Exergue 2

Archive as Thesis/Thesis as Archive

'Descending into the archives,' 'sifting through the archives': both of these phrases seem to suggest the dust of centuries, a stratified archaeology of layers, knowledge that is catalogued, safeguarded, hidden, forbidden. The archive is, perhaps, a vault, an impregnable holding cell for the preservation of things, for the arrangement of ideas, for the protection of reputations—or is it a promise '*of* the future, *to* the future,'[1] the place where new relationships emerge, where transmutation is the defining theme, where the play of the trace flits through the shadows?

How does the thesis itself, in its status as a body of work, and the structural presentation of that work, fit into (or 'be') the archive? What is its ontological status? Consider the two quotes below, both by authors and creative practitioners much concerned with the nature of archives, archival structures, archontic principles:

> We think that with these new technologies we can record things, capture things and keep them for future generations…but those archives are becoming less and less permanent. I actually enjoy that tension…
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> (Christian Marclay, 'Overtures')[2]

> …the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content of the past which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.
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> (Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*)[3]

Through his work with the manipulation of 'found' objects (records, CDs, photographs, and film) and their afterlives, in works such as *Record Without a Cover* (1985)*, More Encores* (1988), and *Accompagnement Musical* (1995), Marclay raises the question of the sound archive: its portability; the collation, curation, and bricolage of sound documents; and the contradiction between ephemeral sound itself as 'permanent' document. Through sound's and the sound document's inevitable decay (both live and in recorded form), he questions the permanence that the archive (in many instances) stands for.

Archive Fever (1995) is Derrida's deconstruction of the nature of recording and inscription, of forms and systems of documentation, of electronic communication and retrieval, mediated by an extended contemplation of psychoanalysis and its forms and systems of 'writing' and recording. In the above quote, Derrida alludes to the archive's fluidity of status, inasmuch as the archive cannot be viewed

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[1] Derrida, 1998, 18.
[2] Marclay, C., quoted in 'Overtures', González, J., 2005, 63.
[3] Derrida, 1998, 16-17.

as an unchanging vault filled with separate contents, a vault that will one day be full, replete and closed; rather, it is a place that itself adapts (its structure) to its new contents, as they grow (or diminish), a place where said contents adapt and change their structure as they are placed together in the archive, even a place that creates its contents—it creates the event.[4] He questions the idea of the 'dead,' or nostalgic, document, instead proposing that the process of archivisation makes a new, living event. Thus, dead becomes live, archived becomes performative, the archive is interactive, it speaks to the future. We should also remember the hidden archives within 'things' and texts, their implied cultural and historical archaeologies, even when their purpose is lost (and must be [re]imagined) or their function is completely removed from that original purpose. Repurposed sounds and objects, texts (including scores) that are now untranslatable or open to multiple interpretations through their (wilful?) refusal to provide any 'rules,' the museum exhibits (objects) with no discernible function—or do I mean that the museum exhibits (shows) to no purpose? What *was* that thing for? What *did* that mean? What are they *now*?

We could pose a number of conceptual questions regarding the thesis as archive: we could think about its structure, its presentational format—in this case, digital texts, sound files (MP3s), artworks and recorded performances (MP4s), rather than physical texts and live performances. Or why not a room of exhibits—books, records, scores, instruments, paint—with interactive films interspersed with live performances, but no guidance as to what 'path' to follow? How is the format of the thesis structured by its contents and how do the contents adapt to the 'form' (or container) of the thesis? Does the thesis, in fact, 'make' the contents? Is the 'event' that Derrida speaks of—the creation of new objects (rather than a collation of old ones) in order to form a new archive—a thesis? Does the thesis archive 'die' as soon as it is formed, or does its interactive and transformative potential (as well as the accrual of new contents) give it endless life? We could contemplate the relationships the thesis engenders through the very act of collation and curation between its selected works: do these works 'talk' to one another; do they comment, or even interrogate? Do they become a 'new' work? The voices of the dead—how does the inclusion of pre-recorded 'found' materials, whether LPs, time loops or 'live/dead' radio signals, sit within the archive? It seems that the archive is open to deconstruction in terms of its structure, its contents, and its ontology.

Let's ponder some of these issues; what is at issue in this *particular* archive?

1. Sounds: their recording, in other words, their status as temporal audio-documents; their assemblage, their reuse, i.e. all of the recorded performance projects, the performance projects which involve some kind of outside, recorded/electronic source, or manipulation of 'live' sounds (Marclay's 'dead sounds—see below); radio and distortion (electronic) effects in *Pole*, records in *Four[6]* (LP version) and time loops with Ableton in *Metatechnic*.

2. Structures: the effects of an electronic/digital format and the implications for memory. Archive as canon, archive as institution, archive as the rule of law. Derrida's *archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique*, where the consignment of memory to documents, whether physical or digital, which Derrida sees in terms of the *process* of *différance*,[5] rather than in terms of

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[4] For example, the news media creates 'events' through its coverage, and the news media can itself become the 'event,' as in a 'media circus.' A performance has to be set up in order to be documented; certain things have to be done before the documentation can take place; then, during the process of documentation, sometimes re-takes have to made in 'live' shows, because the footage first captured was not suitable or the process of documentation had technical issues, etc., which can also lead to misunderstandings such as "can we do that again?" "no, you're on air" (which occurred in two of the Cage performances, as it happens, but I left the 'mistakes' in).

[5] See also 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination,* 1981.

metaphysical binary opposition: that is, the opposition between the 'dead' memory of hypomnesis and 'living' memory of the 'by heart' does not exist for Derrida. This raises questions regarding the format of this thesis. How do a collection of new texts and live performances—which are digitally stored and recorded (in a virtual archive), and which also re-use other electronic hypomnesic archives in the process—come together in the production of a new archive? What is the ontological status of this archive? Does this archive *expect* certain things because of its format and does that have implications for the reader/viewer?

3. Objects: scores, instruments, papers, records (LPs). The materiality and fetishization of the everyday (or otherwise) means of performance. All of the works presented utilise 'things': the piano as dramatic percussion instrument, played by singer and pianist alike in *Weißschatten*; the array of tools—from paint brushes to toy instruments to LPs to kitchen paraphernalia—in the five versions of the John Cage project (an archive within an archive); the percussion, the effects boxes, and the radios in *Pole*; and *Metatechnic's* tactile employment of Ableton and de-preparation (deconstruction) of the prepared pianos. Can the fetishization of these objects—their cultural (and economic) significance—be problematised to the extent that we can wrest agency from them, possibly by repurposing their cultural impedimenta, or by changing their locations? Is the archive an active player or an innocent bystander?

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1. Sounds

Music is a temporal, ephemeral event (and in a live context, probably a social event too), so the audio document immediately opens up a nice set of contradictions. The recording (in any format) forces the live performance (which itself was a 'fixed' moment drawn from an endless lexicon of performative possibilities) into a format where it can be replayed until it breaks and is no longer audible.[6] The immediacy and sociability of the live event is gone, as Marclay says: 'records are about dead sounds, but when I bring records into a performance and play with them, I change my role from a passive listener to an active player; the same is true for the audience. I give a new life to these dead sounds.'[7] Whether or not listening is a passive activity is highly subjective and open to debate, but the social and performance possibilities for the audio-document—its afterlife, if you like—certainly open up an intriguing field of enquiry.[8] A note of caution, though, for we must take care not to become thralls to binary oppositions: here's what Derrida has to say about the dead and the living: 'Let us guard against saying that death is opposed to life. The living being is only a species of what is dead, and a very rare species.'[9] Perhaps it would be better to refer to Marclay's audio documents as 'undead' sounds, as zombies,[10] zombies who problematise the metaphysical spatial opposition of near and far and the temporal opposition of past and present?

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[6] Which opens a new field of performance, of course.
[7] Marclay, 2014, 25.
[8] For more on this subject see: Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music. Technology, Music and Culture* (2020) and Christoph Cox & Daniel Warner, *Audio Culture*, 2017.
[9] Derrida, 2014, 51.
[10] They could also be considered as *pharmakoi*, one of Derrida's 'undecidables'. See *Inter Muros* for a full discussion of the *pharmakon.*

As the recording of any sound or performance document places it within the first two categories—the audio-document *and* the process and structures of memory—we will approach recording from two different angles, starting with the audio-document and its afterlife and how this pertains to the archive.

If, as Derrida asserts, the living being is a only a species of what is dead, and the dead archive is a pledge or promise to the future, then there is no difference between the recorded object (the audio-document), the live performance (that was recorded), and the performances to come that reuse and repurpose the earlier audio-document(s). It is all part of a *process*, all part of the *same* process. Repurposing sound documents is nothing new. From their earliest days, records were more than *just* recordings, their inherent artistic possibilities as found objects having been explored by Cage, Henry, Stockhausen, et al, in previous decades. Marclay's 'hybridisation' of genres—for instance, sculpture and music (sound) in *Record Without a Cover*—further problematise the sound document itself as a stable medium, in other words, what is the 'proper'[11] use of a record? Does a record have a 'proper' use in this context? *Record Without a Cover* deliberately invites damage to the record as object (it is literally supplied 'without a cover'), the physical scarring of the surface as the result of a temporal process, creating an evolving soundscape, supplementary to the original recording, over the course of time. The record itself is composed of excerpts from other records, so there is a double questioning of sound composition: as archive of found sound objects, and as process post recording. Suddenly the owner becomes an interactive composer. It would be interesting to hear a performance of multiple copies of *Record* after ten or twenty years of 'damage.' Therefore, *Record* forces the listener to question the audio document: the collage of found objects, and the pops, hisses and loops caused by its scarification, make it impossible to suspend disbelief and imagine that we are listening to a 'live' recording. We are listening to a lifetime of 'record' experience; we are listening to the medium itself.' The vinyl record becomes a palimpsest that has a history of layered marks that you can't erase; incidental scratches become a natural part of the piece, not a mistake but integral to its meaning and composition.'[12] *More Encores,*[13] is another telling example from Marclay's catalogue that brings undecidability to the foreground through 'the archival implications of a medium that purports to capture forever the fleeting elements of a temporally singular musical event' and the 'impossible' possibility of repeated 'live' performances promised by technologies of reproduction.'[14]

Derrida sees another 'undecidable' contradiction in the very *act* of recording:

> What is involved in this phonographic act? Here's an interpretation, one among others. At each syllable, even at each silence, a decision is imposed: it was not always deliberate or sometimes even the same from one repetition to another. And what it signs is neither law nor the truth…Thus we analyse the resource this double text affords us today: on the one hand, a graphic space opened to multiple readings, in the traditional and protected form of the book (and it is not like a prompt-book, because each time it gives a different reading, another gift, dealing out a new hand all over again), but on the other hand, simultaneously, and also for the first time, we have the tape recording of a

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[11] Is their 'proper' use synonymous with their traditional or conventional use? That is, in a conventional form of dissemination and nothing more?

[12] Estep, 2014, 39.

[13] *More Encores* (1988) is a re-mix (re-appropriation) of found sonic objects, including excerpts from records by John Cage, Maria Callas, Louis Armstrong and so on. Unusually for Marclay, the excerpts are (in many cases) easily identifiable.

[14] González, 2004, 33.

> singular interpretation, made one day, by so on and so forth, *at a single stroke calculated and by chance*. (my italics)[15]

And how do these concerns play out in this thesis? Take the performance of Cage's *Four⁶* known as the 'LP version' as an example:[16] certainly the solitary, as well as the group, or social, aspect of music making (as raised by Marclay), in its performance and its resulting supplements, can be clearly seen here; it is by turns a gregarious, solitary, and weirdly hypnotic work to perform in all of its manifestations, and the original LPs also embody a certain cultural history of musicmaking, individuality, and sociability, as well as the fetishized object of the record itself. The LP version also specifically addresses points made by both Marclay and Derrida about the archival sound-document, in that the damaged (scratched, painted, written on, beaten, cut, stoned, etc.,) records directly result from performing an indeterminate score, which produces three separate supplements: the performance itself, the damaged LPs (all of which are playable and reworkable individually), and the re-mixed track of composite damaged found objects (LPs), which could then take on yet another life of its own and be repurposed again, e.g. spectralized, incorporated into another work,[17] and so on. Thus the medium of recording is foregrounded, found objects are foregrounded; the score, as Derrida says above, is 'a graphic space open to multiple readings,' and, here, those readings imply multiple physical actions and versions, versions which are radically different from one another as well. Yet each performance decision is made in the moment 'calculated and by chance'; undecidability is foregrounded.[18]

Let's return to those scratches on the surface of the record, those scars of experience. Are they part of the archive, a record of the passage of time on a single audio-document; or are they the archive itself; or both? Derrida notes:

> Again, inscribing inscription, it commemorates in its way, effectively, a circumcision. A very singular monument, it is also the document of an archive. In a reiterated manner, it leaves the trace of an incision *right on* the skin: more than one skin at more than one age… Each layer here seems to gape slightly, as the lips of a wound, permitting glimpses of the abyssal possibility of another depth destined for archaeological excavation.[19]

According to Derrida, then, the scratches, whether deliberately or accidentally placed, are another document of the archive; in the same way that writing cuts into the surface of the paper or canvas can be cut through, we sense the action through the absence left by the cut, its *différance*. We sense the infinite depths of layers that are implied by that cut. And the cut applies to more than just the scratches applied (in this case) during the performance; the record (or CD) is also a spiral cut, the incision a fundamental part of the recording process—thus a damaged record is a double cut, leading to Derrida's 'bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play.'[20] Furthermore, archived documents and, in particular, audio-documents—in other words the archive itself—speak to us still.

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[15] Derrida, 2014, 7–8.
[16] Documented in 'Preamble 1: Bubble, Trumpet, Humming, 'Fah!'' In this performance the sound actions were applied to LPs (as manuscripts) resulting in five further performance objects—four individual tracks and a final mix.
[17] The damaged Nick Drake LP is repurposed in *Logosphere*.
[18] These same principles can also be applied to the use of radio and time loops, and other live/dead, self-archiving undecidables.
[19] Derrida, 1998, 20.
[20] Derrida, 1984, 22.

The radio in Stockhausen's *Pole,* the records in *Four⁶,* even *Metatechnic's* time loops are still, in a way, a 'living' presence, what Derrida refers to as phantoms:

> Perhaps he does not respond, but he speaks. A phantom speaks….this means that without responding it disposes of a response, a bit like the answering machine whose voice outlives its moment of recording: you call, the other person is dead, now, whether you know it or not, and the voice responds to you…[21]

We respond to the audio archive by listening, by applauding, by congregating, by using and re-using; and, even though in some sense we are talking to *feuilles mortes* or smelling the residue of burnt incense, the archive must, and will, always speak to the future.

> To record, to archive, is the promise *of* the future, *to* the future. The promise of the archive '…as wager [*gageure*]. The archive has always been a *pledge,* and like every pledge [*gage*], a token of the future.[22]

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2. Archival structures – structures of memory

> . . . *every* archive, we will draw some inferences from this, is at once *institutive* and *conservative*. Revolutionary and traditional. An *eco-nomic* archive in this double sense: it keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law (*nomos*) or making people respect the law.[23]

What better example of the *institutive and conservative* could there be than the traditional thesis? The symbol of the weight of academe, the structures of learning as set out by the institution's 'rule of law.' The academy expects that things will be done in a certain way; it expects to be respected as its archives grow with the fruits of each generation's academic labours. But, as Derrida remarks above, it also conserves, it preserves, it commits to memory so that *we* may forget. And archives are not infallible, for how often have we said 'I KNOW I had that link somewhere'; or perhaps, we find that the object at the end of the link is no longer there–it has been lost or maybe it has been 'disappeared.'[24] Archives decay, things become obsolete, the technology that allows us to retrieve whatever we are looking for no longer works, no one remembers how to access *that* memory, i.e. the memory of the process of retrieval as well as the object itself. Is the archive doing too much of our thinking for us? Is it too 'unnatural' to be trusted? Is it too embedded in structures of power? Or can it be challenged from within: are there radical hermeneutics at play?

Here's what John D. Caputo has to say on the subject, contained within a broader discussion of Derrida and the academy:

> Institutions are the way things get done, *and* they are prone to violence. They are inextricably, undecidably, pharmacologically both things at once. Nothing is innocent…One needs to operate within the university, to prove oneself according to its standards, in order to expose it to its other, to

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[21] Derrida, 1998, 62.
[22] Derrida, 1998, 18.
[23] Derrida, 1998, 7.
[24] However, Mark Fisher would argue that the digitalisation of archives means that what we have lost is 'loss' itself. See *Hauntology and Its Supplements* for more on this.

the abyss, to keep its standards and its preconceived notions of rationality in play, to keep reason in play and to keep the play in reason.[25]

Thus, the archive can indeed be radical, in that it can be used, as though against itself, in order to promote the free play of inquiry and knowledge; or, as Derrida says, 'the archive always works, and *a priori,* against itself.'[26] So if we accept the archive, or the archiving archive as Derrida would say, as a process of decentring, *différance*, and play—that is the disruption of binary oppositions, the undecidability that Caputo mentions above—then the archive is a place of constant movement, of challenge and counter-challenge, of conservation and institution, of double and triple layered substrates of memories, of supplements, of networks of relationships formed between their contents, which themselves form new networks which can be disseminated, networks which make a space for the event… of archiving. As Jabès says: 'Every word unveils another tie.*'*[27]

This thesis, therefore, is nicely trapped within this oscillation, this process of *différance*. It is composed of texts, sounds, objects, scores, photographs, artworks—of new material from (sometimes) old material, with the very purpose of forming a new archive, which becomes old material as soon as it is collated but has the possibility of a new life, a disseminated life of supplements, outside of *this* archive. It has no origin (it builds on the work of many other archives) and it has no end (there is always more that can be added, more to discover), it is an embodiment of the play of the trace. It mixes the cuts of inscription with the cuts of audio-documentation, the hypomnesis of a digital presentation that both allows the user to access everything, in any order—they become users and players (almost composers)—and imposes expectations on the compiler of the archive. There are certain presumptions regarding the digital domain, the academy expects that everything will be documented, in sound and image and text, that everything will be available immediately, in a way, without effort, on the user's part. And that has implications for the presentation and choice of works, and their documentation. Rather than unsatisfactory descriptions, language being virtually incapable of doing music justice, having to permanently resort to metaphor, the user could just listen and then read the commentary—or the other way around—or entirely omit one section or another. Whereas, if a user were in a live performance situation, such as a recital, then it would be impossible not to hear: you cannot turn your ears 'off,' the vibrations will always penetrate the body. To escape the vibrations, you would have to leave. A final thought: as this archive is virtual, where does that leave the materiality of objects if we can no longer touch?

In the digital hypomnesic environment, the user no longer has to sift, to dig, to translate. The user merely presses a key—I repeat, in a sense, is the archive now doing our thinking for us, does it control our actions as users and compilers? Is the archive in post-industrial society open to being used for political means? Here's Derrida, in conversation with Brunette and Wills, on the subject of deconstruction again: 'I would say that the idea that deconstruction should confine itself to the analysis of the discursive text—I know that the idea is widespread—is really either a gross misunderstanding or a political strategy (my underlining) designed to limit deconstruction to matters of language.'[28] So Derrida would certainly assert that the archive (and by extension, the academy) should submit itself to deconstruction's enquiring gaze and should attempt to 'keep reason in play and to keep the play in reason.'[29] Can a digital format help rather than hinder this aim? Perhaps, for

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[25] Caputo, 1987, 235.
[26] Derrida, 1998, 12.
[27] Jabès, 1991, 37.
[28] Brunette & Wills, 1994, 15.
[29] Caputo, 1987, 235.

it can throw indeterminacy into the mix, it can allow a (however limited) free choice of pathways within the archive, rather than presenting a rigid narrative. It can present links, which can point to other areas outside of *this* archive, and into other archives, always supposing that the user is comfortable with following the pre-set paths of whatever search engine is used once the initial links are left behind.

Regarding the museum, it is another example of the archive as institution and the institution as archive, for what do museums do but collect, collate, fetishize, order, appropriate, or even steal, and sometimes (often?) serve an explicit cultural/political agenda? Marclay seeks to problematise the museum's ontology by deconstructing the exhibition and the exhibition space in a playful, although thought-provoking, way. There are other examples of the archive worthy of inclusion here as well, though perhaps more controversial. I refer to the 1993 Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition on (its curators claimed partly 'by') John Cage, *Rolywholyover. . . A Circus* (1993).[30] Marclay's *Accompagnement Musical* (1995), *Arranged and Conducted* (1997), *Keller and Caruso* (2000) and *Shake, Rattle and Roll (fluxmix)* (2004) all deal with archives, specifically museum collections, as artworks. For *Accompagnement,* Marclay took objects from assorted museums in Geneva, all related to the activity of sound making from around the world: pictures of music-making, images related to music applied to any surface, instruments and so on, were (by the standards of the museum as institution) haphazardly jumbled together across multiple exhibition spaces, thus forcing the viewer into a new perspective of the archival institution in what Marclay described as 'these flea-market-like installations.'[31] The regular academic pathway is no longer there, and neither is the aspect of sound—it wasn't an interactive installation, so the instruments on display could not be played by the public, a point made doubly clear by a separate collection of empty cases in one of the installation's spaces, memory, or even audio-hallucinations having to supply the missing (traditional) 'musical' sounds.[32]

'I had never thought much about how sound could be experienced through touch, this was fascinating.'[33] *Keller and Caruso* takes a similarly sideways glance at the realm of sound and vision (or the lack thereof). Utilising the Peabody Conservatory of Music's Caruso archives, including reportage of the meeting between Caruso and Helen Keller in 1917 (where she felt the vibrations of his voice), in an installation of sound making and recording objects (record players, discs, records, video), also with braille and sign language, *Keller and Caruso* problematises access to the archival institution and access to the experience of sound and vision, through the difficulties of experiencing (and being able to 'interpret') the whole installation by one person. The impossibility of *ever* experiencing the *whole* archive.

> You are here. But this place is so vast that even being near means being so distant we can neither see nor hear each other.[34]

Rolywholyover. . . A Circus

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[30] Cage was involved in the pre-exhibition organisation and collation of exhibits and so on. His death during the process meant that the final realisation of the project had to be taken on by the museum though. (Email exchange with W F Brooks).
[31] Marclay, 2014, 49.
[32] Ambience becomes the predominant soundscape instead.
[33] Marclay, 2014, 40.
[34] Jabès, 1991, 149.

Now for another conundrum. Here's González describing Marclay's archival museum installations: '*Accompagnement Musical* turned the normally staid setting of the traditional period galleries into a visual cacophony that more closely resembled a storage space or antique shop than a museum display.'[35] Contrast the above with Kostelanetz describing the opening night of *Rolywholyover*: 'Because the materials of *Rolywholyover* were so disparate (and mounted at different heights), the rooms resembled a junk shop, in this case with well-scrubbed walls and floors…the impression was essentially comic, if not by intention, at least by default,'[36] whereas the director's foreword contains the following: '*Rolywholyover A Circus* at The Museum of Contemporary Art is itself a transcending composition by Cage, in this case for museum… the works of visual art are moved every day according to a chance-generated score. The 'Circus' is thus itself a dynamic work of art. As Cage put it, "The basic idea is that the exhibition would change so much that if you came back a second time, you wouldn't recognise it."[37]

It would appear that the 'junk shop,' 'storage space,'[38] 'flea-market' or even 'composition… for museum' are all things to all people, essentially occupying the same conceptual space, but open to very different perceptions—in other words, like Derrida's 'space opened to multiple readings.' If we clear away the personal (critical) baggage, dubious claims and so on, surrounding the Cage exhibition, we again get an archive in a museum as an independent artwork of some sort. An archive in an institution, an archive in an archive that essentially opposes itself in that it replaces the museum's 'normal' function with its own radical version, thereby becoming institutionalised in the process and subsumed by the archive as it is created. The Cage installation is interesting as, like with Marclay, the exhibits were distributed around several galleries[39] and their arrangement was seemingly haphazard, not only regarding the location of the items (which changed every day according to the chance generated score mentioned above), but also regarding what was and what was not included[40] in their display, labelling and categorisation: in other words, the pathway through the archive.[41] Thus, rather than (subjectively) viewing *Rolywholyover* as a missed opportunity to celebrate the Cagean aesthetic in a way that, as might be supposed, Cage would have approved of, we could reconsider it as an exercise of the archive. An exercise in 'disrupt[ing] people's habitual ways of processing information,'[42] a way of 'reacting to the whole art system of creating collectable objects,'[43] about 'critiquing the institutionalization of the art object, but in a playful and humorous way.'[44] A group of seemingly disparate objects can be made to resonate simply through their proximity to one another. The rest is up to the individual viewer; the path through the archive is a personal matter as well as a universal one. And one last thought on the Cage installation: the exhibition 'catalogue' is a reflective, silver box containing an assortment of items related to Cage and his work—bits of prose by Cage and others, interviews, Cage's drawings, pictures, parts of scores and so on—so the archive gave out its own mini-archive as a memento or supplement. And, as supplement, the tin box not only replaces, and therefore opposes the museum exhibition, but also,

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[35] González, 2005, 57.

[36] Kostelanetz, 1996, 164.

[37] Koshalek, 1993, Director's Foreword, 1st page.

[38] Marclay has also exhibited in unconventional spaces, such as music stores, e.g. *Drumkit* (1999) and *Virtuoso* (2000)

[39] Four galleries were used at the Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition.

[40] Each room had a theme, such as artworks, objects, etc.

[41] Due to the mobile nature of the location of the objects contained in the exhibition the catalogue very quickly became useless as a guide, but interesting as an archive (and artwork), in its own right.

[42] Estep, 2014, 41.

[43] Marclay, 2014, 48.

[44] Marclay, 2014, 49.

therefore, opposes itself. There is no guidance about the order in which to read or look at the contents (and they soon get disordered). Perhaps like the mirrored tin box that holds them, they reflect back on ourselves; perhaps the intention is to give us a little bit of agency when we journey through the archive, to try to escape the museum's fetishization? But there will always be a reckoning, eventually, as there is with any journey…

> I give you—a pure gift, without exchange, without return—but whether I want this or not, the gift guards itself, keeps itself, and from then on you must owe [tu dois]. […] The gift can only be a sacrifice, that is the axiom of speculative reason.[45]

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3. Objects

> these shows are not didactic. They don't inform the viewer about the art object and its historical value; it's more about using the art objects like raw materials in playful ways, and it makes you look at the objects differently.
>
> Christian Marclay, *On&By Christian Marclay*)[46]

The importance to the museum as archival institution, of the fetishization of objects, of histories and *systems* of order and cataloguing, cannot be underestimated. When an artist such as Marclay turns these systems of order inside out, attempts to overturn the institutional fetishization of objects by placing them, *not* as part of an *academic* collection, but by taking the 'storage room,' 'junk shop' approach, the archive works in a different way. As Marclay says, 'the reason they are together is to offer a third reading totally disconnected from their initial usage.'[47] Thus the archive works through a new set of associations, either by collation (in that they are all related to music in some way, but not presented in a standard museum situation); through proximity (they are in several rooms, linked by passages which allow a circulation); through location (the music shop;) or through other senses (*Keller and Caruso* problematises sight, sound and touch). And it is to the realm of touch, and the materiality and the fetishization of objects, and of ways of overturning this fetishization, of overturning the expected (traditional) functions or uses of these objects that we now turn.

How do these objects relate to or even inhabit the archive? Marclay asserts that *it makes you look at the objects differently,* while Derrida tells us that *order is no longer assured*.[48] Two questions arise here: how does the virtual archive (this thesis) accommodate objects when they are no longer touchable? How do these questions relate to my own practice? Let's approach the last question first: I am a singer; my ultimate aim is to *feel* as little as possible vocally (in the throat, that is)—in other words, for the singing mechanism to be so smooth, even as all the constituent parts of the vocal mechanism are moving, that it becomes almost transcendental. I am denied the tactile realm of keys, strings, bows, mallets, and so forth. I am denied the touch of the hands on *things*. As my

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[45] Derrida, 2014, 30.
[46] Marclay, 2014, 49.
[47] Marclay, 2014, 85.
[48] Derrida, 1998, 5.

instrument is myself, I feel the internal and external mechanisms of my body, muscles, lips, tongue, lungs, (a body that gradually accrues all the physical traces of my performances—in a way, the archive of my training and profession) but, unless wielding a tuning fork, the hands are usually still and empty. Usually, I am denied the materiality of things, but in the creation of this archive, this set of performances allows them full reign. Apparently, the hands were bored.

Every work and its realisation covered explores the tactile realm for me as singer, and the tactile aspects of these choices were quite subconscious initially. The choice of works depended on matters of performer agency, matters of notation and the performer/composer interface. The (sometimes literally) deconstructive possibilities of the hands have only gradually emerged over the process of this project. During the five performances of *Four⁶*, I use my voice only once, instead focusing on the musical use of a substantial array of objects, most of which are not musical (including records—more on those presently); objects that are now part of a system of *bricolage*, in that they are put to uses outside of their original or expected purpose. *Metatechnic* does not see or hear me use my voice at all, instead engaging the fingers to operate Ableton, as well as working on and in the piano, exploring not only the *sonorities* of the prepared piano, and touching the keyboard as I play, but also *touching* all the elements of preparation (wood, metal, pottery) as I remove them: a process of negation which adds to the soundscape. *Pole* mixes extensive use of the voice with percussion (for signalling to the other player); and, then again, the fingers are used to manipulate the effects station, that artificially modifies the soundscape. Even *Weißschatten,* which Hespos calls a modern *Lied*, and is substantially vocal, allows me the agency to develop any physical theatre I so wish in the improvised sections.[49]

There are two realms in which these objects operate: the tactile and the material realm—the ways in which they are used in performances; and the cultural realm—of histories, of purpose, of value, of collectability and prestige, of fetish. Thus, if they can no longer be touched, only heard or seen, does that remove their fetish value, and allow them free play in the virtual archive? In the same way that the status of the records in the Cage performance is problematised by damage and re-use—who wants to collect or buy a damaged record?[50]—but the records' *original desirability* is still there as part of their history, the cultural and economic history of these objects has not been erased just because they have been re-purposed. They are old and new at the same time, they are undecidable, they cause perplexity (aporia), and their move to the virtual archive makes that aporia even greater, adds another layer to the substrates. Although the medium is gone, the body of the fetish, if you like, the history of that fetish, its *différance,* remains:

> The *trouble de l'archive* stems from a *mal d'archive…*It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably from searching for the archive right where it slips away.[51]

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[49] At times this includes lid slamming, as counterpoint to the pianist's actions. In Hespos' *Shut Ups!* (2018, also written for me), the singer has several quite elaborate notated lid slamming episodes, as well as freer episodes of improvised theatre.

[50] Perhaps more people than we might first imagine…

[51] Derrida, 1998, 91.

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