

Lucia FARINATI

**Audio Arts Archive:
From Inventory Space to Imagined Space**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
Kingston University London

Department of Critical and Historical Studies
Kingston School of Art

February 2020

Chapter 4: Activating the Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space

Theoretical framework

4.1 Introduction

The Audio Arts Archive comprises a rich and unique body of original recordings that represents one of the most substantial audio archives of artists' voices and sound art preserved by Tate. The Archive includes both original and published recordings, but also material relating to the inception, creation and production of the audio magazine including numerous paper records, rare exhibition catalogues, private view cards, photographs and production equipment. The Archive covers the lifespan of the magazine from 1973 to 2007, yet does not include the whole body of sound works created by Furlong and/or collaborators under the collective name of 'Audio Arts'. (For a full description of the collection see *Diagram 5 Audio Arts Archive*, in *Appendix 2*).

Prior to the acquisition by Tate in 2004, the Audio Arts Archive was simply considered by Furlong as the result of his long-term editorial and artistic activity conducted up to 2007 with the help of a small, dedicated production team.¹ As Furlong has remarked on various occasions, *Audio Arts* was never set up as a (sound) archive.² It was a collaborative artistic project based on the idea of retaining original conversations between artists as well as an audial space for artistic production, collaborative process and social interaction. Furlong has always presented the Audio Arts Archive as a living archive: a body of works which rather than being associated with dusty boxes encapsulating the past is imagined as a sonic organism that can be shaped and reshaped into new artistic forms. This organism does speak about a truthful moment, or what Furlong might prefer to say *actuality*. As I have argued in the introduction of this PhD *Audio Arts* can be seen as the manifestation of both an innovative publishing initiative but also as an expanded sound practice per se. However, since the constitution of the Tate Audio Arts Archive as an autonomous archival entity separate from Furlong's personal archive, the dual symbiotic relationship between the thirty-four year process of recording

¹ The process of acquisition of Audio Arts Archive started in 2004, however Furlong approached the Tate in 1990 with a note of intention. The assessment of the material began in 2001 by Adrian Glew. See interview with Adrian Glew by the present author, 11/01/2019.

² For example the speech at the symposium *Active Archive*, British School of Rome, 18 October 2006.

and publishing artists' interviews and the creation of sound works has been, so to speak, split into two separate strands: the magazine and the artworks. As a consequence, the multifaceted body of recordings produced by William Furlong/*Audio Arts* over thirty-four years is no longer active as a continuous organism. Divided into two strands of practice (the editorial and the artistic) it is rather constrained into a system of classification that follows an indexical archival structure: series, boxes, folders, items. While the preservation and digitisation of the *Audio Arts* recordings and paper records is today vital to guarantee its future access to a wider public, their actual re-contextualisation within the Tate Archive (and its on-line platform) could be seen both as a mode of distribution which inhabits the original spirit of the magazine, but also, on the other hand, as a de-contextualisation of the original project and its multiple trajectories.

In the following I explore the tension between *inventory space* and *imagined space*, in other words the relationship between the archival methodology employed in the re-organisation of *Audio Arts* items (e.g. an in-house 'reactionary project') and conversely the way in which these items have been used creatively by Furlong in the production of new sound works. Finally I explore how listening to (and within) the archive could be considered a form of engagement between the two spaces, acting on one hand as an archival methodology and, on the other, as a creative tool for the active participation of an audience. The key questions I discuss are: how can an archive be defined in relation to an artists' practice (and in this specific case to Furlong's editorial, curatorial and artistic practice)? How is an archive active rather than the ultimate trace of previous activity?

4.2 Inventory Space

Tate's Archive contains the largest collection of artists' interviews in the UK. These are part of the 3,500 recordings held in its audio-visual collection (TAV) and also within its 800+ general archive collections (TGA). With the provision of the Rootstein Hopkins funded audio digitisation suite in 2012 and the associated project to digitise a large selection of *Audio Arts* material, Tate is now in a position to enable wider dissemination of this extensive and underused resource for intensive academic use.

The Audio Arts Archive represents the largest collection of artists' interviews from the 1970s to the 2000s. It is therefore an important collection for Tate. Other relevant collections that have been preserved by Tate Archive include David Sylvester's interviews with American Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s, John Jones' collection of interviews

with almost 100 contemporary artists in 1965-66 and the Tate Archive's digital copies of the British Library's *Artists' Lives* project from 1990.

The process of cataloguing the whole *Audio Arts* collection (TGA 200414) began in 2010 in direct consultation with Furlong and Violet Barrett who helped Tate archivists to identify the material originally stored in their home at 6 Briarwood Road, in Clapham, South West London. Although the Audio Arts Archive is the result of a publishing activity, it does have the characteristics of a 'personal archive'.³ The material production of the magazine took place in the artists' studio. Here the recordings were edited, the inlays of the cassettes designed and finally assembled for final distribution. And here in the artist's home, is where the original master tapes and a large number of related paper records was kept by Furlong and Barrett up to 2004.⁴ What remains today in the studio of 6 Briarwood Road (after the termination of the publishing activity in 2007), are mostly the original master tapes and the equipment for Furlong's sound works. These include sound installations, performances and LP records produced by the artist during and after the production of the magazine.⁵ There are however a number of *Audio Arts* recordings which overlap between the Audio Arts Archive at Tate and Furlong's personal archive.⁶

In terms of audio data, the collection preserved by Tate includes many different formats: cassette tape (c.1000); reel-to-reel tapes (c.1000), DAT (digital audio tape, c.260), CD-ROM (c.100); vinyl record (c.240), and VHS (analogue video recording tape). According to conservation specialists, the life expectancy of audio material is shorter than other media (e.g. documents on paper). Therefore, the digitisation of *Audio Arts* original master tapes was set as one of the key priorities of the Tate preservation project. This was conceived as a 'reactionary project' which meant scheduling different phases of digitisation and continuously monitoring the short term results in order to allow a flexible

³ Silvia Vallini, *Dalla voce registrata alla voce digitalizzata: 'Audio Arts' archive project: management, tecnologia e tecniche tra in-house guideline e standard internazionali*, MA thesis, University of Macerata, 2011

⁴ The archive was physically transported from Furlong's house to the Tate Archive in 2004.

⁵ I have visited Furlong's personal archive on several occasions and listed the number of master tapes present in his home. The archive is not organised nor catalogued. Items are scattered in the former room of *Audio Arts* studio including recording equipment, hard drives, copies of *Audio Arts* tape cassettes, exhibition catalogues and books. Violet Barrett is currently organising the paper records in individual files. Far from being a catalogue of the master tapes the following lists the original master tapes present in this archive. 10 inches reel to reel tapes: *Accent for a Start*, *Arris*, *Imperial War Museum*; *Orchard Gallery*; *Crossing piece for radio*; *Newcastle 1998*; *Interim*; *St James* (Arris); *Broadgate*; *Live to Air*; *Liverpool Radio*; *New Intelligence*. 5 inches reel to reel tapes: *Intelligence*, *Arris*, *Sound Garden*; *Dublin Street*; *Conversation Piece*; *Academic Board*; *Mango Mango* (East End market). Tapes Cassettes: *Wall of Sound*; *Sculpture 1983 - Objects and Spaces*; *Crossing*; *Radio Garden*; *Performing Family*; *Out of Sight*; *Orchard Gallery*.

⁶ For example some copies of the *Audio Arts* productions such as the LP records are preserved both in the Tate Archive (see TGA 200414/7/3/3) and in Furlong's personal archive.

approach in selecting, employing and eventually changing the strategies of digitation for the optimal result.⁷

Thanks to the Rootstein Hopkins funded digitisation project, the original tape recordings produced and published by *Audio Arts* (25 volumes and over 53 supplements) were digitised by Tate by 2013.⁸ The published versions of the magazine were subsequently made available to the public on the Tate website. It is relevant to stress that the Rootstein Hopkins project was the first in-house digitisation project run by the Tate Library & Archive department who established both the criteria of storage management and metadata management of the *Audio Arts* collection. The project resulted in an effective strategy in terms of preservation and access: it allowed the digitisation of the most significant body of recordings produced by *Audio Arts* between 1973 and 2007 but also its immediate access through a dedicated online platform.⁹ However, a large number of unpublished recordings (e.g. unpublished interviews, unedited master tapes, tape-slide recordings) went under a new digitation project in the summer of 2019.¹⁰ Due to the entity and multifaceted aspects of the *Audio Arts* collection, which consists of over 3000 catalogue entries, many items were still in the process of being catalogued during the PhD research.¹¹ This did not constitute an obstacle for organising the public events and writing this thesis owing to a special agreement with Tate at the beginning of the project.¹² However the limited access to the archive provoked another crucial question:

⁷ The project was run entirely by Tate and included a period of two years subdivided into the following stages and tasks: initial research of the fund with the help of William Furlong and Violet Barrett (1-8 weeks) including the individuation of the series and the interpretation of the handwritten notes; a second phase of re-organisation and cataloguing (25-52 weeks); survey of the conservation state of the recordings (1-10 weeks); comparative study of the best strategies for the digitisation process, its cost, methodologies and tools (11-25 weeks); establishment of the sampling tests for the digitisation (26-35 weeks); digitisation (36-52 weeks). See Vallini (2011).

⁸ In 2009 the agreement was signed between the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation and Tate Britain for the cataloguing and digitisation project for the total cost of £160,000. The project began in January 2010. The following people were involved in the project: Adrian Glew, project manager; Allison Foster, archive cataloguer; Jack Maynard, Audio Arts Conservator (from August 2010); John Langdon (Archive curator) an expert of Tate Archive Digital Preservation Strategy.

⁹ <http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts>

¹⁰ Save our Sounds, a British Library's programme to preserve the nation's sound heritage.

¹¹ The catalogue of *Audio Arts* was in a draft form until May 2019 and therefore was not available to the general public. The completed catalogue was published on line in June 2019. 'In terms of cataloguing the Audio Arts project has presented some unique challenges. The collection is unusual in that it contains both the business papers of a successful magazine as well as many of the elements found in personal papers, such as correspondence, personal accounts and ephemera. This diversity is reflected in the way the material has been arranged ... After discussions with the donor, it was agreed that where possible the original order of the material would be preserved. However in some cases, such as the audio recordings, the order in which they were found has been changed to reflect the way in which the recordings were published to enable easier searching of the records.' Jack Maynard and Allison Foster, 'Preserving the Audio Arts Archive', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, vol. no.1, 2012, pp. 59-63. 2012.

¹² It was agreed with Tate to have a 'free access, within the Hyman Kreitman Reading Rooms to

how to make the whole *Audio Arts* collection accessible to a wider audience in this period of transition? And how to enable a wider dissemination of this extensive and underused resource for intensive academic use?

In 2007 Tate Britain presented the first archival display of *Audio Arts*.¹³ The exhibition included five vitrines with paper records, original cassettes tapes and recording equipment, and a selection of artists' interviews (a total of four hours of recorded clips) from the four decades of the magazine. The audience could sit and listen to the audio compilation via headphones. Despite the original proposal of Furlong to present a sound work as part of the *Audio Arts* display, the curatorial team opted for an archival exhibition that focused on the presentation of the magazine, thus excluding the idea of incorporating a sound installation into the archival display.¹⁴ I argue that the attention paid to the magazine with little or no regard to the Audio Arts Sound Works has reinforced the image/view of *Audio Arts* as being solely a publishing project focused on artists' interviews rather than an expanded sound practice.

The Tate archival display of 2007 provoked and triggered important questions for the initial development of my PhD. How can we inscribe *Audio Arts* into a wider history of conceptual art, critical practice, and sound art? To what extent is the artist interview a point of intersection between art practice, oral history, and curatorial critical practice? What is the relationship between the individual sound works created by Furlong and the collaborative productions by *Audio Arts*? Can the continuity between the magazine and the Audio Arts Sound Works be critically and historically addressed through the Tate Archive preservation and curatorial policies? And if so, which kind of curatorial framework might be developed in collaboration with the Tate Archive without infringing the boundaries of Tate's other departments?

Contrary to my initial understanding the rationale for including or excluding Audio Arts Sound Works from the Tate Archive was not informed by a criterion imposed by the Tate, but the result of a clear agreement with Furlong. Right from the outset it was

consult the extensive records of *Audio Arts*, 1973 -2000s (TGA 200414) and the use and reproduction of *Audio Arts* items presented to the public within Tate premises (e.g. research seminars held in the Archive). A selected number of unpublished recordings were also specially digitized on request to allow progress in this research. See letter of support to Lucia Farinati sent by Adrian Glew to Kingston University, 23 February 2016.

¹³ *Audio Arts Bill Furlong* 5 March – 27 April 2007 see also <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/audio-arts> (Accessed 27 Dec. 2019).

¹⁴ In 2007 Tate Britain was not provided with a gallery space devoted exclusively to archival exhibitions. The *Audio Arts* display took place in one of the exhibition galleries at Tate Britain (gallery 61) but the resources allocated were limited to an archival display. The Archive Gallery at Tate Britain was introduced few years later. This allows more flexibility in terms of exhibitions organised by archivist, curators and artists. See the interview with Adrian Glew by the present author, 11/01/2019.

agreed that Tate would acquire both the unpublished and published *Audio Arts* recordings and also the associated material, which constitute about 12 boxes including published sound pieces and artworks by other artists. Beside this the preparatory material was also acquired for each issue including working files, financial records, and associated documentation. To keep this material together as a whole the context was considered important for reconstructing the history of how *Audio Arts* came into being. Also, no medium or format discrimination was adopted in the process of acquisition. Although Furlong regards *Audio Arts* as an artwork in this case the general principle of collecting preparatory and documentary material was applied. As Adrian Glew clarified:

Audio Arts is slightly different because Bill himself regards it as an art work but as a group of recordings one could also see an amazing documentation of the art-world from the 1970 onwards and that is how we viewed it at the Tate. Bill in a sense viewed the acquisition as most appropriately housed at the Tate because research could gain access to it more easily. And it turned out that we could also presented it on line much easier than if it had been acquired as Bill's art work as such. That is not to say we are not interested in Bill's sound art work as well as an institution. There are often discussion between archivists and curators about these areas of overlap or these very liminal spaces between art and archive and of course since 1950s and 1960s a lot of artworks have been produced in very ephemeral ways, which may mean they only exists in an archive, but the nice way that our former director Nick Serota viewed the archive is that is actually part of the whole collection, so the arts and the archive collection is one collection at Tate.¹⁵

Although it is premature to envisage the future of Furlong's own personal archive, is clear from this interview that Tate Archive is potentially interested in extending the collection to Furlong's sound works. However where this collection would exactly sit within the Tate collection and how the two collections would be linked together would have to be evaluated by a specialist team of assessors.

4.3 Imagined Space

In 1998 Furlong created a new work, which employed archival recordings from *Audio Arts* artists' interviews arranged into a multichannel sound installation. Entitled *Conversation Piece*, the work has been presented in different exhibition contexts as a constructed conversation between Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp and Andy

¹⁵ Interview with Adrian Glew by the present author, 11/01/2019. See *Appendix 2* for the full transcript.

Warhol.¹⁶ The dialogue, built through the additive process, is the result of a careful montage of sentences, phrases, words, inferences, implications as well as the un-said, humour, wit, recollection, observation, analysis, and irony. This process increasingly evokes a convincing and sometimes abrasive series of exchanges of ideas and thoughts on art by the four interlocutors. Opposite to the purpose of documenting or reviving a conversation (that could have) happened in the past, the attempt of this sonic artefact is to invite the auditor to physically engage with the actuality of a sound event: the conversation is constructed (the four interlocutors never met in a real time/space) nevertheless it can be experienced as a real sonic event happening in the moment of the listening. Recorded sound has the ability to displace time and space, yet it does have the power to draw the auditor (us) into the actuality of the speech act: 'Recorded speech is actuality, the voice itself registered'.¹⁷

Conversation Piece inaugurated a new mode of creative 'archival' practice, which has been further developed by the artist in the past decade. In larger scale projects like *To Hear Yourself as Others Hear You* - an installation created for the space of the South London Gallery in 2002 - and *Speaking to Others: Who Speaks to Who* - created for Villa Romana in Florence in 2013 - Furlong has gathered together the many voices of *Audio Arts* in an almost 'symphonic' manner. Here an arranged montage of original recordings made in different times and places (in studios, at international exhibitions, in galleries or museums) where Furlong met and talked individually to the artists, is played back in the gallery space. These pieces dip in and out of *Audio Arts* interviews where the listener is offered an aural glimpse of an issue or comment expressed by the artist. While the sonic arrangement of these works exploits fully the use of multichannel technology and in this sense embraces (and opens up) a new spatial strategy, the expediency of working with sound in a sculptural manner is however not new to the artists' practice. As I have demonstrated in *Chapter 1*, Furlong's spatial sensibility derives from the early experimentation in the late 1970s and 1980s with tape. What seems to appear as a kind of novelty in this recent body of works is instead a very direct relationship with the archive itself.¹⁸ It could be argued that these archival montages represent only one small

¹⁶ This piece was shown at the exhibitions *Extraction, Construction, Abstraction*, Sound Museum, Rome, 2006 and *Hearing Me Hearing You*, Plymouth Arts Centre, 2006, curated by the present author. A transcript of the sound piece was also published in *Art for All?* edited by Mark Wallinger & Mary Warnock, London, PEER, 2000, p. 136. All the interviews appear individually on *Audio Arts*. Apart from the one with Duchamp recorded in 1959 by George Heard Hamilton in New York, all the other interviews were conducted and recorded by William Furlong.

¹⁷ Mel Gooding *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, (2006), in *Extraction, Construction, Abstraction* (exhib. cat.), poster publication.

¹⁸ Other sound works which are constructed through archival collages from Audio Arts Archive include *Tholsel* exhibited at *Intelligence: New British Art*, Tate Britain, 2000; *Impossibility of Fixing*

part of Furlong's work and therefore are a peripheral aspect of *Audio Arts*. However, seen in the light of the 'archive mania' and the 'archival impulse' which has recently spread rapidly through contemporary practice, these works in my view deserve much more attention.¹⁹

According to a recent article written by Hal Foster, many artists today seem to be possessed by an archival *impulse* to make historical information often lost or displaced, physically present.²⁰ As a result new instances of contemporary practice, which have embraced an archival approach and sensibility have invaded the space of the museum with indexical installations combining text, objects, platforms, plinths and vitrines.

In another article dedicated to archives of modern art, Foster has also demonstrated how the archival relations between art museums, art history and art practice has been functional to the establishment of modern museums as places of reanimation or reification. That the idea of mnemonic loss is foundational to the archive, that memory crisis is its natural *raison d'être*.²¹ But while the constitution of the archives of modern art reflect the imperative needs of creating new memory structures through which to give new life to the past and enliven the present, the very potential of archival contemporary practice is - according to Foster, that of creating possible scenarios of alternative social relations: 'to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia'.²²

The expression used by Foster, 'archival impulse', is a very charged term, which denotes immediately a psychological dimension. We can easily link the word 'impulse' to instinct, but also, in a more Freudian instance, to compulsion, desire and drive. This path is one that Derrida undertook in looking at the constitution of an archive in terms of a pathological enterprise. According to Derrida, the foundation of an archive takes the place of 'the original and structural breakdown of the said memory'. 'There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside'. Yet 'the logic or repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remain according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive'.²³ For Derrida, an archival relation is more than a simple act of bringing the past back to life. It is rather the repercussion of pathological disorder, a compulsive behaviour impinged on

Meaning, Laure Genillard Gallery, London, 2009; *Not Speaking the Language*, Flat Time House, London, 2010.

¹⁹ I borrow the term 'archival impulse' from Hal Foster's article 'An Archival Impulse' in *October*. I also refer to the work *Archive Mania* by writer Suely Rolnik (2011).

²⁰ Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, vol. 110, 2004, pp. 3-22.

²¹ Hal Foster, 'Archives of Modern Art', *October*, vol. 99, pp.81-95.

²² Hal Foster (2004), p. 22.

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 1996, University of Chicago Press, p. 10-11.

the subject, which he calls *mal d'archive* (archive fever). By following the footsteps of Freud's *Gradiva* and the uncanny relationship between psychoanalysis and archaeology, Derrida's archive is a relentlessly psychological construct.

But if we enter *Conversation Piece*, or any similar archival montage made by Furlong, and try to listen to it with a psychoanalytical ear, looking for slippages and what remains unsaid because it was repressed or simply forgotten, we end up in frustration. Framed as real conversations about art these works are never compulsively nostalgic or over-dramatic, nor are imbued of a desire for an archaeological excavation. If we pay attention to the way the voices have been gathered together, the use of repetition, the overlapping, the clashes between speech (acts), we could say that Furlong's multichannel sound installations are certainly elicited by an 'archival impulse'. But this impulse is far from being of a Freudian nature (the archive fever as invoked by Derrida). The original conversations with the artists happened in their studios, in their exhibitions and sometimes in off-site locations where their projects took place. Here, in the place of production, there is no compulsive desire of excavating into their past life: the artist is not the archaeologist but rather a reporter of the present time.

Different from the contemporary artistic practices described by Foster, in which lost or displaced historical information are made physically present through an installation, Furlong's favour for this artistic form comes from his sculptural attachment to space through sound, and to sound through speech. His 'archival' installations have the simplicity of minimal sculptures and more the aspiration of primary structures: grids constructed of cables and speakers that often underline the architectural features of the gallery space; industrial metal frames hung on the walls as sound paintings, or pure white canvases that function as hidden, remote speakers. This is what can be seen in the gallery. There is also no attempt at producing a quasi-archival architecture, a complex arrangement of found objects, texts, kiosks, platforms, and images.²⁴ Furlong's displays have only one multi-chromatic dimension: that of the plurality of voices, their grain, accent, intonation, pitch, tone, and inflection. This is what can be heard in the gallery.

It has been suggested by art critic Mel Gooding that entering *Audio Arts* and its polyvocality is like entering a three-dimensional novel, the dialogic novel theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin: the artist as the novelist. Entering *Audio Arts* 'is the anarchy of many

²⁴ In looking at the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacita Dean and Sam Durant, Foster observed that the favourite medium of these artists appears to be installation. The work is archival since it does not only draw on informal archives but produces them as well. See Foster (2004).

voices in many rooms [...] This anarchy is not apolitical: it is a liberation from the authoritative retrospective orderings of written discourses'.²⁵

To return to my initial question of how an archive can be defined in relation to an artist's practice, in the case of Furlong's work it is perhaps more productive to explore once more Walter Benjamin's act of unpacking his library: the artist as the collector. Benjamin writes: 'There is, in the life of the collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order'.²⁶ The tension, he refers to, is that between the 'chaos of memories' and the 'order of the catalogue'. One seems to feed the other in the mesmerising process of re-discovering ones personal collection.

How can we frame Furlong's process of making new work out of the Audio Arts Archive, if not as the gesture of unpacking his own (recording) archive? Unpacking the library means for Benjamin the very possibility of creating new relations between the books of his collections. The same possibility can be applied to Furlong's archive. Listening back to the recorded voices, re-arranging them in new structures, giving them new artistic forms are the simple steps for the foundation of a creative, active archive. Active in the sense that is still a living archive and not purely the trace of past activity, active as the conversation is not over yet, it can be continued ... And although constructed, the conversation, all the *Audio Arts* conversations, are nevertheless passionately dialogical both in the source and the signal. Unpacking *Audio Arts* archive means, to conclude, to re-establish the multiple connections, the accumulative, multi-directional, heterogeneous aspect of *Audio Arts* in an act of dialogical imagination.

A few years before making *Conversation Piece* Furlong wrote:

The attraction for the artist of working with recorded sound no doubt resided in its characteristic of maintaining an integrity with regard to the relationship between the moment of recording and the subsequent hearing. The psychophysical and acoustic nature of the recordings itself is structurally re-entered in real time by a listener on subsequent occasions. The distancing process and 'filters' associated with other media are absent and the artist can therefore utilise this sense of the original experience when the work is presented.²⁷

As the artist describes here, the very powerful aspect of recorded sound is the ability to create a 'here and now'. A displaced time and space can be re-entered in the present moment of the playback, in the act of listening back to a recorded voice. This is what

²⁵ Mel Gooding *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, 2006.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting' (1931), in *Illuminations*, Fontana/Collins, p. 60.

²⁷ William Furlong, 'Sound in Recent Art', in *Audio Arts: Beunruhigende Versuche Zur Genauigkeit*, Reclam Leipzig, 1992, p. 286.

Bakhtin has named ‘the zone of maximal contact with the present’.²⁸ It is on this double possibility, the playback technology on one hand, and the very experience of listening to the archive on the other, that I will develop, in the following pages, my proposal for the Activation of the Audio Arts Archive.

4.4 A Sympathetic Listener

Until the early 1970s listening to artists talking about their work and capturing their voices on tape represented very much a novelty for an art magazine. If we think of the prominent art magazines of that time, the voice of the artist was normally mediated by art critics through critical writing, or in the best scenario by transcribing and editing an interview.²⁹ With the introduction of new, portable recording technology and with it the possibility of new forms of distribution accessible to everyone, sound experimentation was increasingly developed among artists, writers and small independent publishers.

Although *Audio Arts* was the first audio magazines established in the UK, it was not the only one. As I have shown in *Chapter 1* other similar initiatives were spreading abroad, especially in France and Italy where the tradition of sound poetry was particularly strong, but also in Canada, the USA and Sweden, where experimental music and the cross-over between performance and audio art represented a significant part of the avant-garde movement. Since its first decade of activity 1973-1983 *Audio Arts* magazine combined many different sound formats and artistic genres in one unique structure. And although its ethos was very much informed by the two-way communication of the cassette culture at that time, the extension of the magazine from cassette tape to site-specific projects, allowed for very different listening moments and experiences. Parallel to the possibility of playing back the recordings and listening to them in a private/intimate space, listening to the *Audio Arts* cassette tapes in a shared space of an exhibition was also a possibility that Furlong developed in collaboration with Archer in the 1980s in projects like *Live to Air* for the Tate Gallery (1982) and *Objects and Spaces* for the Hayward Annual (1983). *Live to Air* at Tate was particularly successful and well received both by the press and audiences alike.³⁰ In the accompanying text for *Live to*

²⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 1981, p.10.

²⁹ See for example *Artforum*, which was founded in 1962, *Flash Art* (1967) and *Artscribe* (1976-92). For a detailed chronicle of the early history of *Artforum* see Amy Newman’s *Challenging Art: 1962-1974*, Soho Press, 2000.

³⁰ ‘While *Audio Arts*’s fascinating glimpses into the potential of sound art is an obvious and popular focus for events at the Tate (when I visited the show there were long queues to use the headphones even though the Tate’s advertising department seems to have gone out of its way to

Air, Tate curator Richard Francis has described Furlong as a ‘sympathetic listener’, he wrote:

Furlong has maintained and fostered very close links with the artists he sets out to serve; these people rather than librarians, archivists and curators are the primary users of *Audio Arts*, because they feel a sympathy with the way things are done, and the way the work is handled.³¹

If on one hand Furlong has been identified as a sympathetic listener, it could also be argued that the listening experience has been and still is a primary form of engagement with *Audio Arts*. But how and where has this experience been situated? And how might this have changed over the years?

The listening act started for Furlong by talking to artists, engaging with their work presented in exhibitions, off-site projects or in their studios. The listening act, in other words, has never been dissociated with the speech act. It has always been related to specific physical contexts and soundscapes. Listening and speaking as the reciprocal act of exchange and dialogue between artists constitutes, in short, the very art of conversation developed over the years by Furlong and his collaborators. However, the innovative aspect of the magazine and its ethos has been rooted in the very possibility of retaining those conversations and those voices in audio formats. According to Furlong, listening to recorded speech on cassette created a proximity with the primary source but also allowed a new mode of communication based on cassette distribution.

For Furlong the diffusion and access to cassette recorders was seen in the light of a potential network of distribution between small groups of isolated individuals which acted as a kind of ‘counter force’ to the powerful mechanism of established media (book publishing, the recording industry, TV, newspapers and radio). On this basis, two-way communication was made possible.

Two-way communication could become a primary feature of information exchange through the audio cassette. In this area both the receiver/audience and publisher/editor would co-exist in a dual structure based on participation and flow of information in both directions, rather than the one way direction maintained at present by media within our culture.³²

ignore the event) there are also several much larger works on display, ambitious tape/slide presentations by Tim Head, James Coleman and Stuart Brisley’. From the review by Waldemar Januszczak, ‘Breaking down the sound barrier. Artists and Sound at the Tate Gallery’, *Arts Guardian*, 1 September, 1982, p.11. TGA 200414/2/39.

³¹ Richard Francis, *Audio Arts: Live to Air*, Tate Gallery, exhibition catalogue, 23 Aug – 19 Sep 1982, London: Tate Gallery.

³² William Furlong, *Workshop Project Audio: Information Distribution on Audio Cassette*. TGA 200414/2/2/2.

Only a few years after this statement, the large exchange of cassette tapes between people across different countries generated a very active international network through which a cassette culture was established. As part of a whole counterculture promoting new music and a certain artistic sensibility, this phenomenon was very much developed outside mainstream media as well as traditional art spaces. It is important to underline that the history of *Audio Arts* and more in general of the cassette culture, runs in parallel to the history of those independent initiatives and artist-run spaces who were concerned with the autonomy and freedom of the arts from the market as well as led by the desire to give voice to artists and art forms which were not visible and recognised by a large audience (See *Chapter 1*).

In the following section I explore the idea of activating the Audio Arts Archive through listening. In *Listening to the archive* I will argue that the playback form could be an intimate, unmediated moment of listening to the archive made possible by the opportunity to access recordings without the consultation of an archivist or without being physically present in the archive (e.g. remote listening or web listening via the *Audio Arts* online archive). In the section *Listening within the archive*, I then explore the relationship between recorded sound and space. Here, I analyse the notion of *active listening* and *deep listening* and how this is related to *activated spectatorship*.

4.5 Listening to the Archive: Playback, Transduction and Re-enactment

During the first year of this research I listened to many *Audio Arts* recordings from the Tate website. While through this platform the access to the *Audio Arts* volumes and supplements is immediate and easy, what seems lacking however is a very real sense of context which provides the auditor with more historical information about each individual recording. In listening back to many recordings done on the occasion of the Venice Biennale or across different art spaces in New York, London and other cities, what, however, came directly into my ears were those background sounds which immediately transported me back to the Giardini of the Venice Biennale where I had been several times, the streets of New York which remained totally unknown to me, or those London neighbourhoods which sounded quite familiar. Those sounds, often described as background noise or local ambience, were captured during the time of making those recordings with artists talking about their work, curators introducing a particular scene or project, or Furlong describing a site specific projects in the form of an audio reportage.

I have kept a diary of these listening moments. Yet the notes taken are more close to a travelogue than a process of studying the contents of each individual number. Sometimes, I wrote down what a conversation is about. I did this in real-time although the attempt was not to faithfully transcribe the conversation. Sometimes, I only annotated a few impressions about the way in which the recording was made and nothing more. I developed this diary as a series of unstructured listening sessions, allowing myself to engage with the material through attentive listening yet letting new thoughts arise and often drift away towards other destinations. Unlike listening to the radio, these listening sessions were moments in which I dropped any expectation, prejudice or preconception. I tried to do this exercise for several weeks, in the attempt not of analysing every single recording but rather by following a process of discovery. By dipping into the archive as if I had never listened to it before, yet gaining familiarity with names, places, projects and events, this process of discovery was built on the principles of *proximity* and *distance*, the axis that forms the experience of recorded sound.

From Adorno to recent sonic studies, many authors have demonstrated how sound more than any other sense, appears to perform largely a desire for proximity and connectedness.³³ Sound has the power to seduce, to create a sense of magic, and to transcend geographical spaces. This sense of desire and connectedness has increased vertiginously since the birth of portable sound devices. With the invention of the portable audio recorder and the Walkman, listening to recorded sound has become possible in any moment and in any location. According to a recent study about *Sound, Proximity and Distance in Western Experience* by Michael Bull, recorded sound has enabled users to manage and orchestrate their space. Through the power of recorded sound, time and space can be aestheticized at the point that ‘the world becomes intimate, known, possessed’.³⁴ According to Bull this phenomenon of mobile privatisation is particularly evident since the introduction of the Walkman and other new similar devices. For Bull ‘cassette player, personal stereo, mobile phone, are technologies of accompanied solitude’.³⁵ They are responsible for what he called a ‘mobile aural solipsism’, something that the generations of artists and musicians of the 1970s would not have imagined in the general enthusiasm for collectivism and outdoor musical gatherings.

³³ According to Adorno acoustic perception is connected with the sensations of spatial depth, inclusiveness, and the absorption of individuality, which are common to all music. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, ‘The Politics of Hearing’ in *Audio culture: Readings in Modern Music*, 2004, pp. 73-75.

³⁴ Michael Bull, *Sound, Proximity and Distance in Western Experience*, in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, 2004, Bloomsbury Publishing, pp.173-91.

³⁵ Ibid.

To return to my listening sessions. I do not normally listen to *Audio Arts* while travelling on the train or outside the comfort of my living room. It would actually be physically impossible for me to understand the words and follow the content of a particular discourse with the constant hum, rattle and screech of the train shaking my body. I believe, however, that sophisticated noise-cancelling headphones would make the ears of somebody else very happy who would like to listen to *Audio Arts* in the same manner of listening to for example Abba. In whatever form the playback moment takes place, listening to recorded speech is nevertheless an act of transformation: turning speech into a set of tracings. If we look back at the history of sound-reproduction technology, the very attempt of machines like the telephone, the phonograph and the radio, 'is to use devices called *transducers*, which turn sound into something else and that something else back into sound'.³⁶ Jonathan Sterne in his book *The Audible Past* poignantly describes this process:

All sound-reproduction technologies work through the use of transducers. Telephones turn your voice into electricity, sending it down a phone line and turning it back into sound at the other end. Radio works on a similar principle but uses waves instead of wires. The diaphragm and stylus of a cylinder phonograph change sound through a process of inscription in tinfoil, wax, or any number of other surfaces. On playback, the stylus and diaphragm transduces the inscriptions back into sound. Digital sound-reproduction technologies all use transducers; they simply add another level of transformation, converting electric current into a series of zeros and ones (and back again).³⁷

By demonstrating a genealogy of those sound machines and the way in which they have shaped modern techniques of listening, Sterne's seminal study opened up the possibility to re-think the whole history of recorded sound through a less transcendental perspective of those theories and writings which have emphasised the effects of distance and displacement. Constructed around the notions of acousmatic and/or 'schizophonic' sound, the idea that recorded technologies have the power to separate a sound from its source (acousmatic sound), and as such have a negative impact on the listener, is an idea that has dominated the literature on sound for a number of years. Much has been written for example on the effect of disorientation produced in the listener in the absence of face-to-face communication, about radio as a fearful medium, as well as about the uncanny feelings of listening to disembodied voices.³⁸ According to Sterne these theories based on

³⁶ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 2003, Duke University Press, p. 22.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 'That is the first thing to remember about radio. It is a fearful medium because we cannot see who or what produces the sound: an invisible excitement for the nerves. This is what I call it

acousmatic listening, ‘hold human experience and the human body to be categories outside the history’.³⁹

For Sterne, the task of writing a history of sound that takes into account context and bodily experience, has also to consider transducers in terms of cultural artifacts although, as he remarks, ‘they operate on a very simple set of physical principles’.⁴⁰ And although this might be less connected to those issues and concerns of experimental music and artistic experience, a history of sound-reproduction technology is an integral part of material and social history. This is a history that has valued positively the proximity and distance of recorded sound and its power of shaping and re-shaping our collective memory.

To return again to the genealogy of *Audio Arts* and Furlong’s idea to use the cassette tape as a tool of promoting alternative forms of communication and distribution, if on one hand this can be seen as a direct contribution to cassette culture and material history (and in this it does follow Sterne’s perspective), on the other hand since the 1980s the sound practice developed by Furlong in collaboration with Archer has clearly privileged the use of recorded speech as a medium for creating sound works. It is relevant to say, however, that the main artistic concern of Furlong has never been the creation of sound objects as abstract entities or ‘pure sound’ (e.g. *musique concrète*) conceptualized by French composer Pierre Schaeffer. Rather than sophisticated musical compositions for an avant-garde audience, *Audio Arts* Sound Works were often created through the participation of people, creating art works for vinyl records or sound installations through the montage and collage of voices gathered in the street. These voices were hardly manipulated in the studio but often spatialized back into the gallery space when the occasion of exhibiting was presented. And although we can observe some similarities with the mixing techniques of *musique concrète* and experimental music (electro-acoustic composition), the relationship of *Audio Arts* with tape did actually develop from other premises: that of (visual) artists working with sound in space, treating the sound of the

schizophonic (split sound) and also why McLuhan called it a “hot” medium’. From R. Murray Schafer, ‘Radical Radio’, in Neil Strauss and Dave Mandl (eds), *Radiotext (e)*, vol. 6, Autonomedia, 1993, p. 292.

A wide literature has developed since the theorisation of acousmatic listening by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer. David Toop’s *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (2010) is for example a recent account of the uncanny power of sound.

³⁹ Jonathan Sterne (2003) p. 20. While I share Sterne’s opinion, I also think that the literature which emphasised the effect of acousmatic listening has also addressed the power of disembodiment and of phantasmic voices in terms of ‘lyrical nostalgia’, offering fascinating accounts of radical artistic and literary experiments which overturned fear, displacement, and uncanniness into new aesthetic forms. See for example the writing of Allen S. Weiss on experimental radio and disembodied voices (1995; 2002).

⁴⁰ Jonathan Sterne (2003) p. 22.

voice sculpturally. As a result, *Audio Arts* inhabited a double trajectory. On one hand the use of tape and playback in the production and distribution of the magazine, on the other the ‘presentation’ of recorded sound in space (or playback on location) in gallery exhibitions and site-specific projects. It is through this double trajectory that *Audio Arts* proposed and offered various modes of engagement with sound. This is a trajectory that nevertheless wanted to stimulate exchange and communication between people.

How, then, to locate and to consider my solitary sonic journey into the Audio Arts Archive?

Listening to the archive online could be easily seen as an experience that rather than enhancing a two-way communication that increases isolation. Playing the recordings on my laptop in my living room could moreover be seen as a contribution to the domestication of sound and aural solipsism. But, like many other users of today’s digital technology, I cannot escape from the sophistication of those devices and the temptation of creating my own personal soundscape. Connecting my computer to my hi-fi speakers does allow me to listen to *Audio Arts* in a manner I would never have imagined before: it transforms the sound of my living space into something else. The sounds of the Venice Biennale and its many voices trigger my own memory of Venice and my own conversations with artists. Those memories travel back to the past yet they move forward: while they are feeding new and inspiring ideas they provoke future aspirations. All these sounds enter my ears as if they do not belong to a past. They simply enter my living room as part of a daily conversation. What has been said, and what I might say are words that form a present moment. As T.S. Eliot, poetically reminds us: ‘What might have been and what has been, point to one end, which is always present’.⁴¹ Proximity and distance are amplified and intermingle with our past and present experience.

To arrive at an initial conclusion, the idea to activate the Audio Arts Archive through listening can be seen through Sterne’s positive reading of sound-reproduction technology as a simple process of transduction: transforming sound into something else and then returning it to sound. As I will demonstrate in the first audio essay *From Transcription to Transduction: the Voice of Joseph Beuys in Audio Arts*, this notion of ‘transduction’ seems a valuable proposition for a journey that alongside the reproduction of sound could be also heard as a re-enactment of speech: an auditory past which will be activated through listening to the archive as well as re-performed by new listeners.

⁴¹ T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, in *Four Quartet*, Faber paper edition, 2009, p.13.

4.6 Listening within the Archive: Active Listening and Activated Spectatorship

... unlike the object qualities of a painting or sculpture, sound activates the space it inhabits. Sound draws attention to the space and the environment it exists in; and tends to create a kind of intimacy with space (for it shares its presence with the space of a space). Sound exists like slowly shifting lights or slightly changing temperatures. It can encourage the listener/viewer to engage with the space differently than if no sound were present.⁴²

Steve Roden

From the early experimentation of John Cage to the spatial manifestation of sound art, from the Soundscape project by R. Murray Schafer to the renewed interest in field recordings, listening and sound has been explored not only in terms of music composition but also as a participatory practice that involves the active role of the listener. These practices have forged new modes of listening to music and sound, which have overturned the traditional relationship between musician and audience. If we think for example to the piece *4'33"* of silence by Cage the separation between musician and audience starts to dissolve. The piece was composed in 1954 for any instrument or combination of instruments. The score instructs the performers not to play their instruments during the whole duration of the piece. By embracing the sounds of the environment that the audience hear while it is performed, the aim of *4'33"* is activating the role of the listener in 'performing' the composition through the listening itself. Sound artist and theoretician Brandon LaBelle in the introduction of his book on sound art describes listening as "a form of participation in the sharing of a sound event" arguing that:

... sound is a relational phenomena which immediately operates through modes of spatiality, from the immediate present to the distant transmission, from inside one's thought and toward others, from immaterial wave to material mass from the here and now to there and then.⁴³

As LaBelle has widely illustrated in his book, in the context of artists working with sound, sound and listening can be framed in terms of an aesthetic practice across diverse spatial practices including site specific and installation art, performance, new media, soundscapes and acoustic ecology. But what kind of participation is possible within this

⁴² Steve, Roden, *Active listening*, Soundwalk Catalog, 2005. See <http://www.inbetweennoise.com/texts/active-listening/> (Accessed 15 February 2020).

⁴³ Brandon, LaBelle, *Introduction to Background Noise: A History of Sound Art*, 2006, Continuum Books, p. xiii.

context as different from traditional forms of music (as for instance a music concert performed in a music hall)?

Steve Roden's reflections on his site-specific sound work provides a very helpful insight. He describes the relationship between sound and space in terms of active listening: sound activates both the listener's perception of space as well as the acoustics of the space itself. He also compares sound to those elements that are responsible in creating atmosphere and affect, such as light and temperature. As has been addressed from a vast literature (from the writing of LaBelle onwards), this dynamic relationship between sound and space stands at the core of the very practice of sound art.⁴⁴ What seems lacking, however, is a wide literature on participation that addresses the experience of listening within the realm of galleries, museums and archives.⁴⁵ While much has been written on audience participation and activated spectatorship in relation to installation art (and there are also studies that have underlined the dialogic and relational aspects of collaborative, participatory and socially engaged art), a specific analysis of the impact of the listening experience in the context of museums and archives seems a nascent field of research.⁴⁶

If we look back at the notion of activated spectatorship for example, it is interesting to note that the very root of this concept is bound to the terms 'spectacle' and 'spectator' (from the French *spectateur* or Latin *spectator*, from *spectare* 'gaze at, observe') instead of 'audience'. Although the Latin etymology of audience is actually from the verb *audire*, which means hearing, what normally constitutes a museum audience is a number of 'spectators' or 'visitors' and not on the contrary a number of auditors. Visual culture

⁴⁴ This is a common understanding of sound art as a separate field from music composition, which traditionally organised sound through time, e.g. writing scores for performances rather than mapping sound spatially or sculpturally. This rationale has been one of *leitmotifs* of the debate on sound art that have sprung among artists and musicians since 2000. To summarize the various positions and opinions of this debate would require a whole chapter in itself. What can be observed after two decades of lively discussion about sound as an artistic medium, is the establishment of sound art and sonic (art) studies as a field of enquiry in itself. Please see Jonathan Sterne (ed.) *The Sound Studies Reader*, 2012, Routledge.

⁴⁵ See for example the study by Robert Knifton (2012), which addresses the role of popular music in the context of the museum. See also the seminar *Voices in (and around) the Museum* organised by Antony Hudek and Sarah Byrne at UCL in 2012, and the review by in Ruth Holt (2012). More recent studies are focused on museum soundscapes and soundwalking as a methodology. See for example Salome Voegelin, *Soundwalking the Museum: A Sonic Journey Through the Visual Display* (2014); John Kannenberg, 'Listening to Museums: Sound Mapping Towards a Sonically Inclusive Museology', *Museological Review*, 2016, vol. 20, pp. 6-17; Laura Gibson and Rebecca Kahn, 'Digital Museums in the 21st Century: Global Microphones or Universal Mufflers?', *Museological Review*, vol. 20, 2016, pp. 39-51.

⁴⁶ In the context of the visual arts see for example the work by Suzanne Lacy (1995); Miwon Kwon (2002); Claire Bishop (2005); Nicolaus Bourriaud (2005) and Grant Kester (2004). For the intersection of art and activism see Lucia Farinati, Claudia Firth, 2017, *The Force of Listening*, Errant Bodies Press.

rather than auditory sensibility has shaped and still shapes the way in which we generally think and talk about audiences in a museum context.

In her book *Installation Art*, Claire Bishop writes about Joseph Beuys's social sculptures, Hélio Oiticica's *Vivências* (total-life experiences) and Group Material's installations, as key examples of *activated spectatorship*.⁴⁷ These works are conceived from the idea of activating the viewer, giving to him or her a role within the work and thus transforming the exhibiting space into an interactive social space. These installations were sometimes conceived to be experienced through the whole body and not simply through the passive gaze of looking at painting or sculpture. Touch, movement, sound, but also activities like cooking, are part of this interaction, as in the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija.

According to Jacques Rancière the word *spectator* has traditionally been seen in a negative light: seeing and listening as opposites of knowing and acting. In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière challenged this view by arguing that the 'emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection'.⁴⁸ Viewing, he suggests, is not completely passive. The spectator also acts. Like the pupil or scholar the spectator 'observes, selects, compares, interprets'.⁴⁹

In addition to these observations, it is interesting to note how the activation of the viewer through the medium of sound has never been called *audienceship* as for example in the context of sound installations *Get Out of This Room Get Out of My Mind* by Bruce Nauman (1968) or *Box with the Sound of its own Making* by Robert Morris (1961). Whereas musician and writer David Toop has proposed the expression 'the mediumship of the listener' in describing the experience of listening/looking at paintings in a museum as if they were lively soundscapes, there are other exceptions to consider.⁵⁰ If we shift from the term 'audience' to that of 'public', the listening experience surfaces back into the art frame and back into the interactive space. On the cover of the book *Mapping the Terrain* edited by artist Suzanne Lacy is an ear.⁵¹ Listening is embedded in this book as an integral process of artistic and curatorial practice, which Lacy framed under the term *New*

⁴⁷ Claire Bishop, 'Activated Spectatorship' in *Installation Art*, 2005, pp.102-127.

⁴⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, London, Verso, 2009, p.13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.13.

⁵⁰ David Toop has proposed the expression 'the mediumship of the listener' in his book *Sinister Resonance* (2010) in describing the experience of listening/looking at paintings in a museum as if they were lively soundscapes.

⁵¹ *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre of Public Art* (1995) by feminist artist and writer Suzanne Lacy is one of the first books that addresses relational art in terms of a listening based art. Here public means both the audience and the public space.

Genre Public Art. Listening was intended as a key element of a relational, empathic and interactive work between the artist and the audience, thus considering art as a listening-centred practice. Here ‘public’ means of course both audience and public space.⁵²

Shifting back to the specific context of sound art and music, the terms we frequently encounter to describe the activation of the listener through sound are often ‘active listening’ (as in Roden) or ‘deep listening’.⁵³ These concepts nevertheless do not simply respond to the reception of sound works, they also designate a specific field of practice, which is generally distinguished from the pure perceptual experience of hearing. Musician and sound practitioner Pauline Oliveros in her writings on listening writes that hearing is the involuntary, the continuous physical phenomena of sound waves coming into the ears, whereas listening has to be cultivated voluntarily: ‘hearing represents the primary sensory perception - hearing happens involuntarily. Listening, on the other hand, is a voluntary process that produces culture through training and experience.’⁵⁴ While hearing is passive - we cannot close our ears – listening is a conscious act and therefore in some sense active.

These reflections on listening as a spatial practice are helpful in considering the space of the archive as a specific sound environment, or soundscape. If on one hand the priorities of every archive is preservation and access, on the other hand the growing need of transforming sound archives into digital online platforms have left very little space for the experimentation of other forms of interaction with sound collections.⁵⁵ Curating sound art has emerged in the past decade as an issue that a number of museums and a dedicated symposium attempted to address, yet very little seems to have been written in relation to the possibility of animating an archive through events specifically focused on recorded sound.⁵⁶

⁵² Suzanne Lacy (1995).

⁵³ This concept was coined by musician and composer Pauline Oliveros, who established a Deep Listening program in 1985 later called Deep Listening Institute (2005).

⁵⁴ Pauline Oliveros, ‘Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)’, paper presented at the *International Congress Culture and Humanity in the New Millennium: The Future of Human Values*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002, p. 27.

⁵⁵ See the account by Simon Rooks on the transformation of the BBC sound archive from a library of recorded programmes, to a serious sound archive department situated in one location, and finally part of a larger and increasingly inter-connected set of collections mostly accessible online. Simon Rooks ‘What Happened to BBC Sound Archive’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 31 no. 2, 2010, p.177-185.

⁵⁶ Major group exhibitions of sound art were presented at London’s Hayward Gallery (*Sonic Boom*, 2000), New York’s P.S.1 (*Volume: Bed of Sound*, 2000), Tokyo’s NTT Inter Communication Centre (*Sound Art - Aound as Media*, 2000), and the California College of Arts and Crafts’ Wattis Institute. The Whitney featured sound art in its 2001 exhibition *Bit Streams* and its 2002 Biennial. Since then, sound art exhibitions have presented also in Frankfurt (*Frequenzen [Hz]* Schirn Kusthalle, 2002), Paris (*Sonic Process*, Centre Pompidou 2002), Turin, Göteborg, Amsterdam, San Francisco, and elsewhere. Two major conferences on Sound Art Curating were also organised in Karlsruhe

The space of an archive is traditionally a space devoted to preservation, consultation and research and less to curatorial experimentation. We can usually listen to sound recordings in special rooms and sometimes with the guidance of special assistance. As we cannot escape the silence we give full attention to our findings and their details. An archive is in this light an ideal place for attentive or active listening. Furthermore, an archive is a place of encounter. We enter an archive with the desire to gather information about an untold history, to dig out and discover data from the past. A collection can always surprise us when after days of consultation all of a sudden we discover unexpected items to be seen or listened to for the first time. Archives keep our memory as well as our curiosity alive.

My proposal for the activation of the Audio Arts Archive exploits the quietness and immersive-ness of the archive by creating a listening space where the conditions for a shared experience might be realised. In a contemporary scenario where the digitisation of sound recordings has allowed the development of many online archives, the access to sound collections seems less a preoccupation of reaching a diverse audience, or representing a technical issue. But what are the limits of this form of dissemination and access?⁵⁷ And what does change when the experience of listening becomes instead a shared form of participation within the space of an archive? The main concern of promoting web listening as the main form of access to *Audio Arts* consists in my view in the lack of dialogue and exchange that might occur between archive users and the wider audience and, especially in this specific case, between a community of researchers and a wide number of art lovers and artists of different generations. Through the organisation and curation of four events in collaboration with the Tate Archive and former collaborators of *Audio Arts* (see original proposal in *Appendix 2*), activating the archive meant keeping a dialogue alive and open across diverse audiences, thus embracing and practising different registers of speaking and listening: that of the archivist, curator, educator and facilitator. The conversations with each guest speaker have been developed through previous meetings and email exchanges, however no elaborate rehearsals were organised for the presentation at the event.

Whereas in the first two events (at the Five Years space and the Stanley Picker Gallery) I have explored the potential of group listening by playing back archival recordings in a studio setting, using multiple devices for the activation and re-enactment

(August 2013) and London (Goldsmiths University of London and Courtauld Institute of Art 15-17 May 2014). See: <https://soundartcurating.org>. (Accessed 14 December 2019).

⁵⁷ In conjunction with the 'information management society' Sue Breakell argues that we are all 'mini-archivists'. See her paper *Connecting Subjectivities: Archives and Creative Practice*, Manchester, 9 February 2018.

of the original audio source. In the events staged at the Tate Archive the listening experience was shared by participants within the physical space of a reading room, interacting with the Audio Arts Archive both as aural and visual artefact.

The following four audio essays should not be listened to as a straightforward documentation of these events. They are rather the result of a dialogic or constructed aural narrative. Although each essay incorporates extracts from the audio recordings made at each venue, they are constructed by following four narratives which I wrote in response to the specific themes, arguments, encounters and experiences I had in devising and curating each event. Each essay is therefore an audio montage which comprises archival recordings from the Audio Arts Archive, recordings from the actual events, extracts from my personal audio archive (e.g. conversations with Furlong), and finally recordings of my own voice reading my own text. The original scripts/scores written for each audio essay are attached in *Appendix 2*.

Chapter 5. Activating Audio Arts Archive: Four Audio Essays

This is an audio chapter. The files can be found on the Research Repository at <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/46708>

- 5.1 Audio Essay 1: From Transcription to Transduction: The Voice of Joseph Beuys in Audio Arts** (duration 40:41 mins)
- 5.2 Audio Essay 2: Listening to Audio Arts Sound Works in Conversation with Michael Archer** (duration 57:16 mins)
- 5.3 Audio Essay 3: Listening to Audio Arts Wallpaper Supplement in Conversation with Susan Hiller** (duration 38:26 mins)
- 5.4 Audio Essay 4: Women's Voices and Sound Works in Audio Arts. In Conversation with Jean Wainwright** (duration 44:59 mins)

Please see *Appendix 2* for the scripts detailing the structure of each audio essay and the relative recordings and texts used in the montage.