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Vocal letters: A migrant’s family records from the 1950s and the phonographic production and reproduction of memory
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**Abstract**

Found and bought a few years ago at an Athens flea market by visual artist and avid record-collector Panos Charalambous, a body of 19 rare acetate 78 rpm. records, made in the United States in the late 1950s by the Greek migrant Konstantinos Chronis and his family, triggers a series of ethnographic and artistic encounters that bring out the role of vocality and phonography in the production and reproduction of memory. Konstantinos Chronis, who migrated to the USA in the beginning of the 20th century, sent these private recordings to his brother and his family back in Greece as a form of vocal letters, including folk songs and nostalgic narratives, family news and highly emotional promises about meeting them once again. Anthropologist Panayotis Panopoulos traces the social life of these records backwards, meeting their original receivers, members of the family and co-villagers of Konstantinos Chronis in Athens and the mountainous village of Roino in Arcadia region, Peloponnese. Vocal traces of more than half a century ago, probably considered forever lost, return to stir up memory, which was also the strong stimulus for the records’ production in the first place. Different layers of memory are assessed and discussed as various performances and levels of (phonographic) vocality accumulate through time. The artist’s intention in the project to resurrect the voices of the dead among their living relatives and village community meet the anthropologist’s interest to reassess the experience of the records’ reception and social life, in a performance of ethnographic/ artistic DJing, through which the recorded voices address their original receivers once again in a meaningful gesture of mending a broken chain of contact and communication.

*In memory of my father, Kostas Panopoulos (1937-2015)*

**Prologue: family matters**

Among several voice memories, most of them rather vague and opaque, from my childhood years, there is a quite clear and crispy one; it comes from the sound of a cassette tape, which my grandfather, my father’s father, brought back from his trip, in the early 1970s, to Sydney, Australia, where he had travelled in order to visit two of his sons and a daughter, grandchildren and other relatives who had migrated in the ‘50s and ‘60s. The night before his return flight, the family came together and they recorded that tape, so that relatives in Greece would be able to listen to the migrants’ voices, greeting them and singing Greek nostalgic songs and songs about migration (*xenitia*). Four decades later, I specifically recall the sound of my uncles’ and aunts’ voices, full of suppressed tears, and a certain Greek popular song from the ‘50s, sung solo by my father’s youngest brother:

*I will climb and sing  
On top of the highest mountain,  
So that my pain, along with the sound of [bouzouki] strings,  
Will be heard in *xenitia* [*2]*

Originally, the last verse would refer to *erimia* (wilderness, desertedness), but in migrants’ lips *erimia* would often turn to *xenitia*, in a meaningful poetic gesture of appropriation/ adjustment of the song to their own lived experiences. For years and years, the sound of this cassette, now lost, probably forever, was the most vivid memory I would have from my relatives, before I met most of them in person, years later. Photographs have always been an indispensable part of my family history; they would continuously travel between my father’s village of origin in the region of Arcadia, Peloponnese, and the city of Athens, but also between Greece and Australia. Since both my grandfather and my father’s youngest brother were professional photographers, I have a rich archive of family photographs and a rich history of exchange of family images. Nevertheless, that flow of photographs never had such a profound effect on me as the voices in the cassette recording of my family in Australia. I don’t know if it was the scarcity and singularity of this cassette or the fact that it was so moving - in some cases even disturbing - for my relatives in Greece to listen to it together in family meetings, but I can vividly remember that the vocal traces of people I had not met in person and the reactions they produced within my family left a deep mark of separation and absence, based on the strong sense and the obsessive repeatability of an (im)material presence.
Introduction: lost and found

It was in January 2015, during an exhibition he held in an art space in Athens, that Panos Charalambous, visual artist and avid record-collector, let me know about a very special set of items in his big collection: a body of 19 acetate, 10-inch, 78 rpm. records which were produced in the late 1950s in the United States of America by Konstantinos Chronis, a migrant from the village of Roino, Arcadia, Peloponnese. Charalambous had spotted these records a few years earlier at a flea market in the center of Athens. They were placed all together in a pink plastic case for long-play records and Panos was intrigued to acquire them by the fact that all of their labels were hand-written, in a rather unhandy script. On most of them, one could read the titles of well-known Greek folk songs, but in some others there were phrases like: “They offer and ask for news from Roino” or “On this side no voice, it doesn’t have..., it doesn’t have voice” (in mixed Greek and English script, crossed out). Some of the records were seriously damaged, but most of them were in quite good condition. Using an electrophone from the ’60s, we listened together to these rare and delicate acetates, in the art gallery where Panos held his latest show: Aquis Submersus.

In his work of the last decade, ranging from Phonopolis (2004) and Voice-o-graph (2006) to Aquis Submersus (2014), Charalambous tackles issues of (im)materiality, presence and absence in phonographic production and reproduction. He mainly focuses on collecting old records and addressing the interweaving of recorded voice to place and memory. Of special interest to him are the recorded voices of Greek singers who have acquired worldwide repute, from Maria Callas to the Greek-Italian experimental vocalist Demetrio Stratos, as well as local stars of folk singing in his native Akarnania (western Greece), like Takis Karnavas. Charalambous works with various media, engraving, video, installation, performance, creating contexts for the production, manipulation and destruction of vinyl records, conceptualized as tokens of (non-) destructibility, but also as ruins of a whole cultural and technological epoch. His work puts together his childhood memories of listening back in the 1970s, at his native village of Rivio and lake Amvrakia, with family archives of commercial records, and the voices of 20th century recorded in vinyl, “the black marble of the century” (Charalambous, 2004). In his live performances, he uses all kinds of sharp edges (agave leaves, rose thorns, eagle nails) to play his vinyls and “resurrect” their voices.

The particularity and rarity of the Chronis’ acetates presented the artist with a very special instance in the world of recorded voice: records that were not multiple copies circulating in a commercial network, but unique items of vocal singularity and address in specific kinship and local networks. An ethnographic perspective bridging anthropological and artistic interests concerning the role of acetates in the production of social memory and structures of feeling was long overdue.

Konstantinos Chronis of Roino migrated to the USA in the beginning of the 20th century. Half a century later, he recorded and sent his family acetates to his younger brother in Greece as a form of vocal letters, including family news and nostalgic narratives, folk songs and highly emotional promises about visiting his native village once again. After I prepared a digital sound-file and a detailed word transcript, we decided to trace the social life of Chronis’ acetates backwards, meeting their original receivers, members of the family and co-villagers of Konstantinos Chronis in Athens and in the mountainous village of Roino. The records triggered a series of encounters in anthropology and art that bring out the role of vocality and phonography in the production and reproduction of memory. Vocal traces of more than half a century ago, probably considered forever lost, return to stir up memory, which was also the strong stimulus for the records’ production in the first place. Different layers of memory are assessed and discussed as various performances and levels of (phonographic) vocality accumulate through time.

The recordings

“So, I greet you all with love, your uncle Konstantinos Chronis, and you also have many greetings from Kostoula [his wife] and from Dimitris [his son], too, and as always from my children, farewell to you then, now I will sing on the other side [of the record]”. 
Konstantinos (Kostas) Chronis was born around 1890 in Roino. He migrated to the USA in 1910, following the first massive transatlantic wave of migration from Greece and other countries of southern Europe (Laliotou 2004, Dounia 2014). According to his nephew Tasoulis (Anastasios) Chronis, whom I interviewed in Roino, he was so eager to migrate that he even forged a letter, supposedly written by his father, to be officially invited by a relative already settled in the USA. Konstantinos' father, Anastasios Chronis, was a shepherd. Kostas had four sisters, Kyriakoula, Charalambo, Konstantina and Sofia, and a younger brother, Giorgis. He returned to his native village in 1918 to marry Kostoulia Nastou in a pre-arranged marriage, but he left Greece for the USA again soon, in order to avoid being drafted and go to the war front. His wife and child followed suit. Konstantinos Chronis settled in California and worked as a farmer in vineyards. Information about his early years in America is rather scarce, but in the '50s, by the time he made the recordings, he was probably a well-established vineyard-owner.

Among members of his family in the village, there was a strong memory of his visit for some months in 1957, with his wife and children, and a more vague memory of an earlier visit during the '50s (possibly in 1953-54). The records in Charalambous' collection are only a part of the records Chronis sent to his brother in the '50s. A villager in Roino remembered songs from the records he had sent, which were not included in the records of the collection. Chronis was probably sending records for several years, both before and after his trip(s) to Roino in the '50s. His recorded voice, somehow, frames his return to the village, communicating strong emotions and nostalgic images and sounds from the old days, before the visit, and memories from that visit, after it. In some cases, though, it is not clear if memories refer to the more distant or to the more recent past, or even to an atemporal experience of homeland.

The records are full of information about his family back in the village and in the United States. Names of relatives, especially, are repeated again and again, in affirmation of relatedness, opening channels of communication and keeping them open through repeated performances of recognizing connectivity. An upcoming family event in the village, the wedding of a niece, and the name-day of his brother become reasons for making and sending new records, with songs and wishes; they reveal a strong desire to participate in the family narrative. The following long excerpt comes from the record titled: “They offer and ask for news from Roino”. Several of the issues discussed thus far are prominent in this passage.

I desired and wanted to come to the homeland to see you all, because you write to me and I haven’t met you. And I always have grievances a little bit, and when I have grievances I always want to start singing a little bit low/ slowly. Now, I know that I tell the old songs, but back then these are the songs they used to tell and these are the songs I like, and when I tell them, no matter how old they are, and when I dance like the old ones, I make them all marvelous at me.

... even the stones from which I was drinking water, I remember them too, but what can man do, xenitia is far
Chronis does not use English or mixed (Greek-English) expressions at all. The only phrase in English in the records is “some day”, which he immediately translates into Greek. Again, the context of its use is a highly emotional and nostalgic reference to his desire to see his home village one more time.

“Poor Roino, we won’t see you again. Niece, listen to me telling it [singing] a little bit low/ slowly. Some day [in English], some day [in Greek] you may see me in Roino, if we don’t die. So, give greetings to everyone, we are all well and I wish you all to be well. But nobody is writing to me, I do not know why, you either got rich or your business has grown!”

Recorded voice follows a one-way track, from “modernized” America to “backward” Greece. Relatives in Greece can only write back. This imbalance is one among several controversial discrepancies in this unequal exchange. Interestingly enough, Chronis’ voice represents and resonates the past and the strongest connection to his place of origin as he sings and talks about this origin in the new reality of xenitia. Reference to life experiences in the United States is minimal (“the winter was very heavy over here this year”) or always connected with a sense of nostalgia for the home country (“we celebrated [orthodox] Easter in the country, […] but xenitia is always xenitia”).

The main feature of the records is the folk songs Chronis sings both a cappella and accompanied by Greek folk musicians. One of the obvious reasons he made these records, after all, was that his brother, Giorgis, was very fond of singing. The word Chronis repeatedly uses to refer to singing is the standard Greek term for “telling”, “talking” (leo). Singing is conceptualized here as an act of communication, the restoration of a suspended dialogue with his home and family.

“We gathered here and we tell it [we sing] and we make plans on how to catch the airplane and come to the [village] square when you will have the wedding of Asimo, to dance. (Female voice intervening: ‘You have to invite us!’). But Panayota, along with Lambrini, they will wait, they say, for the carnations, we cannot come without an invitation! (Female voice: ‘The wedding candies of homeland!’). We joined each other and we tell our poverty, what else can we do, we remember the homeland, we like it for a trip, but [not] … to stay over there. What can we do with it [the homeland], since it happened to be so poor and you make it even worse! You have greetings from everyone, we are all well, the children, the relatives, all well; those of us who are alive. The ones who died, they are gone, … long live your children!”

Most of the songs in the records are well-known songs of the local repertory of Peloponnese and mainland Greece [Recordings 6,7,8,9], while some others can be personal improvisations on popular poetic formulas sung on various standard tunes.

“You, birds migrating,
Birds who have migrated,
You didn’t stay a lot [they didn’t stay a lot] (dialogic singing)
At our poor village [our village]
But there came a time you left [they left]
To go to a foreign land
Beware that xenitia won’t cheat you
So that you will never come back”
Vocalizing memory

“Get a speechless figure
A motionless body
Get my photograph, too, Which is unforgettable”.
(Dounia 2014: 124).

“Styliani, I forgot to tell you on the other record that I have had a grandchild from my son Dimitris, he had a very beautiful girl…”

“…we will send you more records [soon] and we will do the best we can. See you [in Greece] in ’960”.

More than any written letter, acetate records, like home-made cassettes a few years later, address a collectivity of listeners (both literate and illiterate), who can listen to the voice of their relatives together, often in wide, family, neighborhood or village collectivities. In this form of “vocal letters”, a collective voice speaks and sings to a collective audience. Moreover, in opposition to written letters, which are defined by a strong sense of absence, recorded voice in “vocal letters” is a mark, although often an uncanny mark, of presence. On the other hand, Chronis’ acetates created an asymmetry between the two sides involved. Relatives back in Greece were not able to send something similar in reciprocation; the exchange was imbalanced. Meanwhile, recorded singing of Greek folk songs in America somehow reversed the “natural” flow of local singing from Greece to xenitia. Migrants often presented themselves as the conveyors and preservers of local Greek traditions, while singing the “old songs” realizes a deeply emotional reaction and the conscience of their families was through letters and photographs, was commented upon, during my research, by villagers who remembered him stating that he considered the recording of his voice as a way of immortalizing the memory of himself⁸. Someone recalled him telling something like: “I will not die; you will listen to me, in the records, for ever”. It is quite significant that the word he uses in the records to refer to them is plakes (sing. plaka), which handily brings to mind engravings on memorial plaques. Although plaka was the standard term for records during the ’50s, it nevertheless adds an extra sense of monumentality to the acetates. We are certainly before the era of the magnetic tape and the cassette recorder as a ubiquitous technology of everyday life.

In her work on the use of early sound-recording technology among Dutch amateurs, Karin Bijsterveld points out that:

“In most cases, the family sound album topped the list of things to do with a tape recorder. The function of such a ‘talking family album’ was to record the precious moments of family life, like ‘little John’s first speech’. Subsequently one would share the tape with ‘relatives, friends and acquaintances living elsewhere’. But having a tape recorder was also important with respect to one’s own memory. Every family, after all, had one or more albums with photos of important or happy moments. From now on, Philips submitted, these memorable moments could be relived more completely, thanks to ‘a faithful reproduction of all that was said and done, played and sung’. The tape recorder, in other words, was introduced as a family ‘memory device’ (Bijsterveld, 2004:616).

A similar use of the tape recorder has been documented by Nicola Scaldaferrri in an Albanian-speaking community of south Itly with a rich history of migration to the United States:

“Starting from 1957, one of the things brought by Peppino on his trips was a Recordio tape recorder. With this device, he recorded the voices of relatives and friends separated by the ocean, and then shared them by organizing small house parties that became both recording and listening sessions. He thus realized a series of true sonic postcards, to which, during the 1960s, he would add amateur videos shot with a Super 8” (Scaldaferrri, 2014:9).

Tape recorders are perceived as devices which take the voice, they worm out the voice of a person, in order to take it, to transfer it to his relatives and friends overseas. From the recordings of uncle Peppino cited by Scaldaferrri in his article:

“(...) I am your nephew Franco, and just as my voice will come to America, I wish I could come there too; we thank uncle Peppino for bringing our beautiful voices to you in America, where you can hear it in all comfort, as if we were near you.

Chronis’ motivation to record his songs and vocal messages and send them to his family, in a time when the standard form of communication between migrants and their families was through letters and photographs, was commented upon, during my
Panayotis Panopoulos

Entanglements: Vocal Letters

sends back in the form of his speaking and singing voice, the voice of his memory. For him, recording his own voice is the absolute “memory device” for bringing him back home in both a literal and a metaphorical way. The sounds he records are idealized soundscapes of his homeland in his vocal letters (cf. Panopoulos, 2015).

The flexibility of tape-recorders, which dramatically changed structures of feeling. But, as one Dutch how-to book on tape recording from the mid-1960s indicated. The challenge was to realize creative sound recordings by combining the sounds ‘of all sorts of domestic events, such as living room music, the knocking together of a rabbit cage, … bickering, pet sounds, … a characteristically creaking door, the ding-dong of a pendulum, the milkman at the door, the radio tuned to Hilversum I or II [the Dutch BBC, KB] on the background, … all sounds that for relatives faraway from home will be enjoyed like honey on the tongue. They will get that homey feel again and be intensely part of everyday life at home for a little while!” (Bijsterveld, 2004:617-618).

Chronis stands far from such interests. This must certainly be attributed to the technological characteristics of recording with acetates, as opposed to the flexibility of tape-recorders, which dramatically changed structures of feeling. But, as the following excerpt shows, Chronis was also strongly interested in rendering the technological modernity. On the other hand, the device itself is the only index of the way of life overseas. The technology of recording is not used to reproduce any sounds of the migrants’ new life or different forms of living in the other side of the Atlantic, contrary to what happened with the letters or photographs of migrants (Dounia, 2014). Again, Bijsterveld contends that:

“... records … voice letter’”, another repeatedly promoted product the tape recorder hobbyist might pursue. ‘With Gevasonor, the magnetic tape, you may ... record whatever you want to tell to relatives in Canada, Australia and South Africa. This allows them to really hear your voice later on, with all its warmth, all its emotion’. Sound tapes thus became a form of ‘family ties’. Simply reading a letter aloud was not so interesting, as one Dutch how-to book on tape recording from the mid-1960s indicated. The challenge was to realize creative sound recordings by combining the sounds ‘of all sorts of domestic events, such as living room music, the knocking together of a rabbit cage, … bickering, pet sounds, … a characteristically creaking door, the ding-dong of a pendulum, the milkman at the door, the radio tuned to Hilversum I or II [the Dutch BBC, KB] on the background, … all sounds that for relatives faraway from home will be enjoyed like honey on the tongue. They will get that homey feel again and be intensely part of everyday life at home for a little while!” (Bijsterveld, 2004:617-618).

In the photograph hung at the right side of a wall, filled with framed family photographs, in the house of his nephew Tasoulis Chronis in Roino, we see for the first time Konstantinos Chronis, dressed in formal local costume, and his wife in a quasi-ancient-Greek dress. The old black-and-white retouched photograph is an elegant photo-collage made in 1924 in the USA. Giorgis sent a photograph of his wedding to his brother Kostas and Kostas added to it a photograph of himself with his wife and an older photograph of their father, Anastasios Chronis.

Under this family photo gallery, in Tasoulis’ house in Roino, on the 13th of August 2015, the voices of the Chronis family were resurrected, as Panos Charalambous played the records for nephews and nieces, grandchildren and neighbors to hear. Tasoulis, in his nineties, and his wife Olympia, their daughter Eleni, Tasoulis’ sister Rita and her daughter Youla, were among many other people who attended this event, which came as an abrupt cut in the regular flow of time, bridging different eras and places in the present and the past of the family and the village. Talking about one of the major events in his personal life, the early death of his beloved son Giorgos, named after Tasoulis’ father, Tasoulis reckoned how Chronis’ records might had ended up in the flea market. He remembered how, years ago, burglars broke in and emptied his son’s house in Athens.
Stories from different times and places were interwoven with the voice of Chronis speaking and singing, and with what we, me and Panos, also had to say about what we had learned and felt listening to the records. Rina commented on the hardship of pastoral life in the village that made her uncle want to migrate in the first place: “because of this, the night-tending of the flocks, he left”. Also, stories about his destiny to become rich, omens of his good luck, as every stone he would hold had ants underneath, when he was building a fence along with Rina’s and Tasoulis’ father, “while our father’s had none”. The story about how he borrowed money, in USA, from a German migrant, who insisted on visiting him at his home to meet his wife before lending him, and how he was convinced to do so when he saw that she was a hard worker: “If she had lipstick on her lips, he wouldn’t have given him a single penny”. Comparisons of poverty in the past with the present economic crisis in Greece were made several times, while Rina at some point burst into a strange mixture of tears and laughter when her uncle on the record was complaining about the poverty of his country, which drove him away: “Ah, you poor, you should see now how bad things are…”. Digital files of the sound-recordings and photocopies of the word transcripts have by now probably crossed the Atlantic to meet Chronis’ family in America.

The processual and collaborative aspects of this project have effectively influenced the terms of its conception, background and realization in interweaving anthropological and artistic threads and priorities in a single current. Moving from an accidental retrieval of a material relic from the piles of a flea market to the exploration of a family’s history and memory of migration and the return of the voices in the records to their initial recipients, the artist’s intention in the project to resurrect the voices of the dead among their living relatives and village community met the anthropologist’s interest to reassess the experience of the records’ reception and social life, in a performance of ethnographic/ artistic DJing, through which the recorded voices addressed their original receivers once again in a meaningful gesture of mending a broken chain of contact and communication.

Epilogue: styluses

“The listener knows that ‘memory forgets more easily texts than melodies’, he also knows that in order to make sonic units resound, to revive images, to resurrect voices (sonic portraits) the insight of their revelatory force is necessary … the quest for a sparkle where the needle ‘clicks’, ‘rumbles’, ‘scratches’, in the clicks and pops, in the skips, in the momentary albeit vivid lighting; when the stored experiences charge the content of a particular current audiovisual situation … it happens that bizarre luminescences make visible the most close, the most familiar aspects of everyday life” (Charalambous, 2004: 33).

Every letter coming from her sons and daughter in Australia was a major event in the life of my grandmother. I remember her reading the letters again and again using her index finger as a stylus following the grooves of a record. In a similar way, my grandmother would usually repeat the lyrics of a song she heard for the first time after every single verse, whispering the words to memorize them. During our visit to Chronis’ family in Roino, we recorded some other styluses, as well: The walking-stick of Rina as she was pointing to her father in the photograph that became the focus of our visual attention for the whole time of our visit; or the corner of another old framed picture that was used by Tasoulis to help us read the traces in the same photograph of his father and uncle. These styluses operate as needles for stitching memories, like the rose thorns and agave leaves in Charalambous’ experimental live performances.
By “cutting” his acetates, Chronis was creating an archive of older and recent memories of his family and village to send back home. Perceiving himself as an original bearer of these memories, he recorded their (im)material trace, his speaking and singing voice, on plaques that could monumentalize it for the future and for the styluses that would care to resurrect it.

“All the trees in the morning
Are full of dew
My little eyes too
Are full of tears
Because I recall many things”

Appendix: photo essay
Notes
[1] The place but also the condition and the experience of migration.
[2] For an excellent performance of this song by Marika Ninou, one of the most important Greek singers of the ’50s, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4Gm4wmKisc (last access: 26/4/17).
[4] The following excerpt from a text by Thanasis Moutsopoulos, included in the exhibition catalogue of Aquis Submersus further contextualizes Charalambous’ work in the contemporary Greek art-scene: “[Charalambous] strips and uncovers the vulgar side of rural countryside and lumpen culture. I think that more than anything else, this exhibition of Charalambous has to do with the presentation of a ruin. This ruin is, apparently, contemporary Greece itself, more specifically, maybe the post-olympic-games euphoria. His direct reference to the demolition of Columbia records’ factory is the capstone of this project. Memories from Monet’s Water-lilies reappear in basins with electrophones, they float on the water of lake Amvrakia among hundreds of floating records, sending out the voices of Takis Karnavas, Maria Callas and Demetrio Stratos. The insolvency of the petit-bourgeois dream has now become chillingly apparent and, along with it, the comme il faut art of recent years, the vision of international success, the adoption of international idioms, the nouveau riche and all kinds of bubbles. Everything seems to be over” (Moutsopoulos 2014: 15-16, my translation).
[5] “Acetate discs (also known as lacquers or instantaneous discs) are a type of phonograph record created using a recording lathe to cut a groove in real-time, rather than mass-produced from moulds.” (Wikipedia). Acetates were a quite popular sound-recording technology among migrants in the ’40s and the ’50s. They could be produced at home and played immediately after their “cutting”. Since their coating was very delicate, they wore out after some time and this is the reason they are very rare nowadays. Later on, “Voice-o-graph” booths became the popular means for recording one’s voice, before the gradual ascendance of the magnetic tape (Bijsterveld, 2004, Levin, 2010).
[6] These encounters were also fuelled by our recent anthropological and artistic work concerning the (im)materiality of voice, realized in the context of a long-term collaborative project of artists and anthropologists working on voice and the body, sociality and addressing, phonographic technologies and memory: “Fonés (Voices) is a group of visual artists and social scientists exploring the multiple ways in which sounds produced by living bodies are transformed into matter for thought and art making. We explore voice as a means through which social relationships are constituted and acquire meaning. We are also interested in voice itself, and not solely in the messages it transmits or the codes it uses. We are exploring the materiality of voice as a sound phenomenon, its sensory and aesthetic qualities, its connection to the body that produces it and its detachment from it, the ways it is shaped through techniques and technologies and the ways it defines multiple socio-cultural and ‘natural’ environments” (Panopoulos and Rikou 2016).
[7] In the New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), “Const Chronis” from “Roi-no, Greece” is registered to have arrived on 15 September 1910. He was 19 years old, single and he traveled from Napoli, Italy aboard the ship “Regina d’ Italia”.
[9] On the importance of uniqueness and addressing in theorizing the voice, see Cavarero (2005).

References

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The project formed an essential part of “Flatus Vocis” and “Voice-o-graph”, a series of installations and sonic happenings by Panos Charalambous (with Vassili Charalambidis, Angelos Krallis and Panayotis Panopoulos), performed in the “Parliament of Bodies” (Public Programs, curated by Paul B. Preciado) of documenta 14, Athens (July 16-17, 2017) and Kassel (July 7-8, 2017), during which I also made a presentation entitled “Five Fragments of Vocal Letters”, based on the present text [http://www.documenta14.de/en/calendart/23403/voice-o-graph]. It was also presented at the three-day festival Detritus: New music from degraded media, curated by Yannis Kotsonis, in a performance of Panos Charalambous and myself and a lecture I gave under the title: “Vocal Intimacy: Homerecordings of Homesickness and the Memory of Voice”, at a roundtable in which I participated with composers and sound artists Olivia Block, Stephen Cornford and Graham Lambkin (Onassis Cultural Centre, January 28, 2018). I have also presented parts of the text and material in several other events. More specifically, under the title “Vocal Letters: Sounds of Greeks Across the Atlantic”, in the “audiophile series”, curated by Eckehard Pistrick, at bi’bak, a non-profit association for contemporary art and community-based projects (Berlin-Wedding, February 9, 2017), and under the title: “Farwell to you then, now I will sing on the other side…”: Phonography and Memory” (in Greek), at the Conference in honor of Theodoros Paradellis, Department of Social Anthropology and History, University of the Aegean, Mytilene, Greece, May 19, 2017. I wish to thank the organizers and curators of these events for their kind invitation, as well as all the wonderful audiences in the aforementioned performances and lectures for their attendance, participation, and most stimulating and insightful questions and comments.

Notes to acknowledgements
[1] The text I have authored to accompany Charalambous’ page in documenta 14 daybook reads: “Where do voices go when we no longer hear them?” For more than a century they would go on gramophone records, 45 rpm singles, and 12-inch vinyl LPs, but also on some very special, handmade 78 rpm records, the 10-inch acetates, which you could use to record your own voice and send to your familiars, no matter how far away they lived. Specifically, emigrants in America used them often, relying on their grooves to carry their voices across the Atlantic.

What does a collector-artist do when he discovers such an archive of records in the forgotten stacks of a secondhand shop in Athens? What kind of responsibility does he assume toward these voices, or toward the people they address? What kind of relationship can he, Panos Charalambous, born in 1955 in Aetolia-Acarnania, Greece, with them? How should he handle the vulnerable life of these voices? And, if he decided to return them to their original recipients, when, where, and how to do so? Every time these records are played, they are irreparably worn. The voices have been carved on sensitive material, susceptible to time and duration. Every temporary resurrection promotes their total annihilation; they can only exist if one assumes responsibility for their precarious existence, accepting their course to destruction by resurrecting them one more time; taking their lives into one’s hands and brushing aside the fear of their death.

Are some resurrections, however, more valuable than others? The needle does not catch in the grooves the same way each time: the voices may return even more clearly, despite the noise from the material of the record itself, from the deep cuts and the painful scratches. It may only take the right room, perhaps the room where the voices were first listened to, under the photographs that preserve the image of the people speaking, when images finally meet their voices once again, along with the living voices of the people who recognize them, for memory to speak. Ruins as well as resurrections, these vocal monuments are the “black marble” of the last century (http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13576/panos-charalambous).

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