

FEEDBACK | Sound Formations

Introductory notes

The last chapter (or chapter 5[0]) gave a re-collection of the sound experiments and associated reflections at the core of this research project, and of *thinking-with sounds* altogether. However, like every presentation or description of sound in written form, the result is quite flat and silent. No sound to be heard, only the description of sound, which repeats the issue already discussed through Murray Schafer and others in chapter 2. Even if most of the experiments could not be presented in full display, due to the very situational character of the installation, glimpses, vignettes of sound can still be proposed. This is what is intended with the following chapter: proposing a sonic peek into what constituted the thinking and writing, listening and sounding processes of this work.

As already mentioned, this *audio chapter* is inspired by Groth and Samson's *audio paper* (2019, 2016, 2021), which allows to experiment with alternative presentation of scientific arguments through the use of sound and other media. However, in contrast to the examples presented after their manifesto, this audio chapter is not the result or recording of a live presentation in front of an audience. It is an *assemblage* or *bricolage* of sound pieces and bits of text. Moreover, the very intent of the present chapter differs from the *audio paper*. Indeed, the chapter itself does not propose a scientific argument — much like a paper would do — enhanced through the use of sound. Instead, sound itself is what constitute the argument, an »archive« of what has been

experimented with throughout the past few years. The sound does not enhance the text, rather it is the text that illustrates sounds, or works in combination with them. The theoretical reflection is already presented in the chapter 5[0], and would only be repeated without much »added value«. This does not mean that Groth and Samson's *audio paper* is problematic, rather that the following chapter does not entirely fit the description¹. Because of its conception, another engagement with the written text could be taken. Much shorter, much looser in its narrative style. But also inviting the mythical figure of the nymph Echo. Her invocation drives the *thinking-with sounds*, not as metaphor or personification, not as representation, but as vector, as storytelling, as fictional force. In this, the *audio chapter* is also inspired by other forms of sociological narrations, creative practices at the heart of sociological writing processes².

Although the audio chapter works as an archive, another important aspect of *thinking-with sounds* is the engagement with others, the response-ability, the co-creation of a situation, an experience. Reminding Sha's description of technologies of representation and of performance, the question thus arising is to which extent this particular form of presenting knowledge — i.e. the audio paper/audio chapter — could be also become an instrument of knowledge production in itself. In other words, beyond representation, can they become a technology of performance? Can interactivity and generativity be implemented in a way that does not reduce the audio chapter to a recording, and if yes, how?

From this question came the possibility to present a more or less »responsive« audio chapter, where the listener/receiver would be acting as co-composer, co-creator of the experience. Indeed, if the experiments presented in chapter 5 show a multiplicity of actors and of modes

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- 1 Groth and Samson show very well the generativity of the audio paper in its »live« presentation, which resonates with Schulze's understanding of sonic thinking (Schulze, 2018).
 - 2 Examples of such narrative experiments are presented in the Australian sociological zine *SOFIZINE*. <https://sofizine.com/about/>

of knowledge production in their particular settings, in their audio representations, they are merely that, representations where the listener's agency appears quite limited. Or at least, the distribution of this agency is clearly defined. A listener receiving an object, a product created by the »composer«, »producer«, »researcher«, in an *a priori* defined sequence. Speech, performance, alternative storytellings can of course propose a different engagement, and move, produce new subjectivities, but can this distribution be expanded, worked upon, remodelled? Is it possible to conceive an audio chapter without this *a priori* fixated linearity so that it itself could become an »ethical object« (van Loon, 2012)? An assemblage of blocks, tools, moments, that can be re-organised by the one listening/reading it? Where each experiment performed and recorded, where the text written down could be re-arranged, building each time another chapter, an »open work« (Magnusson, 2019)³? An invitation to take part in the process rather than consuming a finished and stable object. In other words, by proposing to co-arrange the events, field recordings, re-creation of *Échos de la pierre* and *ethical machines*, by building a narration that can be re-organised, could it »feed back« into the process of *thinking-with sounds*?

Two possible approaches could be taken, in order to implement this interactivity. On the one hand, building a program allowing the reader/listener to change the order of sequencing, as well as parameters within the »blocks« composing the sequence. This possibility would come the closest to a *technology of performance*, where the distinction between producer/consumer is re-arranged and the co-creation of the event becomes central (Sha, 2013). This departs from the *audio paper* to build a »responsive« multimedia environment. However, because this chapter is a recollection of past events, and already performed experiments, this co-creation would have been artificially re-created

3 Magnusson, who reflects on the »open work«, directly referring to Umberto Eco's eponymous book, mostly focuses on musical notation. However, his argument can be expanded to other types of notation and storytelling, as his references to Deleuze and Guattari's own narrative experiments in *Mille Plateaux* would indicate.

without actually having an effect on the experiment itself. Moreover, the archiving sense, as well as the proposed argumentation, being subjected to change, would not come across, being constantly remodelled⁴. In an unexpected return, Ong's (2002) understanding of the text and its immutability as »truth telling« (or at least as scientific argumentation which nevertheless requires a leap of faith) is also sneaking back, wherein the »open work« seems quite contradictory. How can one present a thesis if it is being entirely reshaped upon its reading? This does not mean that interactivity must be discarded altogether. Indeed, on the other hand, the *audio chapter* can be thought of as an installation/exposition of materials. Although coming closer to technologies of representation, i.e. with limited interaction possibilities, the exposition allows for a partial co-construction of the narration. If the experiments are presented as fixed »results«, the navigation between them is free and non-fixated, allowing for a variety of sequencings, just like when navigating an exposition at a museum. A compromise which, following Groth and Samson, does not strip away the generativity of a knowledge presented in such a way. Each navigation between »rooms« or »pages« are therefore also part of the thinking|doing process at the heart of a *thinking-with sounds*⁵. Moreover, the very practice of reading and listening is not a passive reception. There is already a co-prehension.

The installation/exposition as an open website can therefore work as *anarchive*, giving the possibility of »feed forwarding«, which is central to research-creation (Manning & Massumi, 2014). This organisation — although limited in its possibilities for engagement — still allows for repetition and difference, for various and singular samples of the sonic flux, from which the personality and intent of the composer

4 This also asks another question, which is defining but not in the scope of this work: the notion of authorship and »intellectual property«, which needs to be rethought in the conception of such a work

5 The building of an interactive environment with much more possible entanglements is not completely discarded however. Going beyond the scope of this work, it still remains a possible and fruitful engagement with a *thinking-with sounds*, which will be pursued.

as »one and only« could be strongly diminished, rather emphasizing on the possibles and the multiple. The exposition, although relatively static, presents potentialities of engagement, of movement, of change. At least more than through fixating the performance to a single audio file, in which the linearity would have been too powerful, the tools used reduced to representation, without any reflection on how agency is being distributed. Through this »assemblage«, a certain dimension of openness is kept, in how to read and listen to the chapter. From a fixed sound object without many potentialities, the chapter regains some fragility, virtualities, potentials of further individuations. It is a possibility to present the work done in audio form, to organise it around a particular but non-exclusive narration, to step back without stepping away.

Implying response-ability, interactivity and engagement also means to reflect on the possibility to change things, to work beyond the listening/reading, to continue the *thinking-with sounds*. Proposing an open website forces me to perform in collaboration with a system and to reflect on my own situatedness. It forces me to engage with it carefully, rather than to propose a finished product, an audio black box where too much of that »gatekeeping« would have been at play, too much knowledge retained. Even if sound sounds, knowledge would have remained silent. Consequently, it was important that no barriers (or as few as possible) were preventing from using this *audio chapter* and possibly build upon it. Therefore, for the sake of clarity and ease of use, I decided to embed it temporarily into a set of web pages (hosted on a personal domain). This allowed me to build a rather simple (quite minimalistic) interface, allowing to easily build an assemblage of multiple media formats and texts. The pages are therefore easy to access and to use, hopefully avoiding any kind of »expert« knowledge-keeping. Moreover, the interactivity does not stop at the consumption of the audio chapter, but should keep the possibility of »feed-forwarding«. To do so, every experiment featured in the chapter is also kept open. For each one, a very small »score« loosely represents how the experiment works — as an invitation rather than indication. A list of the equipment used (and/or alternatives) is provided as well as links to each software, which are

all free and open source. In addition, all files, programs and patches I used for the experiments and recordings are also available to download and free to use, with all their mistakes and inaccuracies. Only through this openness can the iterative and generative character of *thinking-with sounds* be pursued, beyond my own contribution.

You can access the audio chapter by scanning the QR-Code below:

