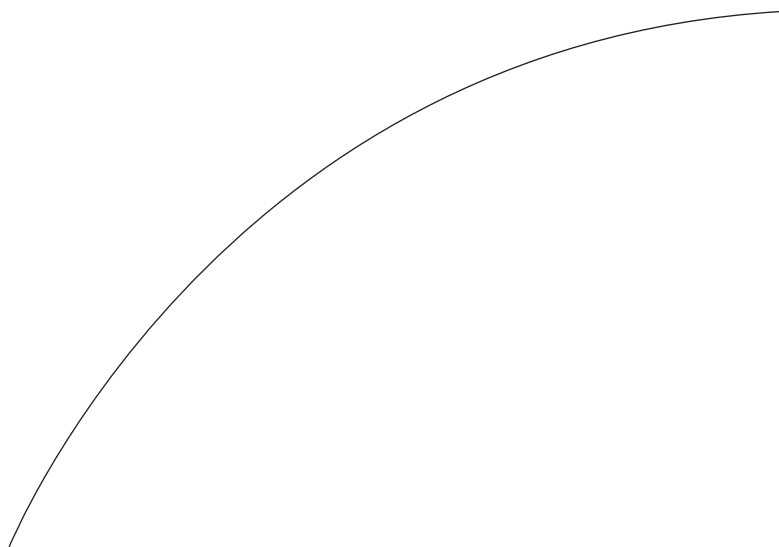


BENDING THE AIR, AGAIN



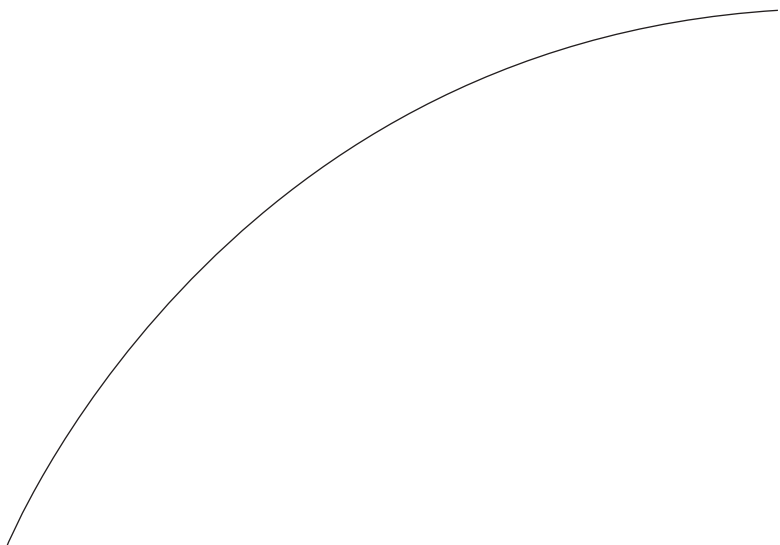
Cédric Maridet

a project commissioned by:



<http://www.thelibrarybysoundpocket.org.hk/listen/bending-the-air-again/>

Bending the air, again is a project that aims to revisit a collection of sound recordings gathered in various places in Hong Kong over the years through listening and writing. Sound samples are selected from my collection, and are explored again as they become the starting point for stories, pieces of writings mixing memories real or fictitious, sonorous or topical elements from these recordings or any other relevant characteristics, as well as any other selected borrowed materials. With Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum* (the Forest of forest) as faraway reference, being an attempt to gather histories from observations, experiments and more established borrowed writings, this project creates an experimental form of knowledge taken the form of disparate pieces of writings. Freely borrowing from this particular form of questioning a subject, this project is about the juxtaposition of writing and recording, taking advantage of the acousmatic situation of listening to linger in the sensation again and aiming at providing a vast forest of material of new encounters.



BENDING THE AIR, AGAIN

Prelude

I switch on the light of the storage room, and wait for a few seconds before the jerking light of the neon stops blinding me, and before the buzzing of its ballast settles. Knowing precisely what I was aiming at, I pull the drawer of the white metallic structure where different types of equipments - cables, microphones, old electronic parts - are sitting. I take out a few boxes, and find what I was after: a few 3.5 inches and 2.5 inches hard disks, all covered with a thin layer of small particles of dust. I become anxious, first to know that they are all functioning properly, and also to know what sort of things I would discover. In a world where pretty much all memories are left to clusters on hard drives, and where it is thought that they are safe with us at anytime, just a click away. How many phone numbers do I remember by heart? Well, I still remember my Hong Kong number for sure, but please don't ask me the number I use when I am in France, or any other numbers that I should remember. I think to myself: "How do I actually make use of these memory blocks left unused?" I leave these words lingering in the air, and bouncing off the walls of my Sheung Wan studio, while I am successfully managing to prevent to getting hit by them again, leaving the question unsolved.

What am I after with these old hard disk in hands? The only thing I know is that I am aiming for sounds. For some years, I go to places, far away or simply around the corner to place microphones and listen. I would use these recordings in compositions, installations or videos. In fact many of these recordings would remain unused, unheard. Yet, I would keep recording these sounds from the environment.

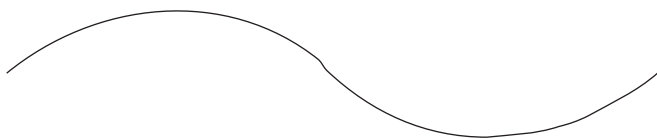
I reach Pierre Schaeffer's *Treatise of Musical Sound Objects*,¹ as I remember he tries to describe different sound units, his "sound objects", into different types. Yes, that's it, starting from page 434, where Schaeffer opposes objects that are "well balanced" to objects that are not. He labels sound objects as suitable for the musical composer and others as "too predictable" or "too original", hence making them unsuitable for composition. This very normative view on types of sound object is obviously very arguable for a man who was searching for a way to invent a solfège that would deal with any kind of sounds. He suddenly seems to reject possibly quite a large portion of the sound spectrum. This

¹ Pierre Schaeffer, 1966. *Traité des Objets Musicaux*, Editions du Seuil, Paris

particular point of his classification is certainly not suitable for me. There are probably other reasons behind the fact that I did not use the sounds that are waiting in these hard disks for any particular works so far.

Don't they deserve a second chance? I always think that sound is somehow a better vehicle than photography to carry memories; probably a sign of my own bias. Yet, what will I remember when I listen to old sound recordings? What is there to be listened to? What stories do they unfold? What does this collection of sound means? With these questions in mind, I take one of these hard disks, talking to myself out loud, with an amused thought for Beckett's Krapp,² and start to look for recordings, as I am decided to make them bend the air, again.

² Samuel Beckett, 1998 Krapp's Last Tape and Ember's, Faber & Faber (first published 1958)



[see sea]

“Can you hear me? (Pause.) Yes, you must hear me. (Pause.) To answer me? (Pause.) No, you don't answer me. (Pause.) Just be with me. (Pause.)”

Yes. These are Henry's words in Beckett's *Embers*.³ Let him continue a little as he goes on:

“That sound you hear is the sea. (Pause. Louder.) I say that sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. (Pause.) I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was. (Pause.)”

No. That is clearly water. (Pause.) I say this is clearly water, not Henry. (Pause.) Actually, not. This is clearly liquid. Sea, river, pond, bay, cape, channel, cove, delta, estuary, gulf, lagoon, lake, marsh, ocean, shoal, spring, stream, swamp, pond, strait, sound, source? (Pause.) Now it crackles. Layers of small grains crackling. Is this liquid ? (Pause.)

Henry, can you hear me? (Pause.) Yes, you must hear me. (Pause.) To answer me? (Pause.) No, you don't answer me. (Pause.) Just be with me. (Pause.)

³ Samuel Beckett, 1998 Krapp's Last Tape and *Ember's*, Faber & Faber (first published 1958)

[different shores]

I sit down on the white bench soaked in sun and salty breeze. The heat is pressing me down, questioning my stay on this metallic seat. Looking around, it seems no other alternative is possible unless I resign myself to get into the refrigerated cabin. I will stay here among young couples and tourists. I am, also, about to go rambling with the promise of a better land, away from the roaring concrete. A stronger blow of wind sends me clouds of fumes from the above chimney of the ferry boat, and makes me realise in an interesting transfer of sensation that although I am supposedly at a very particular viewpoint, from which the whole scenery will unfold nicely, I am also at the back of the boat, in a location where the air conditioning system and the boat engine are rehearsing a distorted version of Charlemagne Palestine's *Negative Sound Study*.⁴ The wind, as an uninvited player begins to join and brings intensity modulations to the whole performance. A sign that the bank is going further away. Like Baudelaire in its *Drunken Boat*, "As I was floating down unconcerned Rivers / I no longer felt myself steered by the haulers." Totally immersed in the performance, the colourful rusty cargos and small junks, and other embarkations of all sizes and shapes are mirages in the heat shimmering on this unstable blue desert.

It is moving. I am wandering. I do not have any specific aim or goal. I don't know anyone on this island. Yet I am here. I remember Raymond Depardon's introduction in his book *Errance* in which he explains how one day he received a fax with a text from Alexandre Laumonier entitled *Wandering or thinking the milieu*. The text began like this:

"wandering, a term at the same time explicit and vague, is ordinarily associated to movement, and singularly to walking, to the idea of getting lost, the lost of one-self. However, the principal problem of wandering is nothing else than the problem of the acceptable place. The wanderer in search of the acceptable place is placed in a very peculiar space, an intermediate space. To the intermediate space corresponds in fact an intermediate time, a temporality that one could qualify of floating. This floating time is the time of the look on history, when the wanderer ponders upon the past, while he/she thinks about his/her near future."

The text goes on:

"the wanderer disappears, becomes silent, engages in the experience of the world, that is why there is no immobile wandering." Depardon ends

⁴ from the album in mid-air, 2009 Alga Marghen

this long quoted passage from Laumonier with the essential question: “as wandering is neither the travel, nor a trip , etc. but rather: what am I doing here?”⁵

The engine changes its tone suddenly, letting space for an unidentified soloist to manifest itself. Human voices. An island is approaching. In a last blast, the engine finishes its part, letting the sea taking over accompanied by the continuous tone of the air conditioning. Time of disembarkment, activity regained. My floating orchestra is finally letting other sounds to be heard, not without last signs of fights.

A door bangs. A different land. I am among humans again.

I am walking.

What am I doing here?

⁵ Raymond Depardon, *Errance*, Seuil, 2000, p 12-13. The text of Laumonier has been published in Laumonier, Alexandre. “L’Errance ou La Pensée du Milieu”. *Magazine Littéraire*, L’Errance de Cervantès aux Écrivains Voyageurs, Avril 1997(21).

[uncanny]

When David Toop mentions about sound as being uncanny, he calls upon Freud who wrote about the fact that often anxieties could come from childhood fear of experiences of darkness and silences: “Freud’s description of the uncanny as eerie or frightening, the unhomely sensations arising from that which is unfamiliar and uncertain, particularly when they are once familiar feelings that have become secret or repressed, extended to the uncanny nature of silence and darkness. Inconclusively, at the end of his famous essay, he attributed this to infantile anxieties that none of us fully overcome. Such fears may be childish, but they are rooted in very deep memories of unknown sounds and series silences overheard in the dark.”⁶

I am maybe 5 or 6. Numbers again fail me. I am lying down on my side on my metallic red framed bed. Outside darkness fills the quiet garden surrounding the house. My fingers run against the texture of the flowery wallpaper. Following different paths, there are mountains, valleys and lakes whose shape is defined by small portions of torn wallpaper that have been ripped over time leaving behind exposed pulp of paper against my fingertips. Soft rocky banks. Having exhausted the landscape, I turn on my stomach, my head on the side, pressing my right ear against the pillow.

Vibrations.

They are regular, or so it seemed in the beginning. One, two, one, two, three, one, two, one, one, one, one, one, one, one, one, two.

In *Critique of Rhythm: A Historical Anthropology of Language*, Henry Meschonnic recalls some of Paul Valéry’s words on rhythm dealing with a physiological model for it: “It is remarkable that conventions of regular poetry, rimes, fixed cesura, equal numbers of syllables or of foot imitate the monotonous regime of the living body’s machinery, and maybe proceed from this fundamental functions’ mechanism, which repeat the act of life, add element of life to element of life, and build the time of life among things, like an edifice of coral rising in the sea.”⁷

Vibrations spread from my thorax to the mattress, from the mattress to the pillow, from the pillow to my outer ear, from my outer ear to my ear canal, from my ear canal to the eardrum, from the eardrum to the three

⁶ David Toop, *Sinister Resonance*, continuum, 2010, p. xiv

⁷ Paul Valéry in Henri Meschonnic, *Critique of Rhythm: A Historical Anthropology of Language*, éditions Verdier, 1982, p. 175

bones of my middle ear, from my middle ear to my cochlea. The sound seems inside my body, yet vibrations are felt on my skin. A long corridor, rhythmic footsteps resonating, dark floating images, suspended breath and faster beating. "It is not the repetition that creates rhythm, but it's the rhythm that allows repetition," says Valery.⁸ One, two, one, one, one, two. In a move sideways, it stops. Yearning for the lost rhythm in the silence of the room, until sleep fades everything out.

A small earthquake under my feet that feels stronger and stronger as I'm walking to the sound blindly. On the tiny slope road, I arrive at a barricade, inside of which, metal cranes supporting mechanical devices relentlessly pierce the ground. One, two, three, four, three, four, there is no partition for these four prepared instruments. The heavyweight is rising again, in anticipation to be released and make the pole disappear into the soil. There are no foundations or scales for these improvised patterns. On each periodic vertical movement of the weight, vibrations radiate horizontally from its impact point, extending their territory through any other surfaces it encounters as their intensities diminish. Only passing cars and buses are playing their own score, disregarding the changing landscape.

Vibrations stop in a final hit. Loud silence.

⁸ *ibidem*, p.174

[anonymous]

From the top, it sounds less clear than the view. The contour of buildings, antennas, foliage are precisely identifiable, and even their density does not seem to bring so much sense of confusion. Sounds are everywhere and yet nowhere. Where are the sounds? Are they at the location of my hearing, are they at the source? Are they in an in-between?

My view from the top is clearly a vantage point for only a certain type of perception. I can easily imagine a viewpoint indicator, naming all the different elements that constitute the landscape, a useful tool for the captain in Mérimé's *Columba*: "The schooner was already within sight of Corsica. The captain pointed out the principal features of the coast, and, though all of these were absolutely unknown to Miss Lydia, she found a certain pleasure in hearing their names; nothing is more tiresome than an anonymous landscape."⁹ I am lost in the sensation of this anonymous landscape. In a playful will to reclaim my land, the land where my feet are grounded, I run among the floors, naming and reading my immediate landscape, making it mine, being the sole captain of this abandoned ship, stranded in the middle of Hong Kong."

"701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 614, 613, 612, 611, 610, 609, 608, 607, 606, 605, 604, 603, 602, 601, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 414, 413, 412, 411, 410, 409, 408, 407, 406, 405, 404, 403, 402, 401, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 214, 213, 212, 211, 210, 209, 208, 207, 206, 205, 204, 203, 202, 201, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114"

"Block B six floor, moisture content, number one, number two, number three, number four, number five, number six, number seven, number eight, number nine..... carbonation depth... hall number one, hall number two, hall number three, hall number four, hall number five, hall number six, hall number seven, hall number eight, hall number nine ..."

"Building Ordinance Chapter 123, notice... danger... lift machinery ...unauthorised access prohibited door to be kept locked..."

⁹ Prosper Mérimée, *Columba*, translated by Lady Mary Loyd, 2006
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2708/2708-h/2708-h.htm>

“No spitting”

“6th floor.. under a fire do not use the lift”

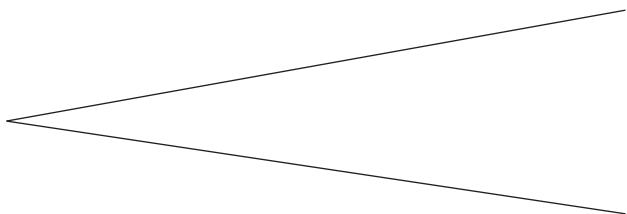
“Notice... it has been brought to our attention that store room in... blank space... of Hollywood Road Police Married Quarter has been illegally occupied... it is an order to remove all private property inside the above store room before...blank space... store room clearance and change of lock will be carried out by this office, after the permitted date.. and any articles found therein, will be treated as abandoned items, and disposed off accordingly without further notifications ... Force Quartering Office...”

“There is a calendar page to block the window... the month are May and June 1999, the fifteen of June was a Thursday...”

“The first of the month was a Thursday.... the second a Friday..... the third a Saturday.... the other pages are torn on the floor....”

[whispering] Sounds are leaking in my ship. I should close the window.

And I am up again, contemplating another world being built.



[wind]

On the 70th floor or so, people celebrating the first day of the second year of the 21st century, on a roof overlooking the whole bay of Hong Kong from Tsim Sha Tsui. Unamused, I start my *Symphony for One Man Alone*:¹⁰ I find my door, and let the wind be the player.

Passing human presence.

Can a symphony be that short? The recording is over, before the end of the piece.

Recording interruptus.

¹⁰ *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (Symphony for One Man Alone) is a musical composition by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry composed in 1949–1950 using many recordings of cracking of a door and sounds made by humans, such as voice, sighs, breathings, etc.

[becomings]

Silence, almost. Close disturbance. Everything is in place, waiting. I deploy myself a little more with each step, a new form of being. “I try to close, and to penetrate a landscape... it is not easy” says Luc Ferrari in his *Presque rien n°2 Thus continues the night in my mutilple head*.¹¹ I step into the landscape. Imperceptible at first, I create a contact with the surroundings, a microphone in hand: the distant road with the last bus passing, birds rehearsing, and cicadas ready to make their timbals vibrate like crazy creatures.

I walk. slowly, my eyes adjust the darkness.

All movements and actions are constituting of a certain form of being and of deployment of possibilities of contact with an environment; I start a negotiation. Jean Christophe Bailly¹² reminds us of George Canguilhem’s statement: “Between the living and the milieu, the relationship is established through a debate”. For all animals and humans alike, a territory is thus defined through this debate. I step into a new territory.

With every step, I step deeper into the night, and take on its form, I dissolve into it. Barking afar. I have been spotted. Dogs are more sensitive to shades of greys and motion, but my sense of vision can only try to adjust the night. Were they waiting for me? The English translation for the French “être aux aguets” is to be on the watch, or on the lookout. How to deal with this translation? All my senses are at play here, with every subtle change of air when the open air path is suddenly covered by trees, the intensities of sounds and their rhythmic changes, movings shadows of foliages, subtle changes of smell of soil and plants.

I continue my exploration in this multiverse. The non-verbals in the background, a foreign language brings me back into more familiar land. My own territory? Probably if I follow Uexküll’s concept of Umwelt,¹³ as what an animal retain from an environment. It establishes specific

¹¹ Luc Ferrari, *Presque rien n°2 - ainsi continue la nuit dans ma tête multiple* (1977)

¹² Jean-Christophe Bailly, « La forme animale », *Le Portique* [Online], 23-24 | 2009, document 1, published online on 28th septembre 2011, URL : <http://leportique.revues.org/index2426.html>

¹³ Jakob von Uexküll, *Mondes animaux et monde humain*, editions Payot & Rivages, 2010

subjective spatio-temporal worlds in which different living organisms exist and act. There is thus distinctions between the different perceived and lived worlds for different species, all as different territories constituting of distinct Umwelten. The world is taken not as a given but as a composition rooted in the interaction between signals that might be recognized, or not, and different species that also produce signs. I recognise sentences, words, potential different acts of communication from my own species.

Vanishing voices. Light replaces darkness instantly: magical manipulation.

Cicadas and their hypnotising calls take over. Looking for points of proximities, I disappear again, losing myself again. Becoming animal?

[echoes]

From my bunker, the little opening above my head reveals clouds passing fast, being partially obscured by foliages blown by the wind. I stand still, alert of any movements of my body in my concrete amplifier. Drops from the outside world are leaking in, cadencing a new pace for me, filling my space with time.

I am waiting. When to start, when to stop?

"Since when had he been waiting? Waiting is always a wait for waiting, wherein the beginning is withheld, the end suspended, and the interval of another wait thus opened."¹⁴

Thunder.

The levels of my recording machine were not ready for this. This is not good. When will it fill my space again through the hole, and vanish gradually? My bunker sustains time but cannot hold it. I know now.

I am waiting for the thunder, it is bound to happen again, it must; I have to be quick, to respond by action, to adjust my level in time silently.

Tensions.

When will it come? The drops and gusting wind are forgotten for some time.

There!

It was louder than I expected. But I think I got it, yet I know it will come again; It could be better; maybe it will last longer, or it will have more variations in its sustain?

Waiting ends without having to put an end to the waiting.

The thunder is now a foghorn.

I always had a liking for this low resonant sounds coming from afar and getting lost in a different horizon. I feel great satisfaction with my new capture. It envelops warmly as a felt shroud.

I move. I become as thick as resonant. Is there anyone out there? I can hear you breathe. The monologue turns into a dialogue.

Voicing out myself out of my body, I fill the space, I hear my form being shaped and transformed. A certain dizziness. I am intoxicated with my feedback. I am circular and wide, I am moving fast, yet still.

¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, 1997. *Awaiting Oblivion*, Trans. John Gregg, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p.25

A gust of wind takes over as I am only flesh and bones again.
It's time to leave before darkness put an end to the difference of light
between outside and inside my concrete cylinder.

[statics]

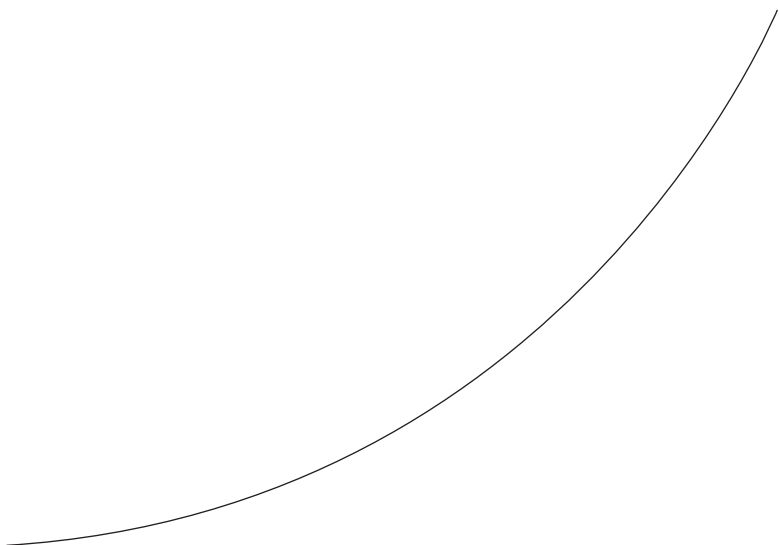
I do not recognise this too familiar corridor, with its unstable floor and uneven walls. Each step is a new uncovering: Sometimes a slow movement of double pendulum is more than moments of (in)equilibrium.

[opening]

“And I am dust, invisible, unbecoming and mute floating, drifting, and
listening as well, to
the sound of your noiseless steps”¹⁵

voilà. [voilà]

¹⁵ Lee Chee Leung, *Porcelain*, Exit Random Press, 1999, p. 45



[ephemerides]

1. 06th June 2009 / Pui Wo beach, water pond, and other small locations around (edited above and under water recordings).
6'39
2. 02nd March 2008 / Ferry from Central to Cheung Chau island.
13'28
3. 19th February 2008 / Pile driver on Seymour Road, Central.
11'30
4. 03rd and 23rd November 2010 / Former Married Police Quarter, Central.
22,04
5. 1st January 2002 / Tsim Sha Tsui.
04'08
6. 25th November 2005 and other recordings with unknown dates (marked as 19th January 2068 on hard drive) / Pak Tam Au, Dailong Wan, Saikung Country Park.
13'52
7. 30th March 2013 / Mount Davis, Pokfulam.
10'19
8. 13th October 2011 / CMC, Kowloon Tong.
7'51
9. 15th June 2009 / Po Hing Fong, Sheung Wan.
4'24

Biography

Cédric Maridet is an artist based in Hong Kong. His work explores the act of listening, collecting and archiving as a departure point for possible knowledge and fiction to construct alternative landscapes in the forms of video, installations, photography, sound compositions and works on paper. His works are presented internationally through residencies (Asia Art Archive), group and solo exhibitions (Art in General, Tate Modern, Para/Site, 2P Contemporary). Maridet studied literature and sociolinguistics in Paris VII University, and hold a Phd in Media Arts (City University of Hong Kong). His writings have been published in two books on sound (Around, soundpocket 2011) and on curating (Who Cares? 16 essays on curating in Asia, Para/Site, 2010). He also contributes to French-based research lab in audio art Locus Sonus and he is also advisor for soundpocket, a non-profit organisation promoting sound art and culture in Hong Kong. Some of his works has been published on his platform monème and released on CD and books.

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