avait été pris en charge par des plasticiens, des peintres, des sculpteurs, ce qui était possible aussi. Parce qu’il y a une forme de sculpture sonore dans l’histoire mais ce sont des musiciens qui sont arrivés avec leur background de musicien c’est à dire leur sens formel, avec plus exactement des invariants et les invariants c’est le travail sur la dynamique, le travail sur les hauteurs, le travail sur le temps, le contrepoint, et le travail sur la couleur c’est à dire l’ordre harmonique, ça se sont les invariants musicaux. Et la technologie de l’époque, celle qui utilisait le disque comme finalement...

O.L : un instrument ?

C.Z : Instrument voilà oui comme instrument et comme atelier...Elle [la musique concrète] cochait les cases de ces invariants. Si on n’avait pas pu faire ces quatre cases, c’est à dire le travail sur la dynamique, le travail sur la couleur, le travail sur la hauteur et le travail sur le temps - parce que la musique se définit par ces cases-là - s’il n’y avait pas eu ça en face il n’y aurait jamais eu de musique concrète, s’il lui manquait une de ces possibilités. Si bien que les musiciens quand ils sont arrivés pour regarder ce truc étrange qu’on appelait musique concrète, ils étaient très étonnés de la modernité mais ils étaient quelque part chez eux déjà. Il n’y avait pas pour eux de rupture.
O.L : Oui il y avait des références, les références étaient les mêmes au travers du son.

C.Z : Même d’une manière inconsciente. Je ne suis pas sure qu’ils en aient conscience, ils faisaient le truc, c’était normal pour eux. On accordait les sons - bon c’était sommaire- on ralentissait un peu le disque pour accorder, on passait d’un disque à l’autre pour créer du discontiun qui est la base même du discours et donc avec cette technologie assez primitive, on pouvait avoir des actions musicales qui correspondaient à des invariants de la musique. Et c’est pour ça que ça a fonctionné, sinon ça n’aurait pas fonctionné.

O.L : Fascinant... Je regarde mes notes.

C.Z : Pardon je dérive...

O.L : Non Christian c’est fantastique, c’est génial que l’on puisse se voir aujourd’hui. Je voudrais revenir à autre chose. Il y a un effet miroir. Quand vous travaillez sur Pierre Schaeffer qui parle de la musique concrète c’est inévitablement un questionnement. Vous en parliez tout à l’heure, c’est cette idée qu’au travers de chaque œuvre que vous avez produite, vous avez adressé quelque chose qui est à un autre niveau de conscience, de votre vie, cheminement.

C.Z : Oui bien sûr et je m’en suis rendu compte après.

O.L : C’est le méta projet, le projet dans le projet. Schaeffer parle dans Arkheion de la musique concrète et vous appliquez le processus, vous créez le projet dans le projet et en même temps vous questionnez votre rapport à la musique concrète

C.Z : Tout à fait.

O.L : Par exemple quand vous avez démarré votre parcours, comment est-ce que la musique concrète vous est apparue?

C.Z : En fait ça a été plus tôt en ce qui me concerne une histoire personnelle, ça a été d’abord la musique électronique : j’étais à l’université de Pau dans le département musique et une des premières choses que j’ai écouté du GRM, ça a été La Roux Ferris de Bernard Parmegiani, une œuvre avec un synthétiseur construit au GRM dans les années 1960 – le Coupigny. Et j’étais frappé par ce son, par tout ce monde étrange, j’étais comme appelé par cette œuvre et j’ai découvert tout le reste assez rapidement...Il y avait une série de disques à l’époque que j’aimais beaucoup c’était chez Philips, les disques argentés, Prospective 21e Siècle...Il y avait Panorama des musiques, nous on avait ça a la fac de Pau...Et j’ai découvert plein de possibilités.

O.L : C’était une évidence.

C.Z : Une évidence et en même temps un mystère que j’avais envie de percer. Donc je me suis débrouillé pour venir - d’une manière assez naive - j’ai appris qu’il y avait une classe au Conservatoire, je me suis débrouillé à être dans cette histoire-là et petit à petit les choses se sont faites comme ça. Il n’y avait rien qui était prémédité mais au départ il y a eu un coup de cœur avec cette musique-là, comme un appel, un déclencheur. Puis ensuite je suis devenu très ami avec Bernard Parmegiani, ça a été bien ça. Et là récemment je travaille avec un synthétiseur Moog et je venais de me l’acheter puis j’ai commencé à trouver en bougeant simplement les boutons – c’est très complexe – j’ai retrouvé les mêmes sons que La Roux Ferris et j’ai fait une petite séquence...Mais comme je ne savais pas encore me servir de ce synthétiseur, j’ai oublié de la sauvegarder.
O.L : Oh non

C.Z : Et je l’ai perdu.

O.L : C’était très éphémère.

C.Z : J’avais un son-madeleine en quelque sorte qui ressemblait beaucoup à *La Roux Ferris* mais j’étais tellement pressé de faire des choses, j’ai changé des trucs puis c’est perdu, il suffisait d’appuyer sur ‘save’. Et hier j’ai trouvé un son - je travaille sur une œuvre radiophonique pour la VDR, la musique d’une adaptation d’un truc de Balzac - et j’ai trouvé le son après avoir passé la journée à chercher le truc et le soir, la tête ailleurs j’ai éteint mon studio sans sauvegarder le son.

O.L : Oh non !

C.Z : Je m’en veux…Ce matin je me suis dit mais tu es bête, je crois que je suis quelqu’un de très bête honnêtement.

O.L : Mais non.

C.Z : Mais si, je suis bête, ce n’est pas possible de faire des trucs comme ça, c’est une forme de bêtise incroyable.

O.L : C’est dur et après il faut accepter que...

C.Z : C’est foutu.

O.L : Que vous n’allez pas le retrouver.

C.Z : On ne peut pas le retrouver.

O.L : Il y a tout le temps des [inaudible] dans le processus créatif parce que ça arrive à tout le monde, on a une session on part sur autre chose, on n’a pas sauvegardé sous un autre nom la session et au final on se rend compte que c’est pourri ce qu’on est en train de faire, on préférait avant mais ce n’est plus possible… C’est plein de petites pertes.

C.Z : Dans l’artisanat de ce travail, il faut être aux aguets, toujours, c’est à dire il faut être éveillé parce qu’on sait très bien que c’est difficile d’avoir une prédiction - tiens je vais faire ce son avec ce synthétiseur comme ça… Ce sont des processus si complexes que la prévisibilité est carrément nulle, comme la prévisibilité de se dire je vais coller ce son avec ce son. Impossible, bon on y arrive avec l’orchestre après une connaissance très approfondie et en ayant sans arrêt remodifié les choses pour s’approcher de quelque chose que l’on cherche.

La prévisibilité dans ce genre de musique est assez nulle. Si bien que la seule manière d’opérer c’est d’opérer concrètement en entendant réellement les choses. Mais on se rend compte qu’on met en confrontation des phénomènes complexes, qu’une forme de hasard, de chance joue et est très active.

Le studio c’est un lieu de l’heuristique, c’est à dire c’est un endroit où il se passe des événements heureux et si on n’est pas comme un chasseur à traquer une proie, c’est à dire dans ce cas là c’est le hasard parce qu’il est très difficile d’avoir des prédictions fiables, si bien que le travail du studio c’est aussi une attitude d’être aux aguets, de ce qui va surgir. Et moi j’ai appris ça, évidemment parce que quand on avait tout en analogique, particulièrement les synthétiseurs où les réglages jouent sur des équilibres extrêmement fins, il fallait absolument si on trouvait quelque chose l’enregistrer sinon c’était perdu définitivement, il n’y avait pas de ‘undo’.
O.L : L’apple Z !

C.Z : Oui et cette particularité fait qu’on était des artisans très aux aguets, sachant que de temps en temps il se passait un événement heureux comme si on était mystique, comme si l’esprit se manifestait. Si bien que ça il fallait pas se le rater parce qu’il ne se manifestait qu’une fois.

O.L : Justement sur l’esprit qui se manifeste, il y a l’idée de faire revenir les fantômes du passé avec le travail à partir d’archives.

C.Z : Oh oui.

O.L : Il y a cette idée de Jacques Derrida - je ne sais pas si vous connaissez ce film [Ghost Dance, Ken McMullen] -et il dit « le cinéma c’est l’art de faire revenir les fantômes »

C.Z : Ah oui merveilleux !

O.L : Et c’est vrai que ce qu’on fait, ce travail du son à partir d’archives, c’est leur redonner vie, c’est vraiment ça et quand en plus c’est quelqu’un qu’on a connu, de proche [Schaeffer] alors...

C.Z : J’ai toujours été très ému par les vieilles photos ou les très vieux films parce que m’apparaît toujours un sentiment, presque bouddhiste, de l’impermanence des choses, et je me dis mais ils sont tous morts, tous ceux-là que je vois, même la petite fille là au coin, la photo a été prise en 1900... et ça me crée un trouble extraordinaire.

O.L : Notre éphémère.

C.Z : Et dans les archives il y a un sentiment confus très profond de cet ordre-là. A tel point que quand j’ai commencé cette série Arkheion avec Stockhausen. Je m’en souviens j’avais discuté avec Konrad Boehmer.

O.L : Je ne le connais pas.

C.Z : Konrad Bohmer - il est mort maintenant - c’était quelqu’un qui a été finalement le successeur responsable de Gottfried Michael Koenig, l’inventeur de la musique électronique avec Stockhausen. Konrad Bohmer était un jeune type qui était à Cologne, au sortir de la seconde guerre mondiale, il était très naïf, il pensait que tous les compositeurs étaient morts - des trucs d’ado – et donc il avait 13 ou 14 ans, il est allé voir le studio de Cologne - il en avait entendu parler par sa mère ou je sais pas qui - et il est tombé sur Stockhausen et Koenig qui étaient en train de monter la musique électronique, en train de composer leurs premières œuvres, et les autres ils lui ont dit écoute tu nous déranges pas, tu t’assois là et tu fermes ta bouche, on ne veut pas t’entendre, tu regardes, tu ne dis rien.

Et il a assisté – je me demande si ce n’est pas à la composition de Kontakt, peut-être... Et il a assisté et commencé comme ça, si bien qu’il a vu toute l’histoire. J’ai fait une longue interview de lui ou il me racontait toute l’histoire de la musique électronique du début, et des tensions qu’il y avait entre Koenig et Stockhausen.

Donc j’étais en train de composer [Les Mots de Stockhausen] et je dis à Konrad, tu sais ce que je suis en train de faire, je vais un truc avec une archive de Stockhausen et il me dit « oui c’est une très bonne idée il va te faire un procès et tu seras célèbre ! ».

[laugh]
C.Z : Alors j’étais embêté.

O.L : Oui il y a un problème de copyright dès qu’on travaille avec une voix existante. On n’y pense pas on est naïf mais c’est problématique.

C.Z : Voilà, donc j’en parle à François Bayle, j’étais un peu inquiet, et il me dit mais tu as l’autorisation de Stockhausen ? Je me suis dit oh là si en plus je dois lui demander à Stockhausen l’autorisation, il va me demander quel est votre projet. Et le projet on le sait quand on a fini. J’étais très embarrassé. Et ça m’a bloqué totalement, à tel point que j’ai fait un travail presque inconscient, il m’est apparu comme une évidence que si Stockhausen était mort, je n’aurais pas ces problèmes. Et je me suis mis dans cette disposition de pensée qu’il était mort et là j’ai pu reprendre le travail.

O.L : Ça vous a libéré.

C.Z : Ça m’a totalement libéré. Mais j’étais vraiment comme si j’y croyais vraiment, cela faisait partie de moi de travailler comme s’il était mort. Quand j’ai eu fini, je l’ai envoyé à Stockhausen, il m’a répondu trois jours après - enfin il était quand même hallucinant ce type.

O.L : Vous l’aviez rencontré ?

C.Z : Si je l’avais vu une fois, mais j’étais comme un insecte, tellement insignifiant. Donc je lui ai envoyé. Stockhausen a toujours eu une grande affection pour le GRM et puis une amitié pour François Bayle, donc j’ai dit en deux mots qui j’étais, où je travaillais et que François Bayle lui envoyait le bonjour et alors il m’a répondu tout de suite, y a que lui qui pouvait répondre ça il m’a dit « j’écouterai mercredi prochain entre 11h et 12h, dans ma voiture ».

[Laugh]

C.Z : Faut être un allemand pour programmer mercredi prochain que pour aller de Cologne à je sais pas où…Donc il avait programmé ce qu’il allait faire ce jour-là et donc il a écouté et il m’a envoyé un mot très gentil, je n’en revenais pas, une carte postale très belle, en me donnant quand même - il y a une sorte de condescendance - un conseil de compositeur « vous devriez essayer de faire de la musique sans répétition ». Et moi justement dans Stockhausen il y a des choses qui reviennent, pour moi la répétition n’est pas une répétition littéralement.

O.L : Elle n’est jamais répétée de la même manière.

C.Z : Mais même si elle est répétée de la même manière, comme elle intervient plus tard dans le temps, elle est modifiée par notre perception et c’est justement ça qui m’intéressait. Mais en même temps ça m’a beaucoup troublé cette chose là et ça m’a amené à toute une réflexion de compositeur, c’était intéressant. Et donc Stockhausen est resté Stockhausen vis-à-vis de moi mais je n’ai pu composer cette œuvre que parce que je m’étais dit qu’il était mort.

O.L : Donc là on revient sur l’idée du fantôme.

C.Z : Oui c’est pour ça que j’y ai pensé, ça m’est revenu en discutant.

O.L : C’est intéressant comment on adresse ça et surtout comment on adresse les figures mythiques.
C.Z : Il y a eu aussi un effet particulièrement avec *Les Voix de Pierre Schaeffer*, c'est que j'ai fait cette pièce peu de temps après sa mort, finalement quelques années après. Et donc n'avons pas peur des termes puisque ça m'est arrivé de rater donc je peux dire quand c'est réussi. Comme l'œuvre a été réussie, disons-le comme ça, elle a un peu scotché tout le monde de ce micro milieu et finalement ça a bloqué l'inévitables nombre d'œuvres qui auraient été composées en hommage, avec la voix de Schaeffer et qui n'auraient pas été forcément du bon niveau. Quelque part en faisant ça j'ai mis la barre assez haut et ça a découragé certain de se lancer puisque forcément ils auraient été comparé à mon propre travail. Ça a eu cet effet qui n'était pas du tout escompté et auquel je n'aurais jamais pensé. Mais je me suis rendu compte en tant que programmateur, j'étais très bien placé pour finalement entendre ce qui se faisait comme propositions artistiques, que ça a bloqué le truc.

O.L : Surtout que dernièrement, il y a eu beaucoup de travaux qui ont été fait à partir de voix samplées.

C.Z : Voilà... Je n'étais pas le tout premier dans le genre, mais je n'étais pas le dernier.

O.L : Mais vous avez une vraie légitimité à travailler avec la voix de Schaeffer.

C.Z : Oui la légitimité c'est que l'œuvre elle tient la route, c'est essentiellement ça. Si l'œuvre avait été ratée, elle aurait ouvert la voie à d'autres tandis que là j'ai senti que ça a bloqué la déferlante qui était inévitable parce que le sujet - et pour les raisons que vous avez dites tout à l'heure - concentre tellement de potentiel. Maintenant il faut passer un certain temps, ça serait possible aujourd'hui de revisiter finalement le concept bien sûr. Me revient à l'esprit une phrase formidable d'un chercheur de l'INA - puisque l'INA c'est une société des archives avec un processus industriel, parce que c'est de l'ordre de l'industrie quand on voit la quantité de matériau. Il disait « l'invariant de l'œuvre est à réinventer ». Ça c'est extraordinaire quand on réfléchit à ça. Parce qu'on pense par exemple que quand il y a une œuvre du passé et particulièrement une œuvre audiovisuelle qu'elle est figée pour l'éternité. Mais ce qui n'est pas figé, c'est le contexte. Quand on écoute aujourd'hui une archive de 1950 on ne l'écoute pas de la même manière en 2000 qu'en 1990. Donc ce qu'on pense bloquer dans le temps avec exactement la même chose, c'est faux, ça évolue, même l'archive et c'est pour ça que l'image poétique du fantôme est très intéressante parce que le fantôme est mouvant par nature. Il se déplace dans l'ombre, dans la nuit, ça c'est très intéressant.

O.L : Oui l'archive évolue en fonction du contexte.

C.Z : Tout à fait.

O.L : Et ce qui est intéressant aussi c'est de se dire que par exemple, maintenant on a tellement accumulé de sons, de matériaux audiovisuels que

C.Z : Oui a un problème de riche.

O.L : Exactement. Et chacun accumule ici tous les jours de la voix - on peut tous s'enregistrer, sa grand-mère le dimanche - et donc la question à se poser est : qu'est-ce qu'on va faire de tous ces matériaux ? Et c'est pour ça que quelque part l'idée de recycler, de retravailler avec les voix du passé, ça nous permet de nous repositionner.

C.Z : On peut aussi travailler avec les sons du passé. J'ai fait une œuvre qui s'appelle *Tour et Détours en 78 tours*, où j'ai retrouvé un vieux disque de Pierre Schaeffer de 1949, qui était un disque de prise de son où il avait enregistré les matériaux préparatoire à la *Suite pour 14 Instruments* et j'aime beaucoup cette œuvre qui est peut-être l'œuvre la moins cotée de Pierre Schaeffer, ce qui est une
erreur à mon avis parce qu’il voulait démontrer que la musique concrète ce n’était pas une question de matériau - les sons concrets - mais que c’était que question de procédé. Si bien qu’il a enregistré 14 instruments de l’orchestre, il y a un hautbois, une clarinette, un violon... Il les a enregistrés en faisant des objets sonores et puis il a recomposé tout ça. Et donc moi j’ai trouvé le disque où il y a ces choses-là.

O.L : Vous l’avez fait il y a combien de temps cette œuvre ?


O.L : Mais votre re-travail de la Suite pour 14 Instruments ?

C.Z : Je ne sais plus ça doit être 2005... ou 2008.

O.L : Je regarderai.

C.Z : Schaeffer voulait faire la démonstration que c’était moins le matériau qui comptait que le procédé, c’est à dire le fait de travailler avec du son enregistré, quel qu’il soit. Et alors le résultat est très étonnant et je ne l’ai découvert qu’en concert. Quand on écoute ça en studio, ça fait un peu kitsch. Mais chez Schaeffer on est au bord du kitsch souvent, mais un kitsch involontaire, le vrai kitsch c’est formidable, le plus difficile à réussir c’est le vrai kitsch à mon avis - je pense au film de Vadim Barbarella, là c’est un chef d’œuvre kitsch.

Mais donc cette œuvre on l’écoute comme ça en studio - sur le coffret Pierre Schaeffer par exemple - oui mais quand on l’écoute en concert - parce qu’en 2010 on avait fait les 100 ans de Pierre Schaeffer j’étais programmateur à l’époque, j’avais décidé de commencer tous les concerts de la saison musicale du GRM par une œuvre de Pierre Schaeffer. Et donc à un moment donné ça a été la Suite pour 14 instruments. Je l’ai diffusée et je me suis rendu compte qu’elle sonnait dans l’espace du concert comme un orchestre fantôme, précisément à cause du matériau. Ce qui n’était pas une dimension voulue par Schaeffer. C’est à dire qu’au-delà de ce que l’on veut, il y a un inconscient dans le son, au-delà du son, de sa structure, ça porte quelque chose. Et là en concert, on a à faire à un orchestre fantôme qui est dans l’espace, ça sonne comme un orchestre mais c’est pas vraiment un orchestre et il se passe quelque chose qui n’était pas du tout voulu par l’auteur mais qui 70 ans après rassemble des tas de sensations, de sentiments, des vieux enregistrements, une manière de prendre les instruments de l’époque avec les petites mélodies naïves que Schaeffer avait écrites, parce qu’il fallait quand même dire à l’instrumentiste tu me fais cette note là où comme ça, donc il avait fait ça en se faisant aidé d’un copain qui s’y connaissait.

O.L : Il ne savait pas écrire la notation, c’est ça.

C.Z : Non pas vraiment. Donc il s’est débrouillé comme il a pu, il ne se sentait pas du tout musicien par rapport à d’autres - je comprends très bien ce sentiment. Mais il a fait ce truc-là, les autres ont fait un peu la gueule parce que ça ne sonnait pas moderne, ça sonnait néo et particulièrement les plasticiens et les gars qui étaient très investis dans le concept de modernité, ils reprochaient à Schaeffer plein de trucs et particulièrement de donner à ces œuvres des titres classiques Symphonie pour une homme seul, Études... Et quand on regarde certain trucs, il y a des noms Gavotte, comme des noms de pièces anciennes... Et les autres étaient exaspérés, ils étaient dans l’avenir, dans les nouveaux matériaux et il fallait que le concept lui-même et que le matériau lui-même soit et surtout pas l’appeler comme ça ou alors c’était une provocation à la Duchamp. Les types se disaient mais ce Schaeffer, il a trouvé un truc extraordinaire ; « mais quel ringard, quel ringard !

[Laugh]
Il ne mérite pas ça, d’être l’inventeur de ça !

Le problème c’est que les autres ils avaient 20 ans ; lui il avait déjà en 1950, 40 ans. A l’époque l’espérance de vie est moindre qu’aujourd’hui. A 60 ans on est un vieux. Il a 20 ans devant lui. Les autres ont 20 ans, ils se disent j’ai toute la vie devant moi. A ce moment-là on ne pense pas à la mort, on est dans l’éternité, qu’on est immortel. C’est ce qui fait le sentiment de la jeunesse. Schaeffer a une génération de plus, c’est un roc, il n’est pas dans l’enthousiasme de la jeunesse, de Pierre Henry - Henry il est né en 1925 peut être…

[recording interruption]

O.L : Parce que forçément en venant vous rencontrer aujourd’hui j’ai approfondi mes recherches… Et incroyable, vous avez travaillé sur cette femme sculpteur Irène Zach – je n’avais pas entendu de son travail, je la découvre – et donc il y a ce *Portrait sans Visage*. Il y a deux parties, avec Yann Paranthoën?

C.Z : Oui qui est notre plus grand artiste radiophonique en France, il est mort il y a quelques années, et j’étais devenu ami avec lui, cette amitié s’est révélée après plus de 20 ans de fréquentations rares. Pourquoi ? Dans les années 70-80, le matériel était si cher, je n’avais pas de ressources, je ne pouvais pas travailler chez moi, si bien que la journée je travaillais pour le GRM, je faisais mon boulot, j’avais un salaire - modeste d’ailleurs - et je restai le soir pour travailler pour moi. Et donc il y avait un autre gars qui était dans ce même cas c’était Yann Paranthoën, ingénieur du son à Radio France et qui la nuit faisait ses œuvres radiophoniques. Il a eu le prix Italia plusieurs fois, c’est extraordinaire son œuvre, extraordinaire attention. Et donc quand j’allais aux toilettes à 2 heures du matin ou à la machine à café, je rencontrai un mec, un breton, un thèseux, on se disait bonjour et il y avait là deux types à 2 heures du matin qui se croisaient, on faisait comme ça avec la tête et ça pendant des années sans se parler. On se connaissait, on s’était repéré, lui il était plus connu que moi, je savais plus pourquoi il était que lui savait qui j’étais. Et un jour à France Culture, un producteur nous a invité tous les deux pour parler de notre travail…Et je parlais du coté artisanale du travail en studio et finalement on s’est rendu compte qu’on pensait beaucoup de choses pareils et alors là des longues conversations ont commencé. Il venait me voir dans mon studio…Ça a été une amitié tardive mais extrêmement puissante et un jour c’est lui qui m’a proposé, il m’a dit « écoute Christian je suis en train de faire un travail sur une sculptrice Irène Zach, si je te donnais les rushs, est ce que tu ferais quelque chose de ton côté ? » J’ai dit oui mais je ne veux pas la connaître.

O.L : Ça rejoint votre approche avec Stockhausen.

C.Z : Oui c’est pour ça que je l’ai appelé un *Portrait sans Visage*, je ne veux pas la connaître, tu me passes tes sons. Lui c’est un ingénieur du son extraordinaire, je ne sais pas comment il faisait pour avoir un son pareil et il m’a passé ses rushs. J’ai fait mon truc de mon côté. Il a fait son truc, je lui ai dit je ne veux pas savoir ce que tu as fait Yann, je fais mon truc à ma manière, on verra plus tard. J’ai fait ma pièce, ça a été très vite, je l’ai pris comme un travail radio en trois, quatre jours pas plus, j’ai été très vite et ça nous a beaucoup plus, ça a intéressé quelques personnes parce que quelque part c’était à la frontière entre un genre qu’on appelle radiophonique et un genre qu’on appelle électroacoustique. Il y avait quelque chose qui dépassait notre ambition, c’était l’observation de cette frontière et les conséquences aussi. Donc c’est une œuvre qui a un sens en elle-même, c’est un travail qui est dans un contexte d’une humanité profonde, j’étais excité par cette amitié au fond et d’autre part ça a dépassé notre simple proposition artistique comme deux dessins qu’on aurait fait rapidement parce que ça a posé des tas de questions sur le genre, sur le son. Et c’était un moment où émergeait une appellation qui allait devenir les arts sonores.
O.L : Le ‘sound art’.

C.Z : Voilà tu vois on est d’accord, comme ça on pourrait encore parler longuement. Chaque sujet est comme une assiette de spaghetti... mais on va s’arrêter là.
Appendix II

Conversation with Wajid Yaseen. 30 April 2020, via Skype.

O.L: I’d like to start with the beginning...How it started and how you collected the material...Because the dissertation I’m writing is about the archives, and repurposing the archival material of voice and so, if you could tell me more...I’ve read everything I could possibly find on the internet but it’s great to have things from you directly and I can put that into words. So, the process of collecting, unearthing it?

W.Y: It’s quite a long story, it started about five or six years ago. The reason why it came about is that my father passed away, twenty odd years - it’s been quite a while since he died. He used to record a sort of devotional hymn, called na’at, he loved to do it and was quite good at it.

O.L: How do you spell it?

W.Y: Na’at. And so, the na’at is a kind of devotional hymn. He was a na’at singer and he would go around, would be asked to sing in mosque, to sing at homes. When I was growing up - when we were children I was asked to sing along. As backing singers, we would go reluctantly to these mosques and sing these na’ats, not knowing what the words meant. Because you’re too young to understand the meaning of the poetry. But anyway, we did that and that’s where my brothers and sisters learnt about harmony, vocalisation, and performance. After a while he was asked to record himself singing on cassette tapes so that other people in the community could hear him. Instead of him coming other, they could get the cassette. He would spend a lot of time in his bedroom just recording these na’ats. And so, we have plenty of these cassettes. Some were given to the community but some we hung on to them. When he passed away, having this voice on these cassettes was valuable. It’s an extraordinary thing to be able to revisit this person that you have an idea of who they are - my father - the biological mass; he used to live and he doesn’t. By listening back to these cassettes, we have this temporary feeling that we can revisit people’s aliveness.

I had to pitch correct his voice when I wanted to listen to it because the tapes were not quite right. The mechanism, the actual device didn’t seem to be recording his voice properly, it was at a pitch that was slightly higher than I remember. I remember sticking it into my door and doing a mild pitch correction. And then I went Ah! There is my dad’s voice. So anyway, I was looking for these cassettes – and it was about five years ago – there is an interesting description on loss and on stress that was made by a therapist, a very interesting diaphragm, the diaphragm was... Let me draw this for you so it kind of makes sense. When you have trauma, loss, usually if this is you and that is the trauma, you are endlessly touched by that space, at the beginning of any kind of loss or pain, it’s consistent. With time, what happens is that the trauma gets smaller but how it affects you is different...So five years ago, I had one of this bolt of ...All the time of missing this guy, was reduced but occasionally, I would be like oh man this is a difficult time.

O.L: Yes.

W.Y: So, I was looking for his cassettes, I went back to Manchester - my mum’s place - looking for these cassettes and I found another cassette. And this cassette didn’t have his name on it, it had somebody else’s name on it. And I just immediately remembered to be asked to record these cassette tapes when I was a kid - these tape letters - these messages that were sent to relatives abroad, like nameless, faceless relatives. And as a second generation Asian, born in Manchester, I can remember being asked to say hi to aunties, uncles back in Pakistan, and it’s so embarrassing, you don’t know all these people, you don’t know their language and occasionally my mum and dad would ask me to sing the national anthem of Pakistan and you are told to recite this stuff and you sing it without knowing
what it means. You don’t understand the political context and why national anthems exist, especially for a country that is so young as Pakistan. The trauma of the separation of India, none of that was connecting to me - interested in watching Disney on the telly.

O.L: But you were very young.

W.Y: Exactly...And of course what we found out is that subsequently the kind of experiences around the partition and all the experiences that these guys had with migrating, they shielded it from us, they didn’t tell us anything about what happened to them and what it was like. Because they were like we are here in the U.K., we are in the colonial motherland - you can’t get away from the relationship between Britain and India, a colonial experience and what it meant for people and my parents. So, all of that is wrapped up, all of this is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the story of these cassettes. So, I had this cassette and immediately when I looked through this drawer at my mum’s place and found this cassette I went like... honestly in a few seconds... the whole project, the whole thing, the meaning of it just smashed into me... I have this cheap artefact in my hand and it’s extraordinary valuable as a memento. And this is before I had any kind of understanding of oral history or heritage in any way, I mean I am a sound artist.

O.L: But that’s it you are a sound artist and you come across a document that is an oral document.

W.Y: Exactly.

O.L: And it’s a double echo for you, because that’s the perfect carrier, it’s a cassette, you had to do something with that.

W.Y: I was also aware that the cassettes themselves were used in different ways. I had a bit of an idea then, I didn’t have an idea as well as I do now, given the amount of research that I’ve done since. I remember that some cassettes were sent to Pakistan and then there were sort of re-recorded over and sent back. So, when I heard this thing I thought these are ghosts, not only as ghosts in the sense of time - time capsules - there are like sonographic artefacts. The magnetic tape, the actual material, in between the gaps of the magnetic tape, there are ghosts.

O.L: I hear what you say... Edison when he was developing his recording devices - he was a spiritualist - and his idea was that between the recordings he would be able to connect with the voices of the dead, and beyond.

W.Y: Yes.

O.L: And in a way, all recordings are the voice of the past and this is something that comes a lot from having interviewed another artist that works with archives [Zanési]. We need to connect with that past and make it re-exist.

W.Y: Yes, it is a simple mechanism, that we understand as a recording technology. But you know my sort of artistry I could not help but have this poetic sort of overlay that there are ghosts in machine, that not only it is captured in time but it is captured on multiple levels...These feelings within seconds condensed, it was a weird experience...And they are so many facets from this project that have sprung out.

Of course, it’s not only a sonographic snapshot of their experience but of course of ours. Of what it is like for migration, what it meant for people to move over and try to make sense of a world and what it smells like, but also to have children that speak a language that’s different from their own.
O.L: You’re fluent? Is it Urdu that you speak?

W.Y: So, here’s another thing. What we found is - considering the aspect language of the cassettes - Urdu in the lingua franca of Pakistan, this is the national language of commerce, all the street signs are in Urdu. In Pakistan, there are I think about six or seven main languages and then there are thousands of dialects. And it’s a very similar thing in India. English and Urdu were the national languages in Pakistan until five years ago. Given the sort of colonial experience, English was very much routed.

O.L: Yes, because I’ve heard that in some the tapes some of the people put in English words every now and then.

W.Y: Yes, and there is an interesting separation between English Urdu and the main language, which we found on these cassettes, and that is Potwari.

O.L: Potwari, how do you spell it?

W.Y: There are several variables spelling. What’s interesting about this is that it’s a language - I originally thought that is was a dialect of Punjabi - but it turns out it’s a transitional language that sits between two different languages, one language is Punjabi and the other language is called Hindko. And it has been defined as such by socio-linguists called [inaudible]. So, it’s called Potwari, it’s a mountain language, it is not written down, it’s an oral only language, which means it has no written tradition. All the people that predominantly use these tapes use Potwari and the reason has to do with social economic background. These guys could not read or write Urdu, with very basic levels of education. So, they’d get other people, and recite letters to them, to type their letters in Urdu - if they wanted Urdu to be used. The thing about Urdu is that it denotes...There is a class pressure on it, there is a class element. So Potwari was used on these cassettes not Urdu.

O.L: Yes, that makes sense, because the cassette is democratising the communication. As soon as we have the device at home it takes away the privilege...The written world is privileged inevitably.

W.Y: Exactly. What this meant was that...And there were a lot of women who made these recordings - the traditional patriarchal - because of the access to technology so these women voices could literally be heard. They could say what they wanted to do and they could have long arguments on these cassettes tape, lots of political stuff would be going on. In fact, one of the cassettes that we’ve got, it is still so sensitive that - it’s in the archives- nobody can listen to it, nobody can read the transcriptions, it’s been fifty years.

O.L: Why?

W.Y: Because of the content, too sensitive.

O.L: Hold on you say in the archives, which archives? We’ve moved on from your father’s drawers.

W.Y: Yes, we have a physical archive, held at the Bishopsgate Institute. It is an entirely new archive that has been created.

O.L: And there is this cassette which hasn’t been heard in many years...
W.Y: This notion of people having their voice heard for the first time and essentially acting interpersonal political dramas, the impact of that cassette would have been devastating for families. It was a very tough time for many families that were based in the U.K. And that cassette has been kept in secret by the owner. I've heard it and I can see why, there are good reasons for that to be kept entirely off the record. We now have it in safe, it won’t get lost nor destroyed. Obviously, the owner kept if for thirty, forty years or so...

O.L: I understand.

W.Y: Somehow we’ve managed to get the owner to give it to us, we’ve got it in the archive.

O.L: And you are at the core of the development of the archives at the Bishopsgate institute. So, from your father’s cassettes and the ones you have since collected from other people, tell me more, how did you assemble the archive?

W.Y: To get to that point it was quite a complicated route, normally you approach the Arts Council for any work, they are my primary funders. But this is not an arts project.

O.L: An anthropological project?

W.Y: Yes, that’s right. This is a heritage project. And in a way when I approached the Arts Council, it just didn’t fit to make this work. When I considered the Heritage Fund – at the time they were called the Lottery Fund, now rebranded the National Lottery Heritage Fund - once I found out about them I was yes here is an organisation that can understand what this project is about. I contacted them and they said “this is an interesting project, but there is always an issue with artists approaching us, they often assume that because there is some heritage element in the project that we’re going to support it”. So, I went ok how is this going to work. I tried to figure out who would be the best organisation to host this, would it be the British Library? And what do I know about archiving? I found out about the Bishopsgate Institute and went to speak with the head librarian who was “oh my god this is amazing we want this to be here”. And then I found out exactly what the Bishopsgate is about. This project couldn’t be more suited, it couldn’t be a better home for it. Finding the Bishopsgate became part of our proposal to the Heritage Fund. I realised I had to start thinking about this project in a different way compared to the way I normally think about work. And for one thing as an artist it was the very first time that I was involved in a project that looked at this because I actively avoided that all my creative life, I’ve hated the idea of looking at my own ethnic background. Identity and politics are not very interesting to me. I’ve never felt comfortable with the idea of ‘women artists’, just ‘artists’ or ‘Asian artists’, no just ‘artists’. And so, I had to sort of actively make sure that I was never misrepresented when I started music with the press.

O.L: Yes, pigeonholed.

W.Y: Yes, so I stayed away from all kind of Asianness...And twenty years later, I am working on a project, which is looking at it in a very particular kind of way.

O.L: It was the time.

W.Y: It’s not about me, trying to come up with an Asian project as such.

O.L: Yes, but the project is about representing the others also, you take yourself away, I mean you are in the project obviously, it’s your story in it but the idea of representation, that’s what is strong...
W.Y: Yes.

O.L: So... It had to exist - and even if you’re still conflicted - and I can understand why - maybe it was the right time to do it now, with more maturity.

W.Y: Yes, absolutely... And by building up an interesting team I managed to bring on board oral history experts, they helped define the project and shine light on it.

O.L: Sorry I missed the name. Who are they?

W.Y: They’re called ‘On the record’. They’re fantastic, they’ve been instrumental in making this project happen. Stunning work... And what was interesting was to approach oral history as a well-defined practice. I am a sound art guy and we are getting all this level of expertise about stuff and there we are these other guys are very nerdy in oral history and it’s amazing to see that, I love specialisation. Anyway, they were thrilled about the project, we had way too many people saying this is amazing for it not to happen. We then found that there were plenty of other people who had a similar kind of practice of recording these cassettes, it was beyond my own family so we’ve managed to find so far... In the archives, we have twenty cassettes so far and forty interviews in the pilot. And now we’ve secured money from the Arts Council as well, and the Heritage Fund for a nationwide project so that is what we are currently working on.

O.L: So, a nationwide project, yes I was going to ask you about the future of the project as I saw recently that you were looking for someone to help. When you say nationwide you mean raising a call for maybe other cassettes to emerge? People finding cassettes and sending them to you?

W.Y: Yes, so we now have enough money to employ teams in the South, in the Midlands and in the North

[interuption with Yaseen’s son]

O.L: And so, you are going to re-install the work...

W.Y: We have a much bigger team now, an administrative team. I have an excellent project coordinator, oral history advisors, about six community engagement officers with their own team of volunteers, a big team of people now ready. We were on the verge of getting all of them to go out and start making connections before the lockdown, it has thrown us a little bit now we’re doing our interviews remotely. We are right on the verge of collecting the next waves of cassettes and collect the next waves of interviews. We’ve already had requests from the People’s History Museum and the museum in Bradford to put on an exhibition so it will be next year, there will be another wave of installations.

O.L: I hope I will come to see the installation. When you did the installation at the People’s History Museum, you said to me last time in the email that you played with the nature and physicality of the tape. I heard the exchange between Asim and Asma and there is a lot of hissing, did it bother you? As a sound artist, I would like to know your thoughts on that, and if the restitution was more important to keep the veracity of the document, and if for the installation you did modify the hissing? Also, if you kept it quite linear as in when you play the tape you play the full tape, as you didn’t try to collage. So yes, if you can tell me on the hissing, the texture of the tape and respecting the entity of the object as opposed to a fragmented approach? And then if you can tell me more about the physicality of the tape if you’ve added some sound design?
W.Y: Yes, ok. It’s an interesting question in terms of how we deal with something like that. Most of the cassettes the audio itself is in Potwari so it’s inaccessible, if I play it to you it’s meaningless apart from the idea that you have some historical kind of media.

O.L: Just to reiterate you speak Potwari or you speak Urdu?

W.Y: I speak Potwari and I have some basic understanding of Urdu. And my Potwari is an anglophile version of it.

But if you were to listen to it, it would be meaningless. To me there were two things that I needed to do: one thing is to make it accessible to non Potwari speakers and two to make any exhibitions in Potwari so Potwari speakers can listen to their own voices and own languages because it’s never publicised, if there is anything that is going to be done in public it’s always in Urdu. And again, we are dealing with class.

O.L: It’s a political dimension embedded with language.

W.Y: Any exhibition that we are going to do is going to be done in Potwari so that the community can hear their own language, their own voices...So, I was how do we get this done? I created six pieces for the sound installation. The sound installation was one part of the exhibition. We had a visual exhibition with an interactive thing, we had the actual cassettes on display and an 8-channels speaker in circle. I created six sound poems and there was a different approach for each one of them. In one there was the conversation between Asim and Asma his partner, so a little clip of the original cassette tapes. And then I got them to - we transcribed the content of the tape - to recite the text in English twenty years later.

O.L: Wow that is beautiful.

W.Y: And it was a bit awkward for them, so it was a one-and-a-half-minute clip of Asim.

O.L: That is the clip available on the website?

W.Y: Yes, in the installation you had Asim’s take - if you imagine a circle of speakers - two speakers on one side of the circle had Asim’s voice in Potwari, two speakers on the other side had Asma’s voice. They’re both on at the same time and the audience member is listening to husband and wife talking to each other at the same time and then a minute and a half later once that little clip is over, it flips and then the opposing speakers have Asim and Asma speaking in English.

O.L: It’s quite clever, the Potwari language comes out but also you stage them...And then it allows anyone to get into the exhibition as an English speaker.

W.Y: There was another piece where I interviewed a guy, in Potwari. How am I going to make this interview with him? It wasn’t just the cassettes, it was the interview, the context, which is as valuable. So, how do I make the interview accessible to non Potwari speakers? I did the same thing, I did the interview in Potwari, we got it transcribed and translated from a team in Pakistan. And then I got the section that I wanted - about two minutes in length. I got his son to recite it in English. And so, what I did is then have - if you imagine again a circle of speakers - two speakers where I ask the questions – as the interviewer – and three speakers are the interviewee’s voice. I would ask the questions in English, he would answer in Potwari. So you have then the perfect balance between English and Potwari.
O.L: So, to recap we’ve got two speakers where you ask the questions, then we hear the interviewee’s voice in Potwari over three speakers, and then in another three speakers we hear his son reciting in English.

W.Y: People like me who understand all three, we can get all of it, people who just speak Potwari get the gist of it and people who only speak English will still understand it.

O.L: Yes, it’s all about the transmission, find a way to operate the transmission of the content because that’s what spoken word is about, it’s the message.

W.Y: And the interesting thing about it is that what you find is that there are many surprising levels of transmission. It isn’t just about making the interview accessible. By doing this process you’re hearing the son’s voice and the son’s voice is Northern, working class, British-Pakistani, and you can hear it encapsulated. There is nothing that is explicitly mentioned but what that tells you, is this is the product of migration. There is another level of transmission that is encoded automatically, that is subtle underneath it all. So, the spatialisation reveals it, it is a bit like a muscle, that’s underlying, you think that is the outside but there is all this other stuff that just sprung out, which is never revealed unless you try this.

O.L: It’s a great project Wajid.

W.Y: And then I haven’t even got to the answer. There is one of the pieces about tapes. To go back to Asim and Asma’s situation, the cassette piece that we wanted to use was incredibly noisy – most cassette tapes are noisy. We basically left them alone. When it came to the public for the installation - I don’t like the process of de-noising them or processing them - but with the tape that we wanted to use, it had multiple hums on it, it had a kind of a cassette play hum, which made it impossible to listen to at the same time. So, what I had to do was de-hum, de-noise and separate all the humming that we moved from it, to basically put it back in again.

[laugh]

I had to put the noise back into the recording but just reduce it, so it wasn’t just a case of reducing the noise, it was technically taking it off and then putting it back on. And then doing a whole mix of this stuff being reintroduced to get a kind of, an agreeable cassette feel.

O.L: I hear what you say.

W.Y: It was just for that one piece.

O.L: You wanted it to feel real but not too real. For the experiencer, it’s still a cassette with the crackle and the hiss but not to the point where it is taking away from the content.

W.Y: Exactly.

There was another piece, which is all about noise, hiss and mistakes. The piece is essentially about the material, very much about how people press the physical buttons and all the mistakes. There may be some instances where somebody has recorded a message and somebody else has accidentally recorded some music in between the messages. And then the tape is pulling and chewing. So, I made a whole specialised collection. It was like a kind of sound art perfect diffused cracks, fractured, crackly thing. So, it was a real composition.
O.L: As a sound artist, it’s too tempting to play with the material itself.

W.Y: Exactly.

O.L: But obviously, you could not do that with everything because you are concerned here with the transmission of the message. You can’t go to the point of treating the voice completely like sculpting the voice. It must be about the message.

W.Y: I had eighty years old woman and men just in the middle of the speakers and cry. You’re not going to get that with a kind of experimental cut-up piece, it’s a step too far.

O.L: Yes.

W.Y: Having them in the middle of a diffused space speaker set-up, they’ve never been in a gallery before in their lives. That can only happen if these previous pieces have been realised.

O.L: So how many people could be in the circle you reckon? To be inside the sound diffusion space? I’ve seen photographs.

W.Y: I will send you some photographs of the space...

O.L: I think what’s interesting here is that if you had treated the voice too much, it would have become too alien, too experimental, it would have taken away from the purpose of the project. But yes, the fact that people could be in the centre, as you said some people never experienced a surround diffusion, it becomes a communal experience.

W.Y: Yes.

O.L: I’ve been to – different topic obviously –...What’s her name ... The Forty Part Motet by Janet Cardiff, I don’t know if you know this piece?

W.Y: Oh, yes.

O.L: And it’s a multi-diffusion and you are with everyone inside. The voice is not treated, the Tallis piece is beautiful, and it’s a communal experience, completely...by just placing people at the centre of it.

W.Y: Yes, absolutely, I was very inspired by that piece, I saw that piece a long time ago and what got me was - the music itself was beautiful and I remember it being quite emotive - but what struck me the most were the breaks, when they stopped with the little coughing and splattering, it felt so full. I remember being the only person in that gallery space in the middle of the speakers and thinking this room is full...I remember it being stunning and I think that ten years later it may have informed how I approached Tape Letters.

For another one of these pieces, I went to Pakistan to do quite a bit of research a couple of times and I did some field recordings there at the market. There is a well-known market [name] and I went there with a nice mic, and everyone was, what is this thing? It’s got a fluffy on top of it. Then when I came back to England - I was born in a town in Great Manchester called Ashton-under-Lyne, there is a market there, a nice old one - I went around recording this market in Ashton. The piece was in the circle, four speakers had the Pakistani market and four speakers had the Ashton market. And it was a
beautiful balance, having these played at the same time. At one point, you only listen to one market and then you listen to another one. And all these guys in the circle, they were laughing, “we know this, we know the sound of this market in Pakistan”. Markets everywhere have the same kind of sound, people going out “onions at this price” or whatever, you’ve got the exact same thing going on in the circle, we had about twenty-five, thirty people in the middle and they must have been sixty around for the private event.

O.L: Brilliant.
If I have more questions I will get back to you but yes it would be good if you could send me a few photos or an audio-visual excerpt if you don’t mind...

What I’m trying to write about is the idea of resounding the voice of the past, the archival voice and in a sense... I don’t know if this is a word you could use to describe your work, and if not it doesn’t matter as I’m investigating artists who are working from the spoken voice archives so it’s up to me to join the dots and see how... I can see the resounding as operating a relocation of sound in time and space in the sense that this project is... So the cassettes are sounding again, they are resounding, if they had been left in the drawer, they would not sound again and I think in a sense your work is operating that resounding, it’s not only that it is sounding technically as sound but it is also bringing in another echo, another dimension to a part of history, that us as British – I am British now, well European – we may not know about. When I found out about your project, it was new to me. Your resounding is bringing another reading... Also it is a new context, you’re placing this material in a new context.
I have a lot to write about...

W.Y: I would love to read this because clearly the way you are thinking about this is very relevant to Tape Letters. I feel like I’m not an academic.

O.L: Well you are, you did a MA!

W.Y: Yes, I did but because I didn’t have a degree, I just leapt into a master because I had been working with sound and music so in some way there is a huge chunk of my education that’s been missing... I don’t feel like a natural academic but I’m very attracted to academic work and I think that resounding couldn’t be a more perfect way to try to describe this project. I will be very interested in reading what you are coming up with and try to contextualise this thing. There are many ways to try to think about this. The interesting thing about this is that we can’t get away from the social-economic class. And what that means, in terms of lack of access to education. This is an absolute working-class phenomenon and I’ve got some guys who have been working on this project that are Urdu speakers, well-educated Pakistanis who don’t get this project because they’re not from that class in some way. And so, when we’re thinking about resounding, this is again coming from an interesting academic background, it is coming from a learnt space. It positions as able to contextualise the behaviour and it is the same thing about understanding Potwari, about the social linguistic aspect. Potwari speakers themselves they don’t even know what linguists are, it’s not even part of their vocabulary. These are working-class Pakistanis, there are the poorest class of a poor country. So, resounding and oral history it’s entirely baffling to them. Whereas for me it’s deeply informative, but I’ve got my foot in that world and in that world of theirs so I am the bridge to somehow access this and this other side in which I’m also interested. It’s an interesting thing

O.L: I’m going to try to formulate the resounding, with the Hepworth tape. I’m going to try to write about these emerging properties of the resounding.

W.Y: Marvellous
O.L: And obviously, your project ties in...It’s a bit daunting but I will get there

W.Y: What’s your timeline?

O.L: It’s been shifted because of the lockdown, everyone is in disarray, we’re looking now at submitting in September so plenty of time. I may have too much material, you’ve given me so much, I can also do an article, which I’d like to do too.

W.Y: If there is anything that comes up, I much prefer talking rather than emails.

O.L: I think that orally we come up with things better, sometimes I record myself talking about something and then type it...Sometimes we get blocked in front of a screen. Thank you Wajid.