

Foundδ Tapes Exhibition



“A Siren song of Decaying Media”

Harold Schellinx



THE FOUND TAPES EXHIBITION

The Found Tapes Exhibition is an evolving online documentary audio project. It has been on the web since late 2002, and has continuously been expanding since. Due to its 'evolving' character, the Found Tapes Exhibition is not really a 'completed' production; nor is it a 'project to be realised'. In fact, it is a mix of both.

The Found Tapes Exhibition's URI is <http://foundtapes.soundblog.net/>¹

Prone as it may be to deterioration in terms of sound *quality* and *fidelity*, magnetic audio tape is a stubborn medium.

It is hard to destroy, very hard to get rid of.

This *physical robustness* is witnessed by the large quantity of remnants of magnetic audio-tape that 'litter' the streets of our cities. Or rather, *used* to litter, as trashed analog audio tape gradually disappeared from our cityscapes with the massive replacement of the cassette player and walkman by mp3-players and mobile phones as the default 'personal stereo devices'. This 'cleaning up' became noticeable to a tape litter collector like myself as early as 2010. At this time of writing, in 2018, it seems to have reached its completion.

FOUND TAPES
AN EVOLVING EXHIBITION
OF CAST AWAY SOUNDS

SoundBlog

[august 28th, 2005] The latest acquisitions, **number 32** and **number 33**, contain bits and pieces plucked from 'tape catchers' along a small stretch of the avenue Charles de Gaulle in Neuilly sur Seine, leading up to the parisian Porte Maillot, reggae and dutch variety from the streets of Amsterdam, and heavy metal found way up in the french Pyrenees ...

Thanks to Google's Maps service, now with zoomable satellite pictures of the spots where tapes were found !

Here's the current **FTE mp3 playlist**...

Have a look at the **Found Tape Pictures Exhibition** ... and the **Found Tape Pictures Special June 15, 2005** ...

Use horizontal scrol to proceed to the exhibition's entrance ...

Thanks for visiting !

BANDÉ MAGNETIQUE KODAK

© 2003-2005 HarsMedia -- "Alles recht"

Indeed most (though not all) of the outdoor 'tape litter' that was so abundantly present for at least two or three decades, stemmed from compact audio cassettes, which until about 2005 were the principal sound carrying media used in 'personal stereo devices' (walkman, car stereo). Any regular user of cassettes will have experienced at some time or other the

¹All of the web site's pages are hand-coded by the author in HTML, in the way that small sites were built in the late 1990s, early 2000s, a style of web design that at this time of writing has become as vintage and obsolete as the medium that is its topic.

'jamming' of his/her playback device, resulting either in the breaking of the tape, or in what is sometimes referred to as *tape-salad* or *cassetti-spaghetti*.²

Generally a user will consider the thus 'messed-up' audio tape as 'useless', and without any attempt to repair, throw it away. Because such 'accidents' often would occur in public spaces (walking, biking or using public means of transport while listening to a walkman, using a car stereo while driving), many of these broken tapes ended up in our streets. On the pavements, in the gutters. Often parts would get caught in trees, bushes, fences.

In some cases they subsequently were removed rather quickly by public cleaning services. But often also they just stay stuck there, for a long time, subject to wear by wind, rain and sunshine ...

Originally inspired by Zoë Irvine's 'Magnetic Migration Music' project, as of march 2002 I have been collecting all audio tape litter that crossed my path. Whenever I come across bits, clods and knots of thrown away tape in the streets, I pick them up, and note time and place of the find.

I began documenting my steadily growing collection of found tapes as of the end of 2002 on the 'Found Tapes Exhibition' web site. At the moment of this writing the site lists and documents 710 finds, gathered in 120 *exhibits*. The 710th find dates back to February 2011. The 120th exhibit was put online on the occasion of the audio cassette's 50th birthday, in 2013. That's about five years ago. There have been no other additions since, but I do hope to be able to provide a complete update very soon. Indeed, I do continue to collect, even though the sight of *genuine* tape litter (in the sense described above) is becoming extremely rare – at least in the (Western European) cities that I frequent.

"With its links to chronology and to a known geography (the location of each found tape is assiduously chronicled), there is more than a little of the blog about Harold Schellinx' project. And indeed, there is a linked soundblog as well as a gallery of 'Found Tape Pictures'. From one point of view (historical), the project allies the tactics of the Readymade to the narrative tactics of the blog. From another point of view (contemporary), blogs have always been readymades..."

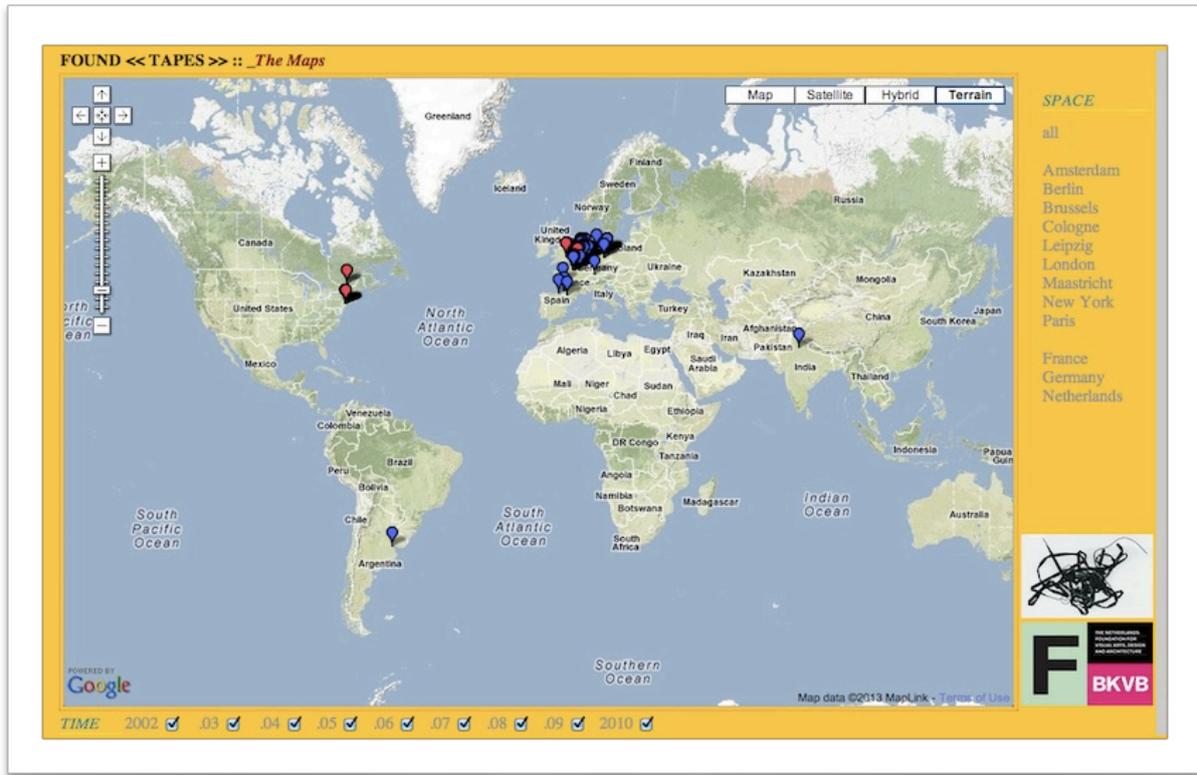
[Low-fi's Net Art Locator : 'The New Readymades' (editorial - <http://www.low-fi.org.uk/> , april 2005)]

In order to make my additions to the exhibition, I need to patiently disentangle the usually badly knotted and mixed up tape salad, and mount the tape back into a cassette in order to be able to play it, listen to it, and – as far as possible – identify the source of the audio that it contains. This 'mounting back' is done in chronological order of finding, and in batches of five consecutive finds, except when more than five tapes were found on the same day (in which case all finds of that day will be mounted together). Such a batch constitutes one of the *exhibits*, which then is added as a web page to the Found Tapes Exhibition site. Finds are there listed in descending chronological order of finding (the '[we]blog' format), together with a short description. Most of the finds are also documented by means of a photograph.

Over the years part of this restoration and documentation work for the collection was done publicly, as part of performances, exhibitions and residencies that were partially or wholly dedicated to the Found Tapes project, in Berlin, Brussels, Brooklyn, Maastricht and other places.

² See <http://harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00562.php>

Supported by a project grant of the Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture, the FBKVB, in 2009/2010 I developed a database and a map interface to the collection, thus making the exhibition accessible geographically by means of the Google Maps API. In the summer of 2018 however, Google changed the conditions of use of Google Maps and the API. As a result, the once available topographic interface has for now disappeared again, leaving nothing but an interesting set of screen shots.



Every *exhibit* includes a corresponding sound montage, which I call a *fotex*.

For a *fotex*, I select fragments from each found tape, which then – in ascending chronological order – are assembled in a digital sound file. The selection of fragments (their character and length) is subjective, and as such reflects my personal tastes, curiosity and interests. It is this possibility of choice that provides an interesting and challenging – for evidently very limited – degree of 'sound creative & artistic' freedom, within an otherwise mainly expository & documentary process. I do, for instance, let the precise determination of which fragment of a found tape to use depend upon the nature of (a) preceding and/or (a) following one(s). Once chosen, however, fragments are used 'straight', without modifications or effects, in order to retain a strict *documentary* quality. Also it is important to notice that no effort whatsoever is made to *restore* the found audio to its 'original fidelity'. On the contrary, I'm particularly interested in the audible wear and deterioration of the recordings contained on the tapes that I find, and indeed will often pick



fragments *because* of a certain sonic texture ... *because* of particular tape-damage 'noises' ... *because* of 'the cracklings' ...

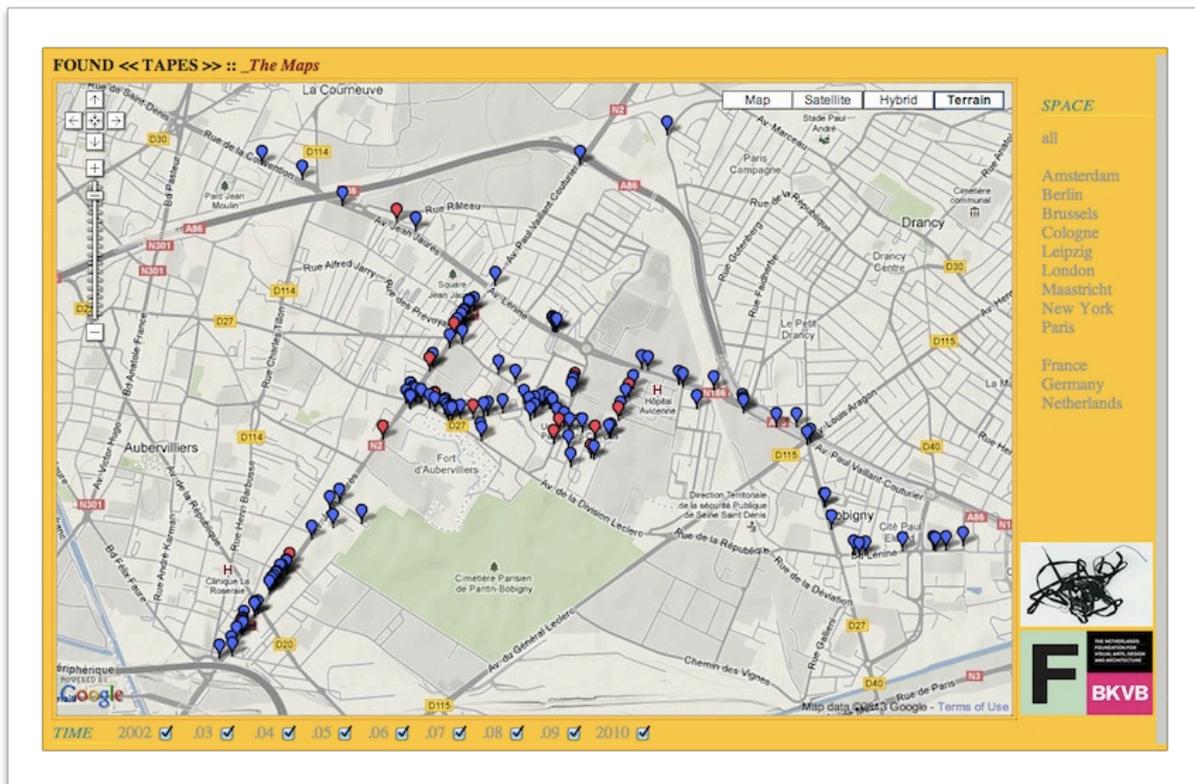
I encode the audio montages for use as part of the web site as 128 kbps 44.1 kHz stereo mp3 files. Each sound file individually is available as part of the corresponding *exhibit*, for play and/or download by visitors of the Exhibition. The current collection's total duration is about 13.5 hours.

The type of audio encountered on the 'littered' tapes is surprisingly varied. Among my collection of found tapes there are language lessons, sermons, sales instructions for medical representatives, interviews, children's stories, dictaphone recordings, recorded telephone conversations, spoken (love) letters, a tape with instructions in Arabic for drivers and many a tape contains recitations from the Koran.

But, as to be expected, the bulk of the finds contains (popular) music of some sort. Precisely *what* sort of music depends strongly on the place where a tape has been picked up, and indeed, the Found Tapes Exhibition makes apparent a clear connection between the type of music and the demography of the whereabouts of a find's location. The map interface provided an interesting means to investigate this. The picking up of cast away tapes in a certain neighbourhood somehow is like randomly sampling the music listened to by (parts of) the neighbourhood's population at a particular time ...

This *sociographic* aspect is one of several fascinating facets of this and other found tape projects.

Closely related is the fact that the use of analog audio cassette tape for 'personal stereo' in the course of the project quite suddenly became obsolete : it was massively replaced by digital alternatives. Not so much by CD's (the use of portable CD players never has been as widespread as the use of the cassette walkman), but especially by playlists of mp3-files, played back through iPods, cellphones and similar compact, portable devices.



From the beginning I have always tried to identify and classify the music and other audio on the found tapes as much as I could. In many cases though, I simply did - and do - not know. It is therefore that all visitors to the site are invited to participate in this determination, and communicate any observations they might have by email. After verification, the 'identification' of a found tape fragment by a visitor will be added to the exhibition file, and duly acknowledged. The introduction and growing sophistication of music identifying software and online identification services, like *Shazam* or *SoundHound* (available for instance as iPhone application) around 2009 make it possible to identify at least most of the 'main stream' western music occurring on the found tapes, even though up until the time of this writing, I have yet to undertake a thorough and systematic attempt at identifying the musical material that can be heard on the exhibition's items.

More elaborate narratives, observations and reflections related to the process of finding and processing tapes, and to particular finds appear as entries of my 'SoundBlog' - <http://soundblog.net/> - in which I online document my work on this and other projects.

Harold Schellinx
Paris/Amsterdam, 2002-2020

« The Found Tapes project was emblematic for the best pieces of art in the SHIFT galleries, mining beneath the surface of simple visual appeal to conjure richly suggestive narratives. » - The Wire (February 2011)



Found Tape Events :

- * *Found in Maastricht* – Klankwerkplaats Stichting Intro / In Situ, Maastricht, the Netherlands – october 28th, 2005
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00567.php>]
- * *Kunsttour 2006*, Maastricht, the Netherlands – may 19th-21st, 2006
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00584.php>]
- * *Modernités Recyclées*, Lille3000 – Lille, France – october 29th, 2006
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00596.php>]
- * *Sound Souvenirs Symposium* – Maastricht, the Netherlands – november 10th, 2006
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00597.php>]
- * *Found Tapes, Found Sounds, Found Recorders* – Kunstprojektraum Takt, Berlin, Germany – february 7-12, 2007 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00603.php>
<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00604.php>]
- * *Found Tapes Exhibition* – Transitlounge, Berlin, Germany – february 7-9, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00604.php>]
- * *Unthreaded Cassette Tapes 'n' Hub Caps* – Acoustic Flux – Kunstprojektraum Takt, Berlin, Germany – february 17 – march 31, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00604.php>]
- * *Found Tapes Talk* – Acoustic Flux Finissage – Kunstprojektraum Takt, Berlin, Germany – march 31, 2007
- * *Found Tapes Talk* – Raum für Kunst und Musik, Köln, Germany – april 4, 2007
- * *Tapemosphere #9* – Raum Für Kunst und Musik, Köln, Germany – april 4-9, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00626.php>]
- * *Dorkbot #3 / Malaupixel Festival* – Mains d'œuvres, Saint-Ouen, France – april 15, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00609.php>]
- * *Lavage, Salissage, Multiplexage* – la MACH-Inante, Montreuil, France – may 17-19, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00611.php#00611a>]
- * *Found Tapes Exhibition* – Recyclart, Brussels, Belgium – juin 4-7, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00638.php#00638> ,
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00643.php>]
- * *Found Tapes – Open Workshop* – Conflux 2007, Brooklyn, New York – september 13, 2007
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00644.php#00644>]
- * *Dorkbot #7 / ARTE 'Tracks' Festival* – Paris, France – nov. 30 / dec. 1, 2007
- * *Found Tapes : 'Random Sleazebag' ...* – Cake & Coffee, Berlin, Germany – July 2-5, 2008
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00656.php>]
- * *Found Tapes : live on the air compiling of fotex 88* – Epsilonia@radio Libertaire, Paris, France – october 2, 2008
- * *Found Tapes* – Presentation at *Re :Visie :Lab*, Theater Kikker, Utrecht, the Netherlands – december 14, 2008
- * *Found Tapes Exhibition* – käämer 12 / Les Ateliers Claus, Brussels, Belgium – january 19-25, 2009 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00676.php>]
- * *Kunsttour 2009*, Maastricht, the Netherlands – May 21st-24th, 2009
[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00676.php>]
- * *Found Tapes Installation* – La Boutique Jaune, Montreuil (France)/ Circuit #1 – june 6th, 2009 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00680.php>]
- * *Cassette trouvées* – live phone-in interview on 'Couleurs 3' (Swiss national radio) – august 4th, 2009.
- * *Founded Tapapes* – presentation at the café 'Die Kasette', Leipzig (Germany) – october 2009 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00697.php>]

- * *Found Tapes Installation* – Puces de l'Art, La Générale N.O., Paris (France) – december 19th 2009 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00708.php>]
- * *Muzzix #10* – workshop, Lille (France) – april 3rd-4th, 2010.
- * *SHIFT Electronic Arts Festival* – Exhibition, performance, artist-talk. Basel (Switzerland) – october 29th-31st, 2010 [<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00755.php>]
- * *STRP Festival* – Found Tapes talk. Eindhoven (the Netherlands) – november 26th, 2010.
- * *Neue Positionen* – Found Tapes expo. Art Focus Euregio, Hasselt (Belgium) – september 9th-11th, 2011.
- * *Neue Positionen* – Found Tapes expo + talk. Art Focus Euregio, Atelierhaus Aachen (Germany) – september 24th-25th, 2011.
- * *Neue Positionen: Der Fortschritt* – Found Tapes expo. Art Focus Euregio, Intro in situ, Maastricht (the Netherlands) – december 13th-30th, 2011.
- * *Recycling Pervasive Media, Intervening in Planned Obsolescence and Practicing Technological Sustainability, international workshop* – Found Tapes Exhibition & Found Tapes Maps presentation. Banff Centre (Canada), July 6th-16th, 2011.
- * *2013 = C50. Tales for Tapes #9* – Found Tapes. Lang Leve Lou Ottens! Kobé, Ivry-sur-Seine (France). June 28-29, 2013.
- * *2013 = C50. Tales for Tapes #10* – Found Tapes. Lang Leve Lou Ottens! Urban Spree, Berlin (Germany). August 30th, 2013.
- * *Cassette Art* – Found Tapes photos + audio stream. Recyclart – Vitrine 5, Brussels (Belgium). July 8-11, 2015
- * *Cassette Art* – Found Tapes photos + audio stream. City Sonic 2015, Mons (Belgium). September 11-27, 2015
- * *The online life of obsolete media* – Online exhibition at the Museum of Post Digital Cultures, curated by Raffaël Dörig. February/March 2016 [<http://www.postdigitalcultures.ch/item/56a91a3ba0bdb6030028d125>]
- * *Vieux Media Fest* – Found Tapes pictures and Found Tapes work – La Générale Nord-Est, Paris (France), July 2017
- * *Cassette Culture Node. Linz* – workshop and presentation – Linz, Austria. 7-12 July 2018
- * *Très Grande Collage (m/f)* - a number of one stretch mega-broadcasts of fourteen hours of *foTex* found tape sound montages by online radio platform *Radio On Berlin* [<http://www.radio-on-berlin.com/?p=9009>]
- * *Found Tapes Porto* – presentation – Porto, Portugal. 10 November 2019

About the Found Tapes Exhibition :

- * *Found Tapes*, index of related entries on the SoundBlog [http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/thematic_index.php#foundtaping]
- * *The New Readymades* – Low-fi.org.uk – april 2005 [<http://www.low-fi.org.uk/cgi-bin/low-fi/main.cgi?session=details&id=1070>]
- * *Found Tapes*, Home Made Labor – february 2007 [http://www.homemade-labor.ch/weblog/archives/2007/02/found_tapes_1.html]
- * *Lost Tapes, Found Sounds, We Make Money Not Art* – february 2007 [<http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/009332.php>]
- * *Le refuge des cassettes abandonnées*, Ecrans / Libération – february 2007 [<http://www.ecrans.fr/spip.php?article861>]
- * *Exploring Urban Art in Brooklyn - NY*, Wall Street Journal online video – september 2007
- * *Found Tapes : le refuge des cassettes abandonnées*. France Culture, *Décibels* – march 15, 2008

* *Foundtaping : les trésors des cassettes jetées à la poubelles* . Barraque à Freaks – Rue 89, may 2008

[<http://www.rue89.com/baraque-a-freaks/foundtaping-les-tresors-des-cassettes-jetees-a-la-poubelle>]

* *Cassettes jetées & trouvées* France Culture, *Minuit/Dix* – september 01, 2008

* *Schönste Schlaufen* [@ *SHIFT 2010*]

[http://www.homemade-labor.ch/weblog/archives/2010/11/schoene_schlauf.html]

* *K7eurs. Tape's Not Dead.* – ARTE TV. Tracks. December 2011

[<http://www.harsmedia.com/SoundBlog/Archief/00774.php>]

Publicatie:

* *Alle Geluid Van De Wereld* – 208pp., May 2010 (not available)

* *Het Kaf en het Koren* – Gonzo (Circus) #137, Jan-Feb 2017

* *The aesthetics of failure, erasure and decay.* In: *Found Tapes Porto 2004-2019.* Edited by Pedro Augusto. ISBN 978-989-33-1651-1. Porto, 2021

References:

1. Zoë Irvine :: *Magnetic Migration Music* [<http://www.zoeirvine.net/magnetic-migration-music/>]

2. Åsa Ståhl :: *Tape Salad*

3. John Smith / Graeme Miller :: *Lost Sound* (1998-2001, video)

[http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/john_smith/lost_sound.html]

4. Michael Bull :: *Sounding Out the City. Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (Berg, Oxford/New York 2000)



foundtapes.soundblog.net
harsmedia.com
[instagram.com/soundblog](https://www.instagram.com/soundblog)
twitter.com/soundblog
soundblog.medium.com