A lecture by **Sound Threshold** for the *Contingency of Curation* conference

**Lucia Farinati:**
During our presentation at the conference we showed an extract from the video documentation of a concert that Sound Threshold organised in 2008 as part of the project Music and Sound Through the Landscape. The project took place on Monte Bondone, in the region of Trentino in Northern Italy, and was a parallel event to Manifesta 7. The concert featured the Irish group Fovea Hex and was the inaugural event of Sound Threshold, a research project that we established in 2007 to investigate the relationship between sound and site.

Before starting to talk specifically about this project, I would like to address some of the topics of this panel, in particular the notion of the work mediation because production. I will do this by referring to the footage we showed at the conference. The video material had not been edited: it is actually taken from the original footage shot by a camera operator who was asked to document the whole concert.

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The location we chose was an astronomic observatory at an altitude of 1600 metres. What you don't actually see from the documentation is the spectacular mountain landscape that characterises the topography of the Trentino and that was the point of departure of our research. To some extent my interest in beginning the presentation with the screening of this footage, lies in the possibility or in the attempt of re-articulating and re-thinking the process of documentation as a process of mediation between site and non-site, and eventually as a form of production in itself.

Moreover, while the film gives an idea of the physical context or the landscape in which Sound Threshold operated, it functions also as a mirror image that highlights the situation in which we find ourselves today: a staged presentation of some kind that will be documented and possibly featured on the Tate media archive, yet a staged presentation which is already, at the moment of speaking, a re-presentation and a documentation in itself. In looking at the stage from the point of view of the audience there is a sense of tension and expectation amplified by the music, but from the position of speaker, a certain uneasiness appears.

Although the panel had been proposed as a 'multi-authorial curatorial event', and the auditorium as a hosting venue of this event, the institutional space that we are occupying and its mediatic power, seem inevitably to nullify any kind of operation, or counter-discourse that aim at disrupting the conventional format of a conference and the rhetoric that it carries within it. For this reason I would like to propose to change the title of this panel from mediation as production to documentation as production. And here I would refer to the essay *Art in the Age of Biopolitics, From Artworks towards Art Documentation* by Boris Groys. Based on these observations the questions are: In which terms is it possible to think aboutdocumentation as production? It this a new open terrain, a conflictual arena or simply the place where the contingency of curation manifests itself? I am still thinking about the unedited piece of documentation, and having serious problems in imagining how this footage could become something unique. Yet it is the documentation of an art project, it is potentially art documentation.

What we had actually experienced with our concert was neither the role of music promoter or the music producer, but to investigate a different mode of production, distribution and reception of sound, both outside the music industry and the gallery/museum context. The expanded field - or as suggested by this conference - the expanded practice which we inhabited, saw the collaboration between us as curators and the musicians responding to this specific site, and it is from this point that we started to develop Sound Threshold.

**Daniela Cascella:**
To refer to another aspect of this panel, I would reflect on the etymology of the word 'contingency'. It comes from Latin, cum + tangere. Where cum is 'with', and tangere is 'to touch', but also 'to reach'. 'To reach with', 'to reach together' - and also, 'to happen', 'to take place'. Hence the Italian adjective 'contiguo': 'close to', sharing a border. It strikes me how a simple etymological research opens up to a number of 'contingencies' that match the title of this symposium with the very nature of our research. The word in itself, contingency, carries within notions of taking place – being host in a place, and place as site - notions of proximity and sharing a border – which is the very nature of our project, called Sound Threshold – and notions of making happen - which in turn imply production, an activity our project has been very much dealing with.

I would argue that my entire curatorial activity has been an ongoing contingency, brought about by writing on sound. At the time I met Lucia, many questions were in my head about curating sound. To be able to engage in a dialogue about the site of sound, and sound across a landscape, was a way of curating sound in a more complex and lively context, and the initial step for the development of our research. In particular, Sound Threshold was born as an investigation of the specific landscape of the Trentino region in Northern Italy. The main questions that prompted such a project looked for ways to go beyond the picture postcard effect within that landscape, and reveal a more vivid sense in it: going beyond conventional systems of representation, and combining modes of looking at with those of looking through. Sound is the media through which we chose to confront such issues. Because it is elusive, and because we felt it could adapt to a variety of contexts, and to non-conventional modes of presentation. We referred to an essay published in 1973 by Vilém Flusser, *Line And Surface*, in which sound was identified as an element capable of destabilising the dynamics of screen/surface.

We chose sound as an element that tears through images and simultaneously re-constitutes them, not simply passing through, but stopping and absorbing. We have investigated the idea of threshold as an extended metaphor of boundary, frontier, track, border and difference as embodied by the Latin word 'limes' - by doing so, we have embraced an idea of landscape not only as a visual construct but also as a complexity of natural elements, literary references and acoustic phenomena. The project took shape through practice. The core of it was Cima Verde: the outcome of the collaboration between Sound Threshold, sound recordist Chris Watson, the team of the Centre for Alpine Ecology of Monte Bondone, and Paneveggio Park. We invited Chris to spend two weeks in a residency on the alpine site, during which he explored the acoustic phenomena of the area and captured them in a series of field recordings, which then resulted in the Cima Verde CD. Again, it has to be underlined how the CD is not as such a documentation, but reflects the very essence of our research: Chris's recordings, the scientists inputs on the ecosystem, our own writings in the booklet. What we ultimately learnt from this experience was a crucial challenge for us as curators: we shifted from a mode of production and distribution that increasingly calls for objects to be displayed or events to be documented, to a more impalpable process which created and asked, most of all, for a shared, and yet intimate, space for listening. The ways in which this space for listening might be critically recollected, and how it distances itself from traditional formats of exhibition-making are what we intend to investigate in the next season of Sound Threshold. To explore listening as a practice and to develop a discourse about site-specificity as challenged by time-based media. The site that we wish to re-visit is the ever-changeable site between the work and the listener, defined by and through time: a travelogue, a recollection, a constellation.