I think of the delay system as a time machine, because first you have to be present to make a sound and play it. Then it's recorded and played back in the future, so that the future is essentially dealing with is really the past. So it sort of expands your sense of time.

Pauline Oliveros [1]

I

A Conversation Between Marcus Gammel and Dani Gal

This conversation between Marcus Gammel and Dani Gal was recorded at Deutschlandfunk Kultur (German Public Broadcasting Radio) on December 4th, 2017, Berlin.

Marcus Gammel: What was the first record you found for your collection, and why did you buy it back then?

Dani Gal: The first record I found was the "Victory Album" of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the so called Six-Day-War. So many copies of it were printed that you can still find them in most second hand record stores in Israel. It was a perfect starting point for the collection. I bought it because I was interested in audio-political documents as field recordings. In 1967 Luc Ferrari composed "Presque Rien" (Almost Nothing) No. 1. It was one of the first compositions of field recordings as *Musique Concrète*, a soundscape that documents one day in an attempt to capture a memory of it, though the Six-Day-War album was made for an entirely different purpose. It is a carefully constructed propaganda record that was made to shape a national narrative – to form memory on a collective level. Since then I have found six different Six-Day-War records in Hebrew, English, Danish, French and Yiddish.

MG: The title "Victory Album" almost sounds like a pop album – it could be a forgotten Beatles record, and some of these covers actually look like they could be pop covers. What came first: were political actors trying to stage themselves like pop stars? Or was it the other way around, that recorded political speeches came first, and it was the pop stars who covered that kind of momentum?

DG: Nowadays we identify vinyl records with pop culture. When we look at these record covers today we may think about political events as rock concerts, and politicians as pop stars. Some of these records try to elevate politicians to this level, or even to the level of prophets. It is a personality cult. Today vinyl records are perceived as fetish objects so when you have political events printed on them, it turns this history into a fetish.

MG: The intention behind those records probably differs from the actual listening practice in many cases. Do you have any idea how those records were actually used and understood at the time?

DG: Audio books as a genre started in the U.S. and Britain after WWI as a solution for soldiers who lost their eyesight in the war. After WWII (in 1948 Columbia introduced the LP vinyl record as we know it today) spoken word records became a genre. People used them, not so much as a substitute for reading, but more as an alternative to mainstream radio culture. Listeners had a choice independent from the broadcasting schedule. The recordings were primarily of literature or radio drama. National and political events were part of the genre, but the motivation and joy from listening to them is not so clear to me. One of the questions that this project is trying to raise is what brought someone to re-play such a record? They certainly had entertainment value, but there was something else that drew the listener. Sound creates atmosphere and space. The instant when someone plays a record of a speech, or a national/political event in a domestic environment, is a moment where the personal meets the national.

MG: That draws another parallel to popular music. On the one hand, it's very much about creating communities and identities. What you listen to is part of what you are or want to be.

DG: The political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson coined the term "Imagined Communities" in 1983 where he proposed that a nation is an imagined political community:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion ... . The nation is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.[2]

For Anderson, 'nation' is the consequence of the development of social communication media. Thanks to the distribution of texts and other media, people living in distant regions could share common feelings, cultural features, and imagine that they were a part of the same nation. These records fit to this definition: phrases like "Recorded Live","Authentic Voices of", and "Original Recordings" were being used on the sleeves. They suggested that sounds are brought to people to experience them, to feel closer to a moment in a time and place when history happened, and through this medium, to feel a sense of belonging to a national collective. Many records also suggest that they function as a tool for memorisation with titles like "I Was There", "A Time to Keep", "Sounds of Our Time" and "A Time to Remember".

MG: The curve on the vinyl is a strong metaphor for the process of writing history. Many musicians, artists and theorists imagined early on that they could create perfect music by scratching directly into vinyl. They could bypass the interpreter who was often a source of mistakes, or failed to do exactly what the author wanted. If the

"Being Dead, He Yet Speaketh."

The wonderful performances of the phonograph are a constant surprise even to persons so callous that no new discovery can arouse.

The reproduction of speech, with both word and tone—of song, with voice and expression—of instrumental music, with its variety of harmonies—surely all this seems uncanny to the listener. To-day some words of cheer are spoken and recorded on the phonograph. Ten years hence, when perchance the speaker is dead, that little cylinder with the impress of sound upon it will be brought forth, and those familiar with the departed one will hear again the words, uttered in the same tone. It will come as a voice from beyond the grave.

THE PHONOGRAM has long since recognized this fact, and has published articles upon the subject. We again repeat that the phonograph, as a preserver of voices of the dead, is invaluable to mankind, had it no other merit. THE PHONOGRAM goes a step further; it has suggested to the manufacturers that albums be constructed, varying in size to suit purchasers, so that they may hold two, four, six, eight or even a hundred cylinders, and that these be prepared artistically, to resemble, as much as possible, in form, a photograph album, yet possessing the conveniences for holding the wax phonograms and keeping them intact.

Fam lies would thus be enabled to hear the voices of its members, and records could be taken from time to time, just as photographs are now made from babyhood, boyhood, manhood and old age. These records could be carefully enclosed in their respective places in the album and thus be preserved for future use.

The day has now come when it is possible to purchase reproductions of the eloquence of our leading statesmen, and of the songs of our famous singers. At our suggestion, persons will soon be sent to foreign countries to collect the voices of all the living kings, queens, statesmen, composers, artists and novelists, and, if possible of the latter, extracts spoken from some of their great works, a space will be set apart in our own and in foreign national museums, for the "Phonograph Cabinet," and this rare and valuable collection of phonograms will be duplicated and preserved for future generations.

We have lost Tennyson, Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant and hundreds of other celebrities, now passed away, but Tennyson's prayer for "The touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still," will be answered, for though the body may be returned to dust, the phonograph will have made and preserved an exact picture of the sound uttered while living.

Historical records part 1, installation view at Kunsthaus Zürich, exhib. "Europe. The Future of History", June 12 – September 6, 2015, 245 vinyl records on wooden shelves, 12 m x 1.8 m
Photography: FMB Studio, Zurich

composer scratched directly into the vinyl, he could convey his message to the audience, similar to how politicians may have imagined the their speeches resonating.

DG: We know that sound recording changed music. Even if the musicians could scratch directly into the vinyl, the format defined the length of their composition. The system that enables a certain freedom also creates new limitations. Steve Wurtzler in his book "Electric Sounds: Technological Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media", explains that:

With the development of radio's, particularly network radio's, commercial identity, U.S. politics would increasingly have to adapt to the medium and its commercial format. Political leaders had already been compelled to adapt to the technological requirements of new media. For radio to function as a disseminator of political rhetoric, for political leaders and aspirants to make use of its capacity as an instrument of national address, the presentation of politics, its rhetoric and spectacle, its performance and substance, would change so as to conform to radio … . Because of its commercial nature, broadcasting and indeed all commercial media, guaranteed that the public received only what it wanted. Consumer-citizens voted with their radio tuner and their leisure spending and media corporations, ever responsive to consumer demands, merely provided for those needs. The modern media corporation inevitably functioned at the service of the public interest … . Politics, when understood as the nexus of public policy and power, fit uneasily into such a model for media … . An election year choice could resemble yet another iteration of the choice consumers made each day, and political "content" took on some of the trappings of "entertainment". Commercial broadcasters, advertisers and the film and phonograph industries, sought to hail an appropriately "modern" consumer, who even in the midst of an economic crisis might be successfully urged to become precisely a citizen of the world as standardized, commercially produced goods, including "entertainment". Citizenship slipped ever closer to consumption. "Participation", whether cultural or political became increasingly to be experienced through listening. That is, participation moved ever closer toward consumption … . The act of listening became discursively aligned with nationalism via the immigrant. Sound media fulfilled, to a large extent, the desire for a shared national imaginary …[3]

MG: It reflects a resonance between democracy and consumerism which is intensified by the phenomenon of filter bubbles. You're supposed to have the impression of maximal freedom because you can choose whatever you like in this vast world of sound, but there are filter mechanisms that try to show you exactly what you might like, what similar people have already consumed. You are supposed to have the impression of being totally free, which is the idea of democracy, but ultimately you're lead to reproduce a mechanism that has been there before you and that has nothing to do with your freedom. The idea of recording political speeches is as old as the technology. Throughout the early days of recording, different archives started collecting voices of important politicians. Here in Berlin you have the *Lautarchiv* that systematically recorded personalities of public interest. This is slightly surprising because there had been efficient ways of transcribing and publishing political statements before. They are still in use, and much of the political system relies on them. So why this drive towards the 'real voice'? What are people listening for in those voices?

DG: When Edison invented the phonograph it was perceived as a tool for the preservation of voice. The first recording ever made was of his own voice. Immediately ethnographers, anthropologists and philologists, understood the potential of the new machine for researching, defining, documenting and categorizing 'other' cultures, other than European culture. In an interview from 1878, Edison said:

I saw the president of the Philological Society the other day … . He wants one of my improved phonographs to preserve the accents of the Onondagas and Tuscaroras, who are dying out … . The phonograph will preserve the exact pronunciation. The president of the philological society means to travel with it among all of the North American tribes.[4]

The problem with the claim of cultures dying out was that Native American cultures did not naturally die. They were eliminated through U.S. federal policies that had a genocidal effect. Sound recordings played an important role in colonial science – its connection to power was established from the beginning.

When spoken words are transcribed into text they become part of the visual world. They lose their dynamism, characteristic of the spoken word. Oral language has a strong personal element because it is directed at a person. Transcribing verbal words abstracts the emotional and obscures the performativity of the speaker. Our culture is oriented towards written text. The technology of sound recording, I believe, brought back a lost quality of experience, what Marshall McLuhan described as a primitive time before our senses were separated.

The British mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote in 1943 that "with the sense of sight, the idea communicates the emotion, whereas, with sound, the emotion communicates the idea, which is more direct and therefore more powerful". The microphone captures sound in a specific time and place, and has the potential to reproduce the atmosphere of the location. There is no clear point of view, like with the camera. Film or video are behind

the screen, in clear division from the audience, but sound surrounds the listener who can feel as if they are present within the suggested context.

MG: There is an ongoing give and take between art and political speech, a lot of material recorded on vinyl has filtered into music culture. From *Musique Concrète* to sampling culture, there has been an extended practice of quoting and composing from texts or noise.

DG: When Pierre Schaeffer coined the term *Musique Concrète* in 1948, he called the primary units of the composition sound objects. I like to think of these recordings as *sound objects*. I used to listen to music that used samples. Pop musicians and DJ's used them as a decorative element, but also to reflect on their own political views, like in the case of hip-hop. Sound artists and avant-garde musicians used them as material, like Steve Reich or in the case of Luigi Nono's "Non Consumiamo Marx" where the material had a political use. I was curious about the source of the samples and wondered what would happen if one got rid of the music and was left with only the samples? This collection could be seen as a source for sampling that I would like to offer back to musicians and sound artists.

MG: So we're looking at a chain of continuous de and re contextualization of sound. It starts with a physical event in real life – if there is anything like that. Something like us sitting here talking, recording, leaving a trace in an electromagnetic medium, and then collecting these signals. Already within the records in your collection there has been a process of gathering, archiving, and recontextualizing in many cases. Speeches are presented on the radio, placed into radio archives, tracked down by people who wanted to make a specific record, and eventually released. So already the context has changed. Then there are musicians, listeners discovering that material, reusing it, recontextualizing it, and so on. This chain can lead in different directions: either the material becomes increasingly abstract, ultimately turning into music – or it redefines concrete histories. How does your collection relate to this gap between abstraction and reality?

DG: When I started to think about these political recordings as material, it opened the possibility to listen to them disconnected from their historical context, and sometimes even from their specific content. This process revealed the mechanism of their production and helped to understand them in a new light. The records stand between what 'happened' and the listener. They contain all the filters, all the stages from the 'real event' to what was recorded, including the noise from the microphone and the transmission. These recordings were later edited, selected and distributed. This process defined what will be remembered.

MG: Indeed, this shapes the history that is being transmitted diachronically as well as synchronically, because it represents a certain narrative rather than others. I was wondering about your own politics when selecting your collection, because you had to distill some kind of signal out of that huge noise of records. How did you select? Do you sort by date of the recording or date of the publication?

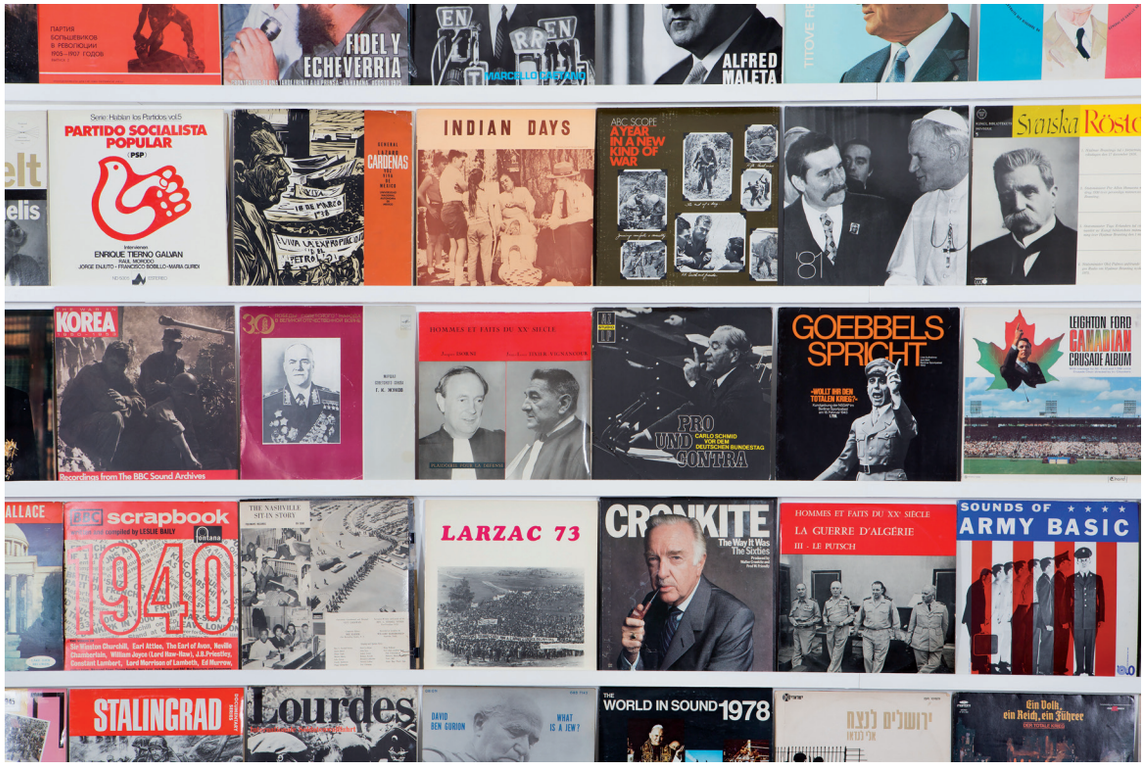
DG: It's usually the date of the recording. These records are a post WWII phenomenon, most of the recordings covers the second half of the 20th century, late 50's to the 80's, but some date back all the way to the first political recordings ever made – of Kaiser Wilhelm II from 1904 for example. The last records cover the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the year that was thought to be the end of history. By then the compact disc replaced vinyl, and television was already much more dominant than radio.

The common thing for all these records is the recordings of specific events in a specific place. Some of them are constructed documentaries or collections of news from a given year, but they always include one or more field recordings of a significant event. My favorite records are those that document one day in history almost like an On Kawara work. When I make the wall installations with the records, I organize them as a mosaic of faces and dates, of power and objection to power. I try to avoid any political agenda or irony between the records. I just display them so the viewers collective consciousness is provoked.

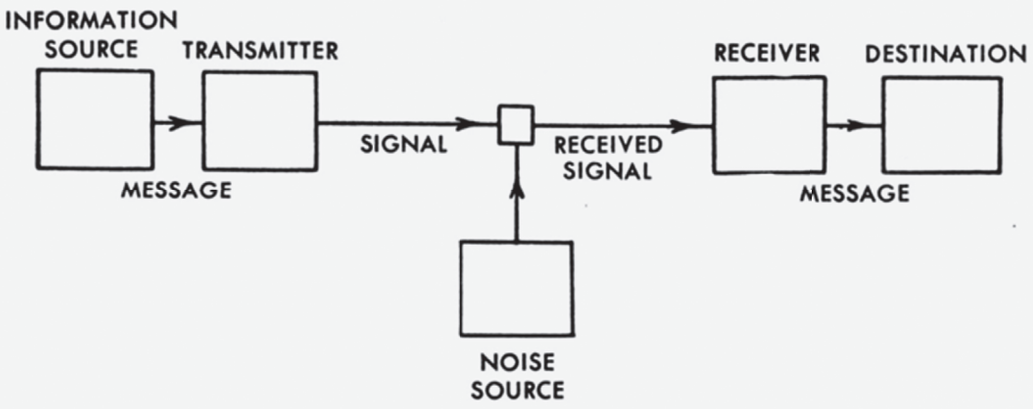
MG: You have made a selection from different sources of 'noise' in art and pop music in the 20th century, starting from Luigi Russolo's "Intonarumori", through to *Music Concrète*, but also into hip-hop music and many other genres. This reflects what you were saying about civil rights movements using records as an alternative information channel. Both in music and politics it means whoever has power over production also has the power to define the signal to noise ratio.

DG: I mentioned 1948 as the year the LP vinyl record was introduced by Columbia and the year that *Music Concrète* was born. 1948 was also when Claude Shannon, the American mathematician and the "Father of Information Theory", published his "Mathematical Theory of Communication".
The model is an interesting way to think about these recordings: there is an information source – a political event, then a microphone as a transmitter of a message which becomes a signal and arrives at a destination: the listener. In the middle there is a noise source. Shannon's model was later important for the development of data compression like the MP3.

MG: In MP3 encoding, a masking noise helps filter away the information that you're not supposed to hear.



Historical records part 2, installation view at private offices in NYC, 2016, 245 vinyl records on wooden shelves, 12 m x 1.8 m
Photography: Jeff Elstone



C.E. Shannon's Model of communication system, 1948

DG: The noise of the recordings makes us become aware of the technology that was used to reproduce sound, but I see the model in a metaphorical way too: noise as the other, the unwanted element in society that interrupts the main narrative, and therefore has to be cleaned and erased. One can see in the book how much is absent. I found very few records of women for example, or many records of Israeli propaganda, but could find only one Palestinian record. Jacques Attali, the french economist and politician wrote in his book "Noise: The Political Economy of Music":

Listening to music is listening to noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power … . With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation of consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms … . Among birds a tool for marking territorial boundaries, noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of territory and the way to make oneself heard within it. And since noise is a source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination …
… These are the dreams of political scientist and the fantasies of men in power: to listen, to memorize-this is the ability to interpret and control history, to manipulate the culture of people, to channel its violence and hopes. Who among us is free of the feeling that this process, taken to an extreme, is turning the modern state into a gigantic, monopolizing noise emitter.[5]

So the radio works I made for Documenta 14 together with Achim Lengerer dealt with the relationship between the message and the noise metaphorically and literally.

MG: The microphone 'listens' differently than the ear. Many times, if you record a particular noise, it sounds much less realistic than if you recreate it like a foley artist. They try to find a kind of acoustic essence for that noise, and then stage that for the microphone. Do you have examples of people who are conscious of this effect? Do they use the microphone as a stage?

DG: Some of the records are great audio documentaries, especially the American ones, for example the album "Vietnam – With The American Fighting Man"[6] from 1966. These documentaries were constructed to such perfection that, when playing sounds from the battlefield, they almost lose their authenticity. There is a point in this record where the speaker's voice tells about sounds that the American soldiers are hearing in the battle and refers to them as *sounds that you can cut with a knife*. It almost sounds like he is talking about splicing audio tape in the studio.

MG: One aspect we haven't touched yet, is the deep historical connection between sound recording, technology and spiritism. Essential parts of radio technology were invented in an attempt to demonstrate that telepathy is possible. Consequently, there have been numerous experiments trying to contact the dead over radio (electronic voice phenomena). Edison imagined recording the last words of the dying as an important use for the phonograph. Does the spiritual resonance of sound recording also appeal to political actors as a means to give a certain authority to the messages they want to convey?

DG: Certainly, the recordings on these records suggest the old idea of the voice being caught on the tape, or as if the dead are preserved on the curve of the record.

MG: The soul basically …

DG: But also the spirit of a place. The recording artist Chris Watson talks about his influence by T. C. Lethbridge, the English parapsychologist and explorer who believed that a significant event could be stored in the place it happened to be retrieved later. These records document places of trauma: wars, genocides, oppression … the 20th century. Some of the records contain interviews with 'the common person' on the streets. I think that these moments are the most interesting in terms of the idea of preserving the voice on a medium, because they capture a piece of reality from people who would not know where their voice would end up. Later when I replay it, it comes back to life in a way.
I grew up in Israel which isolates itself from the Arab world. In spite of the geographical proximity, the Arab world seems very far away. As a kid, when I came across shortwave stations in Arabic, I felt haunted by them. It sounded like voices from beyond, from a world that I was not supposed to know about. Only later I understood that it was mainly because the State educated us to think of the Arab world as the scary enemy. I read an interview with Tod Dockstader, the late American electronic music composer, who wrote about a similar experience growing up in the U.S. where he heard speeches by Hitler on the radio. He felt they had an ominous presence, more because of the sound quality of short wave radio than the content. The added noises and voices on the ether created a moment of hauntology.

MG: Hitler and his propaganda apparatus tried to use precisely this effect in order to create a narrative of a nation guided through one voice. There are quite interesting quotes by Richard Kolb, the most important radio theorist for Nazi Germany, who went on to lay the foundations for radio drama theory in Germany. Some of his ideas went unquestioned all the way into the 1960's because people had totally for-

gotten whom Kolb was associated with. He imagined the voice of the one, of the chosen one, coming through the ether to the people and enlightening them with his sound and visions. Some of this 'remote control' phantasma can still be heard in the way the technology is being used now.

DG: In this spirit I would like to end this interview with another interview. Gerard Malanga, an American poet and recording artist recorded an interview with William Burroughs on July 21st, 1974, in New York. In this interview Burroughs suggested the greatest of all conspiracy theories:

We think of the past as being something that has just happened, right? Therefore, it is fact; but nothing could be further from the truth. This conversation is being recorded. Now suppose ten years from now you tamper with the recordings and change them around, after I was dead. Who could say; that wasn't the actual recording? The past is something that can be changed, altered at your discretion.
[Burroughs points to the two tape recorders facing each other that are taping this conversation.]
The only evidence that this conversation ever took place here is the recording, and if those recordings were altered, then that would be the only record.
The past only exists in some record of it. There are no actual facts.[7]

1 "An interview with Pauline Oliveros by Alan Baker", American Public Media, January 2003.

2 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 6f.

3 Steve J. Wurtzler, Electric Sounds: Technological Change and the Rise of Corporate Mass Media (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 219–227.

4 The origins of ethnographic sound recordings 1878–1892, Patrick Feaster, Resound Vol. 20, Nr. 1/2.

5 Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1985).

6 Vietnam – With The American Fighting Man, LP, Documentary Recordings, 1966.

7 Gerard Malanga, Up from the archives, CD, track 14, Sub Rosa SR170, 1999.

*Marcus Gammel, *1975 in Bremen/Germany, studied Musicology, German Literature and Philosophy at Humboldt University Berlin, Université Paris IV and New York University. He has worked as music journalist, dramaturge, and radio maker in Germany and France.*
Since 2009, Marcus Gammel is curating the weekly sound art programme at Deutschlandradio/Deutschlandfunk Kultur. His productions have been distinguished in competitions such as Prix Ars Electronica, Karl-Sczuka-Preis, Prix Phonurgia Nova, Bienal Internacional de Radio, and New York Festivals. Since 2013, he is coordinating the EURORADIO Ars Acustica Group. In 2016, he was appointed head of Radio Art (radio drama and documentary) at Deutschlandfunk Kultur. In 2017, he co-curated the radio program "Every Time A Ear di Soun" produced by Documenta 14 and Deutschlandfunk Kultur.

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Marshall McLuhan, Culture is Our Business (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 145