The Radio Artist as Ethnographer

Sound and Postcolonial Knowledge in Gilles Aubry and Robert Millis' *The Gramophone Effect* (2017)

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I hereby declare that, in line with the Faculty of Arts' code of conduct for research integrity, the work submitted here is my own original work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

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Introduction

Radio has died many deaths. Since television seized the leading role on the broadcasting stage in the 1950s, radio's obsolescence has been proclaimed over and over again, with digital media forming its most recent menace. While the sonic medium does continue to live on as a particularly resistant zombie, it has received significantly less scholarly attention than its visual competitors. This is especially so when it concerns the artistic outputs of the minor medium.[1] Musicologists have found sound and music in visual media to be a rich and exciting research field, but research into the acoustic format of radio works is still a developing field.[2] A useful framework for researching sound and music in connection to radio and its discourses was articulated by Ute Holl. She conceives the concept of "radiophonics" to approach radio not exclusively as an institution of communication, nor as a specific format of sonic production, but rather as an "epistemic constellation," in which technically mediated perception and cultural conceptions of music and sound alter each other throughout history.[3] The stake in a study of radiophonics, Holl asserts with the current impact of digital media on radio in mind, is a better grasp not only of changing cultures of composition and listening, but of the future "aesthetic and political potentials" of radio as well.[4]

My master's thesis takes its cue from this call and focuses on a contemporary exploration of these aesthetic and political potentials, manifested in the 2017 radio project *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*. Mounted during Documenta 14 as an extensive artistic radio program, diffused globally by several radio stations, *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* invited a range of international artists to create new radio works. Marcus Gammel, who curated the program together with Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, articulates the project's ambition as "an attempt to make the world audible through the radio" against the ubiquity of visual content in our contemporary globalised mediascape:

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[1] For an overview of the current state of radio research, see Alexander Russo, "Radio Sound," in *The*
[2] For recent samples of such research see, e.g., Anne Thurmann-Jajes et al., eds., *Radio as Art: Concepts, Spaces, Practices* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019); Ute Holl, ed., *Radiophonic Cultures Bd. 1* (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2018).
[3] Holl articulates this concept while outlining the framework for the ongoing interdisciplinary research project Radiophonic Cultures. Holl, "Radiophonie. Forschungen für ein kommendes Radio," *Historische Anthropologie* 22, no. 3 (2014): 427.
[4] Ibid., 428-429.

"The artists in this program offer us their own ears and their own voices, their personal reactions to their respective environment. If we follow them, we discover a kind of reverse side of the flood of media images—listening knowledge that continually encourages us to ask new questions."[5]

Radio has long been imagined and used as a medium that can operate within the cracks of mainstream media. The capacity of radio to generate alternative forms of social communication in this way has been well studied.[6] I, however, am interested in its sonically mediated contents, that is, the "listening knowledge" Gammel proposes. How can radiophonic sound present knowledge about reality—especially a reality situated beyond a Western horizon of direct experience in the realm of the Other? One of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*'s outcomes, *The Gramophone Effect* by Swiss and American sound artists Gilles Aubry and Robert Millis, will serve as a case study to further explore this question.

The Gramophone Effect, first broadcast in April 2017 during *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*,[7] resulted from sited collaborative fieldwork at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 in several regions of India. The documentary recordings of musics, voices and environmental sounds gathered there were composed along with archival documents into a 45 minute audio work which tackles the colonial history of sound recording in India and seeks to pluralise hegemonic historical narratives of sonic modernity. The work, as do many of the other commissions of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*, stands in a burgeoning field of radio works that employ artistic research-based documentary practices to sonically address histories, conditions and practices of subaltern groups. Meira Asher's artistic-activist documentaries on political situations in the Middle East, Aurélie Nyirabikali Lierman's poetical documentations of the sonic histories of Rwanda or Felix Blume's ethnographic 'sound-shots' of communities across the globe provide but a few examples of the current upsurge in creative radio documentary. While radio historian Virginia Madsen has noted this upsurge,

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[5] Marcus Gammel, "Listening to the Radio with Frantz Fanon and Rudolf Arnheim," in concept text and detailed program, *Every Time A Ear Di Soun: Savvy Funk*, Savvy Contemporary, 2017, 7.

[6] See, e.g., Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher, eds., *Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the 21st Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 11, 12-15.

[7] Gilles Aubry and Robert Millis, *The Gramophone Effect*, radio work for *Every Time A Ear Di Soun: a Documenta 14 Radio Program*, first broadcast April 8, 2017, audio, 44:29. *The Gramophone Effect* was repeatedly re-broadcast on *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* and on Deutschlandfunk Kultur, and was included in 2018 in the *Radiophonic Spaces* exhibition.

contemporary cases have generally stayed out of the purview of critical analysis.[8] And yet, they provide ideal ground for the study of the convergence of sound and political knowledge. In this domain, usually left to cultural and sound studies, a musicological ear attentive to the historical meanings and dramaturgical uses of sound and music in creative radio documentaries can provide new insights. Since these audio works often stand in close relationship to current academic discourses, such as postcolonialism and ethnography in the case of *The Gramophone Effect,* it is crucial to uncover the sonic-aesthetic techniques with which these discourses are converted into artistic knowledge and practice.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I look into the convergences of (radiophonic) sound, art and knowledge formation about reality on a general level. This will allow me to sketch out the artistic and intellectual climate in which *The Gramophone Effect* stands. I first contextualise the curatorial incentives of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* in broader artistic trends (more specifically those of the documentary and ethnographic turns in contemporary art), before delving into the notion of listening knowledge. To do this, I turn to radio's long history of documentary practices. Although these did not gain the same status as their counterparts in film, many creative methods have been developed within radio to provide access to reality through radiophonic sound alone. To further unpack the notion of listening knowledge, I look into the recent tendency to merge ethnographic and sonic art practices. This tendency, evident in *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*, fits both the heightened academic attention for sounded ways of knowing and the debates tackling the possibility of sound to offer resistance to the purported visual hegemony of the West. Aubry himself has contributed to this debate in his writings on the use of sound to decolonise the methods with which to create and present knowledge about the postcolonial Other.

Reading *The Gramophone Effect* against this context, it will be possible to investigate how the piece negotiates ethnographic attitudes and postcolonial theory in its critical interpretation of the colonial history of recording in India and in its demonstration of Indian sonic practices within postcolonial modernity. This investigation, along with a closer analysis of how colonial and postcolonial subjects, practices and histories are represented in terms of voice, narrative, space, music and editing, will make up the

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[8] See Virginia Madsen, "'Your Ears are a Portal to Another World': The New Radio Documentary Imagination and the Digital Domain," in *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era*, ed. Jason Loviglio, and Michele Hilmes (New York: Routlegde, 2013), 138-141.

remainder of my thesis. I first uncover the historical dimensions and contexts of the sounds used in *The Gramophone Effect*, pointing to their meanings in the context of colonial history and its legacies, as seen through a postcolonialist lens. With their historical layers unpacked, I turn to the dramaturgical placing of these sounds, exploring the potential meanings, contradictions and tensions which it gives rise to. In order to mount such an analysis of the audio work, of which no score or other form of notation exists apart from a script of its spoken narration, it was necessary to make a graphic representation and structure of the piece with EAnalysis, a software program for sound-based analysis. Since *The Gramophone Effect*—now operating as a radio play, then as abstract electroacoustic music—can not be fitted within strict artistic boundaries, it was necessary as well to assemble my methodological tools from several different areas. Apart from insights derived from the aesthetic history of radio documentary and from documentary theory, I draw upon the analysis of radio play semiotics as well as the narrative analysis of electroacoustic music. Jennifer Stoever's concept of the "sonic colour line," with which she has analysed the re-iteration of acoustic stereotypes of marginalised social groups in audio documentaries that precisely seek to intervene in hegemonic discourses on these groups, allows me to nudge my analytical perspective on *The Gramophone Effect* toward a critical interpretation.[9] Finally, several interviews I held with the authors on the research and creation process of the piece have provided an important source of information for my analysis.[10] This, however, has only informed my reading so far as it has allowed me to uncover the source materials and technological means used in the piece. The aim of my analysis is not to discover the intentions of the authors, nor to present an authoritative reading of the work. Rather, my goal is to critically confront the artistic strategies used in the piece with the sound materials and the historical layers and academic discourses linked to them, in order to point out how *The Gramophone Effect* establishes a breadth of potential meanings.

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[9] Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, "Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar Nueva York," *Social Text* 28, no.1 (2010): 59-85.

[10] With Aubry I had a Skype conversation on March 19, 2020 (see appendix A) and an email conversation on May 5 and 8, 2020. With Millis I had an email conversation on May 12, 2020 and a phone conversation on May 16, 2020 (see appendix B).

1. Listening knowledge: (radiophonic) sound, documentary and ethnography

Under its curatorial theme, "Learning from Athens," Documenta 14 caught a good deal of critical attention. Departing from its usual format, the 2017 blockbuster contemporary art event settled in Athens alongside its home base in Kassel. For curator Adam Szymczyk, this move, taken at the height of tensions between Greece and Germany due to the migration crisis and austerity measures imposed by the European Union upon Greece, provided fertile ground for contemporary art to critically reflect on the global complexities of the political and social reality we inhabit. Many Greek locals, however, thought otherwise. A major stumbling block was that the art event had not sought to find connections with the everyday reality of Greece. Graffiti exclaiming, "I refuse to exoticise myself to increase your cultural capital. Signed: The People," swamped the city alongside the public art interventions of Documenta 14.[11]

It is in this context that *The Gramophone Effect* had its airtime premiere during the inauguration of Documenta 14 in Athens. The broadcast marked the kick-off of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*, which extended Documenta 14's exhibition space to the radio ether and was broadcast online, on FM in Kassel and on shortwave around the world during the course of the art festival.[12] According to the organisation 700,000 listeners tuned in online.[13] Yet, compared to the main program of Documenta, much less critical attention has been paid to the radio project. It was however no less ambitious in its set-up. Nine existing radio stations from Greece, Cameroon, Colombia, Brazil, Lebanon, Indonesia, Germany and the United States were invited to participate. For four hours daily their regular programming was punctuated with *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*'s radio program, consisting of 32 commissioned art works for radio, archival material and broadcast selections from Documenta 14's public art programs. Moreover, an entirely new station

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[11] Helena Smith, "'Crapumenta!'…Anger in Athens as the blue lambs of Documenta hit town," *The Guardian,* May 14, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/14/documenta-14-athens-german-art-extravaganza.
[12] Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, "Every Time A Ear Di Soun," in concept text and detailed program, *Every Time A Ear Di Soun: Savvy Funk*, Savvy Contemporary, 2017. All practical information on the set-up of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* was gathered from this concept text.
[13] "Documenta 14, April 8–September 17, 2017, in Athens, Kassel, and beyond, has reached more people than ever before," Documenta, posted September 19, 2017, https://www.documenta14.de/en/news/25596/closing.

was launched. SAVVY Contemporary, an art centre in Berlin founded by Ndikung, was temporarily transformed into an open radio studio, where a 24/7 radio program was produced live by a range of artists.

It is perhaps ironic that *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* didn't stir up much (at least lasting and visible) critical discourse, given its ambition to stimulate critical reflection by making "the world audible through the radio." In the conceptual foundations Ndikung devised for the project, we can discern the concrete curatorial incentives that informed which worlds the project would make audible. *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* was concerned with researching how sound harbours a synchronicity between "bodies, places, spaces and histories."[14] More specifically, it sought to tackle the historicity of sound and listening. For the archival slot of the program, sound archives from across the globe were mined. Furthermore, many of the participating artists focussed on how orality and auditory phenomena can transmit histories. Ndikung relates this aim of the project to the much debated privileging of the eye over the ear in Western knowledge systems and its impact on which histories can be told, making *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* a platform for counter-hegemonic narratives.[15]

In foregrounding research, historiography, archival knowledge and the formulation of counter-hegemonic narratives in artistic creation, *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* and its outcomes can be placed within a broader tendency in contemporary art to turn to documentary and ethnographic strategies. Several authors have noted a new documentary wave of feature documentaries in cinema since the turn of the millennium as well as an increasing interest in the performing arts to stage reality in various forms of documentary theatre, which creatively use (archival) documents.[16] Documentary, as Le Roy and Vanderbeeken write, has become a privileged tool "to produce counter-narratives and counter-histories, a reality at odds with the way in which it is presented in official narratives about certain (historical) events."[17] According to Carol Martin, "setting the record straight" in such a way has come to be felt as imperative within the globalised mediascape after 9/11, hence the upsurge of documentary forms.[18] In the visual arts too, documentary strategies have come to be used to comment on global

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[14] Ndikung, "Every Time A Ear Di Soun," in concept text and detailed program, 4.
[15] Ndikung, "Every Time A Ear Di Soun – Zur Historizität des Hörbaren und zur Verkörperung von Klangräumen," in *Radiophonic Cultures Bd. 1*, 90-92.
[16] For an overview of those authors, see Frederik Le Roy and Robrecht Vanderbeeken, "The Documentary Real: Thinking Documentary Aesthetics," *Foundations of Science* 23 (2018): 197.
[17] Ibid., 199.
[18] Carol Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," *TDR* 50, no. 3 (2006): 14-15.

political, social and cultural realities. Documenta 11 is generally regarded as an one of the events which effectively promoted such socially engaged documentary practices of art.[19] It has equally been connected to the "ethnographic turn" in the arts, which Kris Rutten et al. define as "a wave of art practices, productions and events that show significant similarities with anthropology and ethnographic research in their theorisations of cultural difference and representational practices."[20] This convergence of art and ethnography has been practiced from the 1990s onwards, often in a two-way direction as artists' interest in ethnographic methods corresponded with the "sensory turn" in anthropology which laid eyes on contemporary art for finding new sensual ways to document and practice ethnographic research.[21] It was, however, art critic Hal Foster who in 1995 most famously and critically put the ethnographic turn on the cultural studies radar. Overviewing visual art projects from the late 1980s onwards, Foster noted how artists increasingly and self-consciously turned to anthropological research, whereby the artist as a sited fieldworker, with an aptitude for the reflexive attitude of postmodern ethnography, maps particular institutions and communities or reframes and excavates practices and histories otherwise lost, repressed or marginalised in hegemonic centres of art and knowledge production[22]—concerns high on the agenda of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun* as well.

Less visibly than in cinema, visual and performing arts, the appetite for documentary and ethnography has intersected the domain of (radiophonic) sonic arts as well. Radio is momentarily experiencing a documentary upsurge of its own. An overview of the long tradition of artistic documentary practices in radio, within which this upsurge stands, will reveal how sound has been used to uncover counter-hegemonic narratives and how it has been valorised over the visual to critically reflect reality. The ethnographic turn in contemporary art has been picked up in sonic arts discourses as well. Along with a heightened attention to sounded ways of knowing within academic discourses, these fields will provide a useful background against which I can read *The Gramophone Effect.*

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[19] See, e.g., Le Roy and Vanderbeeken, "The Documentary Real," 197-198.
[20] Kris Rutten, An van Dienderen and Ronald Soetaert, "Revisiting the ethnographic turn in contemporary art," *Critical Arts* 27, no. 5 (2013): 459.
[21] Ibid., 460-461.
[22] This is a condensed summary of Foster's detailed and incisive overview, see Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 181, 190-191, 197.

1. 1. The documentary promise of radio

"Documentary is what we might call a 'fuzzy concept.'"[23] With this assertion by film theorist Bill Nichols in mind many documentary theorists have sought to shed some clarifying light on the 'fuzziness' of documentary. The rise of the documentary film is commonly traced to the early 1920s with reference to Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. The concepts of document and documentary, however, have to be traced further back to the simultaneous development of media of mechanical reproduction and the professional field of historiography in the 19th century, which as Carolyn Birdsall notes, gave rise to a notion of documents as real traces of the past and at the same time designated indexical media technologies as those best suited for capturing reality in "pure data." By emphasising the direct connection to reality offered by indexical media, early documentary cinema was differentiated from works of literature and painting that used realist strategies.[24] But since such a positivist faith in empirical reality became untenable under postmodernity's skepticism of objectivity, both theatre scholar Janelle Reinelt and film theorist Stella Bruzzi have noted how documentary theory became trapped in a deadlock situation. As it always differentiated documentary from the subjective world of fiction by its promise to offer a more direct connection to reality, documentary in this view could do nothing but fail to deliver. As a way out, Bruzzi and Reinelt turn the question away from what documentary is to what it *does*. Bruzzi suggests that it is precisely "the perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation" which is at the heart of documentary.[25] As such, documentaries need to be considered as "performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming."[26] In theatre, Reinelt proposes to examine the promise of documentary, that is, how it claims to "provide access or connection to reality through the facticity of documents, but not without creative mediation,"[27] and allows the spectator to "partner with the documentary as co-producer of the reality in question."[28]

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[23] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 21.

[24] Carolyn Birdsall, "Sonic Artefacts. Reality Codes of Urbanity in Early German Radio Documentary," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), 132-133.

[25] Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2nd ed. (London: Routlegde, 2006), 13.

[26] Ibid., 10.

[27] Janelle Reinelt, "The Promise of Documentary," in *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, ed. Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 22.

[28] Ibid., 10.

Since its early period of experimentation in the 1920s, radio has found many creative ways to make such 'documentary promises' with sound alone. One of the earliest documentary impulses in European broadcasting maps onto the search for an own radio-genic form of expression, which looked at modernist cinema and its techniques of montage for inspiration. They included acoustic portraits of modern cityscapes and faraway places. Among the early German experiments with such portrayals of reality include the *Hörbild* Hans Bodenstedt created of the Hamburg harbour (1924)[29] as well as the acoustic montage with which Walter Ruttmann captured the rhythm of a weekend in Berlin (*Wochende*, 1930). Fritz Walter Bischoff's *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball!!* (1927-8) expanded the stage of reality to the entire globe with a mosaic of diverse sound scenes such as an ocean steamer, the jungle or a soccer stadium in England. Both Bischoff and Ruttmann used optical sound recording with which they could treat sounds captured in reality on celluloid as a film editor would.[30] At the BBC, Lance Sieveking recorded sounds in London subway stations for his radio panoramas and features, devising a complex switchboard system which controlled several radio studios to enable live montage.[31] As Birdsall notes, with the introduction of mobile microphones in 1929, a new technique was added to the repertoire of documentary promises: radio programs which compiled sound segments transmitted from several urban locations into aural tours of metropolises, conjured up the impression of a wandering microphone 'lost in the city.'[32]

With their predilection for documenting the fast-flitting sonic reality of the urban world and for rhythmical techniques of montage, these early radio experiments from the 1920s could count as the sonic equivalent of modernist city films of the same period. Just like those city films, the acoustic radio portraits might be seen either as non-confrontational engagements with modernity's social reality, or as veiled attempts to lyrically bring into focus exactly this social reality by smuggling in the sounds of factories and crowded urbanity in the government imposed apolitical policy of the BBC

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[29] For more information on Bodenstedt, see Birdsall, "Sonic Artefacts," p. 137.

[30] For a detailed account of Ruttmann's and Bischoff's experiments, see Mark E. Cory, "Soundplay: The Polyphonous Tradition of German Radio Art," in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde,* ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 340-342.

[31] Madsen, "A Call to Listen: The 'New' Documentary in Radio – Encountering 'Wild Sound' and The 'Filme Sonore'," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 30, no. 3 (2010), 394.

[32] Birdsall, "Sonic Artefacts," 141-142.

and the German broadcast system.[33] Yet, Madsen points out how some early documentarists at the BBC did directly confront social reality. Most notably, Olive Shapley, a pioneer of social radio documentary in the 1930s, took up the possibilities offered by the mobile microphone to take radio out into the working-class communities of Northern England. For her programs, Shapley, as an early example of Foster's artist sited in the social field if you will, immersed herself in communities whose voices were normally excluded by radio, allowing them to speak in their own regional dialects.[34]

After the Second World War, magnetic tape recording technology allowed for new possibilities to sonically produce knowledge about the lived realities of those people usually marginalised by mainstream media. The Jewish-American artist Tony Schwartz, for example, took a home made recorder out into his New York Midtown neighbourhood, which after the war had become the home of many Puerto Rican migrants. Fascinated with the everyday sounds, music and stories of his neighbours, he created audio documentaries, which sought to intervene in the racist and stereotypical white hegemonic public discourse on this group of people.[35] Like many other radio documentarists of his time, Schwartz strayed from explanatory narration, preferring a montage of direct speech and sounds instead.[36] While making radio documentaries during the 1960s in this way came closer and closer to making film, the advantages of radiophonic sound to capture reality were increasingly articulated against radio's visual competitor, television. Claims that radio could enmesh the listener deeper into the world of the Other, appealing to the inner sight and allowing for more sympathy and imagination,[37] are entirely consistent with the notion of radio as an intimate and direct medium, most famously captured in 1964 by Marshall McLuhan who characterised radio as a "hot" medium that directly affects the listener.[38]

In Germany, the crisis in radio brought on by television in the 1960s propelled a new series of radio experiments which laid dormant after the avant-garde's ventures into urban reality during the 1920s. According to Klaus Schöning, one of the patrons and theorists of these experimental *Neue Hörspiele* of the 1960s, this crisis "revealed all the

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[33] For German state broadcasting, see ibid., 135 and 148; for the BBC, see Evi Karathanasopoulou and Andrew Crisell, "Radio Documentary and the Formation of Urban Aesthetics," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, 170.
[34] Madsen, "'Your Ears are a Portal to Another World'," 128-129.
[35] Stoever-Ackerman, "Splicing the Sonic Color-Line," 59-62.
[36] Madsen, "'Your Ears are a Portal to Another World'," 133.
[37] See ibid., 130-134; also see Madsen, "A Call to Listen," 399, 401.
[38] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 301-302.

more clearly the deficiencies of a narrative Hörspiel dramaturgy."[39] Fathered by both ideologically and aesthetically conservative theorists, the German post-war tradition of narrative radio plays which Schöning refers to cultivated the intimate quality of radio to appeal to the listener's inner eye, but directed it away from external reality into explorations of the inner self. Capitalising on radio's acousmatic darkness through symbolic sound effects, the inner eye served as the stage of imagination for existential dramas or dream plays.[40] For Neue Hörspiel makers and theorists, this was a shameless restriction of the possibilities of radio art: instead of placing sound and music at the service of plot and semantic meaning, the entire "acoustical perception of reality"[41]— musique concrète and electronic music included— had to become the Neue Hörspiel's playground.[42] This led to self-reflexive experimentations with the radio voice, language, sound and technology. Mark Cory explains for example how Peter Handke with his 1968 piece *Hörpsiel* literally attacks the conservative tradition of radio plays by ironically disrupting the expected congruence between semantic meaning, sound effects and music, turning his piece into "an exercise in the defeat of expectations."[43] Ludwig Harig uses such alienation of dramatic plot in his *Ein Blumenstück* to make apparent the violence latent in German children songs by confronting them with fragments from the diary of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höß.[44] Neue Hörspiel was fond of formulating social critique. Its *Original-Ton* artists, for example, in a manner similar to Schwartz, distilled critical radio documentaries out of unscripted recording sessions with groups of people otherwise excluded from radio broadcasting.[45] Ferdinand Kriwet, to name but one other example, created "Hörtexte" which fire rhythmically and associatively organised fragments of speech and sounds sampled from mass media sources at its listeners to remedy a concentrated and creative listening against the demise of communication he diagnosed in mass media environments.[46] One can easily hear an echo of this argument in Gammel's plea for critical listening knowledge in our contemporary mediascape of visual ubiquity.

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[39] Klaus Schöning, "The Contours of Acoustic Art," trans. Cory, *Theatre Journal* 43, no. 3 (1991): 320.
[40] Cory, "Soundplay," 338 and 349-351.
[41] Paul Pörtner quoted in Schöning, "The Contours of Acoustic Art," 321.
[42] See Schöning, "The Contours of Acoustic Art," 319.
[43] Cory, "Soundplay," 360.
[44] Ibid., 357-358.
[45] Ibid., 362.
[46] Ibid., 361-362.

1. 2. Ethnographic sonic art, acoustemology and the audiovisual litany

Radio documentary's concern for presenting knowledge about reality through sound has found further elaboration in recent sonic art practices. Several authors have noted and self-consciously exercised the convergence of the documentary practice of recording in the field, artistic composition and ethnography. Writing in 2002, acoustic ecologist and soundscape artist John Levack Drever noted that to value the documentary impulse of many soundscape works which apply field recordings, they should not be approached only from a purely musical aesthetics, but could be considered as sounding ethnographies. He argues that since both soundscape composition and ethnography are concerned with the making of representations of the world, both disciplines could benefit from further elaborating their commonalities and exchanging their methodologies.[47] Overviewing how this theoretical call has found practical application, sound artist Tullis Rennie in 2016 even speaks of an ethnographic turn in the sonic arts. Observing the limitations of written representation for disseminating knowledge gained through fieldwork, Rennie turns to anthropologists Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright who, as some of the foremost proponents of the sensory turn in anthropology, argue for more formal experimentation with strategies of documentation and representation, necessitating a move away from anthropology's textuality towards the "'border zones' between art and anthropology."[48] According to Rennie "an artistically-motivated approach to sound in the field might begin to answer the same authors' call."[49] Viewed from the other end of the interdisciplinary border zone, Rennie, just like the artists described by Foster, finds ethnography's reflexive attitude to be the primary point of attraction for sound artists.[50]

Within the discourse on the convergence of sonic arts and ethnography, anthropologist and musician Steven Feld is usually cited as an inspirational pioneer. Throughout the intensive studies on the sociality of sound he carried out since 1976 in the Bosavi rainforest region of Papua New Guinea, Feld came to understand how sound

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[47] John Levack Drever, "Soundscape Composition: the Convergence of Ethnography and Acousmatic Music," *Organised Sound* 7, no. 1 (2002): 22-23 and 24-25. He has the work of Hildegard Westerkamp and Barry Truax in mind.
[48] Rennie, "Shadows in The Field Recording," in *Sonologia 2016 – Out of Phase: Conference Proceedings*, ed. Fernando Iazzetta, Lílian Campesato and Rui Chaves (São Paulo: NuSom, 2017), 167-168. Rennie refers to Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright, *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010).
[49] Rennie, "Shadows in The Field Recording," 166.
[50] Ibid., 168.

and listening are an essential way for Bosavi people to inhabit and make sense of their environment. He recounts how every Bosavi child could precisely localise birds in the dense forest by sound; how birds, just like insects or waterfalls, are considered as other "sounding presences" with whom the Bosavi people sonically cohabit the rainforest world; and how their songs "constitute a poetic cartography of the forest," making them layered archives of listening to the environment.[51] These realisations led Feld to transform his research from "an anthropology of sound into an anthropology in sound."[52] He would go out into the rainforest with a microphone and headphones, learning through the help of groups of children to localise birds and bring them into the focus of his recorder. Using such a dialogic methodology of recording, he also created *Voices of the Rainforest* in 1991. With this artistic electroacoustic composition of recorded soundscapes of the Bosavi environment from morning to night he sought to represent a day of sonically inhabiting the Bosavi sound world.

In 1992, ensuing from his research in Papua New Guinea, Feld coined the concept of "acoustemology," which "joins acoustics to epistemology to investigate sounding and listening as a knowing-in-action: a knowing-with and knowing through the audible."[53] Such an investigation, Feld stresses, is not concerned with an epistemology of essences or a claim to truth, rather it engages a relational epistemology, grounded in embodied experience:

> "Knowing through relations insists that one does not simply 'acquire' knowledge but, rather, that one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection."[54]

Crucially, in acoustemology, sound is not merely a vehicle to present knowledge about reality, but is in itself a way of knowing that reality, which also reshuffles common relationships between knower and known, subject and object. Extrapolating the ways of knowing it tracks to the methodology with which it tracks it, acoustemology, Feld argues, could serve to decolonise the paradigms and categories upon which the fields of ethnomusicology and anthropology of sound were built.[55] For Drever too, Feld's dialogic

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[51] Steven Feld, "Acoustemology," in *Keywords in Sound,* ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 18-19.
[52] Ibid,. 17.
[53] Ibid., 12.
[54] Ibid., 13-14.
[55] Ibid., 14.

anthropology *in* sound counts as an example of how ethnography can overcome its unequal power dynamics of representation, fraught with the field's colonial history, necessitating a shift from observation to dialogue and from distance to proximity, which for Drever also maps onto a shift from vision to sound.[56]

Within current scholarly trends, a postcolonial move away from Eurocentric perspectives on knowledge systems has indeed prompted a heightened attention to sounded ways of knowing as well as to how sonic practices by marginalised communities offer resistance to hegemonic cultures.[57] *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*'s curatorial project clearly fits within this trend. In his theoretical framework for the project, Ndikung, in a manner similar to Feld, approaches sound as a relational, sensuous and embodied means of transmitting, storing and producing knowledge and histories. This notion of sound is aligned with the potentiality of radio to directly, sensually and intimately affect its listeners.[58] Oscillating between generalised descriptions of the nature of sound and insights derived from studies on the phenomenology of sound, situated in particular (mostly African and African-diasporic) historical, social and geographical contexts; Ndikung proposes that sound, as an embodied and "contagious" phenomenon, carves shared histories onto listening bodies. This notion of sound as an "embodied instrument of historiography" is wedded against visual and written epistemologies and is imbued with transgressive potential, with the sonorous acting as a way to allow alternative versions of history and imaginable futures to emerge.[59] This, Ndikung states, riffing on James Baldwin's ideas about the necessity out of which jazz was born, "not only to redeem a history unwritten and despised, but to checkmate the European notion of the world. For until this hour, when we speak of history, we are speaking only of how Europe saw—and sees—the world."[60] In Ndikung's concept text, the possibility of sound and listening to yield counter-hegemonic histories is thus connected with a specific understanding of its phenomenology as resistant to the West's written versions of the world and of history.

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[56] Drever, "Soundscape Composition, 24-25.

[57] See, e.g., David W. Samuels et al., "Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): 339; and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 40-45.

[58] Ndikung, "Every Time A Ear Di Soun – Zur Historizität des Hörbaren und zur Verkörperung von Klangräumen," 90, 94.

[59] Ibid., 92-94.

[60] This line from James Baldwin, "Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption" (1979), in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 120, is quoted in German translation in Ndikung, "Every Time A Ear Di Soun – Zur Historizität des Hörbaren und zur Verkörperung von Klangräumen," 93.

Taken together, our theoretical escapade into the relationships which (radiophonic) sound has established with reality and knowledge production at the intersection of art, documentary and ethnography shows us how the direct and intimate qualities of radiophonic sound, or precisely a distortion thereof in the case of the Neue Hörspiel, have come to be valued to provide a portal onto the world of the Other. With *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*, these qualities of radio listening are mapped onto a relational and embodied notion of sound as a way of counter-hegemonic knowing. An attention towards sounded ways of knowing, as is implied in Feld's acoustemology, can allow us to decolonise the tools and categories with which we approach other knowledge systems and the realities these are embedded in. Yet, a note of caution is warranted when phenomenological qualities of sound and listening are portrayed as in-and-of-themselves resistant to the West's visual and written hegemony. This could elevate particular notions of the modes of perception sound and vision offer to transhistorical essences, in contrast to Feld's place-based, historically and socially situated research. Firstly, the automatic equation of Western knowledge systems with ocularcentrism has been contested by many historians working in the field of sound.[61] Furthermore, sound studies scholar Jonathan Sterne has convincingly demystified the essential dichotomy between sound and vision. In what he calls the "audiovisual litany," he summarises the ways in which many authors have naturalised the difference between hearing and seeing into a list of purported truths: hearing "is spherical", "immerses us in the world", "tends towards subjectivity", "is about affect"—the items on the list are easily recognisable, perhaps because according to Sterne they are deeply rooted in Western intellectual history.[62] Sterne stresses that the audiovisual litany obscures a crucial aspect of sound and listening: like any other bodily experience, audition "is a product of the particular conditions of social life, not something that is given prior to it."[63] Thus, he reminds us, "[p]henomenology always presupposes culture, power, practice and epistemology."[64]

Before mounting an analysis of *The Gramophone Effect* to see how the aforementioned notions and tensions are performed and negotiated in the piece, it is worthwhile to turn to Aubry's own musings on the use of sound to create and present

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[61] For an overview of such historians, see, e.g., David W. Samuels et al., "Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology," 333.
[62] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 14-15.
[63] Ibid., 12.
[64] Ibid., 13.

knowledge about the postcolonial Other. As will appear, his thoughts on the convergence of sound, ethnography and artistic practice balance a critical attention towards nexuses of sound, knowledge and power with a confidence in the transformative potential of the phenomenology of sound, akin to Ndikung's ideas.

1. 3. Gilles Aubry's decolonised listening

As an artist and sound studies scholar, Aubry self-consciously works at the interface of sonic arts, postcolonial theory and academic research. His artistic practice combines ethnographic methods and archival research to produce works that turn to the politics and power dynamics of aurality, especially regarding audio cultures in (post-)colonial contexts. Such critical research has brought Aubry to Kinshasa to document the creative appropriation of modern audio technology in current religious practices,[65] or to Mumbai to conduct field research into the activities of the film and television industry and its communities of workers.[66] Operating as an artist embedded in the social field, as Foster would have it, Aubry often collaborates with various practitioners who stand in closer proximity to the cultural practice under scrutiny in his research. Such research then results in installations that freely combine recordings of the environment, conversations and music as well as text-videos and photographs. Often these materials derived from fieldwork are contrasted with other (manipulated) archival and artistic documents. Aubry refers to the resulting polyphony of heterogeneous documentary materials and historical layers as an "extended essay aesthetics,"[67] which situates his practice in the subjective, formally open-ended essayistic tradition within documentary film.[68]

Aubry's artistic-ethnographic practice is firmly grounded in a reflexive theoretical framework. Developing this framework was one of the central concerns of a doctoral project he has started in 2014 at the University of Bern. This project focuses on an attempt at cultural preservation through the use of sound recording by the US composer and writer Paul Bowles. In 1959, equipped with tape recording devices and a primitivist concern for the damaging effects of modernisation on Morocco's traditional

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[65] Aubry, *Pluie de Feu,* 2011, installation with video and photographs, produced for the exhibition *The Urban Cultures of Global Prayers*, nGbK, Berlin, http://www.earpolitics.net/projects/pluie-de-feu-2011/.
[66] Aubry, *Notes via a soundscape of Bollywood*, 2014, video, premiered at International Documentary Film Festival, Marseille, http://www.earpolitics.net/projects/notes-via-a-soundscape-of-bollywood/.
[67] Aubry, email message to the author, May 5, 2020.
[68] For a discussion of the essay form in documentary film, see Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 69-90.

music, Bowles travelled across the newly independent state to collect and preserve 'pure' and 'authentic' Moroccan music genres. The stake in Aubry's project is not only the cultural analysis of Bowles' collection from a postcolonial perspective, but also the question of "how to 'decolonise' audio-based research methods."[69] Some of the answers Aubry proposes in the lectures and publications that ensued from his PhD project left their mark on the research for *The Gramophone Effect* as well.

Approaching Bowles' recordings from a media-anthropological and cultural analytical perspective, Aubry analyses their politics of representation to bare nexuses of power and knowledge production. The recordings for example reflect a hierarchical favouring of supposedly 'pure' musics over 'hybrid' ones and were predicated upon unequal power dynamics since Bowles' status as a Westerner in Morocco allowed him to force local musicians to play for him.[70] Aubry, however, does not leave it at such an academic critique of knowledge formation. Instead he proposes a critical re-interpretation of the collection. By discussing and listening to the records with local musicians, members of cultural organisations, instrument makers and traditional music lovers of some of the places Bowles originally took his recordings, among which the town of Tafraoute, Aubry and his collaborator Zouheir Atbane elicited interpretations that could reveal different aspects of the musical and sonic legacy in Tafraoute and could contradict Bowles' version of it. Crucially, it is through listening encounters that such counter-narratives—"when a subaltern voice starts speaking against its masters' narrative in order to tell its own version of the story"—could be uncovered.[71] Yet, for Aubry, such a critical re-reading of sonic documents in itself does not suffice to decolonise audio-based research. What is called for are approaches "beyond cultural analysis, critical theory and deconstruction."[72] Since, he explained in one of the interviews I held with him, it is never possible to really decolonise the knowledge embedded in archives, we should rather decolonise our own listening.[73]

The research in Tafraoute led to the creation of an audio installation, described by Aubry as "a sonic exploration of the various auditory regimes and perspectives [he and

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[69] "Doctoral project Gilles Aubry," Portraits of doctoral students: Universität Bern, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.sinta.unibe.ch/research/portraits_of_doctoral_students/doctoral_students/aubry_gilles/index_eng.html.

[70] Aubry, "Towards 'decolonized' listening – A sound ethnography of the Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection," in *Sonologia 2016 – Out of Phase: Conference Proceedings*, 78-79.

[71] Ibid., 81.

[72] Ibid., 84.

[73] Aubry, interview with the author, March 19, 2020.

Atbane] had encountered in the course of [their] research,"[74] which combines fragments of the listening sessions and conversations, manipulated field recordings as well as newly performed musics and poems by the artists Aubry and Atbane had met.[75] In an article he wrote to present his research and this 'essayistic' piece of audio art, Aubry picks up some arguments proposed by the "ontological turn" in anthropology to elaborate the necessity of a decolonised approach.[76] However diverse a field, ontological anthropology stems from a reaction against what is perceived as a thinking toward difference in American anthropology which is premised too much on its own set of categories and not on the terms of the Other it is supposed to study, ending up with anthropology speaking not about the worlds of this Other, but rather about its own.[77] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, one of the exemplary figures of this field, writes:

> "We all know the popularity enjoyed in some circles by the thesis that anthropology, because it was supposedly exoticist and primitivist from birth, could only be a perverse theatre where the Other is always 'represented' or 'invented' according to the sordid interests of the West. No history or sociology can camouflage the complacent paternalism of this thesis, which simply transfigures the so-called others into fictions of the Western imagination in which they lack a speaking part."[78]

Seeing the Other represented in primitivist-fraught documents (like those of Bowles) as a mere Western construction also means undoing this Other's lived reality and agency. Accordingly, de Castro insists that Western thought itself needs to be decolonised, whereby Western anthropology would return "to us an image in which we are unrecognisable to ourselves."[79] This necessitates that "those societies and cultures that are the object of anthropological research […] coproduce the theories of society and culture that it formulates."[80] Or to put it plainly: "every nontrivial anthropological theory

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[74] Aubry, "Towards 'decolonized' listening," 85.

[75] Aubry and Zouheir Atbane, *And who sees the mystery*, 2014, video and installation, presented at the exhibition *If You're So Smart, Why Ain't You Rich?*, Marrakech Biennale, http://www.earpolitics.net/projects/and-who-sees-the-mystery-2014/.

[76] Aubry, "Towards 'decolonized' listening," 84.

[77] Lucas Bessire and David Bond, "Ontological anthropology and the deferral of critique," *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 3 (2014): 440. This essay provides a succinct summary as well as an incisive critique of the basic premises of ontological anthropology.

[78] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: for a Post-Structural Anthropology,* trans. and ed. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014), 40.

[79] Ibid., 55.

[80] Ibid., 41.

is a version of an indigenous practice of knowledge."[81] Feld's acoustemology could be seen as an example of such an anthropology. And Aubry, too, sees a privileged role for sound, understood to be immersive and relational, in producing knowledge about the Other that can shed the shackles of a Western epistemology. He imagines a decolonised listening, parallel to de Castro's decolonised thought. Such a listening would require first that one lets go of a "logocentric, cultural grid of interpretation in order to engage more fully in bodily experience" and to attune "to the meaning emerging directly within materials."[82] It would also necessitate a "thinking through sound" (Aubry clearly echoes Feld here) whereby we experience sonic beings which co-exist in an environment, including our own sonic selves, relationally instead of organising them into fixed categorisations or essences. Finally, such a listening ethnography "also appears very close to artistic practice."[83]

In a lecture he gave on his work with colonial sound archives,[84] Aubry connects his decolonised listening to the concept of "sonic possible worlds" that Salomé Voegelin develops in her philosophy of sound.[85] Voegelin approaches reality as made up by several contingent actualities and possibilities. Following 'possible world theorist' David K. Lewis, she surmises that our world is but one among many possible worlds. These possible worlds are real, but have however not been actualised. What we accept to be a singular actual world, then, is in fact but one version of a complex plural reality, filtered through scientific reasoning, knowledge and language, which in turn are determined by political, ideological and social forces. A "sonic sensibility" towards the world could propose alternative standpoints on what the world could be, offering other possible "slices" of reality in its plurality.[86] The aim of this is "not to show a better place but to reveal what this world is made of, to question its singular actuality and to hear other possibilities that are probable too."[87] To elaborate on this sonic sensibility, Voegelin draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on perception in the night, which conjures

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[81] Ibid., 42.
[82] Aubry, "Towards 'decolonized' listening," 84-85.
[83] Ibid., 85.
[84] Aubry, "Attuning to Sound Archives" (transcription of lecture, conference series *Poetics and Politics of Scientific Sound Archives*, University of the Arts, Berlin, February 13, 2017), https://wissenderkuenste.de/texte/ausgabe-7/07-11-2016-reconsidering-the-shape-of-evidence-visual-documents-in-and-beyond-contemporary-art/.
[85] Salomé Voegelin outlined this concept in the introduction and the first chapter of her 2014 book *Sonic Possible Worlds*. I present a somewhat schematized summary of her thoughts: Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-48.
[86] Ibid., 22, 32.
[87] Ibid., 3.

up a boundless space inseparable from the perceiver. The night reveals the "fragility of the real" and makes apparent its plurality: what we thought to be a piece of wood could easily be a rock. Sound, for Voegelin, creates Merleau-Ponty's night-time space. Listening to it, "we stumble and tap in the dark generating and knowing the world as it could be." [88] According to Lewis, a real possible world can become actual by our inhabiting it. Listening, as an act of generating possibilities, thus allows us to "inhabit" and therefor actualise sonic possible worlds. [89]

With this "phenomenological possibilism" in mind, Voegelin discusses several audio works which offer sonic perspectives on particular places: a poetry performance about the town of Bath or artistic field recordings of a village in southern Italy. When conceived of as sonic possible worlds, such works do not offer us with a factual document, a representation of these places, but rather they invite us to inhabit them as possible real worlds:

> "The experience and sense we gain from these worlds is not about them but about how we live temporarily in the environment they provide us with through sounds, and words, and voices, which we take back with us as a sensibility to re-actualise our actual world in its plurality." [90]

It is in the sense of Voegelin's sonic epistemology that I suggest we can understand the decolonised listening Aubry imagines. Artistic audio works about the reality of the Other could function not merely as documents of the "over there" in Tafraoute or elsewhere, as representations to be logocentrically interpreted to acquire factual knowledge about these realities, but rather as "expansions of the over here," that is, an expansion of our own listening and of what we conceive to be actual about the "over there," about Tafraoute, its inhabitants and its music. [91]

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[88] Ibid., 27-28. Voegelin combines ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1945 *Phénoménologie de la perception* and his *Le Visible et l'invisible*, posthumously published in 1964.
[89] Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds*, 30.
[90] Ibid., 35.
[91] I am borrowing Voegelin's phrasings: ibid., 31.

2. Encountering The Gramophone Effect

Pinning down the "over there" about which *The Gramophone Effect* seeks to expand our sonic knowledge is not a simple matter. As stated, the piece resulted from a research trip at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016, which took Aubry and Millis from the Indian-Bangladeshi border region in the Indian Meghalaya state to the cities of Kolkata, Bengaluru and Mumbai.[92] Although initially open-ended, the research came to entail a historiographical reinterpretation of sonic modernity in India. Its focal point is provided by a set of shellac recordings of several Indian musics as well as a travelogue kept by one of the Western recording experts who took such recordings in India. Unlike Bowles' archive, these aren't documents resulting from an ethnomusicological act of cultural preservation. Rather, they are artefacts of the commercial gramophone industry in India in the early 20th century. In order to contradict and pluralise the histories embedded in these artefacts, *The Gramophone Effect* contrasts them with a range of new sonic documents gathered during the trip in India: recordings of environmental sounds, demonstrations of musical instruments and conversations with several artists and researchers. The piece, in keeping with *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*'s curatorial intention to explore alternative historical narratives through auditory phenomena, thus became "a polyphonic audio essay on possible sound histories in the subcontinent."[93]

"Polyphonic" can be taken quite literally, as the different sonic documents that *The Gramophone Effect* draws upon were composed into an intricate overall form, schematically represented in figure 1.[94] 45 minutes in length, opened by a prelude and brought to a close by a postlude, the piece can be divided into two major parts at four fifths of its total length. Only in the latter part do we hear an actual collage of field recordings taken in India (scene H). For the first part (0:00 – 36:25) the research

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[92] All basic information on the research carried out and the materials gathered for *The Gramophone Effect* stems from the interviews I held with Aubry and Millis on March 19, 2020 and May 5, 8, 12 and 16, 2020 (see note 10).

[93] Aubry and Millis, *The Gramophone Effect*, liner notes, 2017.

[94] I based my analysis on the original audio file (wav) of the piece, which I obtained from the artists. The original audio work can be accessed as well online, see Aubry and Millis, *The Gramophone Effect*, Rádio MEC FM, Rio de Janeiro, July 17, 2017, archived online on Mixcloud, https://www.mixcloud.com/radio_documenta_14_brazil/the-gramophone-effect-by-gilles-aubry-robert-millis-on-r%C3%A1dio-mec-fm-rio-de-janeiro/. All durations mentioned in the analysis refer to the original audio file. When following the piece online, each time add 2:31 to the durations listed in the analysis.

materials were distilled into six spoken narrations, enacted by six different voices. Broken up in different segments alternating each other, the narrations are dispersed over ten scenes in the first part (including the prelude). Roughly juxtaposed, separated by silences or bridged by a sound layer functioning as pedal tone, each scene develops a particular sound sphere in which the spoken narrations are set. Some sound spheres of the first part include lengthy fragments of Indian shellac recordings (in scenes C, B'C' and B"C"). Abstract sound collages made up of various noises, the sound of acoustic feedback and percussive sounds stemming from manipulations on gramophones and/or abstract-musical and mimetic-gestural electronic synthetic sounds are included in several sound spheres as well (in scenes A, B, D, E, B'C', F, B"C" and G). The pendant to such abstract collages is provided by sound layers which function semantically to indicate specific spatial settings for the spoken narrations, either realistically so through the use of familiar environmental sounds and sound effects (in scene B, B'C', B"C" and F) or in an entirely non-realistic manner whereby artificial environments are built with mimetic synthetic sounds (in scene D and D'). All of the sound spheres follow a complex development over the first part of the piece, with several scenes reprising, developing and merging contents of sound spheres that were introduced in earlier scenes—thus catapulting the listener back and forth between specific spatial settings and abstract musical passages. To complicate matters further, spoken narrations and sound spheres evolve semi-independently from each other: some of the speaking voices are tied to particular types of sound spheres, but these sound spheres also serve as the setting for other narrations. In other words, at times the impression is created that there is a structural narrative connection between narrations and sound spheres, while elsewhere this impression proves to be untenable. Taken together, this first and major part of *The Gramophone Effect* merges techniques of radio plays with those of abstract electroacoustic music, confusing, in a Neue Hörspiel-like manner, our dramatic expectations more than once.

Fig. 1: General formal scheme of *The Gramophone Effect*: overview of the scenes, spoken narrations and sound spheres over time.

PART 1

Scene A: prelude

Narr. Lulam

Sound sphere A

Scene B

Narr. Desphande
Narr. Lulam
Narr. Desphande
Narr. Dang
Narr. Desphande

Sound sphere B

Scene C

Narr. Dang
Narr. Desphande
Narr. Lulam

Sound sphere C: shellac music

Scene D

Narr. Mulla

Sound sphere D

Scene E

Narr. Bhowmik

Sound sphere E

Scene B'C'

Narr. Dang
Narr. Bhowmik
Narr.
Narr. Mulla

Sound sphere C': shellac music
Shruti box
Shruti box

Sound sphere B'

Scene F

Narr. Bhowmik

Sound sphere F

Scene D'

Narr. Bhowmik

Sound sphere D'

Scene B''C''

Narr. Dang
Narr. Bhowmik
Narr. Dang
Narr. Desphande

Sound sphere C'': shellac music
Sound sphere C'': shellac music

Sound sphere B''
Sound sphere B''

Scene G: Laksmi

Narr. Laksmi

Sound sphere G

PART 2

Narr. Lulam

Scene H: denouement

Field recording

Sound sphere I

Scene I: postlude

Conversation Dang
Narr. Lulam
Da
Narr. Lulam

Sound sphere I

With this general formal scheme in mind, in the following sections I will trace the historical dimensions and contexts of the main sonic documents that make up the sound spheres and spoken narrations of *The Gramophone Effect,* to unpack how and why the piece takes issue with the history of the early phase of India's gramophone industry. I first outline how this industry can be considered as an imperialist enterprise and highlight how the artists characterise its links to the colonial history of the subcontinent. Aided by the interviews I conducted with Aubry, I then expose the research strategies with which the artists sought to deconstruct and pluralise the narratives of sonic modernity embodied in the history of India's early recording industry.[95] Guided by certain decolonial and postcolonial principles, these ran along three theoretical axes, which I will refer to as 'the encounter as method,' 'pluralising historiography' and 'pluralising modernity.'

2. 1. The early recording industry in India as colonial space

The history of the early gramophone industry in India had already been at the centre of an earlier collaboration between Aubry and Millis. In 2015 they created *Jewel of the Ear* for Deutschlandfunk Kultur. With this live performance, the artists wanted to "highlight how the early music industry in India was closely related to its colonial history, and that sound records can be considered colonial spaces."[96] They developed an improvisatory practice of what could best be described as experimental turntablism: Aubry uses his field recording microphone to live process and interact with manipulations Millis performs on mechanical gramophones and electrical record players playing Indian shellac recordings.[97] Fragments of such improvisations are used in *The Gramophone Effect* as well. Along with lengthy fragments of Indian recordings, these appear in many of the piece's sound spheres (in scenes B, C, D, E, B'C', F, B''C''). But the colonial dimension of the early gramophone industry in India is bared most explicitly in recited excerpts of the travelogue kept by T. J. Theobald Noble, which make up a significant part of the spoken narration of *The Gramophone Effect.*

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[95] It was Aubry mostly who developed the theoretical underpinnings of *The Gramophone Effect.*

[96] Aubry and Millis, interview by Shikha Kumar, "What were the earliest recordings from India like? Now you can find out," *Hindustan Times*, March 5, 2016, https://www.hindustantimes.com/brunch/what-were-the-earliest-recordings-from-india-like-now-you-can-find-out/story m37fIH2eKBCJFAzPfs7vgM.html.

[97] Aubry, interview.

Noble was a British recording expert sent on a long 'recording expedition' that crossed India in 1910, where he was to record music for the Indian branch of Pathé Frères. The "native" recordings taken in India were pressed onto Pathé discs in European factories and sent back to the Indian colonial market for sale, along with the record players on which they could be played.[98] Pathé Frères was by no means the only international company to be involved in such a project. As Stephen Putnam Hughes notes, during the formative years of the recording industry in India a range of Euro-American companies similarly "inscribed music as a commodity like cotton or jute in the triangular trade of empire."[99] The competition for a piece of the colonial market was fierce, but the Gramophone and Typewriter Limited soon came to occupy a virtual monopoly, which the British company maintained well into the 20th century. Better known under its later name, the Gramophone Company had also been the first to send out a recording expedition to India in 1902, headed by recording expert Fred Gaisberg.[100]

"The native music is to me worse than Turkish but as long as it suits them and sells well what do we care?"[101] John Watson Hawd, the master brain behind Gaisberg's expedition, summarised the dynamics of the early decade of the recording industry succinctly: all that mattered was establishing a market. Foreign recording experts, equipped with transportable recording machines and no knowledge—nor appreciation—of Indian musics, set up improvised studios in hotels, private homes or in recording camps in villages. Such a recording situation must have been very restrictive for Indian artists: it erased the social sphere of performance conditions, subjected temporally flexible improvisatory forms to fixed short lengths, and all of this had to happen in unbalanced negotiations with the Western recording engineers.[102] Local knowledge systems of music were thus subjugated to Western-centred perspectives on music. Moreover, not only did the expeditionaries decide what would come to be circulated as 'native' Indian music, by writing travelogues for publication in the West, they also participated in producing knowledge about this music, its musicians and their social

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[98] Michael S. Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings 1899-1908* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994), 55-56.
[99] Stephen Putnam Hughes, "Play It Again, Saraswathi: Gramophone, Religion, and Devotional Music in Colonial South India," in *More than Bollywood: Studies in Indian Popular Music*, ed. Gregory D. Booth and Bradley Shope (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117.
[100] See, e.g., Gerry Farrell, "The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India: Historical, Social and Musical Perspectives," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 2 (1993): 32, 41.
[101] Correspondence of John Watson Hawd to the Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. London office, June 1902, EMI Archives, Hayes, quoted in Farrell, "The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India," 33.
[102] Amlan Das Gupta, "Plates and Bangles: Early Recorded Music in India," in *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World,* ed. Supriya Chaudhuri et al. (London: Routlegde, 2018), 56, 62-63.

practices. Gaisberg, for example, kept a diary which was reproduced in his book *Music on Record* in 1946. There, Gaisberg condescendingly describes the first artists he recorded. Along with misguided observations on the music they performed, he had much to say about their reactions to the recording technology: "It was the first time the talking machine had come into their lives and they regarded it with awe and wonderment."[103] Such a "mise-en-scène" of the reception of recording technology, as Michael Taussig has noted, was a common trope in 20th-century descriptions of colonial subjects: Westerners apparently were hugely fascinated with the Other's fascination for their modern apparatus.[104]

    With this historical context in mind and the broader scholarly climate of postcolonial theory and criticism in which Aubry stands, we can better understand *The Gramophone Effect*'s approach to the history of the early recording industry in India. During our interviews, Aubry further clarified this approach to me. First of all, he understands the early shellac recordings as colonial spaces, where "extremely imbalanced power relationships are articulated."[105] Furthermore, he approaches them and the travelogues of Noble and the like as oppressive discursive representations.[106] Since their representational work was predicated upon unequal power relationships, whereby indigenous knowledge systems of musical practice were dismissed and Indian musicians as colonial subjects were denied full self-representation, the early shellac recordings and the travelogues could count as products of "epistemic violence" in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's sense.[107] Secondly, Aubry sees this colonial historical documents as part of a broader discourse of modernity, built upon the notion of modernity as a Western export product. Such an "oppressive narrative of modernity prevents the possibility to highlight

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[103] Fred Gaisberg, *Music on Record* (London: Robert Hale, 1946), quoted in Farrell, "The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India," 34.

[104] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routlegde, 1993), 199.

[105] Aubry, interview.

[106] Aubry, email message to the author, May 8, 2020.

[107] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined the highly influential concept of epistemic violence in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" With it, she refers to the violence inherent to knowledge formation of imperialism. Epistemic violence, as a fundamental component of colonialism, constitutes colonial subjects as Others, declares imperial knowledge about these Others as truth and negates other knowledge systems. Epistemic violence thus prevents colonial subjects from speaking for themselves. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. For a concise summary of Spivak's concept see Anke Bartels et al., *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction* (Berlin: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2019), 153.

different narratives of sonic modernity in formerly colonial countries."[108] Indeed, the mantra of "Europe's essential modernising capacity" that would induce a global transition from traditional to modern civilisation, or what Frederick Cooper has called modernity as the "claim-making concept" with which imperial ideologues justified colonisation, emanates clearly from Gaisberg's diary.[109] And it certainly figures in the travelogue of Theobald Noble.

2. 2. Reading Theobald Noble: the encounter as method

Buried under advertisements for needles, record brushes and cabinets, Noble's Indian diary was published in 1913 in two instalments in the American trade magazine *The Talking Machine World*.[110] Set against orientalist descriptions of the scenery and people in Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore and Bombay, Noble's two articles contain a mix of anecdotes on his recording sessions with Indian musicians and quasi-ethnomusicological claims about the music they performed. The latter is without exception explained and judged from a Western perspective, highlighting difference through claims of absence: absence of harmony, melody and rhythm. The former functions in an overall discourse that posits sound technology as the epitome of Western modernity and casts Indian subjects and musical practices as antithetical to it. Noble continuously stresses the delays in the recording process caused by lengthy negotiations with musicians or by their technological awkwardness. (Of one musician in Bombay, Noble writes: "his imbecility was so provoking that I actually threw a record at him.")[111] The dillydallying of the artists is framed as a general inefficiency of a non-modern society where as Noble claims "the word hurry is not in the native vocabulary."[112] Like this, he rehearses a common trope in colonialist discourses to portray native subjects as living in a condition where the course of time was not yet understood correctly.[113] Spinning around this same trope, Noble also rejects requests for recording sessions in private homes late at night or with audience as inefficient and harmful to an optimal recording process. He thus depicts the

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[108] Aubry, interview.

[109] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 115.

[110] T.J. Theobald Noble, "Recording Artists of All Castes in India," pts. 1 and 2, *The Talking Machine World* 9, no. 4 (April, 1913): 32-33, no. 5 (May, 1913): 48-49.

[111] Ibid., pt. 2, 49.

[112] Ibid., pt. 1, 32.

[113] See, e.g., Martin Clayton, "The Time of Music and the Time of History," in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 774-775.

social dimensions of performance as an irrational practice which has no place in the rationality of modern recording.

These are but a few of the examples of the representational politics at play in Noble's text, but much more epistemological critique could be made. *The Gramophone Effect*, however, does not engage in this sort of postcolonial analysis. Instead, to disentangle how Noble's historical document participates in processes of epistemic violence and continues an "oppressive narrative of modernity," they are approached in a manner similar to Aubry's engagement with Bowles' archive: critique arises through encounter. While in Mumbai, Aubry and Millis asked several people to read excerpts of Noble's articles as a pretext to enter into a conversation about the history of sound and recording. The voices we can hear in *The Gramophone Effect* are those of Usha Deshpande and Gitanjali Dang. Deshpande is a singing teacher in Mumbai who possesses firsthand knowledge of the Hindustani vocal music about which Noble talks in his texts. Dang is a curator, who founded the Mumbai art lab Khanabadosh. Excerpts of their reading as well as the ensuing conversations on the legacy of colonial representations such as Noble's make out two of the central narrations of *The Gramophone Effect.* Crucially, these narrations are the result not of an acting performance, but of an unscripted encounter between Noble's text, the reading participants and the artists. For Aubry, such a method of encounter could be a viable starting point to decolonise audio-based research. He relates his notion of the encounter to that of the colonial encounter, which refers to "the clash between epistemologies of music, sound, medicine, the body and so on, which arises beyond the physical violent clash of the colonising moment."[114] Noble's text could be seen as an outcome of such a clash of epistemologies. For Aubry, collaborative research between himself as a Western subject and participants as postcolonial subjects could be used to perform a new transcultural encounter, whereby the clash of epistemologies is staged again and the difference in positions of the participants can be newly negotiated.[115]

Aubry frames this approach towards decoloniality for *The Gramophone Effect* not in de Castro's ontological anthropology, but in Walter Mignolo's project of intellectual decolonisation and "border thinking." Mignolo's ideas work around the central concept that Western imperialism did not only dominate territories, but knowledge systems as well. A critique of the "epistemic colonial difference" this created from the perspective

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[114] Aubry, interview.
[115] Ibid.

of a European modern epistemology is not sufficient, rather thinking itself needs to be decolonised in order to make room for "epistemology from a subaltern perspective."[116] In the case of European thinkers, Mignolo states with Robert Bernasconi, this "necessitates an encounter with the colonised, where finally the European has the experience of being seen as judged by those they have denied."[117] Spivak's proposal to engage with the Other from within Western institutions of knowledge production might be closer to what is actually happening in Aubry and Millis' research. She argues that postcolonial intellectuals need to "systematically unlearn" privilege in order to "speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) historically muted subaltern subjects."[118] While it remains the question if it is up to the artists (and me by extension) to attribute to Dang and Deshpande a subaltern perspective, since they live in a contemporary postcolonial society which integrates the living legacies of colonialism, they can provide a reaction to Noble's colonial representations from within, while at the same time their affective reading (as I will highlight later on) makes Noble's epistemic violence very palpable, especially for a Western listener.

2. 3. The archive and the repertoire: pluralising historiography

If through the encounter with Dang and Deshpande agency of Indian artists is re-introduced in the unilateral history of sonic modernity captured in Noble's travelogue, another strategy of *The Gramophone Effect* occupies itself with excavating all together different histories of sound and listening within modernity in India. This led to the creation of two spoken narrations which pluralise the piece's historiographical work by mining what performance scholar Diana Taylor would call the "repertoire." In her oft-cited study on cultural memory and modes of transmitting knowledge, Taylor argues that knowledge about the past is recorded and transmitted in two interrelated, but different ways. The first comprises the archival memory of stable objects such as texts, documents and buildings, of which Noble's documents and the shellac recordings could count as

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[116] Walter Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 70-71, see also 65.
[117] Robert Bernasconi, "African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (London: Blackwell, 1997), 192, quoted in Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge," 72.
[118] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 295.

examples.[119] The repertoire, on the other hand, consists of embodied practices, such as gestures, singing, movement, dance… which store and transform "choreographies of meaning" and in this way transmit "communal memories, histories and values from one group/generation to the next."[120] In *The Gramophone Effect* insight in such a repertoire of sonic practices is provided by Kolkata-based singer and field recordist Moushumi Bhowmik, with whom Millis and Aubry travelled to the East Khasi Hills in the Meghalaya state to make recordings near the Indian-Bangladeshi border. Bhowmik, who founded The Travelling Archive together with Sukanta Majumdar, has long been recording and collecting songs and conversations across the fragmented Bengal region, partitioned under colonial rule in 1905 and again in 1947 between India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). In Bhowmik and Majumdar's research, this repertoire of songs, which are largely part of an oral tradition, are treated as forms of knowledge about Bengal's long history of migration.[121] During an improvisation session in a studio in Kolkata, Bhowmik sung and translated the lyrics of some of these songs to English, providing one of the repertoire-narrations of *The Gramophone Effect*. I could not identify the exact songs which were used, but their translated lyrics all poetically evoke reminiscences of migration and dwelling: "what land have you left to come to this one...I ride the wings of the bird...to go to your sky..."[122]

On their trip to the East Khasi Hills, Aubry and Millis were also accompanied by Renee Lulam, a social scientist from Shillong. With her they interviewed the Khasi folk singer Kerios Wahlang, who has been singing his own Khasi songs and playing his self-made *duitara*, a traditional Khasi string instrument, since the late 1970s to keep the heritage of Khasi music alive.[123] Parts of this interview provided the material for the second repertoire-narration of *The Gramophone Effect*. The original Khasi words were not translated and then used as a script, nor can we hear the original conversation with an overdubbed translation. Instead we hear a recording made with Lulam, who live-translates the conversation fed to her bit by bit through headphones. The words of Wahlang, who is hailed as one of the main guardians of the Khasi musical heritage, come

[119] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.
[120] Ibid., 20-21.
[121] Moushumi Bhowmik, "The Journey: Unfurling the Map," *The Travelling Archive,* blog post, 2017, http://www.thetravellingarchive.org/thejourney/the-journey-unfurling-the-map-by-moushumi-bhowmik/.
[122] Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations from the spoken narrations in *The Gramophone Effect* were taken from the script. Aubry and Millis, *The Gramophone Effect*, script, 2017.
[123] Wahlang passed away in 2020, see "Khasi Folk legend Kerios Wahlang no more," *Shillong Today,* January 11, 2020, https://shillongtoday.com/khasi-folk-legend-kerios-wahlang-no-more/.

across as poetic reflections on the transience of time and as laments on the loss of his heritage. The issue of heritage and cultural identity has been and continues to be pertinent among Khasi people, who are a majority indigenous ethnic group in the Meghalaya state and have an own culture, language, religion and musical tradition. This came to be articulated in terms of a distinct cultural identity first when colonialism posed a threat to the Khasi culture, and later on in a series of ethnic conflicts and Khasi-secessionist movements since the 1970s.[124] Today such cultural politics are articulated against the backdrop of the homogenising effects of Westernisation and mainstream Indian culture.[125]

2. 4. Revoicing the Laksmi Tantra: pluralising modernity

Wahlang's story about the loss of an indigenous heritage touches upon the issue of modernity in (post-)colonial contexts, which figured in the research for *The Gramophone Effect* as well. The concept of modernity and its related values of progress, liberation and rationality has provided a central site of contestation in postcolonial studies, where colonialism is not seen as a mere perverted outgrowth of Western modernity but is shown to be inextricability bound up with it.[126] Conceptualising the space of agency of postcolonial subjects within modernity has been of equal concern to these studies, albeit one with less consensus on its diverse proposals. Several of those conflicting proposals seem to be reflected in the sonic materials gathered for *The Gramophone Effect*. One portion of material was recorded during visits to several instrument makers and music shops in Kolkata and Bengaluru. The sounds recorded there reflect both processes of hybridisation as well as a recourse to indigenous authenticity as possible reactions to modernity. The latter is reflected in an improvisation on the *Rudra veena* (in the postlude) which Aubry and Millis recorded with an instrument builder who has long studied the history of decline and revival of this rare instrument, used in Hindustani classical music. The other side of the hybridity-authenticity continuum is represented in recordings made in Bengaluru with a manufacturer of shruti boxes. These instruments are

[124] See Thongkholal Haokip, "Inter-ethnic relations in Meghalaya," *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 3 (2014): 305-309.
[125] See Daisy Hasan, "Talking Back to 'Bollywood': Hindi Commercial Cinema in North-East India," in *South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts*, ed. Shakuntala Banaji (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 45.
[126] Mignolo is one among those scholars, see "The Geopolitics of Knowledge," 60-61, 82.

normally used in practice sessions of Indian classical music to provide it with the fundamental drone. Originally functioning in a similar way as the harmonium, today digital electronic alternatives to these shruti boxes have been developed, which allow the user to synthesise with a turn of a knob different instrumental sounds of a *tanpura*, *tabla*, harmonium...[127] Recordings of the sampled tabla and harmonium drones these shruti boxes produce, are used in the sound sphere of scene B'C'. A snippet of a conversation in English with the manufacturer who explains how this syncretism of innovation and tradition works was included in the piece as well (in scene H).

The most deliberate response of *The Gramophone Effect* to the modernity-dilemma was an attempt of Aubry "to highlight local or vernacular sonic modernity, by not only focusing on industrial-technological music production, but by trying to find other ways of unearthing the modernity of sound practices that were anyway present."[128] It concerns the rewriting of a passage from the *Laksmi Tantra*. This text, of which the manuscripts date back to the 9th and 12th centuries, is related to the corpus of *Pancaratra Agamas* which detail the rites, practices and cosmogony of the communities of Vishnuism, a major Hindu theistic group.[129] The *Laksmi Tantra*, devoted entirely to the goddess Laksmi, counts as a prime example of the central position sound occupies in Hindu theology.[130] In several verses, speaking in first person, Laksmi describes herself as "the mother of all sounds" and she expresses her power as "manifested sound," "immanent in all beings."[131] For Aubry, these verses espouse a performative and dynamic description of sound and the body, "where 'sound' emerges as an embodied and spiritual notion," which is antithetical to his understanding of the "modern sound practice" of recording "characterised by objectification and erasure."[132] This duality bears upon Aubry's reworking of the original verses for the script of *The Gramophone Effect.* He deleted the specific religious concepts, names and ritual prescriptions, but retained most of the sonic attributes with which Laksmi identifies herself—"I hum like the female bumble bee," "I gush forth in an unbroken flow of absolute sound like the

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[127] See, e.g., "Radel Milan digital Tabla + Tanpura," February 19, 2018, video, 3:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5SfiPNfFAo.
[128] Aubry, interview.
[129] Sanjukta Gupta, introduction to *Laksmi Tantra: A Pancaratra Text*, trans. Sanjukta Gupta (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), xv, xvii-xviii, xxi.
[130] For more information on the Hindu sonic theology, see Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Delhi: Molital Banarsidass, 1995), 1-20.
[131] *Laksmi Tantra*, trans. Gupta, 338.
[132] Aubry, email message, May 8, 2020.

flow of oil."[133] In this way, Aubry highlights the embodied notion of sound in the verses, which also closely resembles his own description of decolonised listening as "thinking through sound" whereby the various sonic beings co-existing in an environment are experienced relationally. Yet, Aubry goes beyond this and anachronistically makes Laksmi and her all-pervasive sonic presence resist modern recording technology, adding the following opening line to the verses: "I am the sound you'll never be able to record." Uncannily, the rewritten script in *The Gramophone Effect* is read by a monotonous female-sounding computer-voice speaking English with an Indian accent, resulting in an ambiguous hybridisation. Laksmi's sonic presence of sounding materiality (the "I" in the script) is equated with the hypermodern audio technology of synthesised speech, which is characterised precisely by absence since the material sound-producing body is replaced by a de-individualised, yet ethnic and gendered constructed body. Is sound reproduction technology, contrasted with Laksmi's lines on the impossibility of capturing her sonic presence, highlighted here as a disembodying act of erasure and objectification, a trace of absence?

A consideration of the effects of sound reproduction technology on the notions of embodiment and disembodiment, presence and absence, and sound's ephemerality and recording's preservation—a consideration inexhaustibly picked up by critics since the advent of the phonograph—is tackled directly in one more spoken narration of *The Gramophone Effect*. While in Mumbai, Millis and Aubry encountered sound artist Farah Mulla, who offers a direct critique on the recording process in an essay by her, which she recites in the piece. The essay reflects on the effects of decoupling the voice from its body through recording, using Jacques Derrida's ideas on voice as presence and writing as permanent and iterable trace of absence. In referring to what Derrida called "the gramophone effect,"[134] Mulla reverses the French philosopher's appraisal of audio technology's ability to reproduce a voice in the absence of its speaker as an eyesore to the unity between voice and self-presence posited by Western thought,[135] and instead sketches its alienating and dehumanising effect in a negative light.

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[133] Identical in *Laksmi Tantra*, trans. Gupta, 338 and Aubry and Millis, *The Gramophone Effect*, script.

[134] Jacques Derrida put forth this phrasing in his 1984 lecture "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." which was published in *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote (Albany: State University of New York Press), 41-86, see 56 in particular.

[135] See Frances Dyson, *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 95.

After reviewing the three theoretical axes along which the research for *The Gramophone Effect* ran, it becomes clear that these set in motion an array of binaries. In the method of the encounter, a Euro-American subject is confronted with a postcolonial Indian subject. In the pluralising of historiography, archival memory of documents and recordings is contrasted with knowledge from the embodied practices of the repertoire. And finally, in tackling the oppressive discourse of Western modernity and the space of agency for postcolonial subjects in it, a continuum between hybridity and authenticity is set up, upon which conflicting notions of sound and recording are mapped: embodiment, materiality, presence and unruly ephemerality are wedded against the disembodiment and objectification of modern recording. In the remainder of this analysis we will see how these binaries come to bear on the dramaturgy of *The Gramophone Effect.*

3. Staging The Gramophone Effect

> "The artists in this program offer us their own ears and their own voices, their personal reactions to their respective environment. If we follow them, we discover a kind of reverse side of the flood of media images—listening knowledge that continually encourages us to ask new questions."[136]

I repeat Marcus Gammel's characterisation of the possibility of radio listening to foster different knowledges about the world, because what appears to be a straightforward potential, I want to show here, in fact needs careful construction. Listening to certain places, events and histories of the world does not automatically prompt a critical sensibility towards them. For one, you first need to comprehend more or less what it is you are listening to in order to readjust your understanding of it. While the liner notes, read by announcers before *The Gramophone Effect* was broadcast during *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*,[137] help a little to contextualise some of the sounds and voices used in the piece, much of the information on their contexts I outlined above, let alone the theoretical underpinnings for gathering them, could only be detected after interviewing the artists and further literature study. For Aubry, who made the final mix of the piece and who in his extended essay aesthetics usually relies on visual elements, the acousmatic situation of the radio medium at times felt restrictive for translating the research in India into *The Gramophone Effect*:

> "In a film or installation, it would have been possible to give a more complex sense of the many places and situations which were part of our research, many of which simply do not sound evidently […] So the challenge is how to tell a complex, ambiguous, heterogeneous story of places, situations, polyphony and polysemy, without loosing the political charge of certain sounds, without loosing the listener's critical attention, and without the piece turning into a mere nice sounding abstract collage."[138]

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[136] Gammel, "Listening to the Radio," 7.
[137] This was the case at least for its archived broadcast on Rádio MEC FM, Rio de Janeiro, July 17, 2017 (see note 94).
[138] Aubry, email message, May 5, 2020.

In this heterogeneous story, *The Gramophone Effect* largely stays away both from conventional explanatory narration and from montages of direct speech and interviews gathered in the field, with which radio documentary, as discussed above in section 1.1 historically has established its documentary promise. Instead, the listener's sense of gaining access to reality and to political knowledge about the history of sonic modernity in India is secured by a carefully calibrated dramaturgy and editing, which I will scrutinise in this chapter. I first take a deeper look at the overall dramaturgy of the piece to suggest how it establishes a documentary promise and how Aubry's problematisation of India's early recording industry bears on the two-part structure of the piece. I then outline how the postlude as well as the use of the shellac recordings in the first part pluralise and contest historiographical notions of time and preservation, inherent in the process of recording. A closer consideration of the first part, particularly its dramatisation of space and its staging of Noble's travelogue, will reveal how the piece uses the acousmatic dark of the radio medium to de-centre stable listening attitudes. This might prompt Aubry's decolonised listening, the possibilities and impossibilities of which I expose in the final two sections of my analysis. Throughout all of these sections, it will become clear how Aubry's theoretical approaches towards decoloniality as well as the concomitant set of binaries were translated into the intricate construction of *The Gramophone Effect*.
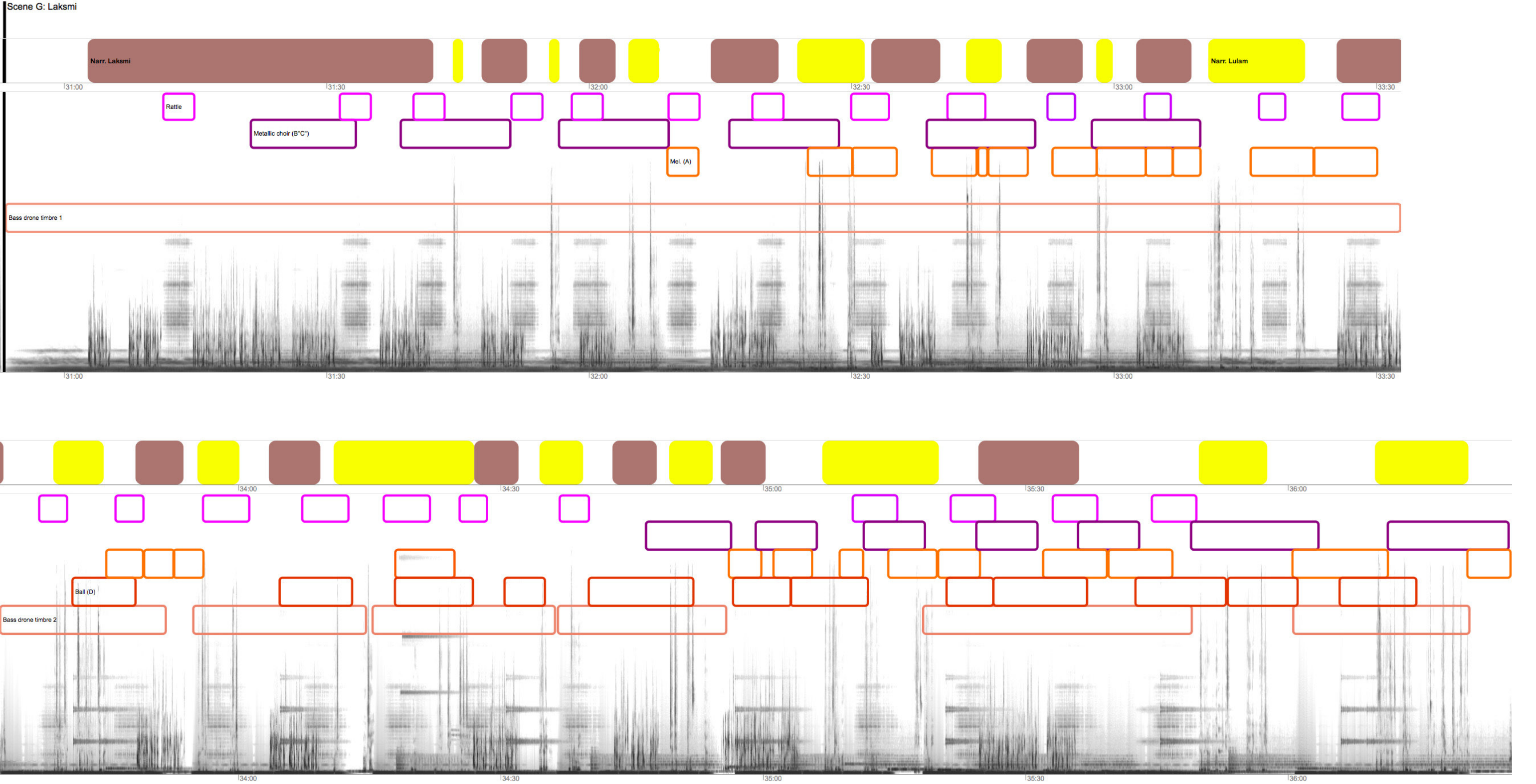
3. 1. A dramaturgy of resistance

The computer-voiced words of Laksmi play a crucial role in regulating the dramaturgical processes that transform *The Gramophone Effect* from a "nice sounding collage" into a work that foments political listening knowledge. By the time we hear them, we are almost two thirds into the piece and the whole six-minute scene they fill makes out the pivotal point which divides the piece in its two parts (scene G: 30:53 – 36:25, see fig. 1). Headed by her verse of resistance—"I am the sound you'll never be able to record"— Laksmi's narration is broken up in several segments, the computer voice gradually sounding less human and more robotic as glitches where syllables follow each other too abruptly multiply in her speech. The segments are alternated with fragments of Lulam's spoken narration. Both narrations run independently of each other, with each new segment continuing were the former left off: the computer voice vigorously characterising her powerful presence in sound metaphor after sound metaphor, while

Lulam now repeats in Khasi and then translates to English Wahlang's poetical descriptions of "the sacred sound of the duitara." Just like Laksmi's verses, these carefully selected fragments reflect a notion of sound characterised by unruliness and understood relationally within the whole environment of sonic beings. "The sound that I love," we hear Lulam speak, "doesn't have a set time […] it just comes on its own." It is "the sound of nature […] silk threads."

The narrations are set in a haptic sound sphere of synthetic and electronically processed sounds, founded on an oscillating bass drone to which sound events are added layer by layer (see fig. 2). Immediately after the computer voice's line, "I hum like the female bumble bee," a percussive rattle-like sound is introduced (31:11), apparently mimetically depicting how Laksmi sounds. It continues to hover intermittently over the drone at variable intervals. Ten seconds later a clearly pitched sustained tone emerges. In its unison and slight convulsion it evokes a choir of voices intoning the same tone, yet its timbral quality is metallic, approaching the sound quality of Laksmi's computer voice. Hints of slowly moving melodies, reverberating with the clarity of bell-like instruments, make the haptic sound sphere complete (cf. fig. 2: "mel."). After having briefly thinned out at the middle of the segment, the sound events start appearing in faster succession and a new event, bursting of gestural energy, is added to gear up the intensity of the scene (33:40): with its harsh attack followed by a series of repeated impacts decreasing in energy, it mimics the behaviour of a bouncing ball. Overall, the placing of the sound events and the spoken words creates an energetic rhythmical interplay. The voices, though clearly intelligible, are thoroughly embedded in the sound sphere without a distinguishable foreground and background. Such rhythmical and dense editing along with the tactile quality of the sound events not only serves to effect a climactic build up, but also sonically emphasises the notion of sound as an embodied and material phenomenon, espoused in the narrations and favoured in Aubry's own decolonised listening. The phrase, "I am the portal into an infinity of possible sound worlds, reaching far beyond what your talking toy can capture," which Aubry puts in Laksmi's mouth at the close of the scene, even makes a direct reference to Voegelin's sonic possible worlds. We can take the phrase quite literally here, as the climactic scene spills over in the second part of the piece, where a new sound world is effectively opened up.

Fig. 2: Overview of the evolution of the Laksmi-scene. The upper frame displays the spoken narrations. The lower frame displays the sound events that make up the sound sphere of the scene. The letters in brackets refer to the sound spheres in which the sound event in question was introduced first.

Scene G: Laksmi

Narr. Laksmi

Narr. Lulam

Rattle

Metallic choir (B°C°)

Mol. (A)

Bass drone timbre 1

Ball (D)

Bass drone timbre 2

As indicated above in my overview of the formal scheme of *The Gramophone Effect*, in the first part of the piece, the materials gathered during the research in India were distilled into a carefully composed form, mixing techniques of radio plays and electroacoustic music, instead of making a documentary montage of field recordings. Apart from the readings of Noble's travelogue, which often are coupled with the early Indian shellac recordings (easily recognisable by their crackling surface noise), the documentary status of the gathered sounds is not made apparent. The repertoire of Bengali songs and the interview with Wahlang on the living legacy of Khasi music are entirely presented through staged spoken narrations, abstracted from any explicit reference to the specific cultural and historical contexts they in fact document. They are recited, translated, that is, intentionally enacted in studio-like situations, resulting in clean and static recordings. When field recordings are used in the first part, they are composed into sound spheres, either acting as specific spatial settings to the narrations (to be understood semantically) or as sound collages (inviting an abstract-musical listening). So, there is no way for listeners to know that some of the percussive sounds in scene E stem from scrap metals in a dump in the Nainital region north of New Delhi and that some of the harmonium and tabla music in scene B'C' was actually made by the shruti boxes recorded in Bengaluru.

All of this changes in the second part of the piece, when Laksmi's computer-voiced words of resistance spill over in a three and a half minute montage of what is clearly field recording footage (scene H: 36:25 – 39:44). In the montage we can recognise some of the voices from the spoken narrations introduced in the first part, but now they appear in snippets of roughly recorded conversations. Bhowmik's voice appears first, speaking with a man in a mix of languages. Not all of it is intelligible, but it is possible to understand that their conversation revolves around life across the Bangladeshi-border, indicating that it was recorded during the field trip in the East Khasi Hills. Elsewhere, we hear a man intonating a descending scale, possibly stemming from Deshpande's singing classes. It is also in this montage that we hear the conversation about the shruti boxes. Throughout the scene the artists are present. We hear their voices asking questions and making small talk, but sense their presence as recordists as well. Since the fragments in this scene seem to be recorded in noisy surroundings, with voices speaking away from the microphone, we get the impression of being in the field together with the recordists' microphone. The scene offers us what radio play scholar Vito Pinto has called a "microphone-ear perspective": the piece does not evolve in front of us, but as

"earwitnesses" we hear what the recordists and the recorded persons would hear.[139] This reality-effect is heightened by the tight editing of the scene. Whereas the slices of recording first overlap each other as well as the sound events of the previous scene, during the last minute the synthetic sounds are eliminated one by one until only the sound of the footsteps and the breathing of the recordist walking with his microphone remains. Finally, the carefully composed sound spheres of the first part make way for a space from reality, captured by a wandering microphone. In its cacophony of the artists and participants' voices, languages and background noises, the montage offers us a subjective behind-the-scenes snapshot of the actual encounters and the fieldwork *The Gramophone Effect* was distilled from. By doing so, it also yields Reinelt's documentary promise (cf. section 1.1): acting as the denouement of the piece, we are provided with the indexical corroboration that what we heard before, the poetic, abstract narrations and sound spheres of the first part, hold a specific connection with reality, a reality which was accessed by ethnographic fieldwork.

This documentary promise is not the only shift the Laksmi-scene unleashes. Following the denouement is one more lengthy scene, acting as a postlude to the piece (scene I: 39:44 – 44:29). Layered over a quiet sound sphere, made up of the improvisation on Rudra veena and the sounds of crickets chirping, the spoken narrations of Lulam and Dang return. Whereas in the first part we could only hear Dang reading Noble's travelogue, in the postlude she speaks her own words in conversation with Millis and Aubry. Not only do we learn here that the artists retrieved Noble's text from an archival website (further aiding the documentary promise), but we can also hear Dang's own reflection on the legacy of the colonial past it carries. It is in the postlude then that we hear the first and only lengthy fragment of the conversations the reading of Noble's texts led to. Furthermore, in the 14 minutes the climactic Laksmi-scene, the denouement and the postlude make up together, the piece contains no more shellac recordings and no more of Noble's words. The resistance of Laksmi is thus literally played out on a dramaturgical level: after she has spoken her computer-voiced words, the oppressive representations and narrative of modernity, embodied in the shellac recordings and Noble's travelogue, are done away with. There is no more speaking for, but only speaking to.

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[139] Vito Pinto, "Listen and Participate: The Work of the *Hörspielmacher* Paul Plamper*,"* in *Radio as Art,* eds. Thurmann-Jajes et al., 284.

3. 2. Resisting what exactly?

Aubry explained to me that the writing of the script for the automated Laksmi-voice was meant to be a joint process with Dang and Bhowmik, who would attune the modifications of the *Laksmi Tantra* to their own understanding of sound materiality and embodiment. This initiative failed however. Since references to ancient Hindu culture have become politically charged in the contemporary context of an increasingly violent and exclusionary Hindu nationalist movement in India, according to Aubry, the participants might have been hesitant to engage with the text. That the hybridisation of the *Laksmi Tantra* was integrated in *The Gramophone Effect* on such a prominent place despite of this, sits uneasily, but the scene and the dramaturgy of resistance it brings with it could be criticised on another level as well.

   With its emphasis on the early recording industry as a colonial space, *The Gramophone Effect* risks to forge a monolithic understanding of colonial modernity. By representing the early phase of the recording industry only with Noble's text and by turning the shellac recordings into his material-musical accomplices, what was in fact a more diverse and ambiguous history is squeezed into too narrow a plot. Several historians of the early Indian recording industry have pointed out that recording was already taken up in India by the end of the 19th century, well before the advent of the gramophone and the Western recording experts in 1902.[140] Michael Kinnear stresses that indigenous entrepreneurs, such as Hemendra Mohan Bose, participated in the industry early on and recorded the most popular artists. Such Indian entrepreneurs also played a crucial role in the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement by releasing popular songs of resistance on record. Foreign companies did so as well.[141] Economic benefit thus seems to have prevailed over the state-interests of the British Raj. Such extra historical accounts reveal a history full of contradictions, which remain silent in *The Gramophone Effect*. In this sense, the piece could be said to unwittingly reproduce the narrative of modernity as a Western export product that it seeks to problematise.

   The central moment of resistance to this narrative could be criticised as well. In order to create the transgressive hybridity in the Laksmi-scene, a reflection on embodiment and sonic materiality was identified and amplified in a text which predates modern discourses on sound and is part of an ancient religious practice and philosophy

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[140] See, e.g., Das Gupta, "Plates and Bangles," 58; also see Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings*, 9.

[141] Kinnear, *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings*, 61-69.

belonging to the cultural history of the colonised. Its rewriting and dramaturgical placing in the piece sets the sound spheres and voices free from the colonial documents of the early recording industry. Aubry thus equates resistance to hegemonic colonial modernity with an indigenous pre-colonial cultural artefact, which in itself has become embroiled in a problematic cultural memory construct of glorious authenticity in Hindu nationalism. Further aided by the Indian-accented computer voice, marking the words as distinctly non-Western, such a move hints towards an essentialisation of indigenous culture as incommensurable with Western modernity and rehearses the binary between coloniser and colonised, while hybridity according to Homi Bhabha, the postcolonial father of the term, is only truly emancipatory when precisely these very "primordial polarities" are challenged. [142] Moreover, by tightly editing together Wahlang's reflection on his favourite sound of the duitara with the notions of sonic spirituality and embodiment from the *Laksmi Tantra*, the cultural tradition of Khasi people is mixed with a Hindu theology of sound and Wahlang's sound reflection is made complicit with Laksmi's resistance to the hegemonic modernity of the recorder. This decontextualisation makes another important move: embodiment, materiality, relationality and unruly ephemerality— notions compatible with Aubry's decolonised listening—now become favoured characteristics of indigenous Indian sonic practices in general and are made incompatible with the recording technology of the coloniser "as a 'modern sound practice' characterised by objectification and erasure."[143] In other words, a generalisation of sound's phenomenology is conjoined with notions of resistance and mapped onto a binary between Western modernity and postcolonial agency.

3. 3. Staging historiography: recordings' permanence and modern time

Aubry obviously is not the first to criticise the recording industry in India as an intrusion of colonial modernity by bringing in notions of embodiment and spirituality, reaped from the Hindu theology of sound. In fact, one of the earliest Indian critics of the gramophone technology, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, used that very same framework. Writing in 1909, he asserts that the machine and the commodified music culture it brought, would not only lead to a deterioration of the taste of South Indians, but would destroy an

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[142] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4; also see Bartels et al., *Postcolonial Literatures in English*, 107.
[143] Aubry, email message, May 8, 2020.

authentic spiritual tradition of Karnatic music (South Indian classical music) as well. He asserted that the intervention of "mechanism between musician and sound is always, per se, disadvantageous."[144] This assertion, Hughes explains, is embedded in the common understanding followed by Coomaraswamy that Indian music traditions "were taught and learned through the performative and embodied encounter between hearing and singing."[145] Moreover, music performance was characterised by the singer's mood. No material inscription could capture such an ephemeral phenomenon. Coomaraswamy's solution, then, to preserve an authentic Indian culture under colonial modernity was to resist the modern gramophone altogether.

In the West, sound recording was equated with preservation from the early days of its invention onwards: "If there was a defining figure in early accounts of sound recording, it was the possibility of preserving the voice beyond the death of the speaker."[146] In his fascinating historical account of such figures of "desire for permanence" in recording, Jonathan Sterne shows how sound reproduction established a particular relationship with history and time.[147] However ephemeral early recordings were in practice, writers quickly developed a sense of the historical possibilities of sound recording, which theoretically could preserve the voices not only of historical figures but of "dying primitive cultures" as well.[148] Interestingly, Sterne shows how such ideas embody bourgeois modernity's sense of time, in which present time—considered as something measurable and controllable that can be "repeated, spent, saved"—clashes with linear-progressive and irreversible historical time.[149] This understanding of time was often used to place non-Western cultures a couple of ranks lower than the modern West on the arrow-pointed timeline of historical progression.[150]

The issue of preservation, permanence and modern time—touched upon in Mulla's narration through the lens of Derrida—is explored throughout *The Gramophone Effect* from several different perspectives: it bears upon how the shellac recordings are treated and it is reflected in the postlude, both in its orchestration of musical time and the

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[144] I'm referring to Hughes's summary of Coomaraswamy's critique. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Gramophones—And Why Not?", in *Essays in National Idealism* (Colombo, IN: Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd., 1909), 205, quoted in Hughes, "Play It Again, Saraswathi," 121.
[145] Hughes, "Play It Again, Saraswathi," 121.
[146] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 287.
[147] Ibid., 12.
[148] Ibid., 308, 311.
[149] Ibid., 310.
[150] Ibid.,. 311-312.

spoken narrations it contains. In this postlude, cradled by the improvisation on the Rudra veena, we first hear Dang reflecting on Noble's travelogue, carefully changing the course of her phrases several times:

> "We have a horrible relationship with our own history in India and this is kind of true in so many...everywhere...you know where there's a kind of...so instead of acknowledging that something....I also see the presence of this text in a kind of social space as a kind of acknowledgment and then to sit and see how can you move on from there, as opposed to not have it at all which often happens with us, you know, we ban things, we cannot make them accessible."

Dang's thoughts on preserving and grappling with the history of colonialism are juxtaposed with Lulam's narration, voicing Wahlang's resolution to save an entirely different past:

> "This instrument has been with us for a long time from ages ago. It's been with us for ages. We don't get to see these, people don't make them anymore. [I]t hurt my feelings. That these things were not available to us any more then I tried to preserve this heritage that we have. It was my attempt at...how do I put it...it was my attempt at...building or passing on the heritage that was forgotten, in any way I could."

It is no coincidence that both reflections on preserving the past are accompanied by the Rudra veena improvisation, which in itself is the result of an act of heritage preservation. The improvisation lasts for the entire five minutes of the postlude and contains two layers. The repetition of a plucked string tone in a periodical pattern serves as a background to the improvisation. This is possibly the tanpura providing the drone. Never quite synchronising with this pattern, an irregularly phrased melody with the more full-bodied and resonant string sound of the Rudra veena slowly moves over the drone. This melody first moves up and down the ambitus of minor third and whole tone intervals in a series of crawling slides, then dives into a deeper register before returning to the minor third and whole tone slides. The improvisation seems to be following the temporal procedure of the *alap*. This special duration, unconstrained by metrical order, usually regulates the first section of raga performance in Indian classical music and is aimed at directing the listener to "aperiodic phenomena," such as "pitch inflections and subtle

dynamic and timbral manipulations."[151] Martin Clayton has shown how several ethnomusicologists have articulated the specific musical time of the alap as symbolic of the circular timescales of Hindu cosmology, thereby wedding it against modern Western regimes of linear and progressive time.[152]

Even if we are not aware of this discussion of the alap, while listening to the postlude of *The Gramophone Effect* we can't help but be aware of time. After the climactic Laksmi-scene and the denouement, both replete with rhythmical activity and a forward driving energy towards the closure of the piece, the Rudra veena improvisation in the postlude, sprinkled with the sound of chirping crickets, bird calls and variations of earlier synthetic sound events mimicking the wind and a choir of otherworldly voices, provides a peaceful calm and sense of timelessness. Nowhere else in the piece does one musical layer remain uninterrupted for such a long duration. Linear musical time is replaced by time unhindered by strict temporal order, adding a layer of musical meaning to Dang and Lulam's spoken narrations on the loss of the historical past. The postlude thus has a double function: it provides a sense of wind-off to the piece, while at the same time offering a multilayered perspective on the past and historical preservation.

If the postlude speaks of different ways to deal with the past, then it is the modern Western desire for permanence in recording itself what is subverted in the first part of *The Gramophone Effect*. It bears emphasising that this desire was essentially a utopia in the early 20th century: "If there was a defining characteristic of those first recording devices and the uses to which they were put, it was the ephemerality of sound recordings," Sterne succinctly writes.[153] Precisely this ambiguous status of early sound recordings, as both ephemeral objects and permanent historical documents, or traces of absence if we follow Derrida, is emphasised in *The Gramophone Effect*. Initially ephemeral commodities, the early Indian records used in the piece were turned into archival documents not until long after they were produced.[154] They stem from Millis' personal collection, who as an amateur collector bought them in junk shops and then placed them in his own personal archive. As figure 3 shows, a total of six lengthy

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[151] Clayton, "The Time of Music and the Time of History," 779.
[152] Ibid., 768-769, 776.
[153] Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 287.
[154] Many early Indian recordings share this fate. Only in 1990 were individual efforts of collectors to archive these recordings coordinated when the Society for Indian Record Collectors was founded.

fragments of Indian recordings, both early acoustic and electrical ones, can be heard in the piece.[155]

Location in the piece		Shellac recording info		Label
Scene A (prelude)	00:01 - 00:39	**UK** (1924)	Edward Prince of Wales *Speech on "Sportsmanship"*	Gramophone Company (HMV) (acoustic rec.)
	00:20 - 01:08	**USA** (1927)	The Charcoal Twins *Comedy routine "Evolution"*	Banner Records (electrical rec.)
Scene C	05:39 - 06:38	**India** (1905)	Bangalore Nagaratnam *"Nitya-Kalyani (Part 3) Ragamalika"*	Gramophone Company (acoustic rec.)
	06:29 - 06:47	**India** (1939)	T. V. Ramaswami Sastrigal *Imitation "Sky Lark Squirrel Country Oil Mill Red Bird"*	Columbia Records (electrical rec.)
	06:47 - 08:48	**India** (1949)	Jnan Prakash Ghose *"Tabla Instrumental"*	His Master's Voice (electrical rec.)
Scene B'C'	14:26 - 15:49	**India** (1908)	Rajlakhi Mukerjee *"Bengalee Female Song: Sindhu-Khambag"*	Gramophone Company (acoustic rec.)
Scene B"C"	26:38 - 28:25	**India** (1906)	Mohamed Husain *"Khamach-Kawali"*	Gramophone Company (acoustic rec.)
	29:42 - 30:52	**India** (1902-1920)	Gauhar Jan *Various records (only the endings)*	Various labels (acoustic recs.)

Fig. 3: List of shellac recordings used in *The Gramophone Effect.*

The recordings represent several different segments of the gramophone repertoire of the first half of the 20th century in India. Scene C includes a *Ragamalika*, which is a type of composition of Karnatic music, sung by the renowned scholar, musician and *devadasi* Bangalore Nagaratnam (1878 – 1952). Tabla music by the famous Hindustani classical musician Jnan Prakash Ghose is included in this scene as well. Bridging those two recordings are the high squeaking sounds of a vocal birdcall imitation by the 'master of imitation' T. V. Ramaswami Sastrigal. In the first half of the 20th century such vocal impersonations of the sonic environment, difficult to record at that time, enjoyed great

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[155] Millis provided me with the dates, labels and artists of the recordings used in *The Gramophone Effect.* Millis, email message to the author, May 12, 2020.

popularity.[156] Scenes B'C' and B"C" include vocal Bengali and Hindustani music respectively.

Placed next to the cleanly recorded voices of the spoken narrations in the first part, the loud crackling surface noise of the shellac recordings clearly stands out, making the listener aware both of their historicity and their material mediation. The experimental turntablism manipulations and the dramaturgical placing of the recordings serve to highlight this ambiguity. Usually, they are played in combination with Dang or Deshpande reading Noble's travelogue, thus further emphasising their status as historical documents. Yet, only once a clear-cut semantic connection is made. In scene B"C" (from 29:42 onwards), when Deshpande is reading Noble's characterisation of his "most expensive artist," gramophone celebrity Gauhar Jan, a chain of her recordings makes up the sound sphere. Only their very endings are used, where Gauhar Jan always announced her name. This habit could indicate a novelty-fascination or might indicate a form of advertising.[157] Be that as it may, in *The Gramophone Effect* it lends itself perfectly to highlight the oppressive character of the early recording process in India. 11 times we can hear "My name is Gauhar Jan" followed by the harsh mechanical sound of the gramophone needle stuck in the locked groove when it has finished playing.[158] Gauhar Jan's voice obsessively repeating her name is slowed down, is filtered until only a ghostly echo remains and is ping-ponged back and forth the stereo image. Like this, her voice is dehumanised, alienated from her body and self-presence, or even, from the individual identity she is announcing by stating her name.

While such manipulations emphasise the oppressive and objectifying character of the shellac recordings, at other moments, the noise-operations could be interpreted to precisely highlight their vulnerability. The first two Indian shellac recordings we can hear in scene C are cleanly faded in and they play their crackling music disturbed only a few times by percussive sounds stemming from the turntablism improvisation. In scene B'C' and B"C", however, the noise-operations become far more intrusive. Here the shellac recordings are no longer introduced with a clean fade-in, but rather with the crude hissing sound of the lead-in groove. In scene B'C', the Bengali song gets disturbed by sustained acoustic feedback and heavy noise-filtering and is finally overpowered by static noise. The recording of vocal Hindustani music in scene B"C" (26:38 – 28:25) is

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[156] Millis, interview with the author, May 16, 2020.
[157] Farrell, "The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India," 50.
[158] Technical information on the turntablism operations stems from my interview with Millis.

cut off by record scratching and finally the thud of the gramophone needle. For Aubry, highlighting the materiality of recordings in such a way has transgressive potential: "The shellac discs are featured as historical colonial documents *and* as vulnerable material sound objects, whose oppressive discursivity can be interrupted via performative noise improvisations."[159] It is thus by exploiting their ephemerality through improvisation that the recordings become resistant to the oppressive history they in fact embody. It must however be noted that these "performative noise-operations" often are barely recognisable as such. Divorced from the music recordings, percussive sounds resulting from handling the gramophones, the sound of acoustic feedback and the hissing noises of the lead-in grooves are dispersed over the scenes of the first part. Here they have a far more de-centring effect. As I will argue in the next section, they interfere with the sound spheres that act as specific spatial settings to the narrations, de-centring the semiotic codes which guide the listener's dramatic expectation of the first part of *The Gramophone Effect.*

3. 4. Stumbling around in the acousmatic dark: the dramatisation of space

Writing on the semiotics of radio plays, Bartosz Lutostański asserts that besides verbal language, acoustic sign systems such as voice, music, real-world sounds and mixing are used to "fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs."[160] Precisely this terror of uncertain signs is the playfield of the first part of *The Gramophone Effect*. Its traps are set from the very beginning in the atmospheric sound sphere with which the piece opens. Here, several layers of reverberant tones move in melodic lines above a deep bass drone, forming a cloud of resonance with their lingering reverberation. The tones were created by Millis who processes shellac recordings with a lot of surface noise through several noise reduction plug-ins and then slices up the filtered sound in individual tones.[161] Sporadically, more active high-pitched synthetic tones are added, evoking bleeps and glitches of a technological nature. One of them makes a long downwards glissando (0:50), directly indicating the sound of modulating radio frequencies. Amidst this sound sphere, two shellac recordings are

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[159] Aubry, email message, May 8, 2020.
[160] Lutostánski transfers Roland Barthes' concept of 'textual anchorage' to the radio play. Bartosz Lutostánski, "A Narratology of Radio Drama: Voice, Perspective, Space," in *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative*, ed. Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 118.
[161] Millis, interview.

played (see fig. 3). They are not Indian ones, through they indirectly hint to India's colonial history. The first record contains a male voice speaking British-accented English in a formal register. Covered under the shellac surface noise and the reverberant sound sphere, some of his words do stick out: "together each unit in our worldwide empire… it was a nation of sportsmen…"[162] They are fragments of a speech recorded in 1924 for the Gramophone Company, in which Edward the Prince of Wales depicts the common "outstanding characteristic" of the "British race" as its love for sportsmanship, which the British nation has handed down to every part of its worldwide empire.[163] Layered on top of the prince's jingoistic speech are two other male voices, speaking in African-American sociolect. We can make out enough words to grasp that they are talking about biological evolution. This concept, heavy with a history of racism, was the theme of a comedy routine on the 1927 record by The Charcoal Twins, an African-American comedy duo performing black face minstrelsy. Amidst these crackling voices Lulam's narration is introduced in front of the stereo field, speaking Wahlang's words on the transience of time. Like this, yet another temporally and geographically marked voice comes to travel the slowly swaying sound sphere. The first scene of *The Gramophone Effect* thus opens up a narrative space without a set time or place: the non-time and the non-place of the radio ether perhaps?

When the start of scene B announces itself with the sound of a door opening (1:37) the narrative space quickly shifts. After the microphone has been moved around slightly, we hear Deshpande's voice asking "Shall I start?" She continues to read the first lines of Noble's travelogue. A documentary interview style is summoned up now: the sound sphere is made up of room tone (the sound of silence to avoid dead air in radio) with the noises of playing kids and traffic seeping through. This prompts us to readjust the semantic understanding of the piece we had so far gathered by adding up its semiotic codes. Aided by the narrative iconicity that reverberating sounds have gained in films to indicate dream states or internalised thought,[164] we come to understand that what we've heard before was a prelude, happening on a different narrative level than the documentary interview taking place in a room in a city. And yet, soon something starts to 'sound wrong' in this new realistic setting as well. 15 seconds into the scene, a

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[162] These lines are not included in the script, but are my own transcription of the piece.
[163] Edward, Prince of Wales, "Speech on 'Sportsmanship'" (Gramophone Company, His Master's Voice, 1924), audio, 4:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iymK-bkN4Wk.
[164] See Katharine Norman, "Stepping Outside for a Moment: Narrative Space in two Works for Sound Alone," in *Music, Electronic Media and Culture,* ed. Simon Emmerson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 223.

mechanically iterated squeaking and softly rustling motor-like sound, punctuated by short impulses of an indefinable sound event with a lot of granulation, sneak into the sound sphere of the scene. These are the sounds of the mechanic of a gramophone and the lead-in groove resulting from the turntablism improvisation, but for listeners who are not intimately familiar with the noises of early gramophones it is impossible to deduct this. It is not until these same sound events pop up more than ten minutes later in scene B'C' (at 14:21) to lead in the shellac recording of the Bengali song, that their source is revealed.

While scene B continues, Lulam's spoken narration makes a short re-appearance (2:59), bringing with her the reverberant sounds and the drone of the prelude. By the time Deshpande's spoken narration starts again (3:24), the reverberant tones have disappeared but the drone lingers on, thus mixing the two previously distinct narrative spaces. Throughout the two remaining minutes of the scene, its narrative space is further unsettled by a series of rhythmically placed musical sounds: percussive sounds (3:37), a short harmonium tone (4:07), the sound of acoustic feedback (4:24) and the high-pitched synthetic sounds of the prelude (4:56) are all added to the repertoire of noises from the turntablism improvisations to intervene in the realistic layer of urban background noises. Only when scene C starts with the music recording of Bangalore Nagaratnam, do we reach a new stable sound sphere again. The sound materiality of the shellac records thus has induced a move from the external space of a room in a city to the musical space inside the shellac record.

Since in radio, as Katharine Norman indicates, the audience's inner eye is asked to provide the spatial setting to narrative action, radio plays and documentaries equip the listener with the "requisite clues for visualisation."[165] In her overview of such dramatisations of space, Karin Bijsterveld makes a distinction between keynote sounds and sound marks. Keynote sounds (following R. Murray Schafer's conception of the term) refer to "sounds that make up the background of a sonic environment."[166] The sound of honks, bells and playing children, signalling the urban environment in which Desphande's reading is set in scene B could count as examples of such sounds. Sound marks, on the other hand, refer to "sounds that stand out in a particular environment," thus signposting specific geographical locations.[167] Bijsterveld and her colleagues note

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[165] Ibid., 219.
[166] Bijsterveld, introduction to *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, 15.
[167] Ibid.

that it is a common topos to sonically evoke the sensory experience of a city by gradually drowning out a musical soundtrack with keynote sounds and sound marks of urban environments. The process I described in scene B establishes the exact reverse of such a "noisification of music":[168] they are the abstract musical sounds which operate as 'intruding noise' to unsettle a stable space of urban keynote sounds. By drowning out stable semiotic codes with the sonic materiality of non-semantic sounds, this 'musification of noise' draws us from a stable external space deep into a musical-material one, to be explored sensually.

In scene B'C' and B"C", which also open with the spoken narrations of Deshpande or Dang reading Noble, an increasingly complex variation of this musification of noise occurs. While scenes B and B'C' use only keynote sounds, scene B"C" opens with a sound mark, particular to cities in India, namely the sound of a religious chant emanating from public loudspeakers (24:09). Such religious sounds, amplified and diffused by loudspeakers mounted on *ashrams*, temples or mosques, are at the centre of debates on noise pollution in India, which are often embroiled in sectarian disputes.[169] The public chant we can hear in scene B"C" is distorted by feedback and delayed echo (suggesting multiple spatially diffused loudspeakers). Gradually the musical potential of these distortions is teased out. By amplifying the acoustic feedback, the musical intervals it forms moving back and forth from the same tone (D4) in major ninths and major sevenths become noticeable. Almost imperceptibly, a bass drone, sustaining a D in a bass register, is faded in under the chant, thus diatonically colouring the intervals formed by the feedback. Eventually, the chanting voice disappears, baring the underlying sound layer of children and car honks. Yet, soon this urban noise too is replaced by the intruding sonic materiality of the motor sound of a gramophone, the hisses of the lead-in groove, rattling sounds and clear metallophone-like tones gently hidden in the sound sphere. Even Dang's voice, stumbling over a sentence while reading, is rhythmically edited in the droning sound sphere, where all the urban noises have disappeared.

While the musification of noise distorts the realism of environments created by real-world sounds, some scenes in *The Gramophone Effect* establish all together unrealistic, artificial spatial settings. Twice we are transported to such a spatial setting: at

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[168] This is the term coined by Jasper Aalbers for these processes. Bijsterveld et al., "Shifting Sounds. Textualization and Dramatization of Urban Soundscapes," in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past*, 37, 45.

[169] See Julian Anthony Lynch, "Festival 'noise' and soundscape politics in Mumbai, India," *Sound Studies* 5, no. 1 (2019): 39, 46-48.

the onset of scene D (8:49) which introduces Mulla's spoken narration and in scene D'
(22:30) where we can hear Bhowmik singing. Both scenes open with a single synthetic
sound event with a whistling timbre making a centrifugal twirling movement. As it
increases and decreases in volume, the impression is created that the sound twirls through
space, moving closer to and further away from the listener. In his overview of narrative
modes in acousmatic music, James Andean suggests that synthetic sounds can establish
"mimetic narratives" by drawing on "our embodied understanding of movement and
behaviour in the world around us."[170] This is precisely how the twirling synthetic sound
event operates: with its recognisable timbral quality, gesture and spatial movement, it
evokes a sense of being-in-space, transporting the listener to the centre of what could be
an empty environment, brought to sounding by the whistling wind or a similar sonic
occurrence. When it provides the setting for Bhowmik's unaccompanied singing voice,
this artificial space remains stable. In scene D, however, it is quickly disturbed by
synthetic, percussive and turntablism sounds alike.

Considered as a whole, the dramatisation of space in the first part of *The
Gramophone Effect* constantly grounds and de-centres the listener's inner eye and
narrative sense of place through its semiotic play with keynote sounds, sound marks and
mimetic sounds. Moving through its soundscape, we are thrown from exterior realistic
spatial settings to interior musical spaces, from documentary realism to artificial reality
and back again, constantly readjusting the tools—from semiotic decoding to sensuous
exploring—whereby we try to make sense of the piece. If we follow Bijsterveld's
adoption of Schafer's soundscape terminology further, we could argue that the
soundscape of *The Gramophone Effect* is decidedly a lo-fi one. Whereas in Schafer's hi-
fi soundscapes there is a clear foreground where even the smallest sound can
communicate intelligible information, in lo-fi soundscapes "individual acoustic signals
are obscured in an over-dense population of sounds."[171] The signal-to-noise ratio is off.
In his criticism on Schafer's privileging of clean hi-fi soundscapes over lo-fi ones,
Brandon LaBelle asks a pertinent question: "how are we to judge what is communication
and what is noise?"[172] For LaBelle it is precisely the all-absorbing intrusive background
which is valuable. Listening, he claims, can be a way of apprehension where "the ground

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[170] James Andean, "Narrative Modes in Acousmatic Music," *Organised Sound* 21, no. 3 (2016): 196.
[171] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and The Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 43.
[172] Brandon LaBelle, "Phantom Music – Radio, Memory, and Narratives from Auditory Life," in *Radio Territories,* ed. Erik Granly Jensen and Brandon LaBelle (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2007), 102.

rules remain in flux" and where we have to shape and reshape knowledge against experience, experience against knowledge.[173] Such a way of apprehending the world seems to be amplified in *The Gramophone Effect*. While we are listening, we "stumble" around (to use Voegelin's phrase) in the acousmatic dark of the radio medium, where no certain assertions about what we perceive can be made: a room in a city in India may turn out to be the musical-material space of a shellac record, public religious noise may in fact be a choir of euphonious feedback and narrative levels can be trumped by other ones in the blink of an ear. It is through constantly measuring our understanding against experience, our semiotic decoding against tactile sensation, that we come to apprehend the piece as well as the presented knowledge on the auditory realities which Aubry and Millis encountered in India.

3. 5. Stumbling around in the acousmatic dark: the archive and the repertoire

Not only the dramatisation of space in *The Gramophone Effect* performs an acousmatic game of narrative ambiguity, the spoken narrations do so as well. Listeners of the piece first come to know Deshpande, Dang, Mulla, Lulam and Bhowmik as relatively anonymous voices, whose role in the piece is unclear. They could be actors interpreting a script, artists performing spoken poetry, translators or ethnographic informants. Upon first hearing them, all that we can be sure of is that they sound like Indian women. It is no coincidence that the persons speaking and especially those reading Noble's text are women. Out of the thirteen individual Indian artists Noble mentions in his two articles eight are women. His exoticist fascination is only partly to be blamed for this high number. Women participated in strikingly large numbers in the recording business in India in its early phase. Amlan Das Gupta explains that female artists of Hindustani music were so willing to be recorded, since they were "accustomed to thinking of musical knowledge as lying in the field of economic exchange," in contradistinction to their male counterparts, who feared losing control over their musical knowledge.[174] For Das Gupta, the first decade of the recording industry marked an important period where those female artists could re-assert their musical identity by singing a great variety of genres in a time when "social distinctions reinforce[d] formal distinctions in the musical

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[173] Ibid., 98-99.

[174] Das Gupta, "Women and Music: The Case of North India," in *Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods,* ed. Bharati Ray (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2005), 469.

world."[175] The greater space of women's agency was short-lived however, as men asserted their dominance in the recording industry after its formative years.[176]

It comes as no surprise that Noble's text does not reflect this space of women's agency. His descriptions of the actual music performed (however superficial they may be) usually appear in relation to male artists. When talking about female artists, Noble dives into lengthy descriptions of their looks and glances, the sweet quality of their voices, their "daintiness", their "splendid figure" and, in the case of established singers like Gauhar Jan, their decadence.[177] In an attempt to characterise the social status of these lovely singers, Noble claims that in India "all female artists are looked upon as prostitutes, and are therefor casteless."[178] Noble thus universalises a specific class of female artists-courtesans (that of *tawaifs*, which in itself was everything but uniform) into the whole group of professional female musicians. Moreover, he depicts their marginalisation as a pre-modern tradition, whereas this in fact resulted from a colonial deformation of pre-colonial practices of music and dance, whereby the diverse and complex social role of tawaifs and their performances gradually came to be perceived as pure entertainment for the male gaze under the attendance of British officers during the 19th century.[179] Noble devises several anecdotes to show how he proudly bypasses the consequences of such 'backward customs' and thereby portrays the Western recordist as an agent of patriarchal civilisation and modernisation of which Indian female artists find themselves at the receiving end.[180] At the same time, in shifting freely between exoticist descriptions of both women's looks and their voices, the recording device becomes an extension of the male gaze, to capture not only their visually but their aurally pleasing features as well.

When speaking Noble's words, Deshpande and Dang, both professional female artists, adopt Noble's first person narrative voice. Since in works for radio, the narrative voice of a text and the physical voice of the person speaking this text are conflated into one,[181] their reading establishes a particularly tense conjunction of subject-positions. If

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[175] Ibid., 467.
[176] Ibid., 470.
[177] Noble, "Recording Artists of All Castes in India," pt. 1, 32-33.
[178] Ibid., 33.
[179] For more information on this colonial deformation of the role of tawaifs, see Vijay Prakash Singh, "From *Tawaif* to Nautch Girl: the Transition of the Lucknow Courtesan," *South Asian Review* 35, no. 2 (2014): 177-194.
[180] In particular: Noble, "Recording Artists of All Castes in India," pt. 1, 33 and pt. 2, 48.
[181] Lars Bernaerts, "Voice and Sound in the Anti-Narrative Radio Play," in *Audionarratology,* 136.

we follow Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois' insights into the "double consciousness" underlying the formation of subaltern subjectivity, where a sense of self is inevitably burdened by "the internalisation of the white gaze" upon the subaltern subject,[182] then Dang and Deshpande, while adopting the textual voice of Noble, are literary performing this double consciousness. As Indian female artists they are gazing Noble's gaze upon Indian female artists. Yet, what might appear to be an almost perverse situation set up by Aubry and Millis can also serve as a powerful way to de-centre the colonial representations embodied in Noble's archival document, precisely by exploiting the aural possibilities of radio's acousmatic conjunction of textual and physical voice.

We first can differentiate Noble's textual voice from the physical reading voices through small hints in the segments of Deshpande's narration in scene B: through her hesitating and unnatural intonation or the distanced tone with which the textual voice refers to Indian people as "natives." Further on in the scene Dang takes over the spoken narration (4:20) and reads the title and signature of Noble's article, revealing whose narrative we are actually listening to. But throughout the following scenes both Dang and Deshpande gain a narrative agency of their own as well. This happens subtly so. In scene C, while reading Noble's descriptions of Hindustani classical vocal music, some uneasy amusement with his ignorance emanates from Deshpande's voice. In her fifth and last segment (28:53 – 30:21), just moments before the start of the climactic Laksmi-scene, Deshpande has broken the narrative frame of Noble's travelogue completely. Now she converses freely with her recordists, realises who the singer Noble calls "Miss Cohar Jan" is (that is, Gauhar Jan) and starts laughing out loud when he writes that "she was everlastingly chewing the proverbial Indian betal-nut." In the staged colonial encounter between Deshpande and Noble the power dynamics have shifted: now it is he who is judged and gazed upon. Moreover, in this section, the quality of Deshpande's voice is processed in such a way as to make her sound metallic and one-dimensional, distancing her voice even more from Noble's narrative one.

Aside from having them break the narrative frame and manipulating their sounding materiality in a Neue Hörspiel-like tradition of media reflexivity (cf. section 1.1), the reading voices also gain independence from Noble's narrative through coupling them with the musification of noise in the sound spheres. A case in point is scene B'C' where Dang reads an anecdote in which Noble recounts how he bypasses the purported

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[182] I draw on Weheliye's reading of the thoughts of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)*.* Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 41-42.

Indian custom to treat musicking women as prostitutes. The anecdote echoes archetypical oriental opera plots,[183] with Noble starring as the brave European hero, equipped not with a heroic tenor voice, but with a modern talking machine. A young musician of Madras with "a perfect figure, large sympathetic eyes and a charm of manner" represents the alluring Oriental woman, while "two Indians with diabolical and satanic faces," described by Noble as the girl's pimps, get the part of his brutal adversaries.[184] Noble bravely defeats them by excluding them from the recording session and by paying the fee in bracelets directly to the girl, rather than in money to them. The anecdote is divided over two segments (13:37 – 14:27 and 15:04 – 15:21) and starts when the sound sphere of the scene still clearly sets Dang's voice in a room in an urban environment:

> "After having recorded Godavari, I visited another woman at her home in the native quarter of Madras, but this time the house was not constructed of marble. In the worst part of the town we were compelled to climb a flight of stairs into a dirty, evil smelling room where one or two men were squatting, smoking and talking, which at our approach diminished into murmurs of surprise."

As this last sentence is spoken, the sound sphere becomes denser, with the sound of a male voice accompanied of shellac crackling stuck in repeat and a slowly oscillating synthetic bass drone. The anecdote continues to introduce Noble's adversaries, while the high-pitched sound of acoustic feedback and barely perceivable synthetic impulses draw the scene away from its realistic spatial setting into the crude sound of the lead-in groove giving way to a recording of the Bengali song. After a short interruption by Bhowmik's narration, Dang continues reading above that song, now heavily filtered. As soon as the "two Indians with diabolical and satanic faces" re-appear in the narrative picture, the male shellac-voice stuck in repeat and the feedback sound do so as well. This might suggest an almost programmatic depiction of Noble's story. Yet, what is expressed in the sound sphere is rather the affective charge of Dang having to tell this story as if it were hers. Through the sound of her swallowing and breathing, that is, the materiality of her voice, Dang's presence, which previously had appeared as that of quite an emotionless reader, couldn't be louder. Along with the intensified sound sphere, her affective voice drowns out the narrative one of Noble.

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[183] I refer to Ralph Locke's characterisation of these plots. Ralph P. Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns's 'Samson et Dalila'," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 3 (1991): 262-263.
[184] Noble, "Recording Artists of All Castes in India," pt. 2, 48.

Characterising the upsurge of documentary theatre after the 2000s, Carol Martin notes how such theatre turns archival memory into Diana Taylor's repertoire since through embodied performance it restores the real events, captured in permanent archival documents.[185] Deshpande and Dang could be said to do so as well. Their embodied performance is in the affect of their voices, their conversing and the way they are placed in the overall sound sphere. It is not just restorative but interruptive of Noble's document. If his writing presents us with how things are, an undisputable "actuality" to use Voegelin's words, then *The Gramophone Effect* does not refute this actuality by giving us another 'true' account of how things actually were. Instead, by imbuing Noble's text with the bodily materiality of speech, the actuality that Noble posits—his anecdotes, his representation of Indian female artists as sensual and agency-deprived subjects, his rendering of patriarchal modernity as reason, progress and redemption—is de-centred and challenged by bringing out the plural realities that participated and were silenced in its construction. This interruption happens when the recorded voice as permanent trace of absence becomes voice as sonorous materiality and corporeality, and, to return to Taylor and Martin, when archival truth is turned into unstable repertoire of which "the choreographies of meanings" can be changed and negotiated.[186]

3. 6. Staging the encounter: decolonised listening or the sonic colour line?

As we have seen, one of the methods of Aubry's decolonised research praxis approaches collaboration with research participants as a transcultural encounter where differences in positions and epistemologies can be negotiated. Both the conversations and sonic content ensuing from this method of the encounter and the encounter itself are made audible throughout *The Gramophone Effect*. In the staging of Noble's travelogue, it is precisely through 'overhearing' the encounter between Aubry and Millis as recordists and Dang and Deshpande as readers (a question directed away from the microphone, a quick clarification of the text), that the narrative frame of Noble's story world gets broken. In the denouement, such audible residues of the encounter take central stage themselves in a crowded montage of roughly recorded snippets of field recording, yielding the piece's documentary promise and foregrounding the presence of the artists/recordists. Yet, the encounter of Aubry's decolonised audio-research does not only involve the artists and the

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[185] Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," 10.
[186] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

participants, but is staged between the audience and the Indian voices and sounds in the piece as well. While listening to *The Gramophone Effect*, we encounter Indian musics without explicit information on their composition, genre or artist. We are confronted with Indian voices whose individual identities and narrative roles remain opaque. The sonic practices these voices reflect upon in their narrations are devoid of any concrete reference to specific cultural contexts. In fact, we encounter Indian sonic realities and subjects from the same unknowing perspective as Noble's. While engaging us in a "clash of epistemologies" in this way, *The Gramophone Effect* offers no fixed listening frame. Instead, the acousmatic game of narrative ambiguity that the piece sets up constantly incites us to shift our listening engagement. In switching from narrative dream worlds to realistic documentary worlds, from urban environmental noise to abstract music, from archival documents to repertoire and from the narrative roles of people reading to the roles of individuals with their own narrative agency, we continuously adjust and re-adjust the way we acquire listening knowledge. Do we employ our musical sensibilities to engage with the sound spheres or do we listen to them referentially as soundscapes of real-world environments? Do we take the realities the spoken narrations conjure up as fictitious or documentary ones?

Speaking of the restrictions that the acousmatic radio medium placed on translating the contextual aspects of the research in India into *The Gramophone Effect,* Aubry suggests that the radio medium does allow for different possibilities to bring out the agency of the collected voices, lost in the acousmatic decontextualisation. These possibilities, Aubry argues, prompt "a renewed understanding of listening: not as a passive reception of critical discourse, but as an active, performative practice, allowing for empathy, care, and transformation and as an act of registering people's presence." Since the visual terms of social and cultural identity are drowned in the opacity of the acousmatic, a possible space of negotiation might be opened up, "where the terms of knowledge, representation and coloniality can be temporarily re-entangled and where the participants can emerge as 'new selves.'" The political of *The Gramophone Effect*, thus, resides not in a discursive deconstruction of colonial representations, but in the "possible of aurality." [187] We can clearly hear Voegelin's notion of sonic possible worlds and Aubry's own notion of decolonised listening echoing here. Indeed, the unstable listening engagement with which we encounter the sonic realities in *The Gramophone Effect* could

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[187] All quotations: Aubry, email message, May 8, 2020.

be said to incite this decolonised listening, where a "logocentric, cultural grid of interpretation" makes way for "the meaning emerging directly within materials" beyond categorisations.[188] And yet, this is far from the only possibility it leads to since, to argue with Sterne once more, "[p]henomenology always presupposes culture, power, practice and epistemology."[189]

Radio's possibility to transcend visual overdetermination, strategically employed in *The Gramophone Effect*, was already observed early in the history of broadcasting. In her study on radio in the first half of the 20th century in the United States, Michelle Hilmes notes how the "virtual riot of social signifiers" which the acousmatic medium could set off was perceived as a threat to social hierarchies. Since without visual cues one could no longer be sure whether persons belonged to their purported ethnic, racial or gender group, radio responded by "endlessly circulating and performing structured representations of ethnicity, race, gender, and other concentrated sites of social and cultural norms—all through language, dialect, and carefully selected aural context." [190] Such acoustic social signifiers could count as examples of what Jennifer Stoever has theorised as the "sonic colour line." Formed through the historical accumulation of dominant representations which exaggerate and "suture" particular sounds (such as vocal sounds, dialects, ambient street sounds or music) to racialised bodies, the sonic colour line functions "to contain the sound of 'Others.'"[191] Its enduring effects exemplify "how listening and sound are always already enmeshed in power relations."[192]

For all the rioting of sonic (social) signifiers which *The Gramophone Effect* sets off in staging the encounter between the listener and the Indian voices and sounds, some of its strategies to decolonise a logocentric listening do in fact rely on the workings of the sonic colour line. In order to renegotiate the archival truth of Noble's document and to bring out the possible realities that were silenced in his representation of reality, the affective and sonorous materiality of Dang and Deshpande's voices also had to posses the right timbre and linguistic accent to acoustically signify Indian and female subjects. While Dang and Deshpande's knowledge of specific Indian artistic practices did inform their reactions to Noble's text (notably Deshpande's laughter with his ignorance of

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[188] Aubry,"Towards 'decolonized' listening," 84-85.
[189] Sterne, The Audible Past, 13.
[190] Michelle Hilmes, "Radio and the Imagined Community," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (London: Routlegde, 2012), 359.
[191] Stoever-Ackerman, "Splicing the Sonic Color-Line," 64-65.
[192] Ibid., 63.

Hindustani music), it is clear that the interruptive strategy would not have had the same effect if subjects, who possessed that same knowledge but sounded British or male, would have read the text. The affective impact arises because Indian women—as a transhistorical category—read Noble's descriptions of the Indian women he recorded.

Considering how *The Gramophone Effect* stages its other encounter, the one between the artists and the participants of the piece, we could argue that by foregrounding their own mediating presence, Aubry and Millis take Spivak's call for the necessity of "speaking to" rather than "listening to or speaking for" subaltern subjects in Western postcolonial scholarship seriously, even in the artistic presentation of their research. On the other hand, the clear distinction between artists and participants could also be said to perpetuate a binary of self and Other. Since the artists are only audibly present in the piece to correct the readings, ask questions, reveal archival sources or as the ones carrying the microphone, overall a demarcation between those on the recorded and those on the recording side of the microphone is created. While many of the participants were invited to collaborate as artists on the piece, in this way their narrative agency might be reduced to that of ethnographic subjects providing us access to an other reality, outside of the researcher's own.

The perpetuation of the binary between Euro-American self and postcolonial Other as well as the reliance upon the sonic colour line is not problematic in itself. It might make an encounter with the piece all the more confrontational: listeners could stop and pause with their own racialised listening, they might be made aware of the binary lens through which they themselves process the Indian voices and ruminate on how to engage with difference beyond essentialisms. What the processes described above do reveal, is the implied listener of the piece, who like the artists themselves encounters the postcolonial Other from a perspective situated in the Euro-American West. Evidenced as well in the use of the *Laksmi Tantra*, careless of its cultural status in contemporary Indian society, the piece is clearly aimed at intervening in a Western public discourse, even though it was created for the global broadcast network of *Every Time A Ear Di Soun.*

3. 7. The aesthetics of the performative

In one of her studies, Stoever analyses the workings of the sonic colour line in *Nueva York*, a 1955 audio documentary on the lives of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York, with which its maker Tony Schwartz explicitly sought to intervene in the white public

discourse on this group of people. Stoever uncovers how Schwartz tries to destabilise sonically engrained stereotypes, but also reveals how his acts of translation, necessary in producing knowledge about the Other, are themselves reliant on the sonic colour line and on processes of othering.[193] Taking my cue from Stoever's nuanced analysis of such representational politics, I will take a closer look at one more component of *The Gramophone Effect,* the repertoire-narrations of Lulam and Bhowmik, to zoom in on Aubry and Millis' acts of translation, bringing out both their possibilities and impossibilities.

Just like Dang and Deshpande's voices, we come to know those of Bhowmik and Lulam as relatively anonymous ones: apart from the observation that they sound like Indian women, it remains unclear which narrative role they fulfil in the piece. Just like Dang and Desphande, they are speaking someone else's words. As noted earlier, Bhowmik and Lulam are translating texts on-the-fly from their mother tongues—Bengali lyrics and Wahlang's interview in Khasi respectively—to English. Aubry uses this method to avoid the conventional process of transcribing, translating and (overdubbed) reading.[194] Since speech and the human voice are some of radio's foremost sign systems, processes of translation are challenging, especially on transnational platforms of radio art like *Every Time A Ear Di Soun*. How to render the multilingualism of the postcolonial world in one metropolitan language? A glance at the debates on language in postcolonial literature shows what is at stake. Gillian Gane posits that in postcolonial literature, processes of translation often go unnoticed: the multiple languages represented in writing are homogenised into the universality of English. An alternative strategy could instead insert specific local allusions in the metropolitan language in such a way as to mark the "linguistic alterity" represented and to highlight the impossibility to universally understand the experience of (post-)colonial subjects.[195] When the acts of translation are done by someone who does not belong to the postcolonial reality represented, as is the case in *The Gramophone Effect*, the translation-dilemma becomes all the more acute: while the first strategy might proclaim a false universalism, the latter might assign essential difference and exteriority to the voices that need translating.

By having Bhowmik and Lulam translating on-the-fly, the linguistic alterity of the original words is clearly marked. English acts as a filter through which the semantic

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[193] Ibid., 62.
[194] Aubry, interview.
[195] Gillian Gane, "Postcolonial Literature and the Magic Radio: The Language of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 3 (2006): 576, 578.

content of the Bengali and Khasi words can be made intelligible for the implied listener from the Euro-American centre, but residues of the original language seep through the filter as well: in the form of accents, a Khasi word lost in translation, a strange grammatical construction. These sonic residues are the only indicators of the cultural and geographical context from which the spoken words were taken. Unlike Dang and Deshpande's narrations, the documentary sources of the repertoire-narrations are not revealed. Listeners (who do not understand Khasi or Bengali) are thus left to the sonic colour line with which they can classify the narrations as Indian, but not as particular, mediated views on Bengali or Khasi sonic cultures. In this sense, the translation-on-the-fly almost seems to work like the synthesised speech with which Laksmi's text was voiced: the original Bengali and Khasi speech is filtered for its meaning and for the material sound qualities that mark a generalised social and ethnic identity.

After all, the sonic colour line shows how the materiality of sound is inextricably connected to the discursive. The materiality of voice is easily interpreted as a cultural code, a sign indicating a social identity. However, this does not foreclose the possibility of what Erika Fischer-Lichte would call an "aesthetics of the performative," where the "material status" of the voice sheds of its signifying work as sonic colour line "to claim a life of its own."[196] When compared to Dang and Deshpande, who only gradually gain an affective presence throughout the first part of the piece, Bhowmik and Lulam's voices possess this quality with their first appearance. As noted, Lulam's narration is first introduced as a dream state in the reverberant sound sphere of the prelude. Both times her narration reappears before the Laksmi-scene (2:59 in scene B and 8:08 in scene C), she brings with her residues of this reverberant sound sphere. Her speech stops and pauses with a clear rhythm and occasionally synchronises with the surrounding sound events. When she utters words in Khasi, the sonic materiality of her voice becomes even more palpable. Bhowmik's narration is introduced in the haptic abstract sound collage of scene E (10:24), where layers of percussive ostinatos—containing synthetic sounds as well as sounds stemming from the turntablism improvisation and from manipulated field recordings of scrap metals in the Nainital region—move in and out synchronisation. Her voice, reciting the translated lyrics of the Bengali song repertoire as if she is singing them without forming tone, drifts along with this sound sphere shifting between polyrhythmic unity and non-metrical chaos. Through the particular musical and performative character

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[196] I am borrowing Fischer-Lichte's phrasings. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London: Routlegde, 2008), 22-23.

of the narrations and the way in which they are placed in their surrounding sound spheres, the sensuous qualities and bodily impact of the materiality of Bhowmik and Lulam's voices might come to overwhelm its social and ethnic signifying work. We don't know who they are, who they represent and what the words they are speaking mean beyond their immediate verbal context in the piece, but we have no choice but to listen and bodily experience their sensuous and affective sonic presence. In such an aesthetics of the performative, where one moves beyond semiotics and a search for discursive knowledge in the spoken narrations, the possibility of Aubry's decolonised listening opens up.

Musical performativity is not the only characteristic which sets the repertoire-narrations apart from those of Dang and Deshpande. Even though the words aren't theirs, Bhowmik and Lulam usually speak them as if they were (with the postlude as notable exception). In the first part of the piece, only a slight hint of doubt when Bhowmik reprises and changes the direction of a sentence indicates that she is translating. Only when we hear Lulam say "tell these people what it means," might we raise an eyebrow and suspect that what she is saying wasn't originally directed at us. Moreover, the sound quality of the recorded voices of Dang and Deshpande seems dry when compared to that of Lulam and Bhowmik's voices, to which often more reverberation is added. In the way they are edited, they do not seem to occupy a foreground level separated of the sound spheres, but rather are firmly embedded in it, seemingly occupying the same sonic space, close to our ears. In the acousmatic dark where we are deprived of the apprehensive overview provided by vision and spatial distance, the close presence of Bhowmik and Lulam's disembodied voices, evoked through sound editing, helps to foreground the haptic aspect of our listening, which—following Anahid Kassabian—makes our ears perceive sound as if we were touching something, closing the gap between hearer and heard, subject and object.[197] Such an intimate listening experience is summoned up especially, when in scene D' (22:30), Bhowmik finally starts singing one of the songs she has been translating. We hear the swaying lullaby-like song of two irregularly phrased melodic sections in acoustic close-up, accompanied only of the twirling sound event whistling like the wind in the artificial empty space, surrounding us in hyper-real proximity. Like this the scene conjures up an intense and intimate effect similar to that which according to performance scholar Jenny Schrödl arises in the aesthetics of

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[197] Anahid Kassabian, "Ubiquitous Listening," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, rev. ed., ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 138-139.

whispering. Such an aesthetics evokes both bodily proximity between whisperer and listener, and a third person who is excluded from that intense moment.[198] Listening privately to the radio, Bhowmik appears to sing, or whisper, to me alone.

It is no coincidence that *The Gramophone Effect* capitalises on the intimate and direct qualities of the "hot" radio medium in the editing of the repertoire-narrations to make them appear intimately and bodily present. After all, for Diana Taylor, the repertoire is characterised by presence and embodiment. But the directness with which Bhowmik and Lulam speak to the listener's ears might also grant an aura of unmediated authenticity to their narrations. Taylor warns us not to force the notion of the repertoire and the archive in a simplistic binary of true and false or one which would see the knowledge the repertoire carries as providing an anti-hegemonic challenge to the power of the archive.[199] In *The Gramophone Effect*, this binary does seem to be partially played out. With the narration of Noble's text, in line with the Neue Hörspiel-tradition of media critique, the audible mediation of the recorded medium is emphasised to distance Deshpande and Dang's physical voice from Noble's narrative one. In the repertoire-narrations, on the other hand, the mediation of the recording and of the translation is underplayed in favour of direct presence, seemingly leaving the repertoire-narrations out of the purview of critique. We have come full cycle with the dualities set up in *The Gramophone Effect*: the ephemeral repertoire is linked to postcolonial subjects and is sonically favoured as performative, present and unmediated expression over the sonically absent and distant archives of the coloniser.

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[198] Jenny Schrödl, "Die Intensität des Flüsterns. Zur sinnlichen Erfahrung von Stimmen," in *Klang und Bewegung: Beiträge zu einer Grundkonstellation*, ed. Christa Brüstle and Albrecht Riethmüller (Aachen: Shaker, 2004), 133-134.
[199] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 22.

Conclusion

I set out this thesis scrutinising the critical listening knowledge which radio, according to Gammel, affords amidst the multitude of images mediating our world today. His emphasis on the critical potentialities of listening echoes some of the rationales of Neue Hörspiel makers, who, like Kriwet, sought to remedy an ability for concentrated listening against the backdrop of mass media environments. The self-reflexive experimentations with radio voice, language, sound and technology of these 1960s and 1970s radio plays were regularly aimed at social critique of reality. Almost fifty years later, sound artist Tullis Rennie also joins reflexivity, sound experiment and critical knowledge formation about reality to characterise what he calls the ethnographic turn in the sonic arts, mirroring art critic Hal Foster's characterisation of the eagerness with which visual artists pick up the reflexive strategies from anthropological research to map communities and histories otherwise repressed or marginalised in hegemonic centres of art and knowledge production.

In *The Gramophone Effect*'s mining of such counter-hegemonic versions of the history of sonic modernity in India, reflexive ethnographic strategies were crucial as well. With the encounter as method, inspired by the decolonial theory of Mignolo, the artists could elicit responses to the colonial narrative of modernity and epistemic violence embedded in Noble's account of early commercial recording in India. This happened literally so in the conversation with Dang on the legacy of such documents, but more often the responses were encapsulated in the affect arising from she and Deshpande's reading confrontation with Noble's words. Furthermore, audible residues of the encounter between the artists and their research-collaborators itself made up the denouement of the piece. With this field recording montage, *The Gramophone Effect* could secure its documentary promise. Aside from the encounter as method, I pointed to two more theoretical axes along which the research for *The Gramophone Effect* ran. To pluralise a historiography of sonic modernity in India, Noble's travelogue and the early Indian shellac recordings, understood as colonial documents, were contrasted with the embodied knowledge of what Taylor would call the repertoire: the memories of displacement stored in Bengali songs and the interview with folk singer Kerios Wahlang on the living legacy of Khasi music. The artists also sought to interrupt the narrative of

modernity as a Western export product replete with values of progress and rationality. This was accomplished most explicitly (and dubiously so) by re-outfitting the ancient verses of the *Laksmi Tantra* on sonic embodiment and spirituality as a hybrid computer-voiced source of resistance.

A closer consideration of the intricate form and dramaturgy of *The Gramophone Effect* allowed me to uncover how the piece performs its three theoretical axes of decoloniality. The scene with the Laksmi verses plays a crucial role in this. Its hybrid resistance radiates over the whole dramaturgy of the piece, as it silences the colonial representations in the Indian shellac recordings and Noble's travelogue from the first part, replacing them with the field recording montage and Dang's own voice speaking for herself in the postlude. In this postlude the pace of musical time is altered, pointing to a second layer of resistance in the dramaturgy of the piece: it also tackles bourgeois modernity's double sense of controllable present time and linear-progressive historical time, which as Sterne has shown, is embodied in Western sound recording's yearning for permanence. Diving deeper into the first part of the piece, we see how this issue of preserving the historical past is further played out. Both Noble's travelogue and the early shellac recordings are foregrounded as historical colonial documents, while at the same time their discursive oppression is interrupted by turning them into unstable repertoire. This happens by way of Dang and Deshpande's reading in the case of the former and through the experimental turntablism improvisations in the case of the latter. The improvisations also serve to destabilise the semiotic codes with which the listener navigates the meaning of the piece, prompting a listening knowledge where there are no stable ground rules and knowledge has to be shaped and reshaped against experience.

Although Aubry prefers to use visual elements in the extended essay aesthetics with which he presents his research, *The Gramophone Effect* does clearly capitalise on the qualities of the acousmatic radio medium. The historical overview of documentary practices in radio that I sketched out revealed how the intimate and direct qualities of the hot medium were valued or precisely distorted in order to create a portal onto the world of the Other. In *The Gramophone Effect* this is played out in the editing and processing of the voices of the Noble-narrations and the repertoire-narrations, with the latter appearing to be more tactile, intimate and present, thus sonically favouring the repertoire over archival knowledge. This brings us to another trope in the discourses on listening knowledge I surveyed, where embodied and relational qualities of the phenomenology of sound are understood to be resistant to Western hegemonic systems of knowledge. In the

case of Aubry's own ethnographic-artistic practice, these qualities made up the conditions for a decolonised listening, which moves beyond discursive critique to attune instead to Voegelin's possible worlds emergent in sound and listening. In *The Gramophone Effect*, the notions of sound connected to Indian sonic practices (both discursively in the narrations and through the actual sound composition) appear very close to those favoured by Aubry himself and are wedded against the objectification and erasure with which he characterises the modern practice of recording. Thereby, the binary set-up in the piece's dramaturgy of resistance between colonial modernity and indigenous cultures of postcolonial subjects is further elaborated on the level of sound's phenomenology. Considering the actual possibilities of a decolonised listening, I have argued that although acoustic signifiers of generalised social identities do bear on some of *The Gramophone Effect*'s strategies, this does not foreclose an aesthetics of the performative, where the sonic colour line gives way to the performative materiality of sounds and voices.

Let's turn to Gammel's critical listening knowledge once more. Sound artists such as Aubry and Millis and the many others who use research-based documentary practices to sonically produce knowledge about the histories and conditions of subaltern groups indeed intervene in and negotiate the global mediascape buzzing on our phones. Studying which realities and discourses they turn to and with which sonic-aesthetic techniques they translate them into artistic listening knowledge would, however, by no means serve to demonstrate the values of listening over vision in our mediascape. Rather, it would provide a major impetus to the domain of musicological study which occupies itself with uncovering how particular cultures of sound and music have intersected with dominant discourses and forms of knowledge production which mediate reality at given times. Further research into creative radio documentaries could endeavour to reveal those intersections in a more comprehensive manner. Such research would benefit from a comparative approach, whereby documentaries clustered around a particular thematic are studied together. In the same vein, junctions with visual traditions of documentary practices could be explored. Finally, further research would also require analysts to enter into conversation not only with documentaries and their makers, but with the participants whose voices and sounds they capture as well.

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