

NO ARCHIVE WILL RESTORE US. FROM THE HAUNTED ARCHIVE TO THE EMBODIED ARCHIVE IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I examine how hauntological practices and haunting methodologies serve as generative and performative tools for rethinking the relationships between archives, memory, collective heritage and performance. Grounded in interdisciplinary perspectives—especially from Performance Studies, Sound Studies, Vocal Studies and Philosophy—I approach the topic from the standpoint of a Southern European performance artist and artistic researcher. My work as a precarious worker within the arts and cultural sector informs the theoretical inquiry, drawing attention to the marginalization and the silencing of certain voices, of the stories of places where archives often fail to survive—because there are no victors’ narratives to tell them—but ghosts certainly do.

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This research reflects on the embodied nature of haunting, which, as Avery Gordon suggests in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), “makes us act differently”. Haunting, in this sense, operates as a catalyst for engagement with both intangible traces of history and the specters of collective memory. Performance, with its non-linear temporality and fragmented structure, provides an apt framework for manifesting these spectral traces, inviting exploration of the complex affective ties between the past and the present.

The first section of this paper outlines the theoretical framework of haunting and its relationship to performance, with a specific focus on sound and voice practices. This framework serves to situate performance as a site for the manifestation of memory, nostalgia, and affect, suggesting that the performative act is not only a way of re-creating history but of engaging with what remains beyond visibility. The second section, focusing on my recent work *Haunted* (Gaia Ginevra Giorgi, 2024), explores the ways in which the performative engagement with an archival radio recording—damaged by a flood in 1994—becomes a form of haunting. By embracing rather than repairing the damaged archive, the performance reactivates it through a process of spectral re-emergence. The final section considers my ongoing collaboration with the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna, investigating how embodied archives can reshape contemporary performance. This project reflects on how the body, as an archive, carries with it the immaterial traces of our collective heritage, inviting reflection on the transformative potential of embodied performance to bring archives to life on stage.

Through these interconnected lines of inquiry, this paper highlights how performance can serve as a site of reimagined histories and collective memory, offering new pathways for thinking about the relationship between the past and the present within the field of Performance Studies.

2. HAUNTOLOGY, TIME OUT OF JOIN, AND THE MATERIALITY OF GHOSTS

2.1 Hauntological Trajectories

The concept of "hauntology" originates from Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, a work in which the philosopher interrogates the spectral dimensions embedded within Marx's analyses. These specters—constitutive yet elusive forces—inhabit the structural conditions that enable capitalism's persistence and are, in Derrida's formulation, susceptible to processes of exorcism. As a term, hauntology fuses "haunting" and "ontology," thereby signifying a departure from the metaphysical assumptions of presence and being, redirecting focus toward a temporality that is dislocated, or as Hamlet articulates, "out of joint." This time-space is one of unresolved presences: entities neither fully absent nor entirely manifest, whose effects reverberate across historical and material conditions. Within Derrida's framework, these spectral manifestations encompass both the latent, invisible mechanisms that stabilize capitalist structures and the ever-looming possibility of communism, the very "specter haunting Europe." In the contemporary landscape, these spectral modalities of exploitation and systemic oppression have multiplied, demanding recognition not merely in ideological abstraction but as forces materially inscribed upon bodies.

The question thus arises: what significance does an ostensibly theoretical discourse on spectrality hold within contemporary socio-political configurations? Marx's proposition of emancipation through an exorcism—a final purging of capital's spectrality—proves inadequate under present conditions, and even Derrida's nuanced reconceptualization fails to fully capture the indeterminacies that haunt contemporary existence. Nonetheless, these theoretical interventions generate productive tensions that continue to inform critical thought. Marx's preoccupation with ghosts pervades his oeuvre, manifesting in his analyses of commodity fetishism and the mystifications intrinsic to

capital's operation, as well as in his efforts to dispel the lingering phantoms of Religion, Monarchy, and the State. Yet, crucially, Marx also regards the specter as a figure of political potential, an entity whose arrival is both feared and desired. This dialectic of spectral necessity and rejection situates ghosts at the core of his theoretical project, underscoring a fundamental dynamic within hauntological inquiry: haunting as simultaneously a structural phenomenon and an affective force. Whereas Marx foregrounds its structural dimensions, Avery Gordon, by contrast, emphasizes how encounters with spectrality at an individual level illuminate broader socio-political realities.

This insight necessitates a recalibration of perception, an attunement to spectral materiality that disrupts linear notions of time. The past, rather than a closed historical moment, remains immanent within the present, while the future is not simply deferred but exerts an anticipatory force. No exorcism, whether theoretical or political, can fully expunge these spectral traces. What, then, constitutes an exorcism? Who enacts it? What is the ontology of the body subjected to purification, and how is it reintegrated post-ritual? Who assumes responsibility for the residual effects of such a process? These are the questions that Marx and Derrida, when reframed through a contemporary lens, must confront. The inadequacy of conventional methodologies in addressing spectrality invites a reconsideration of foundational epistemological premises: to what extent can established conceptual apparatuses dismantle the very structures they presuppose?

Derrida's analysis, as is characteristic of his oeuvre, exceeds its own theoretical parameters, generating conceptual ripples that persist beyond its immediate historical and philosophical context. The work of Walter Benjamin, particularly his notion of "profane illumination" and his insistence on the dynamic interaction between past and present, profoundly shapes contemporary hauntological discourse. Figures such as Karen Barad, Avery Gordon, and Mark Fisher extend and transform hauntology's scope, reframing its concerns through a variety of disciplinary lenses. Barad's engagement with hauntology, for instance,

situates it within the domain of quantum mechanics, arguing that the very fabric of physical reality exhibits spectral characteristics. In *Entanglement, Quantum Mechanics, and Hauntological Heritages*, Barad employs a diffractive methodology to interrogate the ontological implications of quantum entanglement, asserting that materiality itself is not a static given but is constituted through intra-active processes. In this framework, existence is not reducible to discrete entities in fixed spatiotemporal coordinates but is instead entangled across time and space.

This reconceptualization of materiality as inherently queer and spectral necessitates a reassessment of ontological assumptions. Schrödinger's formulation of quantum entanglement, initially confined to physics, is recontextualized within Barad's philosophical and political lexicon, preserving its theoretical rigor while expanding its applicability. Entanglement, within this schema, denotes an ontological condition of correlation, interdependency, and mutual implication across spatial and temporal distances. This conceptualization aligns with hauntology's assertion that material reality is permeated by spectral traces, disruptions that trouble the presumed continuity of presence.

Equally significant is Barad's notion of intra-activity, wherein the prefix "intra" signals an emphasis on relationality as an ontological condition. Unlike conventional notions of interaction, which presuppose discrete entities engaging in external relations, intra-activity foregrounds the constitutive entanglement of phenomena. Within this framework, time is not a linear sequence but an entangled field of differential relations. The implication is clear: at the level of matter itself, causality is destabilized, and temporality resists univocal determination.

The ghost, in this context, assumes a paradoxical materiality—heterogeneous, elusive, and resistant to ontological closure. This is not merely a theoretical abstraction but a recognition of the fundamental entanglement of being. There exists no vantage point

external to this fabric, no privileged subject- position from which to survey reality as an autonomous observer. The epistemic stance that presumes such detachment, characteristic of classical metaphysics, is precisely what spectrality disrupts. Ghosts, by their very nature, signify what dominant epistemologies occlude: the persistent remainder, the unresolved problem that continues to exert its force. They manifest within moments of epistemic rupture and ontological uncertainty, signaling the necessity of confronting what resists assimilation into established paradigms. In this light, the spectral is not an anomaly but a constitutive feature of reality itself. The question thus becomes: what are the material compositions of our ghosts? Learning to inhabit spectrality, rather than seeking to expunge it, is the imperative that follows.

So, what happens if we don't take time for granted? Talking about ghosts is talking about time.

Time and space do not exist as something given – predetermined and unaffected – outside of phenomena; they are intra-actively produced in spatiotemporal materializations.

So, what might happen when the possible iterations of something unresolved speak to us as a “coexisting multiplicity of entangled relations of past-present-future-here-there”?

What happens when these queer and ghostly matters constitute the phenomena of the world? (Primultini, *Materie fantasma. Tre conversazioni Haunting e metodologie performative*, 2024, p. 9)

And again, to quote Laura Tripaldi's *Ectoplasm Feminism* (Nero, 2014). *Notes on the materiality of ghosts* (Nero, 2014):

What material are ghosts made of? We are used to imagining them as incorporeal beings, they float in mid-air, disappear at will, and pass through concrete walls. The ghost's incorporeality, however, is not what makes it frightening. That is, instead, the only thing that makes its horror tolerable. The ghost's transformation into a disembodied hologram is a defense mechanism. Its complete estrangement from the body spares us

from the possibility of contamination, it protects us from the realization that our flesh, too, could be a festering nest of restless shadows. I would like to invite you to rethink the question of the materiality of the ghost, to imagine what it might mean for a ghost to have a body, and for a body to be ghostly. I ask you not to think of this question in terms of haunting or possession. There are no holy or demonic spirits here, invading the quiet container of the body. My proposal, instead, requires a more challenging and more disturbing leap of imagination, what if flesh itself were the ghost?

2.2 Sonic Hauntology: Echoes, Disruptions, and the Materiality of Memory

Building on Derrida's concept of hauntology, Mark Fisher reconfigures it within a sonic dimension, establishing a connection that has since gained critical prominence. In *Specters of Marx*, subtitled *The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Derrida originally introduced hauntology as an alternative to ontology, proposing a framework not predicated upon the self-evidence of presence but rather on absence and untimeliness. Hauntology disrupts the linear temporality of past-present-future, instead envisaging a fractured temporality—what Derrida, drawing from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, characterizes as *out of joint*, dislocated, or, in one of Derrida's preferred translations, *out of kilter* (*fuori di sesto*). The spectral operates through a peculiar mode of visibility, oscillating between a friendly apparition and a disruptive interrogation, manifesting either as the fragmented return of a historical singularity (such as the father in *Hamlet*) or as the deferred realization of an unrealized promise (such as communism in Marxist thought).

Fisher extends this theoretical framework to diagnose the persistence of the virtual as a defining characteristic of hauntology. He delineates two key trajectories: first, the spectral efficacy of that which is

no longer but continues to exert influence in virtual form; second, the virtual effectiveness of that which has not yet materialized but is nonetheless already active. While Derrida formulated his hauntological inquiry in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the subsequent acceleration of neoliberal hegemony, Fisher, writing over a decade later, grapples with the perceived impossibility of any viable alternative to capitalism. In the era of *capitalist realism* (Fisher, 2009), where tele-technologies compress space and time, rendering distant events immediately accessible, and where cyberspace governs the reception, destruction, and consumption of culture—particularly music (Fisher, 2019, p. 35)—Fisher designates as hauntological a heterogeneous convergence of electronic music artists (including William Basinski, Burial, The Caretaker, and the Ghost Box label). These artists, unified by a melancholic sensibility, employ sonic technologies to lend material consistency to memory.

Hauntological music, in this sense, engages with the detritus of obsolete media, incorporating decaying tapes, vinyl records, and ephemeral sonic artifacts. A defining auditory signature of this aesthetic is the crackle of surface noise—the auditory residue of vinyl’s materiality, a sonic correlative to a time *out of joint*. This acoustic imperfection operates as a critical counterpoint to the illusion of immediacy in digital sound reproduction. Unlike digital media, which seeks to efface its own materiality, the crackle in hauntological music foregrounds the medium itself, rendering audible both the recorded sound and the mechanisms of its mediation. More than a nostalgic fetishization of the past, this melancholic aesthetic signals the spectral return of a lost future—not merely delayed but foreclosed, rendered impossible. And yet, Fisher argues, this music refuses to relinquish the desire for futurity. This refusal endows hauntological melancholia with a political dimension, resisting the constrained horizons imposed by capitalist realism (Fisher, 2019, p. 37).

3. THE HAUNTED ARCHIVE

3.1 Memory, Materiality, and Performance in “Haunted”

This chapter examines *Haunted* (2024), a performance art piece that explores the intersection of memory, archival failure, and sonic manipulation. Informed by Avery Gordon’s framework of “haunting” and Derridean hauntology, this study considers how the performance utilizes analog media—specifically magnetic tape—to evoke spectral presences and create an ephemeral archive that oscillates between autobiography and imagination. Through an analysis of the performance’s dramaturgy, written in close collaboration with dramaturg Giada Cipollone, this paper explores how *Haunted* challenges traditional notions of the archive as a stable repository, instead proposing a dynamic, disordered space where memory is rewritten and made manifest through the materiality of sound. Drawing from philosophical reflections on the nature of archives and collective memory, this work redefines the relationship between performance, the archive, and history, offering a model for understanding performance as an active and transformative archival practice.

The relationship between memory, archives, and performance has undergone significant re-examination in recent decades. Scholars in philosophy and performance studies have critiqued the notion of the archive as a monolithic, neutral repository, revealing its inherent instability and spectral qualities. The performance *Haunted* exemplifies these tensions, engaging with archival memory in a way that challenges conventional understandings of preservation and restoration. Through its material engagement with analog sound technologies and its incorporation of live manipulation, *Haunted* creates a dynamic performance archive that destabilizes the notion of the archive as fixed, questioning its role in preserving personal and collective histories. Drawing on key theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Avery Gordon, and Peggy Phelan, this paper explores how *Haunted* reimagines the archive as an active site of haunting and reconfiguration.

3.1 Archival Haunting: the methodological framework

At the heart of *Haunted* lies the concept of "haunting" as a methodological framework for engaging with archival materials. Building on Avery Gordon's understanding of haunting, the work eschews attempts at restoration, repair, or reanimation of lost voices and memories. Instead, the methodology of haunting is employed to explore what remains of the archive—those spectral traces that persist despite, or perhaps because of, their fragmentation. Gordon's notion of haunting, rooted in the idea of "a structure of feeling" (2022, p. 250), offers a way of knowing that recognizes the persistence of repressed or neglected matters that disturb the present. *Haunted* deploys haunting not as a passive return of lost memory, but as an active, performative process of eliciting and shaping these remnants, drawing attention to their social and political force.

The materiality of the archive itself, the magnetic tape damaged by the floodwaters, becomes a key figure in the performance, where the archival object is no longer merely an inert document but an agent that generates new meanings through its sonic properties. This engagement with the material object reconfigures the archive as a space that is not static, but rather perpetually in flux, continuously overwritten and reassembled.

3.2 The Sonic Dimension of Haunting: Memory and Materiality

Sonic memory plays a central role in *Haunted*, as the performance employs analog sound technologies—particularly magnetic tape, hydrophones, and radios—to explore the ghostly presence of lost memories. Following Mark Fisher's extension of Derrida's hauntology into the sonic realm (2006), *Haunted* utilizes the decaying, crackling nature of analog sound to evoke the spectral quality of memory itself. The sound of the spinning tape, with its interruptions, feedback, and

interference, becomes a metaphor for memory's fragmentary and non-linear structure. The loop, as both a dramaturgical rhythm and a material feature of the tape recorder, captures the cyclical nature of memory—repeating, rewinding, and reinterpreting itself.

This cyclical, looping nature of sound in *Haunted* aligns with Fisher's idea of hauntology as a disjointed temporality, one that resists linearity and progress. Instead, it conjures a fragmented past that refuses to remain fixed, resonating through the interference of the medium itself. In this sense, the tape is not simply a means of recording or preserving memory; it is a dynamic agent that mediates between the past and the present, between the known and the unknown. Through the live manipulation of the tape and the hydrophone, *Haunted* explores the potential for the present moment to rewrite or disrupt the past, drawing attention to the materiality of sound and its ability to create new forms of memory.

3.3 The Performative Gesture: Manipulating Memory

In *Haunted*, the performative gesture serves as a central mechanism for disrupting and rewriting memory. The act of live manipulation of the tape—stretching, lifting, and vibrating the fragile material—introduces an element of agency that challenges the archival object's supposed objectivity and stability. This manipulation, marked by the physicality of the performer's body, serves as an intrusive act that undermines the illusion of fidelity and permanence associated with the archival object. In this way, the performance offers a critique of the notion that memory must be preserved in its original, unaltered form.

The live manipulation of the tape represents a performative rewriting of history, in which memory is not fixed or immutable but continually shaped and reshaped by the present. The body, as both a conductor of sound and an agent of disruption, reconfigures the archive by introducing new layers of sound, interference, and distortion. This

live engagement with the material echoes the notion of the "ghost archive" as proposed by Julietta Singh (2018), in which the archive is not a static storehouse of information but a force in flux, perpetually reshaping itself.

3.4 The interference of time: fragmentation and reconfiguration

The presence of interference—whether from radio signals, tape distortions, or the manipulation of sound—further underscores the fragmented and spectral nature of memory in *Haunted*. Radio waves, traditionally associated with the transmission of invisible signals, become a metaphor for the ways in which the past continually intrudes upon the present, reconfiguring the boundaries between the visible and invisible, the known and unknown. The interplay of interference with the material soundscape produces a haunting presence, one that resists coherence and clarity in favor of dissonance and rupture.

Incorporating these interferences into the performance challenges the conventional understanding of memory as a stable and retrievable resource. Instead, *Haunted* presents memory as an ongoing process of reconfiguration, where the past is never fully recovered but constantly re-imagined through the material and sonic remnants that persist.

3.5 The Re-Archiving of Memory: Collective Action and Affective Stories

In conclusion, *Haunted* emphasizes the idea of the archive as a site of collective action, where memory is not simply an individual possession but a shared, affective force. The re-archiving process in *Haunted* is not about recovering lost histories or presenting a coherent narrative, but about creating a space for new interpretations and reconfigurations of the past. The audience's experience of the performance, shaped by the spatialization of sound and the fragmentation of the archive, invites a more active engagement with

memory. Through this participatory process, the archive becomes a living, breathing entity, always open to revision and reinterpretation.

The catalog distributed to the audience at the end of each performance embodies this fluidity, presenting a mutable archive that mixes factual memory with mythic invention. This provisional archive highlights the impossibility of restoring a definitive version of the past, instead emphasizing the archive's potential to generate new meanings through collective engagement and affective exchange.

3.6 Conclusion: Reconfiguring the Archive Through Performance

Haunted offers a radical rethinking of the archive, memory, and performance, using the materiality of sound and the performative gesture to engage with histories that resist closure. By embracing haunting as a methodological framework and performance as a site of active re-archiving, the work challenges traditional notions of preservation, offering a model for understanding the archive as an open, transformative space. Through its engagement with the spectral, the material, and the affective dimensions of memory, *Haunted* demonstrates how performance can serve as a powerful tool for reimagining the past, inviting new possibilities for the archive as both a site of loss and regeneration.

4. THE EMBODIED ARCHIVE

Often, what is truly significant in an archive is what is absent. Here, performative practices come into play, with their ability to engage with ghosts and collective heritage through techniques of embodiment.

This chapter engages with my current research, which takes as starting point the scientific and religious archives of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, from which the names (and voices) of many female patients (or test subjects), at the same time seers, sibyls, and somnambulists— often young and of lower social classes—have

almost entirely disappeared. These women were frequently relegated to the roles of hysterics, witches, or exploited as sideshow curiosities for economic gain. The case studies informing my research focus on women who found in mentalism and magic a tool for emancipation, bending the paranormal to their advantage. Accidentally their adventurous lives left traces in newspapers, posters, and judicial records. They subverted the prevailing paradigms of magic, attempting to overturn their destinies by using their voices and deceiving the educated, wealthy, and male bourgeois and noble elites that surrounded them.

In illusionist shows, women are sawed, crushed, and tortured amidst applause: their bodies are passive objects to be abused. My research, who refused to end up under the magician's saw, overturned the table, and used the power of magic from the perspective of an original psychic feminism.

This chapter, drawing upon the research of Mariano Tomatis in *Incantagioni* (2022) and Clara Gallini in *La Sonnambula Meravigliosa* (1983), uses my ongoing research for the development of a new performative project *May somnambulism never open our mouth* (working title) as a case study to interrogate the practices of embodiment within archives, with particular emphasis on what is missing from them.

4.1 May somnambulism never opens our mouth. Research Directions

In 1894, Théodore Flournoy, professor of experimental psychology at the University of Geneva, assembled a group of experts—including Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics—to examine the enigmatic case of Hélène Smith, a renowned Genevan medium. In a state of self-hypnosis (somnambulism), Smith exhibited the ability to alter her voice and speak in invented, unknown languages (glossolalia or speaking in tongue). A number of prominent scientists and scholars gathered on this occasion to investigate the voices and languages—multiple, unknown, and glossolalic—that seemed to emanate from the body of a young woman diagnosed with hysteria. This event

unfolded in a historical context marked by the emergence of psychoanalytic theories in Vienna (Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1899), the invention of the first magnetic tape recorders, and the establishment of the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna (also in 1899, founded by the physiologist Sigmund Exner, a mentor to Freud), the first European archive of recorded voices.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Europe witnessed an increasing obsession with the female voice, positioned at the intersection of spiritualism, early psychoanalytic theories, technological innovation, and scientific inquiry. This research examines various case studies, from the ventriloquism of Carlotta Cerino—who, in 1835, managed to secure an audience with Re Carlo Alberto—to the diaries of Sabina Spielrein, whose trajectory in the early twentieth century exemplifies a reversal of status: from a diagnosed hysteric under the analytical gaze of Freud and Jung to a psychoanalyst and scholar in her own right. The preoccupation with the female voice is further reflected in the study of early twentieth-century sound materials preserved in the Phonogrammarchiv of Vienna. Field recordings from sessions in phoniatics, early speech therapy, and psychiatry document how female voices have historically been subjected to scientific scrutiny and domestication.

By tracing the biographies of women who—positioned between magnetism, somnambulism, clairvoyance, necromancy, and pathology—claimed their voice and explored alternative states of embodiment and phonation, this research offers a historical analysis of the power dynamics between magic and science. Drawing upon historical archives, including Charcot's studies on hysterical states, I examine parallels between the contemporary European (and global) context and the period under investigation, particularly concerning the interplay between techno-scientific advancements and the resurgence of esoteric, magical, and spiritual practices. This study engages with the theoretical perspectives of anthropologist Clara Gallini and the critical illusionism of Mariano Tomatis to investigate the voice both as an

instrument of power and as a means of emancipation.

The research operates on multiple levels: theoretical, historical, and anthropological, as well as performative. This latter dimension necessitates the exploration of extended vocal techniques, specifically those linked to extreme high-pitched voices (culturally associated with pathological hysteria in the female domain) and extremely low-pitched voices (connected to authority and power). This includes the study of screaming techniques and somatic practices, such as the Feldenkrais Method, which enables an investigation of affective states of the body through posture. Additionally, scenic work on visual illusionism and the study of psychoacoustic phenomena and auditory hallucinations will be fundamental in the development of an experimental sound-based work.

4.2 From the Archive to the Body

Starting from the material processes through which the voice emerges—traversing the anatomy and physiology of the phonatory apparatus, as well as the educational and medical contexts and techniques aimed at conforming to conventional aesthetic models (speech therapy, singing, acting)—this research seeks to illuminate the paradigms of sound and listening normalization. As Brandon LaBelle suggests in *Acoustic Justice: Performativity, Listening, and the Work of Reorientation*, the voice is not merely a sonic event but a political and relational act that resists normativity and creates spaces for alternative forms of listening and expression.

Adopting this perspective, the ongoing research examines the earliest vocal recordings housed in the Phonogrammarchiv of Vienna, particularly those originating from phoniatic, medical, and psychiatric contexts. The female voices analyzed are systematically pathologized, while male voices assume the role of authority and scientific knowledge, issuing commands, judgments, or diagnoses—thereby shaping the

historical record and defining the identity of female voices. As a vocal performer, I am interested in reactivating these materials through the use of the body and the exploration of extended vocal techniques and somatic practices. The reverberation of archival materials within the space of performance and within the performer's body generates a short circuit that opens up a space, particularly for those voices and subjectivities that did not survive the mechanisms of archival classification and historicization.

In her essay *Libraries of Voices*, Shelley Trower explores the notion of preserved voices, comparing them to books or pages stored in a "library." She distinguishes between two forms of voice archiving:

1. Phonographic form: A tangible collection of phonographic recordings, organized on shelves like books to be "read" through a sensitive needle.
2. Atmospheric form: Sound vibrations imprinted in the atoms of the surrounding air, creating a constantly expanding, omnipresent library.

This analysis recalls the historical necessity of transcribing spoken words to ensure their survival over time. In the phonographic context, the archive requires active creation and can be physically manipulated and structured. In contrast, the "atmospheric library" is ubiquitous and grows uncontrollably.

I thus interpret performative practices—and this project in particular—as a means of allowing silenced voices to continue reverberating.

By examining these modes of preservation, Trower highlights the different ways voices endure across time and space, offering a unique perspective on the relationship between sound, memory, and archival practices.

4.3 Voice and Language: Glossolalia as a Tool for Speaking Out

In her essay *Glossolalia / Xenoglossia*, included in the anthology *Unsound:Undead* (2019), Agnès Gayraud explores the phenomena of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and xenoglossia (the ability to speak or understand a foreign language unknown to the speaker). She examines these linguistic occurrences through various lenses, including their cultural, psychological, and philosophical implications. Gayraud delves into how these phenomena challenge conventional understandings of language, communication, and the boundaries of the self. By analyzing historical cases and theoretical perspectives, she sheds light on the significance of glossolalia and xenoglossia in broader discussions about human consciousness and the limits of linguistic expression. Gayraud writes:

Glossolalia or speaking in tongues is the ability to read, write or speak an unknown language, an ability the speaker supposedly gains from a supernatural spirit. It sounds like a mixture of muttering and utterances that are neither directly intelligible nor translatable, but rather open to interpretation. From Pythia, the ancient Oracle of Delphi, to the mediaeval Christian tradition, to today's Charismatic Movement, glossolalia has always been considered as a manifestation of the presence of God in the individual who demonstrates this unlearned skill. Because it breaks the natural laws of knowledge, it must be considered a miracle.

The phenomenon of glossolalia, particularly as it was studied in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, provides a crucial lens through which to analyze the intersections of voice, gender, and the limits of the human subject. Michel de Certeau's reflections on the areopagus as a space that mediates voices point to the broader epistemological and historical concerns surrounding the representation and interpretation of female voices—especially those attributed to supernatural or non-human sources (De Certeau, 1988).

Similarly, in the world of stage magic, the female body has traditionally been an object of manipulation, subjected to acts of sawing, crushing, and other forms of symbolic violence, all performed to the

applause of the audience (Tomatis, 2024).

However, these performances of silencing and control were not the only possible narratives. Both glossolalia and the esoteric arts provided some women with unexpected tools of resistance. While figures like H  l  ne Smith (born Catherine-  lise Muller) were scrutinized under hypnosis for their purported ability to speak unknown languages (Flournoy, 1894), others actively weaponized mentalism and illusionism to carve out spaces of agency and influence. This study examines the lives of six women who, in the 18th and 19th centuries, rejected the passive role assigned to them within magic and mysticism, using their own voices. Instead of being subjected to the magician's saw, they harnessed the power of illusion, altered states of consciousness, and divinatory practice to subvert dominant structures of knowledge and power (Tomatis, 2024).

4.3 Subversive Mentalists: Six Women Who Redefined Magic

Illusionist and historian Mariano Tomatis reconstructs the lives of six women from the 18th and 19th centuries who turned mentalism and magic into tools of self-determination. These six figures left traces in newspapers, theater bills, and judicial records, attesting to their defiance of normative gender roles. In this context, we do not focus on individual biographies, but rather on the structural dynamics that led to their removal from institutional archives, leaving behind only secondary or immaterial traces. As a feminist researcher, it is nonetheless important for me to mention their names and their spells:

- Rosalie Lefevre (one of her names), the modern sibyl who enchants the audience with her visions in a state of somnambulism;

- Carlotta Bongioanni, the necromancer who communicates with the spirit of the venerable Maria Clotilde of Bourbon and is so convincing that she attracts the attention of Re Carlo Alberto;
- Jeanne Rochette, who, also in a state of somnambulism, sees the afterlife, describing it with a narrative complexity worthy of Scheherazade;
- young Léonide Pigeaire, a child who reads with a blindfold on, and whose name becomes synonymous with "sorceress";
- Prudence Bernard, the somnambulist whose tricks are repeatedly exposed without hindering her in her séances;
- Hersilie Rouy, an invisible woman unjustly committed to six asylums on the charge of having devoted herself "to the study of the mysteries of somnambulism and animal magnetism".

Until the publication of *La Sonnambula Meravigliosa* by Clara Gallini, in 1983, it had been historians, particularly in the fields of psychology and medicine, who addressed the subject of magnetism. Clara Gallini, however, interprets magnetism through an anthropological lens, identifying themes such as the relationship between body and psyche, the logic and effectiveness of practices beyond mere therapeutic methods, the circulation of cultural models, and the construction of the female image, all of which can offer fruitful insights from various perspectives.

In recounting practices that, from somnambulistic phenomena, lead to hysterical symptoms, the focus of Gallini's research becomes the mode of control over the body and psyche of women. According to Catholic and Western conceptions, women have long been considered emotionally unstable and inferior by nature. Confined to the roles of wife and mother within the bourgeois family structure, the expression of their discomfort through somatic symptoms or transgressive behaviors was traditionally categorized by medical professionals as pathological—whereas what was once seen as "marvelous" could now only be interpreted as deviant.

As an attempt to give expression to that irrational part of the human experience without reducing it to pathology, magnetism and hypnotism offered a secular and unified vision of humanity.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

This interdisciplinary investigation, drawing from historical magic, psychoanalysis, and performance theory, situates these women within broader cultural anxieties about the female voice—whether speaking in unknown tongues or enacting impossible feats of perception. By revisiting both glossolalia and mentalism, this study proposes a new framework: psychic feminism, a mode of resistance that uses language, deception, and performance to challenge patriarchal constraints.

Through a comparative study of female mentalists and glossolalic voices, this study has sought to illuminate the shared anxieties surrounding women's performative power—whether in the illusionist's act or the trance state of glossolalia. The historical pathologization and control of these voices reflects a broader epistemological struggle: the fear that women's speech might escape male interpretation and authority.

Yet, as Tomatis (2024) illustrates, these women did not submit to erasure. Instead, they harnessed illusion, deception, and performance as forms of psychic resistance. By reclaiming the esoteric and the ecstatic, they turned magic and glossolalia into subversive tools, dismantling traditional structures of power and knowledge.

Through psychic feminism, these figures disrupted the epistemic order, transforming the spectacle of their own voices and bodies into a radical assertion of autonomy. Their histories continue to haunt and shape contemporary understandings of gender, voice, and performative power—reminding us that the enchanted, the irrational, and the unexplained have always been sites of feminist resistance.

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