

English Studies in Canada



Archives, Intimacy, Embodiment Encountering the Sound Subject in the Literary Archive

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Volume 46, Number 2-3-4, June–September–December 2020

New Sonic Approaches in Literary Studies

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1111315ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903557>

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Publisher(s)

Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)

ISSN

0317-0802 (print)

1913-4835 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Polyck-O'Neill, J. (2020). Archives, Intimacy, Embodiment: Encountering the Sound Subject in the Literary Archive. *English Studies in Canada*, 46(2-3-4), 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2020.a903557>

Archives, Intimacy, Embodiment: Encountering the Sound Subject in the Literary Archive

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IT IS FEBRUARY 2022. I am working in Special Collections and Rare Books at Simon Fraser University (SFU), newly reopened after a long closure due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is my first time physically in an archive since well before March 2020 when most physical institutional spaces were closed as part of widespread public health measures. The space is quiet and quite warm, as the entire floor is enclosed, externally enveloped in a white waterproof, protective membrane defending against the pervasive Vancouver rain. This makes the space feel even more alien and isolated from the rest of campus, which itself is much quieter than usual due to the pandemic. The microclimate is womblike and slightly oppressive in its lack of air circulation; a pervasive sense of stillness and envelopment heightens the experience of being in this space. These effects dramatize my activity in the chambers of the collections and allows for a sense of sharpened focus. I am looking at the Lisa Robertson fonds in person for the first time. More importantly, I am *listening* in the Lisa Robertson fonds for the first time.

The addition of sonic, vocal layers in the form of sound recordings to an archival collection contributes meaningfully to what Linda Morra calls the “affective economies” (after Sara Ahmed) of the archive, which are

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“shaped by the effects of encounters ... and by reorientation(s) between subject and object” (2). As Jason Camlot observes in *Phonopoetics*, hearing a recording of a subject in an archival setting can also be a “strangely real” encounter, developing “an experience of real-time processing” that few other media can reproduce (3). The sensory aspects of sound in the archives have the potential to create a sense of proximity not commonly found in conventional textual archives, which are generally imagined to be near-silent spaces for monastic contemplation. Additionally, sound, as an aural medium, has a unique relationship to performance, which registers a form of embodiment for the listener and leads to a sense of intangible and nuanced, embodied reception. Building a sense of closeness and immediacy between the archive-user and the research object or subject, sound recordings generate new forms of intimacy and connection, enabling the user to access nuanced details otherwise obfuscated or overlooked in conventional literary archives.

Considering the archive according to Julietta Singh’s proposition that “the archive is a stimulus between myself and myself” (26), this essay will reflect on my time spent working with Lisa Robertson’s archives. Recounting recent theorizations of sound as both object and material for the archive, I consider how the addition of sound recordings enables archive-users to access and reconsider the literary research subject as a “subject,” a complex being that exists beyond the confines of texts and textual records. This allows for further examination of how what Katherine McLeod terms “a proximity to voice” (128) enriches the experience of encountering the subject in the archive by unconcealing aspects of embodiment while adding affective and uncanny dimensions to the encounter.

Special Collections

To look at and listen to the Lisa Robertson fonds in SFU’s collections, I first needed special permission from Robertson. Within the fonds description, the “Terms of Governing Access” (2022) state that “With the exception of published materials and related ephemera, and proofs and page proofs of subsequently published manuscripts, access to papers and notebooks is restricted to researchers who have obtained permission from Lisa Robertson, as long as she is still living” (Fortier, Zerkee, and Wieland 4).¹ Seeing as we have worked together in the past and are on amicable terms, she granted permission readily, even offering to accompany me in my journey

1 While working on this essay, an updated version of Lisa Fortier’s finding aid was published. The updated version was amended first by Jennifer Zerkee in 2012, then by Alexandra Wieland in 2022.

through her materials as needed from a distance, although she warned me, as warmly as possible, that some of the materials I had been hoping to examine are confidential and off limits to all, possibly until well after her death, or possibly forever. This made sense, as she is only sixty years of age, and many of the documents in her files represent intimate ties to other people, living and dead. I presented our last email as evidence of permission and was later granted access. I sit with the first of the boxes I have requested in front of me; there are forty-nine other boxes in the collection. The box is filled with files organizing different drafts of her 2004 manuscript for *Rousseau's Boat*, which is being reprinted as *Boat* this spring by Coach House Press.² The printed sheets are inhabited by marginalia, small corrections scrawled by editors and Robertson herself. I think of Jane Bennett's idea of the enchantment of inanimate objects, a gentle version of object-oriented ontology that resonates among archival scholars. These files do, indeed, seem somehow alive, although there is also a pervasive sense of monastic quietude and sterility to the experience of looking through these papers. Even the documents decorated with coffee rings, handwritten marginalia (including seemingly unrelated notes and lists), and other evidence of everyday life are somehow museological. I am not required to wear white cotton gloves here, as has been required in other special collections and archives, but even without these precautions I feel as though I am performing or on display, as simultaneously a kind of detached spectator. There is something both spectacular and spectatorial about what I am doing; I am in front of a large window into the halls with elevators on the seventh floor, so students and others sometimes peer in curiously, and I am also being observed, quite diplomatically, by the archivists busy at their desks. I am being looked at and I am also looking. Admittedly, what I have come here to do *is* curious. I have come here to look at documents and to piece together narratives from these files. I have identified myself as such. I am here to look at special objects in a special room: *Special Collections*. The need to receive explicit permission and to be admitted to access these materials underlines how particularized and intimate this kind of work can be. This is the specialized work of examining a person's material life, and it is a heightened, uncommon experience, even for those who undertake this work regularly.

As a scholar of the archive, I am tasked with looking at these collected special objects, and, to do so properly, there is an imperative to remain

2 The book is perhaps best known via its second version, *R's Boat*, printed by the University of California Press in 2016.

objective and maintain a sense of professional distance, as with other highly skilled and specialized professions. I am tasked with separating myself from my work. I have assigned myself this task, and it is understood, conventionally, that scholars approach special objects this way. A tradition that has been passed down from my peers, advisors, and mentors. The first time I looked at an archive, I felt the full constraints of this tradition: look carefully, close-read the text (or object-as-text), touch only minimally, *feel* only minimally—this was prior to engaging with the work of scholars such as Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar,³ whose transformative work theorizes the multiplicitous affective realities of archival work. The idea of feeling minimally when working in the archive can be problematized on many levels; many of my colleagues attest to actually feeling quite deeply when engaging in this work, although feelings seem to be completely at odds with the distanced and objective demeanour the scholar-critic might sense they must assume in one's *métier*. Of course, as Buss and Kadar attest, these attitudes have never sat properly with those who perform this work—even if emotions have been kept private and apart from the work of archival studies—and attitudes about the actualities and the lived realities of archival studies have been undertaking major critical revisioning. We are, after all, depending on the nature of the task at hand, people categorically tasked with looking at and scrutinizing the lives of other people.

Looking at and scrutinizing the lives of others is a demanding undertaking, and more attention is being paid to this in the current, multivalent and interdisciplinary forum of archival studies. Methods and approaches are being attentively revised, such that the field (as it were) is undergoing radical transformation. Archives scholar Michelle Caswell has famously declared that the field of archive studies is “on fire” (12) in the introduction to her book *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, attesting to the revisions and evolutions to the field undertaken by contemporary scholars of information sciences and the humanities. Caswell describes these changes to the field, “this recent burst of energy and insight ... encompassing various and sometimes conflicting methods, theories, and aims ... as *critical archival studies*” (12). Alluding here more specifically to “liberatory memory work” in the archives (13), she also gestures to the broader ways archival studies have been shifting to acknowledge and ground themselves in the humanity of their subjects and in the very

3 See, for instance, the scholarly explorations of affect and subjectivity in Marlene Kadar and Helen M. Buss's edited collection *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*, published in 2001 by Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

subjectivities of those groups and/or individuals implicated in memory work. I can sense such shifts in my own perceptions of the materials in the Robertson archive: I am conscious of how materials stimulate specific feelings, how the ethical parameters of my work have real world effects, and these factors shape my approach to my research, while also asking me to be aware of my own social and critical positionality within my work. Linda Morra describes the transformation of archival studies in the introduction to *Moving Archives*, observing how “a researcher’s critical positioning in relation to archival materials and understanding the implications, ethical and otherwise, of the affective dynamic that is deployed for this purpose has become paramount,” noting that “[i]ntersections of affect, ethics, and the archive were crucially developed at the symposium Affect and the Archive in November 2014, held at the University of California, Los Angeles, which subsequently produced a special issue, ‘Affect and the Archive, Archives and their Affects, in *Archival Science* in 2016,” edited by Marika Cifor and Anne J. Gilliland (8). While these shifts also signal an interest in the effects of archives on the archival scholar or user, the lived realities of the subjects, along with their individual and collective bodies and voices, are also of primary interest. The ways that these aspects of individual and collective subjecthood, especially within historically marginalized populations and communities, have been previously overlooked or obfuscated in archival studies and archival conventions is itself under particular scrutiny. It is important, then, to ask: if these attributes have been collectively kept apart from, or out of, or made secondary (or worse) in archival studies for so long, how has this affected the ways that subjects are enframed in and by the archive and its systems, conventions, and attitudes, even as archival studies, ever “on fire,” adapts to changing sociocultural conditions? And how does this transform my understanding of the subject in alternative media archives, such as sound archives, which are only recently garnering sustained and specific attention? Turning again to my work with Robertson’s archive at SRU, particularly in terms of having been granted permission to access some of the more personal files, my answer seems to lie not only in the ways the methodologies and theoretical frameworks I employ in looking at the archive have adapted to these changing conditions but also in the ways that I am learning to perceive and engage with the emotions and intimacy I experience while looking—and listening—during the archival encounter. Nothing I am examining is affectively neutral; I am entrusted with narratives and information—about relationships and communities—that are not only confidential but, in many ways, are almost visceral, and some aspects of these move me so deeply that I struggle to

translate them to language, mostly because some of these experiences do, in fact, transcend text, words.

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Listening to and for the subject

When I am researching in Robertson's collection, I have the opportunity to listen to sound recordings that have otherwise been inaccessible, and they recall two key reflections: the first, that there is no substitute for the human voice in establishing intimacy with listeners; and the second, that the moment I first heard a recording of Robertson reading her own work after having read many of her books and poems, I felt a strange and renewed affinity for her writing, mainly because her voice has such tenor and gravitas that it seems almost otherworldly. Moreover, I felt an affinity for *her*, for her biographical history and lived reality. Once I heard Robertson read, her voice became indelibly imprinted to her writing and I could "hear" it when I read her work in text form. Hearing her voice transformed the way I began to understand her, as a literary figure and as a distinct and fully formed being. Hearing her voice made her real in ways that other media forms and sensory modes did not. These feelings of intimacy and affinity upon hearing Robertson's voice recordings are entirely related to the relationship I had already established to her work and personhood, which was decisively affirmative. The listening experience is coloured by biases and pre-conceptions, so encounters with the voice of research subjects will vary but will nevertheless give renewed affective texture to the research.

The kinds of sound recordings found in literary archives are often live recordings, whether from readings or radio appearances or from contemporary webcasts or podcasts. The files can be analogue or digital, although most are now digitized or being digitized due to mandates to preserve sound collections and make them accessible. My first encounter with Robertson's reading voice was when listening to a recording of the 1994 launch of *XEclogue* at the Kootenay School of Writing (ksw) in Vancouver,⁴ which I first found on the PennSound⁵ website while doing early research on her

4 I returned to this recording later when writing an article, "Lisa Robertson's Archive, Singular and Collective," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 44.2 (June 2018): 75–100, after editor Jason Camlot recommended that I cite it and yet again when making an episode for the SpokenWeb podcast about my work with Robertson and her archives, published in fall 2021.

5 PennSound, originating from the University of Pennsylvania, is "an ongoing project committed to producing new audio recordings and preserving existing audio archives" ("About PennSound") and was launched in 2005.

involvement with the school; the file was digital, from a tape that had been digitized. In my visit to SFU's fonds, I listened to undigitized tapes in a part of the archives I had not yet explored, in the corner of a meeting room set up with books of sound files and equipment for listening to sound media.

While researching Robertson at SFU, I inquired about the different media available in their collections that might allow me to better access Robertson's personal, feminist networks, a key topic in my work. I am particularly interested in materials related to poet, curator, and organizer Nancy Shaw, a scholar responsible for many changes in the ksw's operations in terms of its connections to Artspeak, a Vancouver artist-run centre. During our time working together, Robertson repeatedly stressed the importance of looking into Shaw's work, within the ksw and Artspeak, and more broadly, given my interest in how ksw intersected with the Vancouver art world and the group's feminist activity. Presented with a box of tapes from the Kootenay School of Writing fonds (also held at SFU), I selected the tapes hand-annotated with Robertson's name as well as those of Shaw, which only roughly corresponded with the finding aid; it was explained that the tapes had been annotated somewhat ad hoc over the years.⁶ Again, the experience was heightened and singular, made even more so by the privacy of the listening space. Putting on a pair of ear-covering headphones, I pressed play on the first tape and realized it first had to be rewound. All of these attributes served to build momentum for the initial moments of listening to the recording.

The tape I initially listened to at SFU is one of Shaw reading at the ksw with Phil McCrumb. I note this because this presented the first time I heard Shaw read her own work—the first time I heard her voice was during a brief appearance reading a part of Robertson's *XEclogue* on the aforementioned recording—and I am deeply affected by this sustained encounter with her voice, reading from her book *Scopocratic*, published by ECW Press in 1992. Like Robertson, Shaw speaks clearly and with purpose and also with a bit of humour. Knowing as I do that she would die in 2007 at the too-young age of forty-five, while listening and processing the experience, I am struck, suddenly, by the breadth of the loss, for Robertson and for members of the broader community, some of whom I can hear in the recording at hand. By listening to Shaw's voice, I feel I am closer to understanding the reasons Robertson encouraged me to engage

6 Robertson helpfully offered corrections and clarifications to the annotations over instant message, augmenting my experience of the materials. Tony Power, curator of the SFU poetry collections, shared that a large-scale digitization and reorganization of the sound files was currently being undertaken.

with Shaw and her legacy. The reasons had seemed beyond words, like Robertson was communicating something intangible but urgent, and I can feel a sense of resolution emerge when I listen to Shaw's voice. My feelings do not seem entirely rational—in the moment, it seems that these feelings are derived from an embodied realization that Shaw was a whole person and not simply a set of texts and narratives. In sensing this, I am also more aware of Robertson as a complex human being, as an independent subject rather than as an assemblage of files and objects in and beyond an archive. Sound recordings, of her and of her close friends and colleagues, have given her subject form.

In *No Archive Will Restore You*, Julietta Singh asserts the primacy of the subject and subjectivity in the undertaking of archival research. She posits that “the archive is a stimulus between myself and myself” (26), positioning herself, and her internal dialogue, within the frame of the archive to examine how the archive is affected by such exchanges in and between subjects and subjectivities in such a way as to be difficult to ascertain. While this does not necessarily foreground the collaborative nature of the archival encounter, as an engagement between the subject of and in the archive with that of the researcher, it nevertheless speaks to the kind of subject-inflected reflexivity archival research entails.

Singh's book also gives voice to the current state of archival studies as one that is in flux. In the narrative, a friend, an archivist, is visiting Singh at home and sharing reflections on a recent meeting with radical archivists at a conference, “where archivists decried the scholarly preoccupation with the site of their impassioned labor,” noting that “for them, the critique of the archive's gaps and silences fails to account for their low wages and for the lack of accessibility to some of the materials they most want to gather” (26), in addition to other observations. This recalls aspects of Caswell's and Morra's observations that archival workers are re-examining their relationships to the archive and re-situating themselves in their work, asking new questions of conventions and traditions. Of the narrator's attempt to grasp the significance of the archive in her own experience while confronted by what she describes as the “archivist's frustration” Singh writes,

I respond awkwardly that my interest in the archive is more creative than intellectual. This is a lie, since I cannot parse the difference between these modes ... If the archive is a remnant, it is one that keeps whispering to me, insisting on its place in my everyday life. What I might have said to her instead is this: “I am a disquieted archive that fumbles in words. A thing made up of infinite, intractable traces” (26).

This illustrates the ways the boundaries between the subject of the archive and the archival user can become intermingled in the context of archival research by means of the affective resonances of the encounter. The movement between Singh's hesitancy in describing her interest in the archive and statement that she herself is "a disquieted archive that fumbles in words" suggests that the experience of the archival encounter bears strongly on her self-conception. Furthermore, the blurring—the difficulty to parse—between creative and intellectual that Singh describes suggests the experience of feelings and sensations that are challenging to categorize, even more so because of the material realities of the archive. The idea of the archive as a "remnant ... insisting on its place in my everyday life" (Singh 26) suggests that the archive can have effects beyond the intellectual, with the potential to both inform and transform the archive-user in ways outside the space of the material archive. This is augmented by the shift in Singh's language when she describes, "I am a disquieted archive that fumbles in words," where the narrator becomes the archive, is elemental to the archive, with the fumbling "in words" further representing a blurring in both identity and rationality, denoting a sense of moving into a space of fragmented perception. The "infinite, intractable traces" might here be interpreted as the intangibilities of feeling beyond the rational and material, particularly as it concerns the apprehension of subjectivity (or subjectivities) and the identity (or identities) of the subject in the archive.

When listening to Robertson's and Shaw's voice recordings in the archive, I have renewed awareness of myself as a unique subject when I respond emotionally and intellectually to the materials before me; I am simultaneously made aware of the subjectivity of the subject I am studying. I can hear Shaw's voice and experience her presence even though she is no longer living; I feel I can access aspects of her being that exceed mere description. I feel, irrationally, that I can somehow "know" the subject of my studies by accessing their unique voices. This vocative experience has broad implications for the ways I might examine and analyze archival materials. I am made more aware of the humanity at stake within my analysis. The archival encounter is heightened, and my perception seems to be sharpened by these sensations and realizations. The sensory, spatialized experience of hearing the human voice in the archive—the voices of the people and community I am studying—enhances my overall comprehension of Robertson as subject within the spectrum of archival objects.

Sound objects and the archive

I started working on Robertson and her writing almost a decade ago in a time that preceded many of the texts that inform my current approach to the archive. Forms of perception and engagement in the archives have been changing dramatically as the materials and material histories of the archive have been re-examined. Asking how and why sound media is different from other media forms demands that sound be theorized in a dedicated manner and that new interpretive methods be developed. The effects of sound media are specific and specialized and need to be interpreted that way; while the field of archival studies broadly has been attending to previously overlooked attributes and effects of archives more generally, so too have scholars of media archives in recent years acknowledged that different media in archives import different and highly specialized meanings and attributes. Jason Camlot, in *Phonopoetics: The Making of Early Literary Recordings*, observes how, to be interpreted as literary works, literary sound recordings need their listeners to consider “the historically specific convergences between audio-recording technologies, media formats, and the institutions and practices of the literary context” (4). For Camlot, shifts in perception start with foregrounding the historicity, media contexts, and institutional boundaries of the sound recordings while also considering the implications for listening to such historical media. Camlot explains, “Phonopoetics as a concept refers to the emergence and making (poesis) of literary speech sounds (phono) as they can be heard in early spoken recordings. That such sounds were apprehended (captured) on replayable records allows us to apprehend (understand) their literary historical significance” (5), noting how both media and the listener make meaning together. When I listen to the archival recordings of Robertson and Shaw, I am at once highly aware of their material media specificities while also being enveloped in the listening experience. The ways I interpret the voice recordings are entirely connected to understanding their contexts of production and origin and are also shaped by the contexts in which I am receiving and exploring them. My experience as a listener imports a range of my lived experience and knowledge into the forum of interpretation. These attributes are foundational to my intellectual and emotional responses and to the ways I begin to access and form the idea of the sound subject, the person (Robertson) whose vocal acts I am analyzing in my research.

That sound is materially different from visual media is indisputable, but to attempt to analyze it apart from visual and textual cues and attributes presents a challenge because sound is so deeply tied to its contexts

of production, including that pertaining to the subject(s) from which it is derived. This presents conceptual difficulties for those attempting to theorize sound as a distinct feature, or object—a method that isolates sound from its contexts to analyze only the sound itself. For instance, the editors of *Sound Objects*, James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow, develop the concept of the “sound object” as a method for undertaking this challenge. Making case for the apprehension of the aural as opposed to the visual (6), they lay out a genealogy of the theorization of the “sound object” by means of Pierre Schaeffer’s “*musique concrète*” and “*objet sonore*” which, similar to Camlot’s approach, draw together the experience of listening and technological innovations in sound recording (6–12). Steintrager and Chow trace the genealogy of the sound object (6). Connecting Schaeffer’s concept of “reduced listening” to his conception of sounds as “self-standing sound objects,” they observe how Schaeffer “approached sounds as discrete and multifaceted phenomena rather than as carriers of meaning or as effects bound to sources and causes” (7–8). Importantly, they also observe how Schaeffer’s approach remains “inseparable from the technological media of reproduction at his disposal” (8), arguing that the sound object is “a construct of iterative perception” because it is effectively “machine made” (8). Steintrager and Chow are clear that they are not by any means inventing the sound object⁷ and that the sound object is indeed a kind of perceptual assemblage that includes details of its technical aspects of its production. They argue that a “theory of sound objects, we contend, is the ineluctable noncoincidence of emission and reception and the entanglement of subjectivity and objectivity” (12), explicitly mentioning how subjectivity and emission are inherent to their perspective.

The reading of the sound object as being a perceptual assemblage produced from its conceptual and material entanglements, but also discrete from its contexts of production, is inconsistent with my own experience and recalls some of the baggage I felt I needed to work through in my work with Robertson’s archival materials, where it was impossible to divorce sound from subject. It seems useful, in this instance, to observe that for Steintrager and Chow sound exists chiefly as a text—a methodological decision that seems to be tied to a persistent formalist theoretical legacy for textual analysis at odds with the more holistic intersectional feminist lens called for in contemporary feminist archival studies, where to dis-

7 In assembling this anthology, Steintrager and Chow are attempting to import this conceptual frame to the current mode of sound analysis and renovate and revisit contemporary traditions that neglect to cater to sound as a specialized form of primary text.

connect object and subject is counter-intuitive. Within an object-focused framework, sound is understood as distinct and separate from its *source* of origin, complicating the role of the actual, real subject producing the sound object within this assemblage. But while the subject producing the sound recording seems to be understood, in arguing for the objecthood of sound Steintrager and Chow are effectively, if unintentionally, downplaying the importance of the role of the subjecthood, or subjectivity, of the subject producing the sound object. While they are not explicitly analyzing sounds produced by the human voice, the subject producing the sound nevertheless seems strangely disembodied, with the *objecthood* of the sound *object* as a distinct and discrete entity foregrounded in their analysis. The need to individuate sound as a distinct “object” relates to sound’s connections to many other perceptual cues and elements.

Chow⁸ and Steintrager are rightly concerned with the primacy of the image in analysis and the ways that the visual (including both image and text), as a kind of dominant and primary form of information, forces sound into an ancillary role in analytic traditions, including recent tendencies in scholarly inquiry. Steintrager and Chow argue that other modalities dominate analytical faculties, noting how text and the visual, although meaningfully intertwined with sound, seem to take over in the context of contemporary critical theory. They offer a short, incisive history of the secondary treatment of sound and the audible in comparison with the visual, giving credence to their shared imperative to theorize both sound and its objecthood within this framework.

The argument for the study of the sound object as a specific entity does not necessarily detract from the primacy of the sound subject. In attending to the role of the sound source—the subject—of the recording, Camlot, in his holistic approach to sound media analysis, makes both the subject and the medium for production crucial components in approaching sound media. In thinking about the sound subject, it is useful to foreground the active role of the listener as interpreter as Steintrager, Chow, and Camlot do. Camlot draws attention to the active role of the originary subject as the producer of the sound recording—a role that makes the subject active within the analytic frame—mainly because he focalizes the poetics of the speech act in his study and the medium and process for producing the

8 Chow, in her essay “Listening After Acousmaticity” included in the collection, examines the concept of “acousmaticity”—of listening unaccompanied and uninterrupted by the sight of sound’s source (116). There is therefore an antecedent and theoretical imperative inborn within this framework for listening and study of a sound text without the seeming distraction of its derivation or author.

recording as a relational entity. Further, Camlot's analysis is grounded in the real and dynamic physical and conceptual context of the archive, where the material attributes of the production of sound files are palpable and focalized.

The subject and medium of sound recordings—as objects—are correlated, and the archive itself, as a component of both the process and context for listening, becomes part of this interrelation. Listening to Robertson and Shaw in the archive, I am at once aware of the objecthood of the sound recordings as sonic entities, while also observing how encountering the sounds of their voices generates forms of particularized sensory, intimate, and embodied knowledge. Rather than being at odds with the sound object, the subject is an element of the conceptual assemblage accounted for in its conception as such. Efforts to aesthetically and sensorily bracket off the sound object from its contexts and conditions for both production and reception present conceptual and material challenges in the literary archive, where sound files of all kinds are more often than not directly correlated to subjectivity and subject as external, primary attributes. It is therefore productive to connect object to subject in the archive; after all, particularly in the case of sound recordings in the archive that deal primarily in recordings of the voice, the two are effectively intertwined.

The sound subject

The subject producing the sound object in fact informs and transforms its reception. For Camlot, hearing a recording of a subject in an archival setting can be, among other compelling forms of strangeness, a “strangely real” encounter, developing “an experience of real-time processing” that few other media can reproduce (3). The strange realness of the encounter he describes can be attributed to the interface between the listener and the media and also between the listener and the subject who was being recorded, as mentioned earlier. This is due, largely, to the impact of the encounter with a human voice: the powerful interface between listener and the speaking voice.

Katherine McLeod observes how “a proximity to voice” (128) shapes the encounter with vocal sound recordings in the archive. In her account of her work on Phyllis Webb, she posits that this presents a rational and perceptual conundrum for the listener, that this is “a proximity that is fraught and that serves as a reminder that the voice of any poet as represented in the archive is both hers and not hers” (128), suggesting that, again, the experience of hearing a sound subject in the archive presents a conceptually challenging matter that is difficult to ascertain in objective

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terms. McLeod describes this experience as one of being moved, noting how “the proximity is a relationship that could be expressed as what Sara Ahmed describes as an attachment formed ‘through movement, through being moved by a proximity to others’” (128). This notion of being moved by means of proximity to voice draws attention to the unique capacity of the voice, even in recorded form, to stimulate specific forms of emotion and perception, as with Robertson’s and Shaw’s readings. This is why I feel I can suddenly know Shaw: her voice brings me close to her. It moves me.

The human voice possesses unique relationships and effects, both within itself and with the listener. In *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Steven Connor argues, “A voice is not a condition, nor yet an attribute, but an event” (4), noting how a voice asserts itself as a unique entity. He explains that the voice is both “product and process” and, turning to his relationship with his own voice, states, “giving voice is the process which simultaneously produces articulate sound, and produces myself, as a self-producing being. Here, now, I speak: now, again, it is I speaking still” (3). Further, he asserts that “What a voice, any voice, always says, no matter what the particular local import may be of the words it emits, is this: this, here, this voice, is not merely a voice, a particular aggregation of tones and timbre; it is voice or voicing itself. Listen, says a voice: some being is giving voice” (3–4). Giving voice is, for Connor, a method for self-assertion and the establishment of self as a kind of self-directed intervention. It is a declarative act and also a mode of expressing a unique subjectivity.

Voice also imparts unique forms of sonic and affective information. In the context of a sound archive, voice delivers the experience of an encounter with the subject being analyzed that is more than textual. It is imbued with the strange realness Camlot describes, while also enacting a form of production, producing a different subjective form within the archive: it articulates the other in sound, producing intangible effects that are immediately recognizable to the listener. Speaking in the first person, Connor explains, “A voice ... establishes me as an inside capable of recognizing and being recognized by an outside” (6). Voice is at once internal and external. Connor argues, “Perhaps the commonest experiential proof of the voice’s split condition, as at once cleaving to and taking leave of myself, is provided by the experience of hearing one’s own recorded voice” (7), observing how sound recordings produce a form of othering even for the person whose voice is being recorded, by means of making material and external what is primarily internal to the speaking subject. This suggests why so many people dislike hearing a recording of their own voices: this

externalizing of the internal produces a kind of alienation from oneself. But for listeners in the archive, sound recordings and the sound of a person's recorded voice provide a pathway to intimacy and deeper understanding, as with Robertson's and Shaw's voices in the archive. The voice resonates and makes forms of meaning connected to but also apart from the meaning of the words uttered.

To hear Robertson speak in voice recordings externalizes what is otherwise internal and makes "strangely real" her position as a subject. Approached this way, the irrational emotionality of working in the archive seems like a logical response. Being confronted with the very being inherent to my research is a perceptually and intellectually jarring experience that is difficult to parse from an objective, professional standpoint. Under the auspices of "liberatory memory work" (Caswell 13) and taking into account the complexity of the "affective dynamic" of archival work (Morra 8), the precise nature of work with sound archives is challenging to determine. The literary sound archive is a site for an uncanny encounter with the real that provides access to the listener's own subjectivity and identity in ways that other archival forms cannot, and thus activity in the sound archive possesses a uniquely powerful reflexive tenor, particularly in the context of contemporary archival studies where these kinds of specialized information are of renewed interest.

My work in Robertson's archive has been significantly augmented by my capacity to listen to her voice and the voices of her close friends, members of her community, and people who have significantly affected her and her work. I am moved by what I hear and what I hear deepens my understanding of all other materials I encounter and analyze during my time spent at SFU. Further, it also asks that I reconsider my previous interpretations of her writings. Engagement with sound objects is transformative for many reasons: sound objects import content and information and also a unique aesthetic, sensory situation. Engagement with sound objects that feature the human voice, however, import different attributes in that they bring the subject into being by means of creating proximity. The necessarily fragmentary nature of the archive often corresponds with my own sense of myself as a fragmentary and multiplicitous being, and this seems to produce a correlation between what I am examining and the sense that I am looking at a unique subject. Listening to Robertson's and Shaw's voice recordings shapes the experience and contributes significantly to my construction of a Robertson and Shaw as sound subjects in the archive and adds necessary affective and conceptual dimension to the archival work I perform.

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