

South African Music Studies

Vol. 36/37

SAMUS: South African Music Studies Vol. 36/37

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The publication of this volume was made possible by funding from the SAMRO Endowment for the National Arts.

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Landscapes of Loss: Curatorial Mapping and the Use of Archival Sound Recordings

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how sites marked by loss can be activated and represented through sound, curatorship and mapping. We examine this by looking at a recent exhibition, *Lingering Absences: Hearing Landscape Through Memory*, that is based on the Eoan Group Archive. The Eoan Group was one of the first to produce full-scale opera productions in South Africa, yet their history remained largely unknown to the general public until 2006, when archival records that detailed the history of the group were uncovered. Drawing on this collection of material, and on an oral history project and book publication inspired by the Eoan Group Archive, the *Lingering Absences* exhibition worked with ideas of dislocation, absence and discomfort as a way of engaging with traumatic pasts, thereby deliberately avoiding a chronological and teleological reproduction of the Eoan Group's history. Investigating the methodologies that were used to conceptualise and execute the exhibition, this article engages with curatorial sound mapping as a creative research practice through which to explore the intersection of memory, sound, body and place.

Introduction

How might we listen to and recognise stories, remnants, and submerged ways of knowing as unresolved remainders of memory? What might mappings that are sensitive to past injustices look, sound, and feel like? (Till, 2010)

Processes of change and disruption leave their mark on any given landscape. Within the South African context, these processes bear the socio-political traces of colonialism and apartheid. Recognising the entanglement of racial policies with the local topography, one can argue that the South African landscape has long existed under duress. At the same time, changes in the landscape have also been reflective of significant socio-political changes. As such, the landscape may act as a mnemonic device that recollects the ways through which humans have dealt with change in the face of the ideological narratives of a given time. Within this complex socio-spatial context, this article is interested in how the idea and manifestation of loss can be represented by a given landscape or, conversely, how humans inscribe a given landscape with a sense of loss.

As a case study, this article investigates an exhibition created by the authors for an international conference entitled 'Hearing Landscape Critically: Music, Place and the Space of Sound', hosted by Stellenbosch University in 2013. The project, called *Lingering Absences: Hearing Landscapes Through Memory*, was displayed at the Sasol Art Museum in Stellenbosch, and focussed on the Eoan Opera Group, one of the first groups to perform full scale opera productions in South Africa. As a coloured¹ opera company, the Eoan Group's history was influenced, and to an extent determined, by the racial laws of the apartheid government. Forced removals and institutionalised racism severely impacted the personal lives of Group members, their career possibilities, families and communities.

The Eoan Archive and the Eoan Oral History project, preserved at the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS), Stellenbosch University,² speak to the loss and trauma engendered by the group's apartheid experiences. In particular, the oral history project, which comprises a number of interviews conducted with former group members, played a significant part in the conceptualisation of our exhibition.³ Following the traces of music and memory, the exhibition traverses the Isaac Ochberg Hall in District Six, the Cape Town City Hall in Cape Town's city centre, and the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone – three key locations that stand as markers of the Eoan Group's relationship to the landscape. We

understand the word 'location' to refer to an area within a physical landscape that can be (or could historically have been) located with a degree of certainty. The term 'landscape' is used to reference both the geophysical features of a space, as well as the cultural overlay of human activities. As such, our definition of landscape takes into account both its physical and abstract attributes.

Presenting both existing and lost localities, as well as political, personal, and cultural landscapes, *Lingering Absences* investigated the various layers of memory that sediment the Eoan Group's complex history. Instead of presenting a contained and resolved historical narrative of the Group, the exhibition sought to provide a space for experimentation that tested the degree to which memory, archival material, and sound could act as sites of interchange.

In order to understand the context and conceptualisation of the exhibition, we will first provide a brief historical account of the Eoan Group and the donation of their materials to the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS), before moving on to explore the two main methodologies used during the project.

On Material Selection

As the basis of *Lingering Absences*, we drew on a wealth of material, including archival footage from the Documentation Centre for Music, building plans from Revel Fox and Partners Architects in Cape Town, maps and photographs from the South African National Archives, the street map on the floor of the District Six museum and the oral history publication, *Eoan – Our Story* (2013).⁴ These documents served as markers of the Eoan Group's complex history, and provided an opportunity to engage with both its material and abstract residue.

The Eoan Group was founded by Helen Southern-Holt in 1933 as a culture and welfare organisation for the coloured community of District Six, Cape Town.⁵ During the 1950s, under the tutelage of Joseph Manka, the group's small choir grew into an amateur opera company, which produced some of the first full-scale Italian opera performances in South Africa. Despite the apartheid government's increasingly debilitating legislation, such as the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 and

the Group Areas Act of 1955,⁶ the Eoan Opera Group produced eleven annual opera seasons, two arts festivals and tours throughout South Africa and the United Kingdom between 1956 and 1975.⁷



Figure 1: The only known photograph of the Isaac Ochberg Hall in Hanover Street, District Six (Africa Media Online)

Initially based in the Isaac Ochberg Hall in District Six (Fig. 1), the Group was moved to the Joseph Stone Theatre in Athlone when District Six was declared a white 'Group Area' in 1966. The Group had used the Ochberg Hall from 1949 to the mid-1960s for rehearsals and community performances (Eoan History Project 2012, 175), but by 1968, District Six had been razed to the ground by the apartheid government, and more than 60 000 residents—including the Eoan Group—had been forcefully relocated to the edge of the city on land known as the 'Cape Flats'.

The move to Athlone signalled a watershed moment for the Eoan Group, as it removed them from the hub of Cape Town's cultural life to the city's periphery. This coincided with renovations to the Cape Town City Hall, the venue that hosted Eoan's main performances from 1937 to 1972, including ten of their opera seasons. These renovations in 1973 made the venue unsuitable for opera productions, and the Group had to find alternative venues.

Due to a combination of dwindling audience numbers, financial constraints and rising political tension, producing opera became increasingly difficult for Eoan and, as a result, they performed their last full-scale opera production in 1975. While the group enjoyed tremendous success during the 1960s with sold-out shows and rave reviews, they became politically ostracised in their own community due to their perceived complicity with the apartheid government.

Initially, the Group vowed not to perform to segregated audiences. However, the apartheid government's increasingly enforced racial segregation saw the prohibition of mixed audiences. In order to keep on performing, Eoan was forced to abide by these requirements. The group also accepted funding from the Department of Coloured Affairs, a contentious apartheid institution that drew heavy criticism from coloured communities for its entrenchment of racist policies. By accepting this funding Eoan had to 'comply with apartheid legislation which forced them to perform to racially segregated audiences only' (Eoan History Project 2012, 23). This caused tension in the group between members who were not interested in politics but just wanted to sing, and the more politically active members. In 1979, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS)⁸ declared Eoan a 'banned organisation' and called on the coloured community to boycott Eoan's performances (Eoan History Project 2012, 252). In all, the group's trajectory from rising success to their final demise in the mid-1970s speaks of a complex history marked by the shadow of apartheid bureaucracy and racial discrimination.⁹

In 2006, a large collection of Eoan material was discovered beneath the Joseph Stone Auditorium's stage, thanks to the efforts of DOMUS's Special Collections Librarian, Santie de Jongh, and a process of negotiation was started with the community to ensure the preservation of this material. However, donating the Eoan collection to Stellenbosch University was complicated by the role this institution had played in disempowering the Eoan community in the past (Lambrechts 2012, 191).¹⁰ A permanent loan agreement was therefore undertaken and an oral history project was launched to recognise the role of the Eoan Group in South Africa's music landscape, while also recognising that they had been severely disempowered by various apartheid institutions. As such, an

important aspect of the oral history project was that it would be steered by a committee consisting of, inter alia, members of the community from which the Eoan Group drew its members. This was seen as a vital part of the process and a step towards forging relationships between archival institutions, academics and community members. In this manner, the Eoan Oral History project resembles other such projects in South Africa that seek to address the mandate to speak to, and fill, the gaps left in the country's archival records during colonial and apartheid times.¹¹

As a product of this collaboration, a book, entitled *Eoan – Our Story* (2012), was compiled from existing archival material, as well as transcriptions of interviews conducted with former Eoan members. In order to reflect the Group's dynamics, the book presents different opinions and memories of similar events next to each other, in some cases negating the 'facts' to be found in the archive. The very idea of archival finality, or of one historical 'truth', is thus refuted as the extensive range of voices and personal memories informing this compilation prevent the archive from performing its systematic detachment into the realm of 'fact'. Instead, the book opens a vital space for recollection that is at once public and personal, historic and idiosyncratic.

On Methodology: Mapping and Curatorship

For the purpose of our exhibition project, a methodology of curatorial mapping provided a platform for engaging with the diverse and polemical archival material to which the exhibition had access. This methodology, which we formulated and introduced specifically for its interdisciplinary character, draws on mapping and curatorship as a means to interpret, translate and select complex information, and to create links between objects/ideas on an audio-visual and spatial platform. Straddling two diverse fields, our practice is thus much indebted to the rich methodological terrains of both mapping and curatorship.

Traditionally, a curator acts as a manager or caretaker, for example of the objects or cultural heritage of institutions such as galleries, museums and archives. In such spaces, curators are responsible for temporary or permanent collections; they fulfil roles as custodians, interpreters, intermediaries, authors/auteurs, or selectors. The curator's work of

presentation, interpretation, and preservation can take place in designated exhibition spaces, or can extend into other curatorial platforms, which may be alternative physical locations and/or spaces opened up by new technological advancements.

Curatorship aimed at broadening and interrogating its methodological practice resonates with what has been described as the 'curatorial turn' that occurred in contemporary cultural practices and discourses (Von Bismarck et al. 2012, 8). This turn, which coincides with larger cultural shifts in various disciplines in the late twentieth century, marks a profound change in the primary role of the curator: it reconsiders the curator's traditional value as caretaker, and instead conceives of her as a creative narrator (O'Neill 2007, 15). As a mode of production in the domain of cultural value (Bourdieu 1993, 261), curatorship is central to the establishment of meaning within and around objects, spaces, practices and discourses. As such, curatorship has developed as 'a field of overlapping and intertwining activities, tasks, and roles that formerly were divided and more clearly attributed to different professions, institutions, and disciplines' (Von Bismarck et al. 2012, 8).¹²

Mapping, a form of representation that charts some features of a physical landscape and/or conceptual terrain, underwent comparable changes to the field of curatorship. The practice of mapping is based on the idea that our experience, understanding and navigation of reality can be represented in such a way that we can orientate ourselves to and move within the spaces that surround us. For such forms of orientation and movement to be facilitated, mapping uses certain techniques (such as drawing, graphic rendering, etc.) and media (including printed maps and digital interfaces, to name but a few) to represent the relationships between objects, bodies, sounds, and ideas within delineated terrains. Maps are recognised for their ability to represent various spatialities (be they physical, abstract or intangible), and can range from the geographic, where the context and scale of the map are fixed, to maps that are interactive and changing. This form of representation can take the semblance of, amongst others, cartography (the graphic representation of the features of a given landscape), gene mapping, brain mapping, sound mapping, and data mapping. As such, mapping can be understood as a

form of data visualisation that is concerned with the production and interpretation of information, and it aims to make such information, which is often complex and excessive, more understandable, shareable and usable by a larger public. Deriving from the Latin term *mappa mundi* (or 'cloth of the world'), maps have a long and complex history¹³ of acting as two- or three-dimensional symbolic devices for representing the spatial relationships between or arrangement of elements. It must be understood, however, that mapping is an idiosyncratic and ideological practice inevitably imbued with socio-political endeavours and effects. In South Africa, for example, mapping served the apartheid government's separate development policies and informed the forced removals of various communities. Consequently, it can be regarded as a visual practice that supported and reflected both colonialism and apartheid. This awareness permeates contemporary scholarship, which is becoming increasingly critical of any assumptions of mapping as an innocent or objective practice.¹⁴

The work of L.A. Alexander (2000) represents such an endeavour to question the objectivity of mapping practices. Alexander uses maps to question the realms of the empirical and bureaucratic – categories that are central to traditional understandings of cartographic maps. By drawing on cartography, fiction, visual reportage and ethnography she creates dense maps, what she calls an 'intimate cartography', that moves between a physical landscape and an emotive experience of place.¹⁵ In the maps she creates, both physical and imagined, Alexander draws upon historical and contemporary detail as a means to understand the human subject's relation to her surroundings. This resonates with Arjun Appadurai's (2000, 180) view on mapping, which he sees as a localising medium used to socialise space, and to construct safe zones where human contact and interaction may be facilitated. Maps, in other words, help us to conceive of and localise ourselves in relation to an other. They are thus central to human endeavours to make contact and build relationships. As such, they facilitate the navigation not only of the spaces of the world, the city and the street, but also of corporeal, emotional and intellectual spaces. Mapping as a spatial and cultural practice is thus not necessarily preoccupied with capturing the existing landscape, but

may also strive to interlace 'the historical with the contemporary, the political with the lyrical, the factual with the fictional, and the discursive with the embodied in ways that make unexpected connections' (Till 2010, 3). This kind of mapping is an attempt to 'record and represent the grain and patina of place' through interpretation and juxtaposition, rather than through facts and figures (Biggs 2010, 6).

The three locations we chose to focus on in our exhibition, namely the Isaac Ochberg Hall (District Six), the Cape Town City Hall (City Centre), and the Joseph Stone Theatre (Athlone), are all landscapes marked by loss, forced removals and institutionalised racism.

CAPE TOWN

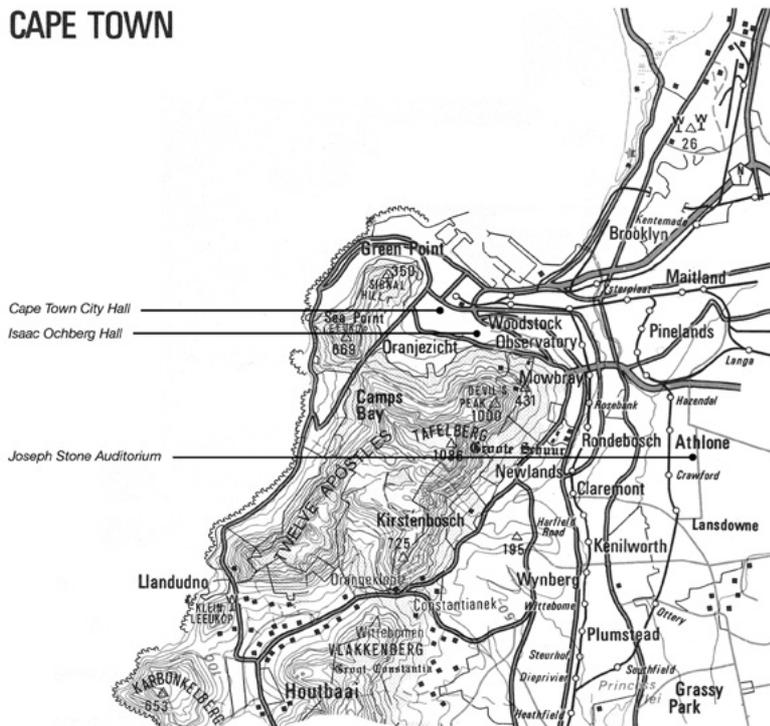


Figure 2: A map showing the three sites selected for the exhibition as well as the areas the group were forcibly moved to. This map forms part of the hand-out that was created for the exhibition. (Van der Wal 2013)

Our engagement with these landscapes was prompted by the ways in which former Eoan Group members remembered the spaces where they used to live, work and dwell. Their recollections are marked by a sense of loss of community, space, and music.

In response, we, as curators, asked ourselves how these memories of loss speak to the landscapes as they exist today. Moreover, we asked whether these landscapes can somehow be activated to speak of the communities who used to live there. For example, if we can no longer hear the Eoan Group singing in the Cape Town City Hall, what about their expression of musical community still lingers in this space? Can we engage with traces of the past 'that are present and yet not always visible' (Till, 2010)? 'Traces', in this context, referred for us to encounters with those items in the archive that pointed towards musical lives forged in specific spaces, such as audio recordings, photographs and maps. Through our encounters with these materials, sound became one of our primary tools with which to discover and seek an understanding of the relationship between the Eoan Group and the landscape in which they dwelled.

Sound allowed us to listen to that which is recognisable and to use such information in an imaginative manner – as a means to seek understanding of place and community. Brandon LaBelle (2010, xvi) writes in *Acoustic Territories* that 'sound as it moves from its source towards a listener ... is a story imparting a great deal of information fully charged with geographic, social, psychological, and emotional energy'. We used this characteristic of sound to explore the historical and contemporary landscapes of the Eoan Group. In our exhibition, sound acted as a link between locations, between here and there, past and present. As LaBelle notes, sound continuously 'disintegrate[s] and reconfigure[s] space' (LaBelle 2010, xxi), it is 'dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment' (Carpenter and McLuhan, quoted in LaBelle 2010, xxii). For us, therefore, sound was the thread, the dynamic force, that permeated our creative practice and allowed us to think critically about concepts of community and landscape.

We experimented with various soundings in this exhibition, drawing strongly on the oral history interviews conducted with the Eoan Group's

former members, the live recordings made of the group's opera performances, and sound recordings made by us of the three locations represented in the exhibition.



Figure 3: Making field recordings of the place where we estimated the Isaac Ochberg Hall to have been, District Six, Cape Town. (Lambrechts 2013)

These sounds were curated in an exhibition setting to speak of community and landscape in various ways. On one level, sound operated as a localising medium for plotting the relationship between landscape and human subject. It facilitated remembering the past and how places used to be, or might have been. Listening to the recollections of places and of specific events within these places, for example, we become aware, as an audience, of how the Eoan Group situated itself within the three locations in the exhibition. In addition, we are challenged as listeners, and hence participants in this telling, to consider ourselves in relation to the group. Here, Appadurai's understanding of mapping as a social enterprise is of importance, as sound helps us to conceive of ourselves in relation to an other (another human, another place, another time).

Sound also allowed us in the exhibition to place the contemporary moment in conversation with the past, thus opening up the concept of

loss for further exploration. The contemporary soundscapes we recorded of each of the three locations, considered in counterpoint to the recollections of group members, reminds the listener of that which is no longer present: it maps both presence and absence by charting the landscape as *is*, drawing attention not only to that which is there, but also to that which is not.

On Sound and Exhibition Making

In conceptualising *Lingering Absences*, we tried to steer away from reproducing the archive in a linear fashion, or to present the Eoan Group's history as completely penetrable or comprehensible. Instead we chose to work with ideas of dislocation, absence and discomfort. The viewer's experience was deliberately obstructed through the use of a stripped aesthetic, and we rejected the construction of an easily consumable narrative in favour of one that the viewer had to explore for herself. The move away from a consumable historical representation was motivated by our understanding of history as multifaceted, layered and non-linear, and by our awareness of the institutional context, namely Stellenbosch University, where this exhibition was to be shown. This translated the focus of the project into an exploration of how bureaucratic, political, personal and physical landscapes shaped the Eoan Group and their performances.

The exhibition was built in three rooms of the Sasol Art Museum in Stellenbosch, and was specifically designed for this space. Upon arrival, viewers first visited a distribution point located in a corner of the first room. Here, they were given an oversized map (A0 in size) that showed the three rooms allocated to the exhibition and served as a basic guide with historical information about the group.

The first room was dominated by a projection of archival film footage from the Group's 1967 opera season, during which they performed *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *La Traviata*, and *Madam Butterfly*. The film montage compiled from these three productions captured fleeting scenes: members of the Eoan Group preparing backstage; audience members arriving at the Cape Town City Hall; and singers performing onstage. The original 8mm colour film was grainy and filled with flickering images that we left unedited. This format did not generally allow for the simultaneous recording

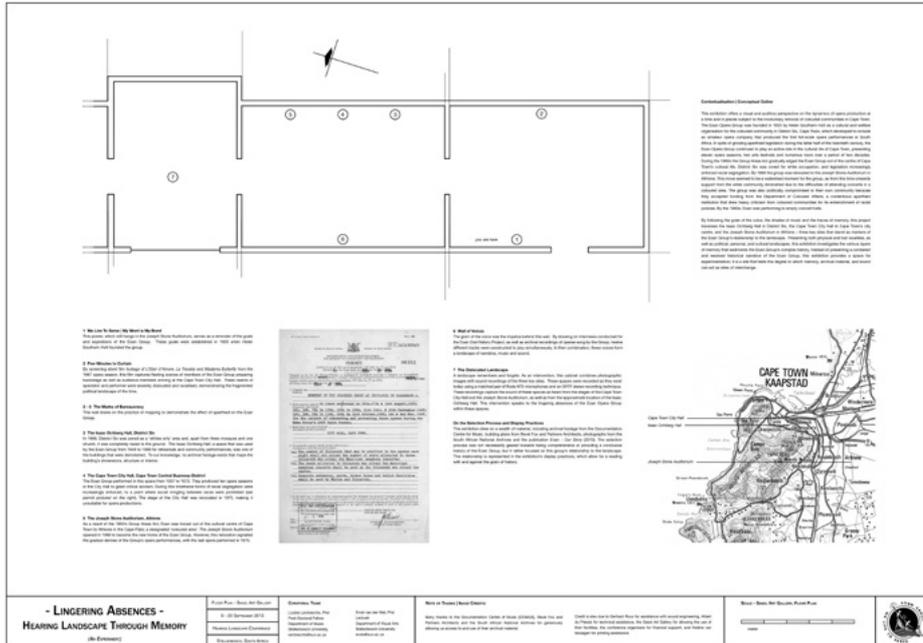


Figure 4: Map given to viewers of the exhibition. (Van der Wal 2013)

of image and sound, and sound had to be recorded separately. However, the accompanying sound track to the Eoan Group's 1967 production films seems to have been lost. Hence, the film has been reduced to a silent rendition of sound – we see opera singers warming up, making jokes and singing on stage, but we never hear them.

In the second room on the eastern wall, three 4m prints were hung side by side (Fig. 6), asserting the bureaucratic landscape within which the Group functioned. The first print spoke to the erasure and the absence of documentation on the Isaac Ochberg Hall in District Six, which was razed to the ground along with the rest of the area. The second print displays the enforcement of racial segregation in the form of a seating plan of the Cape Town City Hall, where the group performed until they were moved to the Joseph Stone Auditorium. Here, the allocation of seats to members of the different race groupings is materially demonstrated, with handwritten annotations showing which parts of the seating had to be reserved for which races. The third print, a blueprint of the Joseph Stone, stands in stark contrast to the opulence and privilege



Figure 5: Screenshots taken from the film montage showed in the first room of the exhibition. (Films from the Eoan Group Archive: DOMUS)

encountered in the Cape Town City Hall. It is a grim reminder of the disenfranchisement that informed and accompanied the physical displacement of the Eoan Group.

The physical and bureaucratic landscape represented by the three prints was challenged by the personal and the intimate cultural landscape constructed on the opposite wall. In this installation, twenty-four speakers were set up and divided into pairs that emitted twelve separate tracks, playing simultaneously in a three-hour cycle.¹⁶ Each track was compiled from material gathered as part of the Oral History project to focus specifically on the Eoan Group members' own recollections of the three key sites. These spoken reflections were interspersed with extracts from archival recordings of the Group's operatic performances within these spaces. At a distance, the 'sound wall' represented a literal 'wall of

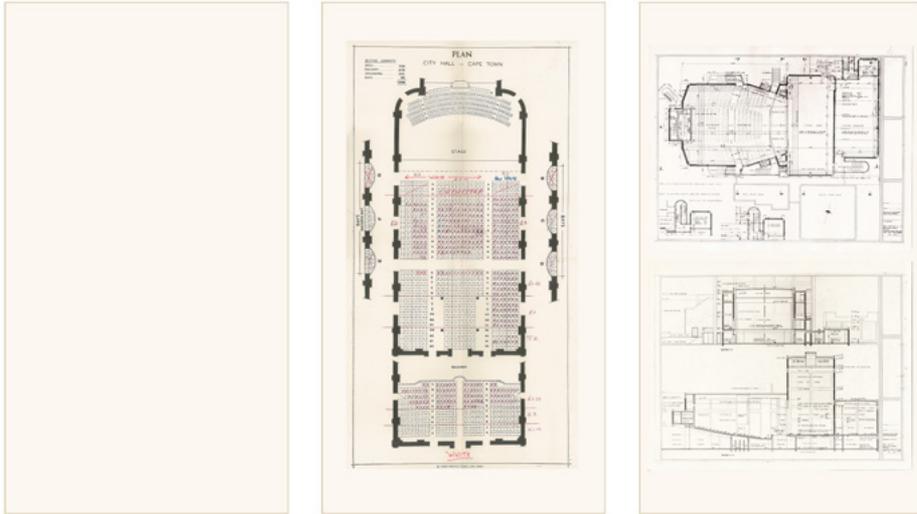


Figure 6: The three prints that were displayed next to one another, 1) Isaac Ocherg Hall, District Six, 2) Cape Town City Hall, City Centre, 3) Joseph Stone Theatre, Athlone. (Eoan Group Archive, DOMUS; Revel Fox Architects, Cape Town)

sound' – a cacophony of sorts – but moving closer to the microphones, the speakers' voices became clear, facilitating a degree of intimacy with the stories being recounted on the wall.¹⁷



Figure 7: Listening to the sound wall. (Schonken 2013)

The last room brought together the various traces of memory, archive and place exhibited throughout the previous two rooms. A simple light cabinet greeted the viewer in a darkened room. On the light cabinet, a photographic image of each of the three key sites was displayed. These images were each linked to a sound recording that captured the sound of one of these spaces. The soundscapes of Cape Town City Hall and the Joseph Stone Auditorium were both recorded from their stages, while the soundscape of the Isaac Ochberg Hall was recorded from the approximate place where it once stood. The locations were recorded using a matched pair of Rode NT5 microphones and an ORTF stereo recording technique.¹⁸ Each image (a 10x5cm photograph of each site) was aligned to a pair of headphones that blocked out the sound from the other installations, and it emitted a ten-minute unedited recording of what these places sound like today.

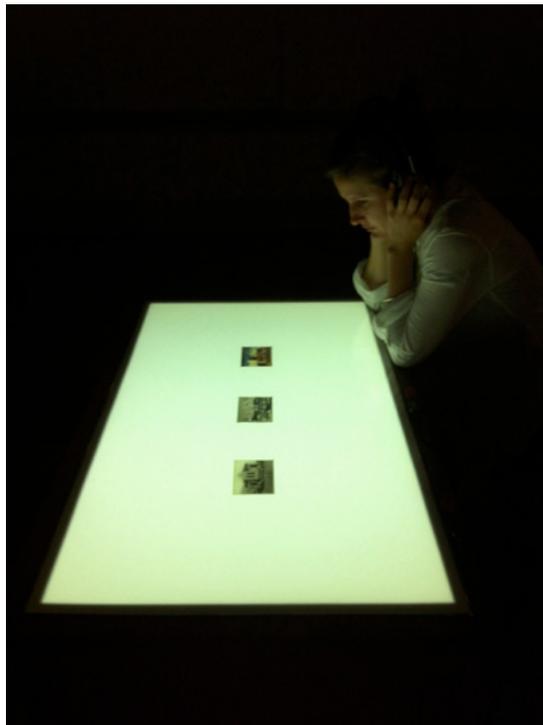


Figure 8: Light cabinet, with three photographs. Each print is linked to a specific recording of the three sites. (Lambrechts and Van der Wal 2013)

Throughout the exhibition, the permeation of sound, its absence, or its presence through archival recordings, narrating voices or recorded soundscapes reveals the various layers of history and memory that sediment the Eoan Group's legacy. We treated these soundings from the past and from the present not simply as acoustic documents, but as complex mediated objects that speak to the political, personal and practical realities of living in South Africa. The absence of sound in the archival film footage, for instance, served to heighten the awareness of how the Group and the spaces wherein they moved were constructed, and undermined traditional connotations of truthfulness associated with the filmic form. We interpreted the silence of the film as a reflection on the racial policies of the time that actively endeavoured to render people silent. A poignant moment in the film silently captures the stratified racialised landscape, with two camera angles dominating the viewer's perspective. These angles differentiate between the arrival of white and coloured audience members using separate entrance ways, as required by law at that time. For the viewer encountering the film at first sight, the flickering images, graininess and colouring of the medium might seem somewhat nostalgic. However, the silently repeated sequences of racial segregation disrupt and complicate an easy reading of this film as a consumable aesthetic device.

Similarly to the film, wherein the visual footage of musical performance raised an expectation of sound and hearing, the site of the former Isaach Ochberg Hall in District Six, adjacent to one of the busiest central business districts in South Africa, raised an expectation of noise. The recording of this location, however, reflected an empty and quiet soundscape. In addition, we found the site impenetrable; tracing the hall's exact location for our intervention was almost impossible due to a lack of documentation, which spoke to us of the erasure of the communities that used to dwell there.¹⁹ The eerie silence of the soundscape serves as a placeholder for all that has been erased. Experiencing this recording in the exhibition, listeners initially thought that there was something wrong with the track, switching it on and off. This exposed the difficulty of listening to absence, of being confronted with a cityscape that is devoid of the sounds of human presence. The recording of the Cape Town City

Hall stage similarly speaks to this silence, but it is a silence of a different kind: the resonance of the spacious echo on the well-insulated stage reflects the historical opulence of this venue—it does not allow any undesired sounds in, but rather performs a luxurious delinking from noise of quotidian city life. This differs markedly from the recording of the Joseph Stone Theatre stage, which is filled with the deafening infiltration of the outside world.

In contrast to these site-specific recordings, the sound wall functions as a location where voice, music and noise interact, thereby testing the interchange between the public and the private. Paul Ricoeur (2008, 36) notes that remembering invokes 'the situations in the world in which one has seen, experienced, learned', situations that 'imply one's own body and the bodies of others, lived space'. On the sound wall, one hears the clinking of tea cups, people coming and going, doors slamming, phones ringing, neighbours popping in – all of which serve to remind the listener of the intimacy that escapes official and bureaucratic frames. In addition, the soft volume of the sound wall draws attention to our bodies, urging us to move closer in order to hear.²⁰ By engaging the visitor's senses (their capacity to touch, see and hear) in an intimate manner, the curatorial method forces the viewer to become aware of her own body in relation to others. Sound used in this way can therefore also be understood as confrontational. Brandon LaBelle (2012) points out that sound does not wait to be invited in:

it already moves toward a visitor, to inculcate a situation of immediate relation, direct meeting, integration, negotiation. It is already linking multiple spaces, supporting associations between body and object, you and I, here to there and promoting certain resonances across multiple skins.

Sound therefore collapses 'the distances generally instantiated by the viewer/viewed dyad operative within the visual arts' and as such it can 'carve out a space for the operations of an active listening' (LaBelle 2012).²¹ Even though sound penetrates and confronts, the viewer is still given a choice – active listening is not the same as inadvertently



Figure 9: Participants experimenting with different ways of listening, the exhibition map becoming an audio aid. (Schonken 2013)

accepting sounds drifting towards one. It invokes a choice to participate, to listen, to search for understanding. In *Lingering Absences*, sound allowed us to create an experiential space wherein the outcome, or the experience of the viewer, was not predetermined, but depended on the perseverance and dedication of the viewer/listener to engage with the three-hour piece playing through multiple channels on the sound wall. Through active listening, listeners were encouraged to hear the voices that have become silent through political suppression and the passing of time. They were prompted to reconstruct in their imaginations the spaces referenced in the exhibition and to fill them with these voices in an act of imaginative reconstruction of a thriving and bustling community life.

Erica Lehrer (2011) writes that, when curating 'difficult memories', the acts of excavating deeply suppressed memories and of forcing the viewer to confront their own relation to (or complicity in) such recollections are of great importance. The plurality of voices on the wall, impenetrable without personal interaction, challenged the construction of an 'impartial' historical narrative that seeks to neutralise, order and depersonalise. It destabilised regulation and contested the illusion of knowing. Instead, the sound installation confronted the viewer with a multitude of relations,

memories, places and times. Through active listening, we are drawn into an intimate and embodied listening experience with others that may deepen our understanding of how pasts are negotiated and how futures might be imagined. The sound installations in the exhibition – the recollections, the opera recordings, the silences of the film, and the mediated noises of the soundscapes – created a place where we could become aware of the resonance of silence and loss.

Conclusion

In *Lingering Absences*, we departed from the traditional view on the role of the autonomous, specialist curator/creator, as ‘trusted expert’ whose knowledge, practice and observations determine meaning and value (see Stimler, cited in Proctor 2010, 40). As such, we were able to redefine, explore and adjust how and what to exhibit. Our endeavour led us to identify and engage with two core critical issues that underpin the archival-curatorial project: first was how to activate and represent material, communities and practices that fall outside of traditional museum/archival/academic spaces in ways that are recognisable to the viewer, while still respecting the silence and loss inherent to such places and communities. Second, was a methodological disavowal of the notion that mapping or exhibition devices can necessarily assume finality and closure. Instead, our project emphasised that any form of ‘knowing’ is a communal gesture that trades in both fact and imagination. The discrepancies between archival facts and personal memories, between different recollections of similar events, was treated as a sign of the inherent difficulty of dealing with a past. This is especially true when various participants, including community members, the viewers and the curators, are encouraged to remember together.

Moving our curatorial practice into the terrain of sound and mapping practices has opened up our work to a myriad of possibilities, both in representation of material as well as in allowing us continuously to move between research, practical trial-and-error, reflection and critical evaluation, towards learning and understanding. This allows for a collaborative, experimental and interdisciplinary practice that counters archival illusions of finality and autonomy. Ultimately, our exhibition served as a

map that was continuously created and recreated through the viewer's relation to sound, thereby displacing closure.

Ranging from the two-dimensional to the bodily, the visual to the aural, this exhibition drew on maps as a means to speak to the very idea of a landscape in flux. For the Eoan Opera Group, the South African landscape was the ground for their growth and success, but it was also the catalyst for their displacement and disappearance. To hear them speak and sing today might not be enough to change a landscape, but it does allow us to foster some connection, albeit tenuous, with this community – a connection that lies somewhere between the ear and the ground.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The term 'coloured' is a racial term used by the apartheid government. People classified as coloured were not only individuals of racially mixed descent, but included the Khoisan and individuals descended from slaves brought mainly from Southeast Asia. The term has a complex history that has at times included its rejection as an apartheid label and at others, its claiming as a self-referential term (Fourie, 2013). We are using the term in this article to indicate the Eoan Group's own self-referential claim to this term.
- 2 DOMUS is the Special Collections Division of the Music Library, Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service.
- 3 A total of 47 interviews were conducted from 2009-2010 with former members of the Eoan Opera Group, family members and administrative staff. The interviews were conducted by a team of eight people including Stellenbosch University academic staff, members of the Eoan community, and DOMUS archivists. These interviews are all preserved at the Documentation Centre for Music as part of the Eoan Group Archive.
- 4 Our research on the Eoan Opera Group has benefited significantly from the generosity of Hilde Roos. Her work on Eoan served to open up this archive for projects such as ours, and we are much indebted to her research. For examples see: *Eoan – Our Story* (2012), edited by Hilde Roos and Wayne Muller, as well as the chapter 'Archival Secrets: Constructing the History of Eoan' in Roos's PhD dissertation entitled *Opera Production in the Western Cape: Strategies in Search of Indigenization* (2010, 75-150).
- 5 The Group also offered ballet classes, folk dance, speech, drama, painting and sewing classes (Roos and Muller 2012, 174)

- 6 The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act No 49 of 1953 legalised the racial segregation of public areas while the Group Areas Act assigned racial groups to specific residential and business areas in South Africa. Under this Act, all races declared 'non-white' were forcibly removed from areas zoned for white occupation only. They were usually moved to areas outside of city centres, from where they had to commute long distances to work.
- 7 The group toured South Africa in 1960 and 1965 and travelled to the United Kingdom in 1975 (Eoan History Project 2012, 245, 247, 250).
- 8 The South African Council on Sport (SACOS) was a non-racial governing body for sport in South Africa aligned with the anti-apartheid movement.
- 9 The group performed their last full scale opera in 1975. However, they continued to present concerts with mixed programmes of famous arias until the early 1980s.
- 10 The University of Stellenbosch shares a historical past with some of the founding fathers of apartheid including D.F. Malan, B.J. Voster and H.F. Verwoerd, who all studied or taught at this institution (see Koorts 2014; Gilliomee 2003).
- 11 Examples of other projects include the ANC Oral History Project, the Oral History Programme of the National Archives of South Africa (NASA), oral history projects such as 'Forgotten Voices in the Present' at the South African History Archive (SAHA) and the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), which focusses on collecting the stories and experiences of South Africans under the apartheid government (see Morrow and Wotshela 2005, 325).
- 12 See also O'Doherty (1999), O'Neill (2012), Rugg and Sedgwick (2007) and Von Hantelmann (2012) on contemporary definitions of curatorship.
- 13 Mapping as cartographic practice has a long record, particularly within modernist and colonial discourses, of perpetuating a belief in the ability to trace 'culture and civilisation' (Thrower 1999, 1). As such, mapping has been used to exercise power and to legitimise discriminatory policies by drawing on its 'scientific' credentials, particularly when justifying Western domination in colonial territories. The ideologies and practices of modernity and colonialism could be applied and justified through mapping, specifically by dividing and categorising the spaces of the Western 'self' versus that of the non-Western 'other' (Imbert 2004); mapping is thus central to the division and capturing of space and resources. It is important to acknowledge that mapping as cartographic practice has, for all its uses and aptitudes, been a form of spatial

representation that is marked by a struggle over knowledge and power (Imbert 2004).

14 See, for example, the work of Sébastien Caquard (2011), Christina Ljunberg (2003) and Barbara Piatti and Lorenz Hurni (2009) for contemporary scholarship that engages with mapping as a subjective, counterfactual practice.

15 For similar practices see the work of Ian Biggs (2010; 2011), Teri Reub (2013) and Karen Till (2008; 2010).

16 We are indebted to Gerhard Roux, lecturer in Music Technology at Stellenbosch University, for assisting us in designing the technological aspects of this installation.

17 For an impression of what the sound wall might have sounded like, please visit our *Soundcloud* page and listen to 'Lingering Absences: Sound Wall', <https://soundcloud.com/user-5739450/lingering-absences-sw>.

18 To hear these tracks, please visit our *Soundcloud* page and listen to 'Lingering Absences: Joseph Stone'; 'Lingering Absences: Cape Town City Hall'; and 'Lingering Absences: Isaac Ochberg Hall' (<https://soundcloud.com/user-5739450>).

19 Apart from confirmation that the Isaac Ochberg Hall was located in Hanover Street, no archival material exists, to our knowledge, that could map the building's official location, dimensions or structure. Only one photograph is known to exist of the hall's exterior (used in this article), and a few photographs exist in the Eoan Archive that depict activities inside the building. In order to approximate the building's location, we made use of maps of District Six kept at the National Archives in Cape Town. Most helpful, however, was the street map drawn on the floor of the District Six Museum in Cape Town. Originally part of the exhibition, 'Streets: Retracing District Six' with which the Museum opened in 2000, the map has since been filled in by former residents of District Six with street names, places, schools, street corner café's etc. The Isaac Ochberg Hall was also drawn in on the map, and we used this approximate location along with the maps found in the National Archive to make our recordings of this site.

20 For work on the body and its relation to sound, see Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice* (2011), which presents a phenomenological perspective on the human experience of sound. Also see Salome Voegelin's *Listening to Noise and Silence* (2010) for a philosophical reading of sound art, and Caleb Kelly's book *Sound* (2011), which provides an important point of reference on artists working in the contemporary (and connected) fields of art/music/sound.

21 LaBelle (2012) notes that although 'modes of participation and interaction remain key strategies within arts' practices, the sound arts fundamentally presuppose such strategies'. He points out that in sound arts, participation is not really a choice, because sound moves towards the participant, and permeates the body, without the viewer having a choice.

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