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Archival Silences as Historical Sources

**Reconsidering Sound Recordings of Prisoners of War (1915-1918)
from the Berlin Lautarchiv**

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1. The Sound Archive

This article aims to consider not only sound recordings of speech samples as historical sources, but also the absence of words and the content hereof: silences in speech. Its focus are sound recordings made by prisoners in German camps during World War I, today kept in the Lautarchiv (Sound Archive) of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (<http://www.lautarchiv.hu-berlin.de/>). The World War I recordings comprise one of the archive's three founding collections. The first contains voice portraits of illustrious figures such as Kaiser Wilhelm II and Paul von Hindenburg, the recordings of which began during the war in connection with the autograph collection of Ludwig Darmstaedter. The second collection is made up of voice portraits of people who were not well-known or prominent individuals, but exemplary speakers of particular languages and dialects. Between 1915 and 1918, in German prisoner of war camps, the state-funded Königlich Preußische Phonographische Kommission (Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission) produced sound recordings of a range of languages, dialects and ethnic groups for the purposes of linguistic and musicological research.¹ 1,030 recordings of music and song samples on Edison cylinders were produced under Carl Stumpf and his assistant, musicologist Georg Schüne-mann, and in 1920 they were integrated into the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv, which had been founded around 1900 by Stumpf and headed by Erich Moritz von Hornbostel since 1905. The recordings of prisoners of war continued the project of the Phonogram Archive to save and document the musical culture of primarily non-European groups, but also contained for example a collection of songs of the descendants of Germans who had emigrated to Russia.² Also in German prisoner of war camps a group of linguists produced 1,650 recordings on wax discs. According to the English teacher and commissioner of the Phonographische Kommission Wilhelm Doegen, these gramophone recordings should form a 'museum of the peoples' voices' and a library of samples of spoken languages and dialects.³ In 1920 they were combined with the small collection of voice portraits of important men to form the Lautabteilung der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek (Sound Department of the Prussian State Library) in Berlin. Beginning in 1926 a few of the prisoners' recordings were published as discs, each with an accompanying transcription and translation in the series 'Lautbibliothek. Phonetische Platten und Umschriften' (Sound Library. Phonetic Discs and Transcriptions).⁴ The larger part, however, has remained unpublished in the collection, which in 1934 was transformed together with new recordings into the Institut für Lautforschung (Institute for Sound Research) at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin. Today, the collection is once again stored in the Humboldt-Universität after having been evacuated for years, whereas the research institute for phonetics to which it belonged after World War II disappeared in the 1980s. The collection is no longer a part of current phonetic or linguistic

research, but a historical collection of recordings. Although the sound recordings were matrixed, copied, played back and transcribed in the 1920s and, beginning in 1999, recently digitalised and indexed, they remain condemned – both content-wise and in terms of their physical sound – to silence: not so much because they are rarely played and have never been published, but above all because they are not listened to.

Only recently has it become clear to historians and cultural theorists that the unpublished recordings of prisoners of war are not only valuable as historical speech samples, but can also be understood as sources for the historiography of soldiers – especially colonial soldiers – in World War I.⁵ Some of the recordings contain extraordinary personal and biographical descriptions in the form of folkloristic songs or texts. Accordingly, the collection of recordings of prisoners of war in the Lautarchiv is both a *collection* of historical phonetic discs and a historical, military and colonial *archive*.⁶ It is an archive, because it is now possible to address both historical and cultural-theoretical research questions to the collection: for instance, questions about the style and content of prisoners' descriptions of war, a war that first of all created the conditions – internment and the infrastructure of the camps – that made it possible to produce sound recordings on a larger scale. It is my contention – seen from the perspective of the history and theory of culture – that what is at issue in the recordings of prisoners of war found in the Lautarchiv is not merely physical and semantic speech, but also a powerful silence. Silence as a metaphor has largely been theorised in philosophy,⁷ history,⁸ cultural science⁹ and other humanistic fields¹⁰ as well as in its poetic-political significance.¹¹ Silence as a sounding or non-sounding phenomenon has been elaborated in sound art¹² and sound studies¹³ as well as in media studies.¹⁴ My intention here is to investigate the relationship of silence with the early sound archive¹⁵ and sound recordings on the basis of the concrete example of the Lautarchiv. This silence spans a number of dimensions: the silence of the archives, technical silence, content-related silence, silence of the presentation and political silence.

2. The Silence of Archives

The first task is to distinguish a sound archive from a conventional archive containing analogous written or visual documents. Although a sound archive also contains written documents that can be read, the sources to which it owes its name have to be listened to.¹⁶ It can be argued that the early sound archives, generally speaking, did not adopt collections derived from administrative archives, as was the case with historical archives,¹⁷ but produced their archival documents or objects themselves.¹⁸ In addition, the principal documents of sound archives are time-based media, and they therefore 'speak' themselves; they preserve sounds as sounds, lan-

guage as spoken or sung language. Consequently, they also conserve the silence of the sources as acoustic and audible silence. Hence, the aesthetic experience of the time-based medium of the sound recording is not only that the sound is played back over time and that a segment of historical time seems to reoccur in the present, but also that the sound in this passage of time, as sound, can be suspended, can become silent, while the medium and time continue running.

At this point, it is important to distinguish between two types of silences for which the German language has two different words: *Schweigen*, understood as non-speech, as a conscious, non-verbal act of communication, and *Stille*, understood as an abstract and pure state. *Schweigen* as non-speech is related to potential speech – and is to be distinguished from *Stille* as the absence of sound. While *Stille* is associated with nothingness and is therefore also a fiction or a purely aesthetic construct, *Schweigen* does not imply nothing, but rather a break: *Schweigen* begins where speech breaks off, is interrupted or withheld in some other way; *Schweigen* ends when speech is restored. *Schweigen* is dependent on speech; to some extent it is the negation of speech; there is *Schweigen* where nothing is being said, but where something could, should, must, wants to be said. In this paper my use of the English ‘silence’ should be understood in the sense of the German *Schweigen*, not *Stille*.

Of course, in very general terms silence can be observed in all historical archives. Archives have never recorded everything that we desire to know, to read up on and to reconstruct; rather, they always only contain fragments from the past and thus always only enable a construction of history that has to grapple with lacks and to give them context. In this sense, all historical archives administer not only an abundance of sources, but also their lack, and challenge historiography as a work of careful that does not reduce these lacks to nothing. In the sound archive, which houses the voices of so many historical figures, one becomes aware of (all) the other people whose voices were not recorded and, for those who were recorded, all the other speech situations that can be heard or imagined. The presence of the existing sound recordings makes it clear that by far the largest part of the past has not been captured in sound. With regard to the majority of voices, biographies and events, the archive remains silent. This *structural silence* is not a unique characteristic of sound archives; it can also be found in the form of gaps and lacunae in all other historical archives.

3. Technical Silence

More specific for the sound archive is the *technical silence* of the archive. The sound recordings as speaking sources are collected, preserved in a storage space and are silent as documents in the sense that they do not sound until they are activated by the user. The big difference between sound archives and other archives with time-

based media, such as film or video archives, is that a person's voice is played back without an image of this person being shown. Characteristic for the sound recording since the inventions of the phonograph (1877) and the gramophone (1887) is that a recording of a human voice can be separated from the body, the place and the time of the recording and stored with other voice recordings in the form of sound objects, which led to the founding of archives.¹⁹ As sound objects, sound recordings are able to wander through space and time, independent of the person whose voice is heard. When we hear a human voice that has been separated from the body of the speaker, it raises in our imagination the questions of who the speaker was, what he or she looked like, and so on: a desire for embodiment, for imagining the body and situation from which the sound emanated.²⁰ While a sound archive houses a chorus of voices in technical reproduction, it never sounds in its entirety. An archive of sound recordings is silent for most of the time on an entirely practical level, although its potential lies precisely in the speaking, the making-speak and the allowing-to-speak of its recordings.

If *technical silence* is characteristic for sound archives, it is still not specific for the recordings of prisoners of war. For this collection the linguists of the Phonographische Kommission made it a premise of their research that the texts to be recorded should be written down. For the gramophone recordings the prisoners recited the written text version from memory or read it aloud. If they could not read, the researchers would whisper the words and sentences to them. This inverted procedure, whereby written texts were verbalised for sound recordings, had been practised since 1908 by Joseph Seemüller at the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna for recordings of German dialects²¹ and served, with regard to phonetic and dialect research, to achieve the most exact possible correlation between the spoken and the written. Besides the so-called spoken text, the researchers of the Phonographische Kommission also produced, as far as possible, a phonetic transcription of the texts as well as a German translation. The transcriptions were archived alongside the sound recordings in the collection. While many recordings contain numbers, lists of words, fairy tales, fables, poems, prayers and songs, one also finds personal stories that the researchers described as authored by the speakers themselves. How individual this authorship was considering the conditions under which the texts were written – the camp and the prior, scientifically controlled writing procedure – remains dubitable: Were the prisoners asked or forbidden to write certain passages, did the academics 'complete' or shorten their stories and so on?

4. Content-Related Silence

Despite these auto-biographical accounts, another form of silence is also characteristic for the collection of voices of prisoners of war, namely the *content-related*

silence of the sources. Elsewhere I have shown how, even in the texts described by the researchers as authored by the prisoners themselves, criticism of the conditions in the camp – hunger, disease, death and mistreatment – was either avoided or paraphrased, clothed in metaphors or encoded in various ways.²² This corresponds to the censorship affecting the prisoners' letters home, in which for example use of the word 'hunger' was forbidden.²³ Although we have seen no evidence so far that the texts for the sound recordings – which remained in the hands of the German researchers – were also subjected to censorship or any other kind of interference by the camp or administrative bodies, they are likely to have been subjected to restrictions. In the following I will show these effects on concrete examples taken from the prisoner of war recordings.

On 1 August 1917 in Stolberg Antoine Subas, a Basque prisoner of war from Arcangues, filled three gramophone records with a connected report.²⁴ While the sound recordings themselves were labelled 'Lebensgeschichte eines Basken' (The life story of a Basque), the French transcription undertaken by the Romance philologist Hermann Urtel is entitled 'La lettre d'un basque en 1917' (Letter of a Basque in 1917). It remains unclear, however, whether the letter was intended to be posted, had been written before or especially for the sound recording, and whether Subas wrote the text himself or dictated it. The written document, which covers a number of sheets, begins with a general address: 'Well, good people, although I'm no scholar, I've decided to say everything I want to say in my simplicity as clearly as possible. We are in 1917'.²⁵ The following description by Subas, who describes himself as 'no scholar', recounts in considerable detail his conscription into the army, his parting with his village and family, his journey to Bayonne and from there through France to the battlefields. He describes how he participated in the Battle of the Marne, where he was wounded and captured by the Germans along with other soldiers from the French army.

To be taken from there to the interior of Germany, we left a heap of wounded to be cared for by their Red Cross. Some with their arms torn off, others their legs. One with a broken hip, another with his body perforated by five bullets. And many similar cases. It was terrible to hear their cries and groans, and worse still to see the state of these poor comrades.²⁶

Subas describes death, mutilation, injury, pain and the shock of seeing and hearing the suffering of the wounded. He is able to invoke the horror of the battlefields, but does not criticise the treatment of the prisoners. When the subject turns to the role of the Germans, in whose power Subas found himself when he read his text aloud into the gramophone horn, censorship intervenes. In his letter he describes, following his capture, his journey with the other prisoners through Belgium to Germany.

Since then we have stayed here under their [the Germans'] command. Our senses dulled. But don't think that because we're prisoners we are unhappy and treated brutally. No, it's like this: what I want to say personally: I've been in Germany for three years; so far not once have either officers or a soldier said a word out of place. Quite the opposite. I believe that if we could understand each other, we'd become proper comrades together. You understand? These are men like us, family men, who are also waiting for an end to this terrible war.

Everything works well here. We are well looked after, and the German camp authorities do everything in their power to make our lives easier. We can only be grateful to these gentlemen, and they will leave a lasting memory.²⁷

The prisoners spoke into the gramophone horn neither spontaneously nor, with regard to content, freely. Subas' words show the balancing act required to express oneself in a German camp in front of German researchers. Although he repeatedly describes the war as a catastrophe, he does not blame anyone. On the contrary, he explicitly praises the efforts of the German camp commanders with regard to the prisoners and the opportunity, outside the period of (forced) labour, to read and attend concerts, theatrical performances and films. Subas' descriptions of leisure time read like German propaganda – and are invoked in similar sounding letters as evidence of the good German camp policy in the book *Der Kriegsgefangenen Haltung und Schicksal in Deutschland* published by Wilhelm Doegen in 1919 by order of the Reichswehrministerium.²⁸ It can be assumed that it was taboo in German camps to criticise the camp conditions. Therefore, in order to uncover any hidden or coded messages, we must listen and read between the lines and words of the prisoners. Today, more than a hundred years later, such messages can only be deciphered with difficulty – and this can only be achieved with the help of experts in the respective language, history and culture. Typical for the sound recordings is the ephemerality of the sound and of its meaning – which has to be painstakingly reconstructed.

In his analyses of power Michel Foucault has shown that power does not only operate restrictively, but also productively. Censorship not only suppresses modes of speaking; it also sets free other forms of expression, for example coded ones – on a great scale and with great variation. Thus, in his research on sexuality Foucault has shown that, beginning in the eighteenth century, talk about sex did not simply disappear, but changed and engendered 'a new regime of discourses'.

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.²⁹

With this historical and theoretical perspective Foucault goes beyond the framework of essayistic and philosophical investigations of silence that understand the act of falling silent as a lack, a refusal or an interruption of the utterance – as absence. In the reception of later poststructuralist theories Lisa Mazzei applied a deconstructive approach to investigating the role of a silence that is charged with content. Her fascinating project, ‘thinking silence not as absence but as presence, not as lack but as excess, as *meaning full and purpose full*’,³⁰ however, only concerns textual sources, omissions in textualisations. In her call to listen to silence she is forced to place the word ‘listen’ in inverted commas, as it does not address an acoustic entity. In a text, a textualisation, one cannot acoustically hear acoustic silence; through overwriting it is often not transmitted and through transcription often broken. Only in the medium of sound, of listening as such, can silence be acoustically heard and sustained – instead of commented on.

5. Silence of the Presentation

It appears that with the sound recordings of the prisoners of war censorship did not interfere in the existing documents and cut holes in the texts, but that at least in a few cases it had already been internalised, with the effect that nothing was written or spoken that had to be edited out. Nor did any editing take place with the gramophone recordings themselves. A stylus attached to an oscillating membrane registered into a wax disc every sound that entered into the gramophone horn: the voice of the speaker, the comments and whispered prompts of the researchers, the noise of the motor and the rotating of the disc as well as the long sustained tone at the end of the recording. During the matrixing process a copper matrix was produced from the wax disc, from which an unlimited number of shellac records could subsequently be cast. In the process all noise, all unintended remarks and disturbances were preserved – and all pauses, all the silence. The gramophone, once started, recorded everything – music, speech, sounds and silences, regardless of its meaning or sense, as has been pointed out by Friedrich Kittler.³¹ Thus, besides the texts and melodies, the shellac records from which the currently available digital copies were made offer a wide spectrum of other qualities. Disturbances and silence have not been removed in the interest of the production of a coherent, uninterrupted narrative, but preserved as historical sources, as integral parts of the historical spoken or sung texts.

By ignoring for a moment what the researchers perceived as disturbances – questions, coughs, laughter, sighs, incidental remarks or afterthoughts – it becomes possible on the basis of the unedited historical sound material to hear the *silence of the presentation*, the *performative silence of the speaker*. With such silence I neither mean the aesthetic pauses that are an integral part of songs and music recitals nor the

normal breaks in speech between sentences or units of meaning. Instead I am referring to unforeseen, unintended pauses that interrupt the normal flow of speech as disrupting, delaying, faltering and terminating as well as intentionally prolonged breaks in speech. The unforeseen silence of the presentation, the gaps in the spoken and sung recordings, becomes productive insofar as it gives rise in the listener less to a desire for embodiment than to a desire for narration, as they seem to call for narrative filling, for answers to questions. Why does the speaker stop speaking? Is he disconcerted, confused? Has he forgotten the text? Is he looking up at the other people present? Is he thinking of home or possibly of the payment for the recording? Is he impressed by the technical equipment? Does he interrupt the flow of speech intentionally? Has he lost sight of the line in the text that he is reciting? Is he in pain, short of breath? Is he suffering from hunger? Did he hear a noise or a comment? Did he stop to listen to something else?

These moments of silence in the presentation refer, on the one hand, to the precarious political situation, the imbalance of power between those doing the recording and those being recorded: the German researchers in alliance with the camp commanders and the prisoners in the camp as interned wartime enemies. They characterise the collection of sound recordings with prisoners of war once more as a sensitive collection that was compiled for research purposes under the coercive situation of the camp.³² On the other hand, the unintended pauses in the presentation also refer to the rigid recording setup, whereby the speaker is pressed by the researchers in front of the gramophone horn and, at the same time, is made to read aloud or repeat the text from a sheet of paper held above it.

Silence is historically significant; however, it can only be interpreted speculatively. It is not clear why the speaker falls silent. From a distance that is both historical and mediated it is impossible to fully determine the reasons for the silence. In the acoustic and imageless medium silence refuses semantic attributions – and this is what poses a challenge to scientific analysis: Silence wants to be, but cannot be, narratively filled. In this sense, it represents a challenge for historiography – when silence is interpreted, when one speaks over it or about it, it is simultaneously broken. Whereas silence can be heard and sustained in the medium of sound, the task of cultural history is to give it context and meaning without denying its performativity.

6. Political Silence

All four forms of silence outlined here – structural silence in the archive (incomplete collection), technical silence of the sound recording (non-sounding), content-related silence of the sources (withholding or encoding of content) and performative silence in the presentation (breaking-off of speech) – can overlap, cancel or inten-

sify one another. There is a fifth form which I call political silence. Political silence is the silence produced by a human not as an object of science, but as a political subject and social being, as *zoon politicon* (Aristotle). A personal account by a political subject turns out to be a historical source when listened to with attention to its content, its social function and its personal perspective. Consulting the archive to find out how the prisoners of war described disease in the camp, we learn that not one of the 1,650 discs have a title that contains the word disease. Accusatory speech about disease and infection was in most cases taboo. Albert Kudjabo, a Congolese prisoner of war from the Belgian army, spoke, whistled and drummed the sentence 'Doctor is called to a man with a sick neck' into the gramophone.³³ However, this recording does not provide information about disease in the camp, but illustrates the motives of the researchers: The drum language was recorded as a special form of language and from an ethnological perspective. None of the three recordings have been preserved. Here the archive is silent both structurally and technically, since lost recordings can no longer be played, but only imagined.

However, a detailed search not among the titles, but in the prisoners' texts does deliver traces of statements about disease in the camp. For example, Antoine Subas continued his letter: 'Don't worry about us. We're lacking nothing, at least so far. We haven't had the least pimple on us. The gentlemen doctors look after the sick very well. They take all the necessary precautions to prevent epidemics'.³⁴ As a result of external or internalised censorship, epidemics, which along with hunger and poor hygiene represented the greatest threat to life in the camp, could only appear in the negative, as either hindered or indefinitely deferred. On the other hand, a personal remark can be found in a text spoken into the gramophone horn on 8 December 1916 by Mala Singh from 'Gardivala', India, a twenty-nine-year-old Sikh.³⁵ He tells the story of a king and his seven sons, which ends as follows: 'The demon brought everyone back to life. He brought everyone home. When they arrived back home the king was overjoyed. To the youngest the king gave his kingdom. Actually, the story is very long, but I have only written this much because I am not feeling well. I'm sick and in pain! For four months now! I have also been in hospital, but the pains haven't gone away'.³⁶

The source states that Mala Singh is suffering, but not how he was treated in the infirmary, and how he is being treated now that he has left. His presentation, however, does not fall silent when he shifts from the fairy tale from his homeland to his very real disease in the German prisoner of war camp. Where silence about his suffering might be conceivable or even expected, it fails to occur. However, statements about disease can only be found with difficulty; they are infused with structural, technical and content-related silence and perhaps also present in performative silence, where they are not verbalised. Silence circles around the taboo theme in its various manifestations. It is also a political silence infiltrated by power, prohibi-

tions and omissions as well as by strategies of speaking without saying anything or falling silent and thereby implying something. The historian's task might consist in making this silence discursively audible in the text, since in writing it is not acoustically available.

7. Parable of Silence

To bypass the paradox of making silence audible in the written – which in this online article enjoys the specific medial possibility of being accompanied, maybe over-sounded by the sound recording itself – I would like to conclude by discussing another recording from the collection, one that makes silence a theme in itself. Here silence enters the scene as a parable. At the time of his sound recording on 1 March 1917 Seoraj Singh was in the so-called *Halbmondlager* (half-moon camp) in Wünsdorf south of Berlin. This was a *Sonderlager* (special camp) in which after 1915 principally Indian and African colonial soldiers from the British and French armies were interned. The prisoners were meant to be politically indoctrinated and through targeted propaganda persuaded to reject their colonial masters.³⁷ Seoraj Singh was a Hindu from Sairapur (Rai-Bareilly) in India, and a Thakur. By profession he was a *zimindar*, a landowner or farmer. His age at the time of the recording is not known – at least it was not entered into the *Personal-Bogen*, the form holding personal information which the linguists filled out for each gramophone recording.³⁸ The form, which also enquired after the birthplace of the speaker's parents and the places in which the speaker had lived during different periods of his life, served less to document the speaker's individual biography than to record influences of language and dialect as well as social factors such as the schooling the speaker had undergone. Seoraj Singh was registered as a Hindi speaker. Although one can find information and completed reports about him, he remains a blank canvas, an unknown biography. The real object of interest for the researchers was his audible speech.

Accordingly, the top of the form, clearly separated by a horizontal line from the personal details recorded further down, was used for information about the sound recording. Here, one could enter, besides the register number which complied with the principle of *numerus currens*, consecutive numbering, the place and room as well as the date and time of the recording, its duration and the diameter of the disc. To indicate the type of recording, one could underline one of the following options: 'speech recording, song recording, choir recording, instrument recording, orchestra recording'. Next to this was a box that was mostly used to indicate the language and provide a short title. For the recording PK 653 'Story / Hindi (Thakur)' was entered.

Seoraj Singh's narration does not contain biographical information, but is a version of one of the many Akbar-Birbal stories that were known in many languages in

India. Akbar the Great was a sixteenth-century Mughal emperor, Birbal his minister. A constant theme of the stories is Birbal's use of cunning to overcome difficult situations and thereby to faithfully serve Akbar, who had power, but little worldly wisdom. Akbar-Birbal stories are mostly humorous and end with a clear moral message.

On 3 January 1917 in the Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf Seoraj Singh related the following narrative in Hindi into the gramophone horn:

The King of Delhi once asked his minister, a very intellectual man, "Biran, show me something that has never been seen before and never been heard." Biran replied, "Good, your majesty, I shall show you something that will delight your senses." On making this promise, he returned home and remained there for many days. To the men in his home he said, "Should someone ask after me, you must tell them that the King has ordered me to show him something miraculous, and that is why you know nothing."

After several days had passed in this manner, Birbal presented himself in the audience hall and said, "The marvellous sight that you wished to behold, I shall show it tomorrow, and Your Majesty, Her Royal Highness, Mr Khúshru and his wife too should come".

Saying this, he took everyone with him to his house and had them sit under his bed, and said, "No one is to speak; everyone must remain silent."³⁹

This story about silence is not especially well-known, nor does it end with an explicit moral message. Birbal is supposed to show Akbar something 'miraculous'. He thinks up something that Akbar has never consciously seen or heard: to be silent and to see and hear only silence. The story ends abruptly: Everyone is made to sit under Birbal's bed and remain silent. The end seems to be missing. However, the end is also the point: that silence is filled with the not-said. While in the written versions, for instance the historical transcription, the story ends with a full stop, a punctuation mark, in the acoustic version Seoraj Singh breaks off after the last sentence in a way that is unexpected for European ears: 'nat sab cup sap salbrà'. Then a pause. Crackle. Crackle. Crackle. The command to remain silent is followed by its acoustic fulfilment: The recording continues to run without spoken words, empty; only the crackling and clicking of the gramophone can be heard. Silence becomes audible as a time in which speech is possible, expected, necessary, but in which speech is withheld. Silence as non-speech, until at the end of the disc one hears a sustained note: a wobbly tone announcing the standard pitch, which at the time was 435 Hz. The reference tone was used to set the disc to the right playing speed and thereby to ensure that the voice of the speaker was not played at the wrong pitch or speed. The standard pitch sounds for one, two, three seconds, and the recording ends.

The Akbar-Birbal story is a parable about silence, about listening to non-speech as something wonderful. However, it is also a parable in a second dimension, since

the story about silence is spoken, made audible through a voice, recorded onto a gramophone record, played on a computer or a CD. Silence is not only discursively named, but also practised as real and audible or inaudible – in sound, in the audio medium. Hence, the parable about silence becomes to some extent a realisation of the moral message, both in the spoken content and on the level of the acoustic. The story about silence figures as a semantically interpretable *and* acoustically audible parable – and perhaps also as a moral tale for historians: to understand the listening-to-silence of the sources as a possible political act and not to suspend this through overwriting.

Notes

- 1 For the history of the Phonographische Kommission, see Mehnert, Dieter. (1996). Historische Schallaufnahmen – Das Lautarchiv an der Humboldt-Universität Berlin. In: *Studententexte zur Sprachkommunikation. Elektronische Sprachsignalverarbeitung 13*, pp. 28-45. Berlin; Bayer, Kirsten and Mahrenholz, Jürgen. (2000). ‘Stimmen der Völker’ – Das Berliner Lautarchiv. In: Bredekamp, Horst, Brüning, Jochen and Weber, Cornelia (Eds.), *Theater der Natur und Kunst* (catalogue), pp. 117-128. Berlin; Ziegler, Susanne. (2000). Die akustischen Sammlungen. Historische Tondokumente im Phonogramm-Archiv und im Lautarchiv. In: Bredekamp, Horst, Brüning, Jochen and Weber, Cornelia (Eds.), *Theater der Natur und Kunst*, pp. 197-206. Berlin; Mahrenholz, Jürgen. (2003). Zum Lautarchiv und seiner wissenschaftlichen Erschließung durch die Datenbank IMAGO. In: Bröcker, Marianne (Ed.), *Berichte aus dem ICTM-Nationalkomitee Deutschland XII*. Universitätsbibliothek Bamberg; Lange, Britta. (2007). Ein Archiv von Stimmen. Kriegsgefangene unter ethnografischer Beobachtung. In: Wegmann, Nikolaus, Maye, Harun and Reiber, Cornelius (Eds.), *Original/Ton. Zur Mediengeschichte des O-Tons*, pp. 317-341. Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz.
- 2 Schünemann, Georg. (1923). *Das Lied der deutschen Kolonisten in Russland – mit 434 in deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern gesammelten Liedern* (Sammelbände für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft 3). München.
- 3 Doegen, Wilhelm (Ed.). (1925). *Unter fremden Völkern – Eine neue Völkerkunde*. Berlin. Foreword and introduction (pp. 9-17).
- 4 After being transferred to the university in 1934, the collection was renamed: ‘Lautbibliothek. Text zu den Sprachplatten des Instituts für Lautforschung an der Universität Berlin’.
- 5 Cf. Ahuja, Ravi, Liebau, Heike and Roy, Franziska (Eds.). (2011). ‘When the war began, we heard of several kings’. *South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*. New Delhi.
- 6 Cf. Stoler, Anna Laura. (2009). *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton.
- 7 In moral philosophy as well as in speech philosophy. On the concepts of logocentrism and phonocentrism see the work of Derrida; Jacques. (2005 [1967]). *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Routledge: London and New York, NY.
- 8 See e.g. Foucault, Michel. (1998 [1976]). *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: 1*. London: Penguin Books.
- 9 See e.g. in postcolonial theory: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- 10 See e.g. systems theory: Luhmann, Niklas (1989). *Reden und Schweigen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

- 11 See e.g. Sontag, Susan (1969). *The Aesthetics of Silence*. In: *Studies of Radical Will*, chapter 1. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- 12 See e.g. the compositions of Karl Heinz Stockhausen ("Klavierstück X", 1962) or the compositions of Raymond Murray Schafer on quietness as well as his theoretical work *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* from 1977 (Schafer, Murray [1994]. *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* Rochester: Destiny Books).
- 13 See e.g. Smith, Mark. (2001). *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press; Sterne, Jonathan (2003). *The Audible Past. Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press; or Walraven, Maarten (2013). History and its Acoustic Context: Silence, Resonance, Echo and where to Find them in the Archive. *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 4(1).
- 14 See e.g. Kittler, Friedrich A. (1999 [1986]). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- 15 See various institutional histories on the phonogram archives of Berlin, Vienna, Zurich, Paris etc.
- 16 Cf. Hoffmann, Anette. (2015). Introduction. Listening to Sound Archives. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 2014. DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2014.983314.
- 17 Cf. Schenk, Dietmar. (2008). *Kleine Theorie des Archivs*. Stuttgart.
- 18 Cf. Hoffmann, Christoph. (2004). Vor dem Apparat. Das Wiener Phonogramm-Archiv. In: Sven Spieker (Ed.), *Bürokratische Leidenschaften*, pp. 281-294. Berlin.
- 19 Cf. Ames, Eric. (2003). The Sound of Evolution. *Modernism/Modernity*, 10(2), 297-325.
- 20 Cf. Macho, Thomas. (2006). Stimmen ohne Körper. Anmerkungen zur Technikgeschichte der Stimme. In: Doris Kolesch and Sybille Krämer (Eds.), *Stimme. Annäherung an ein Phänomen*, pp. 130-146. Frankfurt am Main.
- 21 Cf. Lechleitner, Gerda. (2010). '... den lebendigen Klang der Mundart hören ...' (Seemüller 1908). Dialektologie als Impulsgeber in der Anfangszeit des Phonogrammarchivs. In: Hubert Bergmann et al. (Eds.), *Fokus Dialekt. Analysieren – Dokumentieren – Kommunizieren. Festschrift für Ingeborg Geyer zum 60. Geburtstag*, pp. 251-262. Hildesheim, Zurich and New York, NY.
- 22 On the open criticism of camp conditions, see Lange, Britta (2011): 'Denken Sie selber über diese Sache nach ...' Tonaufnahmen in deutschen Gefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkriegs. In: Margit Berner, Anette Hoffmann and Britta Lange (Eds.), *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, pp. 89-128. Hamburg. On coded messages, see 'Poste Restante, and Messages in Bottles. Sound Recordings of Indian Prisoners in World War I'. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/02533952.2014.989721, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2014.989721>.
- 23 Cf. Spitzer, Leo. (1920). *Die Umschreibungen des Begriffs 'Hunger' im Italienischen: Stilistisch-onomasiologische Studie auf Grund von unveröffentlichtem Zensurmaterial*. Halle.
- 24 HU Berlin, Lautarchiv, PK 1094, PK 1095, PK 1103. Antoine Subas, recorded in Stolberg (Preuß. Hof), guestroom, on 1 August 1917. 'Lebensgeschichte eines Basken' in Basque-Labourdin, historical transcription into Basque, phonetic text of the Basque, and translation into French by Hermann Urtel. The misspellings and grammatical errors in all the passages quoted here belong to the original translation.
- 25 'Doc, bonnes gens, quoique je ne suis pas des grands savans, je me décide à dire tout ceux que je veux dire dans ma simplicité aussi clairement que possible. Nous sommes en 1917'.
- 26 'Pour être dirigé de là à l'intérieur de l'Allemagne, on avait laisse un tas de blesses pour être soigné à leur croix rouge. Les uns les bras emportés, les autres les cuisses. L'un la hanche brisée, un autre le corps perforé de cinq balles. Et beaucoup d'autres comme ca. C'était pitoyable d'entendre leurs cris et plaints, et plus pitoyable de voir encore l'état de ses pauvres camarades'.
- 27 'Depuis lors, on reste ici sous leurs [the Germans'] ordres. La pensée un peu obscure. Mais ne croyez pas cependant que parce qu'on est prisonniers on est malheureux et menu

brutalement. Non voici! Ce que je veux dire personnellement: Il y a trois ans que je suis en Allemagne; pas une fois encore, ni officiers, ni un soldat, m'ont pas dis une parole mal placée. Bien le contraire. Je crois que si on pouvait se comprendre, on serait tout à fait camarades ensemble: Vous comprenez! Ceux-ci aussi sont des homes comme nous, et pères de famille, qui attendent la fin de cette terrible guerre?

Tout marche bien ici. On est bien soigné, et les autorités allemandes du camps font tout leur possible pour adoucir notre sort. Nous ne pouvons avoir que de la reconnaissance pour ces Messieurs; Et qu'un souvenir inoubliable'.

- 28 Cf. Doegen, Wilhelm. (1921). *Kriegsgefangene Völker. Bd. 1: Der Kriegsgefangenen Haltung und Schicksal in Deutschland*. Edited with Theodor Kappstein. Berlin. Esp. pp. 227ff.
- 29 Foucault, Michel. (1998 [1976]). *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley. London et al.: Penguin Books. P. 27.
- 30 Mazzei, Lisa A. (2007). *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research. Putting Poststructural Theory to Work*. New York, NY: Peter Lang. P. 116.
- 31 Kittler, Friedrich A. (1999 [1986]). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. German version from 1986: ‚Der Phonograph hört eben nicht wie die Ohren, die darauf dressiert sind, aus Geräuschen immer gleich Stimmen, Wörter, Töne herauszufiltern; er verzeichnet akustische Ereignisse als solche, (pp. 39-40).
- 32 Cf. Berner, Margit, Hoffmann, Anette and Lange, Britta. (2011). *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*. Hamburg.
- 33 ‚Arzt wird zu einem Mann mit krankem Nacken gerufen’. HU Berlin, Lautarchiv, PK 797, Albert Kudjabo, recorded 25 March 1917 in the prisoner of war camp in Münster.
- 34 ‚Ne vous faites pas de mauvais sang pour nous. Rien nous fait défaut, au moins jusqu’à présent. On n’a pas eu encore la moindre bouton sur nous. Messieurs les médecins soignent très bien les malades. Ils prennent tous les soins nécessaires pour écarter les épidémies’. PK 1094, 1095, 1103, historical translation into French.
- 35 HU Berlin, Lautarchiv, PK 600 und PK 601. Mala Singh from Gardivala in Punjab, India, recorded on 8 December 1916 in the Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf. Historical transcriptions and German translation by Tarachand Roy.
- 36 ‚Der Dämon machte alle lebendig. Er brachte alle nach Hause. Als sie nach Hause kamen, da freute sich der König sehr. Der König übergab dem Jüngsten das Königreich. Die Geschichte ist eigentlich sehr lang, aber ich schreibe nur so viel, weil mir nicht wohl ist. Ich bin krank und habe Schmerzen! Seit vier Monaten! Ich bin auch im Hospital gewesen, aber die Schmerzen sind nicht fortgegangen’. Ibid., PK 601, historical translation into German.
- 37 On the Halbmondlager, see for example Höpp, Gerhard. (1997). *Muslimen in der Mark – Als Kriegsgefangene und Internierte in Wünsdorf und Zossen, 1914-1924*. Berlin.
- 38 HU Berlin, Lautarchiv, PK 653, *Personal-Bogen* (full details on the *Personal-Bogen* for PK 645). Historical transcription into spoken text and phonetic text as well as German translation.
- 39 HU Berlin, Lautarchiv, PK 653. Translation from Hindi by Rubaica Jaliwala (2014).