Fleeting Voices (Wien, 1-3 Oct 25)

Zentrum Fokus Forschung, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Oct 1–03, 2025
Deadline: Apr 6, 2025

Katrin Abromeit, Laura Bohnenblust, Eva Hallama

Fleeting Voices. Preserving Acoustic Heritage in the Archives and the Arts. Experimental conference SONIME & Heritage Studies Vienna.

Speaking, singing and using one's voice for communication is one of the oldest cultural techniques. And hearing is one of the earliest human senses, which we actively pursue and exercise already as a foetus. Since the invention of storing and reproducing voices on sound carriers, the ephemeral level of the acoustic has taken on a materiality outside the human body. This has made it possible to keep the voice for individual and cultural memories. These techniques of saving and remembering are connected to the desire to hold on to the voice as a coveted object and to preserve it for the future – for the family, the "home", for collecting and "scientific purposes". Simultaneously, they reveal the paradox of the material fixation of the ephemeral. Every time we replay a sound recording, we are dependent on listening and the fleeting nature of sound as its fundamental character, which raises the question: What does it mean to capture a voice on a sound carrier? What does this mean culturally, epistemologically, technically and politically both in terms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage?

Fleeting Voices discusses voices and their sound carriers as a subject of heritage studies, materials science, media theory, art- and cultural history. It explores the specifics of acoustic heritage, the agency of (various – also human) sound carriers in archives or artworks and the voice as a medium. It focuses on the voice and the acoustic sphere as an inherently ephemeral and intangible object of cultural heritage research. At the same time, it addresses recorded voices as highly material objects and still underestimated subjects of heritage science or art history.

For the final conference of the ÖAW-funded Heritage Science project "Sonic Memories. Audio Letters in Times of Migration and Mobility", in collaboration with the Chair of Cultural Heritage Studies at the University of Vienna, we invite archivists, artists and scholars to submit papers addressing the following topics:

Politics of Listening:
How should we listen to historical voices today? What do we hear when we listen to voices, what/who remains silent and why? How do recorded and replayed voices interact with questions of ownership, authenticity, and cultural representation – especially when we are dealing with underlying colonial ideologies? To what extent does listening to acoustic recordings offer a productive alternative to reading written history?

Sending Voices and Voice as a Medium:

How does private communication change when the conversation is enabled and shaped by technical equipment? How does a medium like a voice letter change and reshape communication? In what ways is the voice a carrier of closeness and intimacy? How is it connected to the wish to inscribe oneself into a collective memory or a distant future? How can we conceptualize the voice when we think of it as a medium?

Recorded Voices - Preserved Voices:
What forms of sound carriers and which replay devices were available for private recordings, and is their history of use adequately represented in the archives and research? In this context, questions of materiality and the challenges of restoring and preserving audio recordings arise. What demands do direct recording media place on conservation? What measures of conservation and restoration are specifically applicable to them? What are recent developments?

Voices in Artistic Practice and Art Exhibitions:
How do artists include voice(s) in their work to engage with themes such as memory, identity or cultural heritage? On what grounds and how are historical sound recordings chosen? To what extent does the human body itself (re)appear as a sound carrier, for example in the context of art performances? How much does listening to artworks change the perception and interpretation in an environment dominated by the visual?

Submission Guidelines:
We encourage you to propose experimental presentation forms such as performance, poem, listening sessions, workshops or group presentations alongside conventional conference presentations.
Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract, outlining the title, form and content of the contribution with up to 300 words along with a short bio (150 words) by April 6, 2025. Submissions should be sent to fleeting.voices@uni-ak.ac.at with the subject line “Fleeting Voices”.

Selected participants will be notified by June 30, 2025. We would like to request pre-circulated draft papers (2-3,000 words, or its experimental equivalent) to encourage discussion. These are expected by September 14, 2025.

Keynote:
MADEYOULOOK (http://www.made-you-look.net/)

Scientific Committee:
Clemens Apprich – University of Applied Arts Vienna
Noémie Etienne – University of Vienna
Ricarda Denzer - University of Applied Arts Vienna
Elena Gómez Sánchez – Deutsches Bergbaumuseum Bochum
Kerstin Klenke – Phonogrammarchiv, Austrian Academy of Sciences
Thomas Y. Levin – Princeton University
Thomas Macho – IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies Vienna
Gerhild Perl – University of Trier
Dirk Rupnow – University of Innsbruck
Jens Schröter – University of Bonn

Concept:
Katrin Abromeit (Phonogrammarchiv), Laura Bohnenblust (University of Vienna), Eva Hallama (University of Applied Arts Vienna)

Institutions:
Department Media Theory – University of Applied Arts Vienna
Phonogrammarchiv – Austrian Academy of Sciences
Cultural Heritage Studies – University of Vienna (Faculty Center for Transdisciplinary and Cultural Studies)
Zentrum Fokus Forschung – University of Applied Arts Vienna

Venue:
Zentrum Fokus Forschung, Rustenschacherallee 2–4, 1020 Wien

Reference:
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