

Materialidades da Literatura



Vol. 5.1 (2017)

ISSN 2182-8830

‘Vox Media: O Som na Literatura’

Oswaldo Manuel Silvestre e

Felipe Cussen (orgs.)

Vox Media: Sound, “under language,” and “narrative archaeology” in/as Literature

JOHN F. BARBER

Washington State University, Vancouver

Abstract

This essay describes (re)combining and/or (re)conceptualizing sound artifacts from two pioneering works of electronic literature no longer readily available to create a new, sound-based narrative for each work. The *techné* proposed promotes broader opportunities for conceptualizing and creating literary artifacts characterized by audibility of text, sound as text and meaning, and heightened awareness of the author’s and/or speaker’s voice(s) in the text. This approach may help challenge the past invisibility of voice in literature and promote practices more rewarding than simulacra, description, or transcription. *Vox Media*. Sound in and/or as literature. **Keywords:** sound; remix; under language; sound narratives; aural/oral storytelling; sound files; computer code; narrative archaeology; hearing; listening.

Resumo

Este ensaio descreve a (re)combinação e/ou (re)conceitualização de artefactos sonoros de duas obras pioneiras de literatura eletrónica, que deixaram de estar acessíveis, com o objetivo de criar uma nova narrativa sonora para cada uma delas. A *techné* proposta amplia as oportunidades para conceitualizar e criar artefactos literários caracterizados pela audibilidade do texto, o som como texto e sentido, e uma maior conscientização da(s) voz(es) do autor e/ou do(s) falantes no texto. Esta abordagem pode contribuir para questionar o passado de invisibilidade da voz na literatura e promover práticas mais gratificantes do que os simulacros, as descrições ou as transcrições. *Vox Media*. Som na e/ou como literatura. **Palavras-chave:** som; remistura; sob a linguagem; narrativas sonoras; narrativa aural/oral; ficheiros de som; código de computador; arqueologia narrativa; audição; escuta.

One might argue that sound of voice is at the center of literature and literary acts like reading and writing. The storyteller’s voice is preserved by the technology of writing. It is reproduced and distributed by the technology of printing. It is recalled by the practice of reading.

This centrality of sound(s)—voices (of authors and others) and mechanical and/or environmental sounds that help provide context, meaning, and presence—promotes audibility and visibility in readers’ imaginations, and prompts us to consider *vox media*—voice in literature, voice as a means for literature—a methodology of engagement beyond the idea of text as material contexts for inscribed symbols and/or information.

For example, consider electronic literature. Described by Espen Aarseth in his keynote talk at the 2015 Electronic Literature Organization conference, electronic literature involves the production, distribution, and consumption of literary artifacts dependent upon computer technologies for its representations and performances (Aarseth 2015). Although occluded by the seeming penchant for the visual generation and/or manipulation of text on computer screens, sound represents a viable and valuable potentiality. And, as I discuss in this essay, promotes *vox media*, especially with regard to pioneering works of electronic literature no longer easily accessible.

I pursued this connection between sound and electronic literature as part of my presentation at the 2016 International Digital Media and Technology conference. I said both sound and electronic literature promote transformative literary acts: speech, language, writing, printing, remediation. Beyond these moments of brightness, however, both sound and electronic literature are ephemeral, shapeshifters in the shadows, gone soon after their production—sound into the surrounding air, electronic literature into a parade of shimmering pixels on computer screens—both seemingly something from nothing, and to nothing, but both capable of returning as something new.¹

To explore this point, I leverage Stuart Moulthrop's concept of "under language" and Jeremy Hight's "narrative archaeology." Moulthrop argues that computer programming, the underlying code, "under language," is inseparable from a work of electronic literature (Moulthrop 2012). Hight sees "narrative archaeology" as a methodology for recovering narrative artifacts faded, forgotten, or lost in the debris of passing time and changing technologies (Hight 2015, 2006, 2005).

I use these terms—under language and narrative archaeology—to promote sound-based narratives that are faithful to their heritage as artifacts from earlier, more expansive works, even while pointing to new narrative approaches that position sound(s) as an important and integral affordance of future forms of literature.

I begin by positioning sound as a fundamental sensory input and communication channel for human culture. Sound conveys deep, rich infor-

¹The terms "shapeshifting" and "something from nothing" were themes of the International Conference on Digital Media and Textuality, Universität Bremen, Germany, 3-5 November 2016. This conference, chaired by Daniela Côrtes Maduro, sought to examine how practices and debates associated with the computer medium have contributed to shaping digital artifacts. I used these terms in my presentation "Sound and Electronic Literature: 'Under Language' and 'Narrative Archaeology'" which was part of a panel entitled "Nothing comes of nothing." More information available at the conference website: <https://digmediatextuality.wordpress.com/>. Additionally, a sound art work of my creation was included in the exhibition, "Shapeshifting Texts," held in conjunction with the conference. My work, "Tunnel To Another World," was inspired by the idea of the ear as a portal and imagines a journey via tunnel. Exhibition website: <https://exhibitionshapeshiftingtexts.wordpress.com/>. More information and a listening opportunity available at my archival website: <http://www.nospace.net/john/archive/tunnel/tunnel-another-world.html>.

mation. Listening provides access to this information, which can transform space and place.

Then, I provide a brief outline of the historical association between sound and electronic literature. Sound has been largely overlooked both by definition and practice. I encourage a fresh look at new opportunities.

One opportunity might be to (re)combine, (re)conceptualize sound artifacts from works of electronic literature no longer easily accessible. This practice provides a compelling way to engage with sound-based literary experiences, perhaps more so than emulation, description, or transcription. I describe my application of this *techné* (theory and practice) to both *Under Language* (Moulthrop, 2007) and *34 North 118 West* (Hight, Knowlton, and Spellman 2002-2003).

In conclusion, I contend that (re)mixing aural artifacts can provide and preserve sound narratives that are at once faithful to their heritage and indicative of a fluid creative element involved in the construction and manipulation of literary experiences. This approach promotes future considerations for new forms of experimental literature where sound is the basis of its experience (Barber 2016; see also note 1).

Why sound?

If we consider sound as the phoneme for speech (verbalization of abstract thought), then it becomes a central component of narrative (the recounting of a sequence of events and their meanings) and storytelling (the addition of setting, plot, characters, logical unfolding of events, a climax), and, so, as result, the basis for literature (written works considered to possess lasting artistic merit) and the various practices and cultures associated with its production and consumption (reading, writing, and listening).

But why focus on sound? There are several reasons.

Sound is the original, fundamental sensory input and communication channel for human culture.

Walter Murch says sound is the first of human senses to become active, soon after conception, and the one upon which newborns rely predominately before their visual acuity has developed (Murch 2005).

Sound is ephemeral, disappearing soon after its creation.

Sound is pervasive, immersive, and “at once the most forceful stimulus that human beings experience, and the most evanescent.” Unless recorded, many sounds are no longer available for study, or are difficult to study (Smith 2013, 127, 128).

Sound conveys a great deal of information, accessible through careful listening.

Gary Ferrington likens listening to “theater of the mind,” where each listener is her own dramaturge (Ferrington 1994). Marshall McLuhan says sound provides a “subliminal echo chamber” capable of evoking memories and/or associations long forgotten or ignored (McLuhan 1964, 264). Embodied social and cultural traces can be carried by sound(s), often without the awareness of their bearers (Schafer 1977). Awareness can be prompted by careful listening. By listening, we open new ways of thinking about and appreciating the social experience, memory, time, and place—the auditory culture—of sound (Bull and Back 2003, 12).

Sound is capable of providing immersive, interactive contexts for listeners.

Listening to sound(s) opens a “portal through which a deeper, often inarticulate, consciousness can be glimpsed” (Hall 2010, 99). Such glimpses may promote imagination, interaction, even immersion. Sound effectively prompts life from little details “seen” in the mind’s eye (Crook 1999, 8). Auditory imagination provides a full range of experience, from sedimented memories to wildest fantasy (Ihde 1976, 61-64).

Sound transforms space to place.

Bruce R. Smith says knowing the world through sound is fundamentally different from knowing the world through vision (Smith 2013, 129). Stephen Feld notes “the primacy of sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world” (Feld 2003, 226).

Charles Bernstein suggests a way these ideas about sound might play out when he argues that we must pay attention to the way poetry is written, and performed. Attention to the performance of the poet reading her work brings attention to the sonic materials on which the performance is based. Hearing poets read their works, says Bernstein, “we change our hearing and reading of their works on the page as well” (Bernstein 1998, 6). In this regard, the aurality of the performance is not an adjunct, nor is it secondary, to the text of the poem (Bernstein 1998, 8).

Following Bernstein, ideally, we would read and listen to poetry—as well as other forms of writing—across the divide of sight and sound, between text and performance, using both our eyes and our ears.

One way we might do this is described by Amy Cowan in her interview with research scientist David Frohlich who is developing a system he calls “autophotography” where sounds surrounding a scene are recorded simultaneously as it is photographed. This sound track can be replayed whenever the photograph is viewed thus adding sonic details associated with the image. Sounds are thought to capture the emotional setting in far richer detail than the image alone, and to aid the viewer’s recall of those details (Cowan 2002).

Electronic literature takes an approach similar to autophotography by including words on screens, as images, or generating them as part of the work, as performance. More interesting, however, is the challenge of introducing new sounds to represent, or even disrupt, what we can see. “The reader acquires ears,” says Christof Migone. “What we hear are the sounds of our imagination interpreting the text, a process which exists in all reading to a certain extent” (Migone 2001, 47).

We can draw upon Futurism and Dada sound poetry and their attempts to provide expressive and material practices for vocal narrative performance comprised of language without words, or, even, without (known) code, yet still capable of binding speaker and audience to subjects understood through the act of listening.

Consider Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), an Italian poet, editor, and founder of the Futurist movement, who developed the concept of *parole in liberta* (roughly, words in freedom). He experimented with typography, scattering words of different sizes, in different typefaces, over the page, freeing them from the linear tyranny of the sentence and paragraph, visually representing the sounds of these words as they might be spoken by the poet. In speaking his poetry, Marinetti experimented with onomatopoeias to create the sound effects he visualized with typography.

In Russia, Futurism developed around the experiments of Velemir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) and Aleksej Kruchenykh (1886-1968) to abstract language into sounds rather than meanings. They called this approach *zuum*. Their pioneering work formed the basis for what we now call “sound poetry.”

The focus on phonetic sounds of speech rather than semantic meaning, inherited from the Futurists, remained strong for the Dadaists. Hugo Ball, his companion Emily Hennings, along with Marcel Janco, Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, and Jean Arp, experimented with sound poetry and simultaneous poetry, where multiple speakers spoke or made other vocalizations, simultaneously. For Ball, the sounds of words were most important. They were, as he noted in his 23 June 1916 diary entry, the “innermost alchemy of the word,” the “last and holiest refuge” of poetry (Ball 1974, 70-71).

Ball also claimed to have invented a new genre of poems, “Verse ohne Worte, [poems without words],” in which the balance of the vowels is weighed and distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence (Ball 1974, 70-71).

Lacking wide availability of recording technology, Futurist and Dada sound poetry focused on print or performance. With increased availability of multimedia, and as influenced by electronic literature, sound poetry has become little films, intended primarily for viewing, words without voice.

Sound and electronic literature

Historically, sound has augmented electronic literature. In 2006, Dene Grigar concluded that the majority of sound(s) in works of electronic literature provided background, context, or basis for interaction with the text (Grigar, 2006).

Why this paucity of sound? Bernstein proposes the term “frame lock” to describe how focus on one particular aspect within any frame of reference diverts attention from others. Bernstein calls these overlooked features the “disattend track” and notes, “within text-bound literary studies, the disattend track may include such features as the visual representation of the language as well as its acoustic structure” (Bernstein 1994).

In 2008, at the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) conference in Vancouver, Washington, United States, Kenneth Sherwood noted several works of electronic literature then archived by the ELO that featured strong sonic components:

The meditation on listening and indeterminacy of Stuart Moulthrop’s *Radio Salience* and [Reiner] Strasser and [Alan] Sondheim’s *Dawn*; the foregrounding of sound-track in Young-Hae Chang’s pseudo-filmic flash poems, the adoption of “edit to the beat” techniques of MTV and television commercials in [Giselle] Beiguelman’s *Code Movie 1*; the privileging of audio in the remix rhythms in Babel [Chris Joseph] and Esha’s *Urbanalities*; the witty, instrumental score for the kinetic word ballet of [Robert] Kendall’s *Faith*; the user-driven audio collages of [Maria] Mencia’s *Birds Singing Other Birds’ Songs* and [Jim] Andrew’s *Nio*; the triggered, synthetic sound of [Damien Everett and Melinda] Rackham’s *carrier (becoming symborg)*; and the ambient drone and crackle accompanying Geniwate’s [and Brian Kim Stefan’s] *Generative Poetry* (Sherwood 2008).

So, to be fair, there are examples of electronic literature where we can point to the use of sound(s) as a central narrative element. But, procedurally, the ELO argues, on its website under the heading “What is E-Lit?”, that while electronic literature “can intersect with conceptual and sound arts . . . reading and writing remain central to the literary arts.” From this statement, one might surmise the ELO argues reading and writing as the basis for literature. Sound augments these literary acts (Barber 2014).

Practically, Internet and World Wide Web bandwidth circa early 2000s did not support transmission of large audio files. One hopes a more robust web environment, with increased throughput capabilities, will promote forms of electronic literature where sound assumes a more prominent role.

Based on this conceptual framework, I suggest (re)mixing, (re)combining, and/or (re)conceptualizing sound artifacts from works of electronic literature no longer readily accessible to create new, sound-based narratives. I explore

this scenario through discussion of my efforts with *Under Language* (Moulthrop, 2007) and *34 North 118 West* (Hight, Knowlton, and Spellman 2002-2003).

In this exploration, I leverage Stuart Moulthrop’s concept of “under language” and Jeremy Hight’s “narrative archaeology” to promote new, sound-based narratives faithful to their heritage as artifacts from earlier, more expansive works, even while pointing to new narrative approaches that position sound(s) as an important and integral affordance of future forms of literature.

The *techne* proposed promotes broader opportunities for conceptualizing and creating literary artifacts characterized by audibility of text, sound as text and meaning, and heightened awareness of the author’s and/or speaker’s voice(s) in the text. This approach may help challenge the past invisibility of voice in literature.

Under Language

Pioneering electronic literature author Stuart Moulthrop released *Under Language* in 2007. Moulthrop calls this work a “literary instrument,” an artifact akin to literature but structured like a game (Moulthrop 2007). The work features a screen display interface that responds to mouse clicks. Few instructions are provided for interaction, leaving the reader-player to learn the rules for the work.²

Using a visual, game-like, interactive interface, users select ten lines of text for a poem. When all ten lines are selected, the program displays them on screen, along with a closing graphic, chosen by the program to reflect the quality of the final text. The user can repeat as many times as desired for different poems.

Moulthrop’s title, *Under Language*, speaks to the underlying computer code that drives the work, the necessity to notice how writing intersects code, and the consequences of a collision (collusion?) when poetry meets code.³

² Moulthrop maintains a dedicated, archival website for *Under Language* here: <http://www.smoulthrop.com/lit/ul/>. Moulthrop notes that he borrowed the term “literary instrument” from John Cayley “many years ago to describe things that might look like literature, but also like structures for play, though not necessarily what we would call games. In fact, this one lies pretty close to game space, having rules, a scoring system (albeit invisible), and even a simple *agon* [struggle or contest] in which you compete against the perversity of the puzzle-maker, and constraints of the clock” (Moulthrop 2007).

³ About the origin of the term “under language,” Moulthrop says, “The phrase ‘under-language’ was invented by the comics artist, Alan Moore, in an interview he gave in the early 1980s. He used it to describe the essence of comics art, which is neither verbal nor visual, but something that underlies and infuses both modes. The term gets at the essence behind Moore’s great genius for irony and verbal-visual puns. It also provides a convenient reminder that everything, these days, tends to mean more than it seems” (Moulthrop 2007).

So, “under language” underlies and infuses *Under Language*, which is, fundamentally, a generative textual work, meant to be experienced visually, on the screen. But the brilliance of this work is Moulthrop’s sonification of the underlying five layers of computer code. The first is a series of computer-voiced renditions of ActionScripts programmed by Moulthrop that operate the work. The second layer is a series of ambient recorded collages of tunings across radio broadcasts. The third level consists of pseudo-code, again voiced by text-to-speech technology. Comments and summaries, ostensibly voiced by the ten-line poem at the heart of this work, constitute the fourth level. The fifth level is an audio collage, where the poem’s ten lines are each vocalized, as well as comments seemingly from the poem’s self-awareness of its creation.

These vocalized narratives of the “under language” for Moulthrop’s work are not specifically ordered, but rather assembled from reader-player choices of lines for a generated poem. Still, the result provides unprecedented access to the interactive affordances beyond the programs screen-based visual displays.

Moulthrop’s point is that under language (the underlying code) is the language of computer programming, and is inseparable from the work titled *Under Language*. With *Under Language*, the work, he argues that to experience electronic literature we need to appreciate the underlying code.⁴

In response, I argue that *Under Language*, the work, rather than a visual work is an example of sound-based electronic literature. Hearing the under language of the computer programming vocalized we understand the presence of hidden narratives concurrently creating and commenting upon our experience of the work’s visualization, and, indeed, speaking the larger context for its experience. Rather than visuals augmented by audio, *Under Language* is a work of electronic literature where sound is augmented by visuals, where sound is at the heart of the literary experience.

Using sound files from *Under Language* provided by Moulthrop, I created an audio narrative by arranging individual sound files following their numbering from Moulthrop’s original content database to establish arbitrary sequen-

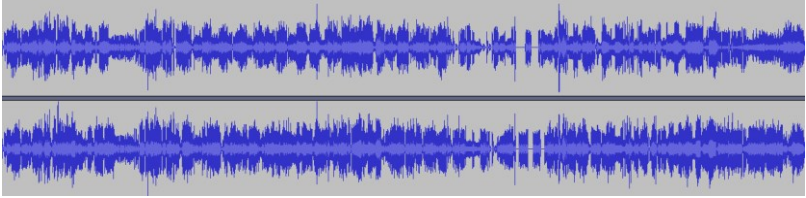
⁴ Similar to *Under Language*, Moulthrop’s *Radio Saliency* (2007) is an interactive image-text-sound instrument with a game-like interface that explores indeterminacy, accident, and resonance, taking as its muse the breathless voice of the airwaves and radio. Using sound files supplied by Moulthrop, I created a sonic narrative artifact for this work of electronic literature. For more information and a listening opportunity, please visit my *Radio Saliency* archival website:

<http://www.nospace.net/john/archive/radioelo/moulthrop/radiosalience/radiosalience.html>

Patterned after the first video game, Pong, Moulthrop’s *Sc4nda1 in New Media* (2012) explores new forms of writing in digital contexts. Using sound files supplied by Moulthrop, I created a sonic narrative artifact for this work of electronic literature. For more information and a listening opportunity, please visit my *Sc4nda1 in New Media* archival website:

<http://www.nospace.net/john/archive/radioelo/moulthrop/sc4nda1/sc4nda1.html>

tial, if nonlinear, order. Other methodologies could be used. As with the original work, there are five layers to this reconceptualized narrative: computer-voiced renditions of ActionScripts, ambient recorded collages of tunings across radio broadcasts, pseudo-code, again voiced by text-to-speech technology, comments and summaries, ostensibly voiced by the ten-line poem at the heart of this work, and an audio collage. The reader-player is responsible for making sense of the artifact.⁵



<http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/matlit/article/view/3777/4162>

A sound narrative created by John Barber using sound files supplied by Stuart Moulthrop from the electronic literature work, *Under Language*.

Narrative Archaeology

Jeremy Hight, with Jeff Knowlton and Naomi Spellman, created and released 34 North 118 West in 2002-2003 as the first location-aware narrative. Originally a wireless guided tour for an art museum, this pioneering locative narrative combined audio, digital media, and Global Positioning System technology (GPS) to create an interactive sound-based story about a once thriving railroad depot situated at 34 North latitude, 118 West longitude in downtown Los Angeles, California, during the first half of the 20th century.

Participants walked through the four-block area mapped for the project, then a bleak industrial zone, with a laptop computer, a GPS device, and headphones. GPS tracked and overlaid their position on a map of the area displayed on the computer screen. Easily identifiable locations were also displayed. Approaching these locations, participants triggered audio narratives and soundscapes created from historic, ethnographic, and architectural information about the area.

Other sound effects—squeaking wooden cart wheels and musicians entertaining on busy street corners—were triggered by hidden GPS locations, each waiting to be discovered by wandering participants. The idea was for these sounds to connect physical locations with events, activities, narratives, and lives of a past dismissed by urban change. Signs, displays, and other physical elements and details at each location augmented the narratives, and

⁵ See my *Under Language* archival website for more information and a listening opportunity: <http://www.nospace.net/john/radioelo/moulthrop/underlanguage/underlanguage.html>

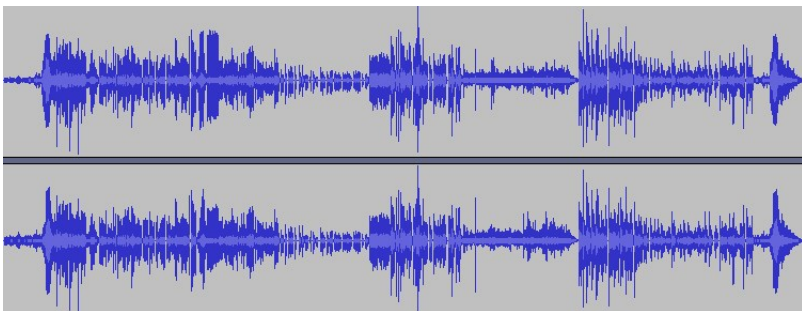
provided interaction(s) with the characters and history of the area defined by the geographic coordinates 34 North 118 West.

Hight argued 34 North 118 West provided a methodology for recovering lost historical, cultural, and ethnographical narratives at the work's focal location. As participants moved throughout the space, triggering narratives, they developed a sense of the work's larger scope and concept. These narratives of forgotten or faded histories, lost buildings, tensions of past persons still present, all buried in memory, could, Hight contended, return with sufficient ability to sustain listeners simultaneously in two separate realities at the same location, one present, the other past (Hight 2015).

This approach to storytelling—Hight calls it “narrative archaeology”—helps organize forgotten historical and cultural information into meaningful narratives about a place, a time, and people, pulling them, as sections and/or layers in time, into present view and hearing. Hight contends this provides a way to recover the past (Hight 2005 and 2006).

34 North 118 West, both the original location and the work of electronic literature, are no longer available. Both are buried in the shifting detritus of history, memory, and change. Using sound files provided by Hight and Knowlton, I created an audio narrative that recovers some of the aural experience of the work. My simulacra does not reproduce the original experience of uncovering the various narratives while walking about the story's setting, but it does allow an acousmatic surround experience far more compelling than reading textual transcriptions of the original sound-based narratives.

In my (re)combination, I utilized an Aristotelian, linear narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end, with the sound of a passing train as bookends. Other approaches could be utilized. The results from any approach is for the sound-based narratives of 34 North 118 West, the place, to return and revive 34 North 118 West, the work of electronic literature, as an immersive experience.⁶



<http://impactum-journals.uc.pt/matlit/article/view/3777/4162>

A sound narrative created by John Barber using sound files supplied by Jeremy Hight from the electronic literature work, *34 North 118 West*.

⁶ See my *34 North 118 West* archival webpage for more information and a listening opportunity: <http://www.nospace.net/john/radioelo/34n118w/34n118w.html>

So what?

What does all this mean? Why is it important? I have several responses. First, sound soon disappears, but is capable of returning. Using sound artifacts from *Under Language and 34 North 118 West*, I demonstrated a *techne* for (re)combining, (re)configuring, and/or (re)imagining those sounds to promote further engagement with the original works.

Applied to other works of electronic literature, no longer available or difficult to access, (re)combining and/or (re)conceptualizing recovered sound artifacts provides a compelling way to tease out additional sound-based literary experiences.

The proposed *techne* promotes broader opportunities for conceptualizing and creating literary artifacts characterized by audibility of text, sound as text and meaning, and heightened awareness of the author’s/speaker’s voice(s) in the text. This approach may help challenge the past invisibility of voice in literature.

We might consider the sound-based artifacts created in this way as concurrent aspects of a single narrative, sonic bridges connecting past and present. The return of sound prompts users’ imaginations and expresses a second sense or esoteric meaning regarding the original work.

Marshall McLuhan speaks to sound bridges when he connects sound with a “subliminal echo chamber” capable of evoking memories and/or associations long forgotten or ignored (McLuhan 1964, 264). And, as noted earlier, Alan Hall says, listening opens a “portal through which a deeper, often inarticulate, consciousness can be glimpsed” (Hall 2010, 99). Such glimpses may promote imagination, interaction, even immersion. Tim Crook says sound very effectively prompts life from little details “seen” in the mind’s eye (Crook 1999, 8).

But sound(s) must be heard. Composer, performer, and poet Jaap Blonk says that, “Hearing is everywhere. And it knocks at every window of your cochlea. . . . You hear! You hear, you hear sound! Sound” (Blonk 2008, 32, 33).

What do we hear? When we listen to voice, quite a lot. Composer Trevor Wishart notes the “richness and complexity of everyday sounds,” especially those associated with the human voice, and says, “The voice connects with so many things. When we speak we not only convey meanings but we portray things about ourselves, simple things like what gender we are or whether we are ill or healthy, but also, perhaps, what our intentions are, what our mood is” (Wishart 2008, 71).

At the heart of voice are words. Laurie Anderson calls words “magic,” and says they can change people’s minds. “There are no more powerful things in the world than words” (Anderson 2008, 184).

Cathy Lane notes a social, cultural, and political power in words, as well as the opportunity for “artistic intervention” to bridge the gaps between the semantic and abstract components of words (Lane 2008, 10).

One form of intervention is remixing, a theory and practice following work(s) by John Cage, Brion Gysin, William S. Burroughs, François Dufrêne, Kurt Schwitters, and Henri Chopin—sound poets, text sound artists, composers, and verbal experimenters—storytellers all. Paul Miller (aka DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid) describes remixing as “Lay[ing] one metaphor onto the other, remix[ing], and press[ing] play. The sampling machine can handle any sound, and any expression. . . . Form and function, fact and fiction, art and architecture—all woven into a testimony of human reconstruction in media” (Miller 2008, 6, 8).

To anticipate future use of this *techne*, suppose that only the sound files survive, or are the most easily accessible artifact from works of electronic literature no longer readily available. (Re)combining, (re)mixing these sound files to create compelling listening experiences could return faded, forgotten, lost sounds with sufficient ability to sustain engagement with the original work, as well as trigger associative narratives in readers’ imaginations, thus providing a sense of the work’s larger scope and concept. By (re)combining aural artifacts we can provide and preserve sound narratives that are at once faithful to their heritage and indicative of a fluid creative element involved in the construction and manipulation of electronic literary experiences.

What’s next?

The intent of this essay is to consider new approaches to sound(s) associated with electronic and/or experimental literature and/or writing. I have imagined here voice as a node of deformations and technological appropriations, virtual interpretations, and (re)readings, all supportive of the performance of voice as a basis for electronic literature.

Following this theme, I described (re)combining and/or (re)conceptualizing sound artifacts from two pioneering works of electronic literature no longer readily accessible to create a new, sound-based narrative for each work.

The concept and practice of (re)combining and/or (re)conceptualizing “under language” (Moulthrop 2012) and “narrative archaeology” (Hight 2015, 2006, 2005) prompts a *techne* (technology, practice, and aesthetics) for creating literary artifacts characterized by audibility of text, sound as text and meaning, and heightened awareness of the author’s and/or speaker’s voice(s) in the text.

Combining and overlaying performance, technology, and literature prompts interesting (re)mediations, (re)presentations, and (re)productions of literary artifacts, objects, and events that challenge the past invisibility of

voice in literature and promote engagement and interaction more rewarding than emulation, description, or transcription.

These combinations will also encourage tensions: between text and meaning, between physical and virtual presence of the author(s), and between literature as concept and experience. Such tensions foreground questions, and further consideration:

What is the connection between sound(s) and literature?
What role(s) has sound(s) played in literature past?
What role(s) might sound(s) play in literature future?
What conditions of and for new listening are emerging with the continual development of new media as a system for communicating new ideas in new ways?
Can we conceive of works of literature that are based primarily on sound(s)?
Can we expect new, unheard (of) sound(s) that will challenge our ability to listen and configure sonic narratives?⁷

Increased technical capabilities, new aesthetics, and a new *techne* regarding utilizing sound(s) will challenge our thinking about and practice of the materialities of literature. Works yet to be produced will surely be interesting. Listen. Vox Media. Sound in/as literature. From something, seemingly nothing, comes something more.

References

- AARSETH, Espen (2015). “Electronic Literature. What Is It?” Keynote address presented at the Electronic Literature Organization Conference, Bergen, Norway, August 5.
- ANDERSON, Laurie (2008). “Interviewed by Cathy Lane.” *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice*. Ed. Cathy Lane. London: CRISAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice). 180-185.
- BALL, Hugo (1974). *Dei Flucht aus der Zeit* [Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary]. Translated by Ann Raimés. New York: Viking Press. 70-71.
- BARBER, John (2014). “Internet Radio and Electronic Literature: Locating the Text in Aural Narratives.” *ebr (electronic book review)* 3 May. <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/internetradio>
- (2016). “Sound and Electronic Literature: ‘Under Language’ and ‘Narrative Archaeology’.” International Conference on Digital Media

⁷ My curatorial project radioELO, conceived for the 2014 ELO Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, intended to collect, and then curate, spoken voice, soundtracks, soundscapes, and sound collages associated with works of electronic literature. See my archival webpage for more information and a listening opportunity: <http://www.nouspace.net/john/archive/radioelo/radioelo.html>.

- and Textuality. Universität Bremen, Germany, 3-5 November 2016. <https://shapeshiftingtexts.wordpress.com>
- BERNSTEIN, Charles (1994). "Frame Lock." *College Literature* 21.2 (June). 25 Aug. 2017. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/essays/frame-lock.html>. [See also 1992 Modern Language Association conference as part of a panel entitled "Framing the Frame: Theory and Practice"]
- , ed. (1998). *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Oxford University Press.
- BLONK, Jaap (2008). "Sound." *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice*. Ed. Cathy Lane. London: CRiSAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice). 31-33.
- BULL, Michael and Les Back (2003). "Introduction." *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 1-18.
- COWEN, Amy (2002). "Talking Photos: Interview with David Frohlich." *Mpulse, A Cooltown Magazine*, June. Originally at www.cooltown.com/mpulse/0602-thinker.asp but no longer available.
- CROOK, Tim (1999). *Radio Drama. Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- ELECTRONIC LITERATURE ORGANIZATION (2015). 25 Aug. 2017. <http://eliterature.org/what-is-e-lit/>
- FELD, Stephen (2003). "A Rainforest Acoustemology." *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 223-239.
- FERRINGTON, Gary (1994). "Audio Design: Creating Multi-Sensory Images For The Mind," *Journal of Visual Literacy* 14.1: 61-67.
- GRIGAR, Dene (2006). "The Role of Sound in Electronic Literature." No longer online but formerly available at *trAce Online Writing Center*. <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/Opinion/index.cfm?article=140>
- HALL, Alan (2010). "Cigarettes and Dance Steps." *Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound*. Ed. John Biewen and Alexa Dilworth. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 99. <http://realityradiobook.org/>
- HIGHT, Jeremy (2005). "Narrative Archeology: Reading the Landscape." Paper presented at Media in Transition Conference: The Work of Stories, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 6-8. 25 Aug. 2017. <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit4/papers/hight.pdf>
- (2006). "Views from Above: Locative Narrative and the Landscape." *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* Vol 14, 7.8 (30 November). [Special issue, "Wild Nature and the Digital Life"] 25 Aug. 2017. http://leoalmanac.org/journal/vol_14/lea_v14_n07-08/jhight.asp.
- (2015). "Narrative Archaeology." *academia.edu*. 25 Aug. 2017. http://www.academia.edu/203311/narrative_archaeology.
- HIGHT, Jeremy, Jeff Knowlton, Naomi Spellman (2002-2003). *34 North 118 West*. <http://34n118w.net/>

- IHDE, Don (2003). “Auditory Imagination.” *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 61-66. [First published in Ihde, Don (1976). *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*. Ohio University Press, Athens. 133-139.]
- LANE, Cathy (2008). “Forward.” *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice*. Ed. Cathy Lane. London: CRISAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice). 7-11
- MCLUHAN, Marshall (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- MIGONE, Christof (2001). “Headhole: Malfunctions and Dysfunctions of an FM Exciter.” *Experimental Sound & Radio*. Ed. Allen S. Weiss. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 42-52.
- MILLER, Paul D. (2008). “In through the Out Door.” *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*. Ed. Paul Miller. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 6-8.
- MOULTHROP, Stuart (2012). “Sc4nda1 in New Media.” *Dichtung Digital: A Journal of Art and Culture in Digital Media*, 41.9 (November). 25 Aug. 2017. <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2012/41/moulthrop/snm/>.
- (2007). *Radio Salience*. Center for Digital Discourse and Culture. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. 25 Aug. 2017. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/journals/newriver/07Spring/moulthrop/radioSalience/index.htm>.
- (2007). *Under Language*. 25 Aug. 2017. <http://www.smoulthrop.com/lit/ul/>
- MURCH, Walter (2005). “Womb Tone,” *Transom Review* 5.1. 25 Aug. 2017. <http://transom.org/2005/walter-murch-part-1/>
- SCHAFFER, R. Murray (1977). *The Tuning of the World: A Pioneering Exploration Into the Past History and Present State of the Most Neglected Aspect Of Our Environment: The Soundscape*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto. [See also Schaffer, R. Murray (1993). *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books, Rochester, Vermont adapted from *The New Soundscape* (1966) and *The Tuning of the World* (1977)]
- SHERWOOD, Kenneth (2008). “From Audio Black to Artful Noises: Looking at Sound in Electronic Literature.” Paper presented at the Electronic Literature Organization Conference, Vancouver, WA, May 2008. 25 Aug. 2017. <http://elmcip.net/critical-writing/audio-black-artful-noises-looking-sound-electronic-literature>
- SMITH, Bruce R. (2003). “Tuning into London c. 1600.” *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 127-135.
- SUROWIECKI, James (2004). *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations*. New York: Doubleday.

WISHART, Trevor (2008). Interviewed by Cathy Lane. In *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice*. Ed. Cathy Lane. London: CRISAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice). 70-72.

© 2017 John F. Barber.

Licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).