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Field Recording, Autoethnography, and the Entanglements of the Heard: Author's Note and References

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Article abstract

An audio essay considering the act of recording, of editing, of the moment and the ways in which they entangle with each other. A proposal of a methodology for listening to the story of the sound around and within us, through the practice of field recording and the myriad ways we might consider the archive, the preferences at play, and the processes we use to extract meaning in field recording practice.

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Debashis Sinha

The following notes are in response to the insightful comments of the reviewers of my audio essay, “Field Recording, Autoethnography, and the Entanglements of the Heard,” which is my contribution to this special issue of *Performance Matters* on “Performing Practice-Based Research.” Audio essays are a relatively new form of scholarship that combine spoken text and soundscape. As a sound producer, this way of thinking feels intuitive, but of course, it is not innocent. Yet I begin my meditation on sound and recording by suggesting that autoethnography follows “the impulse of the moment rather than an extractive compulsion” (2:03).

[Listen to audio essay here.](#)

The idea that “autoethnography is not extractive” is, of course, a strange claim to make, given that we are listening to an audio essay that relies on extraction on so many levels—to record, to edit, even to equalize and mix audio are actions that are predicated on removing or repurposing (extracting) information from one mode or context to another. That astute observation, shared by one of the reviewers, has made me realize that it is imperative to contemplate the assumptions embedded in my passionate and arguably naïve statement. Could the extraction I practise in the course of my research-creation be part of the continuum of violence that plagues so many research methods? Is there some place in my process to investigate that thread? Is the repurposing of the information of our lived reality to seek other hidden or personal meanings necessarily always connected to colonial modes of removal, expression, sublimation, erasure, theft . . . ? The list of questions goes on.

Clearly, the history of recording and listening has deep and profound connections to colonialism and coloniality (Budhaditya Chattopadhyay [2022] engages deeply with this idea, but there are myriad other sources that also examine this relationship, such as the *Sounding Out!* blog [<https://soundstudiesblog.com/>]). The teasing out, disruption, and refusal of these relationships in our research-creation practices is a long but necessary road, some of the many complicated and intersectional steps on the path.

In every moment, I listen for story. And in every moment, I listen for how to lift the story up, to let it be the thing it is.

Driven by a deep commitment to the primacy of sound in creative expression, **Debashis Sinha** has created numerous audio-centred solo and collaborative projects across Canada and internationally. Sound design and composition credits include works for contemporary dance, video, film, and Dora Award-winning productions with many of Canada's premiere performing arts companies, including numerous works for Peggy Baker Dance Projects, The Stratford Festival, Soulpepper Theatre Company, Canadian Stage, Why Not Theatre, and many others. Currently, Sinha has been researching sound production using machine learning and AI with an ear to uncovering new strategies and avenues of story creation. He is an assistant professor in The Creative School at Toronto Metropolitan University, and the 2023 Louis Applebaum Composer's Award laureate.

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