# The Unheard Avant-garde in Scandinavia: Experiments between systems design, performativity, and art.

This panel will focus on The Unheard Avant-garde in Scandinavia: Experiments between Systems design, performativity, and art - with three participants from three different institutions (Danish Broadcast Company, Design University in Kolding and Aalborg University in Copenhagen).

The Unheard Avant-garde is the title of a research-project in the context of the Danish Infrastructure Project LARM, which generally focuses on sound- and radio culture in archives. The Unheard Avant-garde research project is about the things and experiments that never made it into the archives – and how to make it possible to re-enter them into the public memory and -spheres of post-digital culture.

However, the Unheard Avant-gardes project is more than ‘just’ an archive project. It is as much a re-investigation of the fundamental conditions of Media Art. As such, it may also be viewed as an attempt to re-configure (our ideas about) the relations between technology, media, and art.

This is the curatorial and conceptual focal point in the reworking and presentation of the Unheard Avant-gardes in Scandinavia at the exhibition Sound Art – Sound as Medium for Fine Art at ZKM in Karlsruhe (running from March 16 2012 to January 8 2013). Focus is on sound in every aspect and on many levels, including sound as noise, as document, and as medium for artistic practices.

Because of the invention of technologies that makes it possible, in still new ways, to ‘liberate’ sound from its source, sound became the first technologically emerged material that mediated (a) new art; as such, sound art should be considered the first media art practice. Sound is immaterial and sound art practices are fugitive / ephemeral. They are time-based, often playing with the perception of presence and space, and it is nothing within the art-category without being experienced.

Thus, sound art practices, as most media art practices, become ‘unheard’ (of) in archives. It flies beneath the radar of cultural memory and knowledge like a sub-mediated parallel history.

It is from this unheard status of experimental media art that the Unheard Avant-gardes project finds it momentum: Not only in giving the unheard a voice, but also in addressing some fundamental issues concerning the way new transdisciplinary domains are renegotiated across disciplines and boundaries of competences.

We want to create an archive interface to the unheard avant-garde.

This panel will present, analyse, and discuss from the different perspectives of the participants, the creation of the Unheard Avant-garde section – and, especially, focus will be put on how interaction designers, system-designers, media artists, humanistic researchers and media art curators collaborated in a truly transdisciplinary setup and organizational configuration. It will revolve around one example in particular: The ‘POEX tape’ interface.

Presenters: Martin Luckmann (DK), Matteo Sartori (DK), and Morten Søndergaard (DK) (Panel Chair). With reference to (but not present): Mogens Jacobsen (DK) and Ivan Dehn (DK).

## POEX TAPE - Interfacing the unheard

Presenter: Martin Luckmann, DR – Danish Broadcast Company.

#### Overall

By creating a tangible user interface, the POEX TAPE allowed the users/audience to navigate the avant-garde sound art part of the POEX65 exhibition. The process and challenges of creating this installation will be shared in this presentation.

#### The process

At the time of the POEX65 exhibition, the main recording technology was the reel-to-reel recorder. Artist such as Else Marie Pade used the recorder both as a recording device and as an instrument. This widely used technology became the main inspiration for the interface of the POEX TAPE. As a part of the *Unheard Avant-garde in Scandinavia* exhibition we wanted to introduce the audiovisuals from the POEX65 exhibition in a new form while allowing the user to interact with the sound art. With the reel-to-reel recorder inspiration we did just that.

#### The interface

Though posing as a giant reel-to-reel recorder, the installation was build by utilizing a set of cutting-edge-technologies like software from the openFrameworks.org project and consumer products like the Nintendo Wii and Apple’s MacBook Pro. With headphones and a play head the users where then able to activate the POEX TAPE with new user scenarios as the result.

#### PLEASE DO TOUCH

One of the main issues of the interface was making the users/audiences understand how to use it, but, which is even more interesting: making the user aware that they are allowed to touch the installation. Being a part of an exhibition containing very expensive artworks that was definitely not touchable, users tend to react with a certain restraint towards the interface. A discussion of solutions to this matter will be a part of the presentation as well as some statistics of the use.

## The CHAOS App – making a sub media systems design

Presenter: Matteo Sartori, Kolding Design University

The CHAOS App is, at its core, a software application for organizing data. The data it organizes consists primarily of a user's files and the data pertaining to them, also known as metadata.

The importance of remote collaboration as an emerging work pattern is acknowledged by the integration of the concepts of users, sharing and permissions into the design from the outset. By leveraging the CHAOS cloud framework it ensures the persistence of data and the users' peace of mind.

The CHAOS App was conceived as a solution to a problem faced by those researchers, artists and students who, having gathered a certain amount of disparate material, were unable to organize it in a way that properly reflected their many and varied perspectives on it.

In the research preceding the development of the CHAOS App it was found that, currently, many different applications are being used either to approximate the desired results or to avoid the obstructions of the prescribed software. This fragmentation is a problem in itself, but worse still, none of the existing alternatives seem to achieve a satisfactory result.

Through a combination of both proven and emergent paradigms, CHAOS App seeks to redress the inadequacies of existing solutions by addressing the common complaints directly and examining where existing tools fall short.

To illustrate this approach, the following example looks at a limitation mentioned by all those involved in the research: The difficulty in getting and maintaining a good overview of the data as the complexity increases.

Existing hierarchical paradigms fall short when there is a need to represent the multifaceted nature of all data yet the most prevalent proposed solution, tagging and search, suffers from a lack of the spatiality that humans are naturally adapted to. Tagging relies on the user's ability to recall and relate details about that which she wants to find. This is directly opposed to the way we normally find things; by looking for something until we recognize it. This is a particularly successful strategy when we are allowed to organize ourselves spatially, but becomes ineffective as the data increases.

CHAOS App's solution to this, here greatly simplified, is to combine the spatial advantages of a free-form surface such as a work or desktop, with the logical and precise rigour of a tag and search system. A zoomable interface provides the necessary navigational tools to ensure the effortless movement between overview and detail, the macro and micro scales.

An intrinsic aspect of the CHAOS App philosophy is the explicit visual definition of relationships between data elements. Related data is literally, or rather graphically, connected. The resulting richly coupled data space in turn aims to provide, through the semantic power inherent in logical relationships, a strong explorative element.

The CHAOS App is still in the early stages of development and the design has yet to stand the test of the users, but it is our hope and ambition to create a tool that will provide a new and significantly better experience for researchers, artists and students alike in working with large and diverse collections of data.

### Becoming unheard… again

Presenter: Morten Søndergaard (Panel Chair)

What is an unheard avant-garde? Of course, the answer may be tautological: no one has ever heard of the unheard avant-garde, as it were.

And then again – rumours and curatorial intuition has it that private and ‘small’ archives around the globe are full of unheard stuff. In this case, I am focusing on the ephemeral, experimental, performative and intermedial art practices and projects by energetic project makers (often long since diseased) that never made it into the ‘grand’ archives – and, after a time, are forgotten, simply.

This project has three purposes: To identify and locate the unheard avant-gardes. To create a systems design that makes it possible to work with the different modalities of the unheard. To create an interface that makes it possible to experience (traces of) the unheard avant-garde.

The purpose, then, is to define the modalities needed and methodologies to obtain them in order to reactivate, on a curatorial and humanistic level, the field of the ‘unheard avant-gardes’ (if it indeed is one field) – what are the categories? How do we describe them? Do they manifest themselves into (new) paradigms? And what would be best practice for metadating and documenting the field? Furthermore, these questions also point towards a more fundamental problematic regarding the definition and function of ‘art’ in a mediated cultural context and environment.

Presenters:

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Team-members, not present in Kent:

Ivan Dehn, head of the Department for Innovation and Development, Danish Broadcast Company, [ide@dr.dk](mailto:ide@dr.dk)

Mogens Jacobsen, Media Artist, co-founder of Artnode.dk, works and lives in Copenhagen. [www.mogensjacobsen.dk](http://www.mogensjacobsen.dk)