The Sounds of Obsolescence in the Age of Digital Re-Production

This practice-based research focuses on creating a series of sound sculptures that establish a narrative between the past and present through the convergence of obsolete and current media technologies. Within the transdisciplinary frame of media archaeology, new methods of inquiry into the obsolete object’s engagement and relationship with current media technologies may emerge that defamiliarize current narratives. Using a practice-based research approach, the process of defining, producing and refining the art works will be supported by an exegesis that contextualises and interprets the knowledge embodied in these works. By discursively revealing aesthetic and artistic intentions in this way the artefact and the process of its creation become sources of embodied knowledge and artistic method. This research contributes to existing practice-based discourse by providing new insights into the process of making, interpreting and contextualising sound-based art informed by media archaeology.
1 INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research uses the “potentials of the media archaeological method” to provide a rich vein of information from which to conceptualise and create object-based sound installations (Parikka, 2012, 2). The novelty is that by articulating the research as media archaeological, the works are explicitly contextualised and the research is engaged as such, an approach which is relatively uncommon. As an art practice, the object-based sound installation (which works with physical artefacts rather than sound alone) can be one way of re-presencing the obsolete object and its relationship alongside new media technologies. Informed by media archaeology, new perspectives on the object can emerge that defamiliarise common historical narrative. As a method of research, writing about the making process can reveal the artist’s aesthetic and intellectual intentions and experiential knowledge that may otherwise be left to an audience’s interpretation. By writing about the creative process, and my aesthetic and intellectual intentions, in conjunction with analysis of the artefact itself, I therefore aim to articulate insights into my artistic practice, its relationship to the cultural context and theoretical practices which inform it, and to do so in ways that will inform future work.

2 RELATED WORKS

Characteristics of the object-based sound installation and/or a media archaeological approach provide a lens to interpret works and gain insights into the relationship between old and new media, the artist and the audience and the artist’s relationship with the artefact. Examples include Ethan Rose’s Reflection, Martin Messier’s SEWING MACHINE ORCHESTRA and Projectors and Zimoun’s works using common objects such as cardboard boxes and small motors. Nicholas Bernier has drawn inspiration for his sound-based art from historical ideas and objects. An example, Frequencies (A/Oscillation), draws from the experiments of 19th century physicist Jules Lissajous who first discovered a method for visualising sound. Paul DeMarinis is an artist who adopts a media archaeological approach to create works that “construct alternative and hypothetical media histories.” (Parikka 2011, 14) Examples of this approach include The Messenger, Gray Matter and Firebirds. The author’s own work, Click, is an example of the media archaeological method used to conceptualise and create an object-based sound installation (Dunham et al. 2018). A series of Brownie Box cameras is re-presented in a quasi-digital context, disrupting a commonly held belief of analogue as old and digital as new. Recontextualising the Brownie Box in this way defamiliarises the presentation of digital information through a familiar medium.

3 METHODOLOGY

Initially, a framework of practices proposed by Graham Sullivan will provide the basis for the research methodology. He suggests that by delving into “the-
oretical, conceptual, dialectical and contextual practices through artmaking”, the artist-researcher can take an audience “to where we’ve never been, to see what we’ve never seen” then “they bring us back and help us look again at what we thought we knew.” (Sullivan 2009, 62) The author will create a series of artefacts that establish a narrative between the past and present through the convergence of obsolete and current media technologies. An exegesis will give each artefact a voice, revealing the embodied knowledge that has been collected and preserved by the author through the process of making.

4 CONTRIBUTION

An approach informed by media archaeology to create sound-based art can provide the possibility of new and unexpected insights into the object as a “temporally displaced” artefact within the present (Burges 2013, 90-91). The practice-based method further extends the existing bodies of knowledge in this field, in media archaeology informed sound-based art and as a unique contribution across all three areas of research and practice.

5 PROGRESS

The research is progressing towards the submission of a full research proposal. An audio-visual installation based on the sonification of a mid-20th century book of random number tables has been completed and exhibited. A second sound installation based on the juxtaposition of telegraph technology with current communication media is currently in development.

REFERENCES


Dunham, Paul and Zareei, Mo. “Click: an Audiovisual Sound Sculpture” in Proceedings of the 24th International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA2018), Durban, South Africa, 227-232, 2018
