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# Audio Journalism: An Epistemology of Bodily Engagements with Sounds

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## ABSTRACT

This article highlights the critical role played by the body in audio journalistic epistemology. It focuses on the journalist's "audio body" and its deployment in the creation of documentary podcasts. Highly tuned to both the audible and the inaudible, this is a body at once central to the journalist's investigatory toolkit, at once responsible for the creation of powerful audio journalism that brings listeners into an intimate space with the subject at hand. Foregrounding the role of the body in the processes of audio journalism also highlights the importance of affect and time in journalistic sound-based montages. By way of illustration, three immersive sound pieces that document news production in a variety of media outlets are discussed. So too are the ways that the documentarist and author of this article was required to mobilize and subsequently reflect upon her own "audio body."

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## Introduction: Presenting the Audio Body of the Journalist

This article draws attention to the centrality of the journalist's body in the day-to-day performance of news work. It shows how the body can serve as a primary research "tool"; as an information-gathering and data-analyzing "device"; and as a "crafter" and "polisher" of the finished report. The body, here, is understood as a medium for storytelling, the deployment of which enhances the richness and complexity of the material being presented.

The article addresses the following questions: In what ways is the journalist's body an "audio body"?; Are there particular ways to sonically mobilize the journalist's body?; How does this audio body produce journalistic forms and knowledges that are sonically specific? And how is conceiving of the audio body as a key element in audio journalism useful to our understanding of its epistemology?

In providing concrete examples of sound documentary creation, this article highlights a range of ways that the audio body comes into play. It shows how the sonically sensitized audio body is equally adept at picking up on the inaudible. It argues that the audio body's distinct "touch" lends complexity and nuance to stories: creating multiple layers of meaning; delivering a variety of affective punches. It addresses the listening public's reception of the sound montages that result of this "tuning in" to and of the

audio body on the part of the journalist, and suggests how an intimacy might develop between audience members and documentary subjects. In sum, the article reflects on changing attitudes towards the role of the body in journalism (Francoeur 2021a), and draws attention to the place of sound and intimacy when it comes to producing documentary podcasts (Biewen and Diworth 2017; Dowling and Miller 2019; Lindgren 2023) and contributing to journalistic epistemology (Carlson 2020; Chalaby 1998; Park 1940).

### **Problematic: Deploying the Body as Sound Specialist**

Continuing a trajectory investigating the audio documentary as a journalistic form that recognizes the importance of the body (Francoeur 2022), and building on a conception of the body as an information-gathering and information-analyzing “device” in the journalist’s “toolkit,” the body is understood here as a sensing and sentient instrument with the capacity to organize and make sense of the everyday. Affects, emotions, physical sensations, nerve impulses – even what we refer to as “rationality” – are all part of this bodily amalgam of senses and sensibilities. As theorized previously, the journalist’s body acts as a “sensor” in order to “capture” information; as a “transducer” in order to filter through and analyze that information; and as a “depository” in order to store and reuse what has marked, informed and sensitized it in the line of work (Francoeur 2021a).

That work, as this article emphasizes, can be sound-based. Composing audio pieces that mix voices and sounds – an approach I have previously referred to as “sound writing” – is a practice that treats sounds as information; that seeks out the intangible in sonic form; that is attentive to how inaudible affect enters into dialogue with the sensor and transducer body of the person collecting, filtering and analyzing sonic information; and that results in sound compositions the simultaneously resignify the real and inform the body of the listener. Sound writing, in other words, creates commonality in that both producing and listening bodies vibrate sonically, and difference in that no two audio bodies resonate (or for that matter, *reason*) in the same way (Francoeur 2022).

Few empirical studies have been done on the journalistic or documentarist audio body at work. Addressing this gap, the article describes the making of three experimental audio documentaries during which the documentarist paid particular attention to her audio body in its capacity as sensor, transducer and depository. She observed, for example, that her body’s reaction to certain sounds, or to the absence of sound, had important repercussions on how the resulting documentaries would go on to be shaped. The making of these documentaries provided insights into what makes audio journalism distinct. In other words, by remaining attentive to her audio body, the epistemological uniqueness of audio journalism became apparent.

In the section that follows key elements of journalistic epistemology are discussed, as are the specificities of the raw material that constitutes audio journalism: sound. From this, an epistemology of audio journalism emerges: an epistemology that positions the audio body at its core, and that privileges at once the ways of knowing that a sound-attentive body enables, at once the particular journalistic formats and knowledges to which this sensing body gives rise.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Producing the Real: An Epistemology of Journalism*

Epistemology speaks to the way knowledge is produced, and the ways in which that knowledge becomes validated. Of interest to us here is journalistic epistemology: the particular knowledges journalism produces and perpetuates, the methods used to do this, and the various forms it takes.

From an epistemological standpoint, journalism produces specific knowledges (Park 1940) aimed at keeping citizens informed and, ideally, empowered. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) state, “the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (17). To do this, journalists rely on “facts” (Chalaby 1998) that are trustworthy and verifiable. In the words of Ekström (2002), “the legitimacy of journalism is intimately bound up with claims to knowledge and truth” (260).

Though contentious and endlessly debated, the words “fact” and “truth” remain the cornerstones of journalistic epistemology (Carlson 2023; Ramsälv, Ekström, and Westlund 2023). That said, journalistic knowledge encompasses a broad spectrum of facts and truths, with our definition of what constitutes a fact and what constitutes a truth varying depending on whether we are talking about “breaking news” (Ekström, Ramsälv, and Westlund 2021), a “fact check” (Graves 2017), or reports presented as “investigative journalism” (Ettema and Glasser 1998). A constant navigation between “scientific truth” and “common sense” – what Labasse (2015) refers to as “mesoepistemology” – Parasie (2015) uses the term “justified beliefs” (373) to capture what journalism tends to settle for in that blurry terrain between the “provable” and the “socially acceptable.”

As for the specific journalistic techniques used to produce knowledges and assemble them into a presentable format, these include but are not limited to the weighting of evidence, observation, interviews, double-checking facts, and accessing and evaluating credible sources (Steensen et al. 2022). A set of diverse and ever-changing practices and techniques are constitutive of the overall production process, and these in turn are influenced by the specific nature of the genre, or the type of beat being covered by the journalist – be it digital journalism where social media platforms play a key role (Ekström and Westlund 2019); breaking news with its incremental online updates (Ekström, Ramsälv, and Westlund 2021); scientific journalism with its recourse to antecedent referencing (Brennen 2018); data journalism with its reliance on statistical evidence (Ramsälv, Ekström, and Westlund 2023), or live-blogging (Matheson and Wahl-Jorgensen 2020). These differences aside, the core journalistic techniques remain the same – research, triangulation of information, and formatting.

The forms journalistic knowledge takes varies, and can range from data visualization (Ramsälv, Ekström, and Westlund 2023) to aesthetic journalism (Cramerotti 2009) to artistic journalism (Postema and Deuze 2020) to theatre (Adams and Cooper 2024; Postema 2024). In general, however, journalistic formats remain recognizable: in part because they follow set “patterns of discourse” (Schudson 1989); in part because audiences are familiar with the institutions responsible for them.

Carlson (2020) succinctly sums up what constitutes journalistic epistemology:

News is treated as a form of knowledge in which journalists use habitual techniques to assemble information systematically into meaningful textual forms that can be shared with and

understood by mass audiences. To be knowledge, a news story makes an implied epistemic claim as to its veracity, supported by the institutionalized nature of its production. (231)

But what of audio journalism? An examination of the particularities of sound can help shed light on the specificities of its epistemology.

### ***Pinpointing the Particularities of Sound***

Sound has distinct features, best highlighted through the work and writings of sonically inspired creators and researchers: sound composers, anthropologists and geographers who specialize in all things audio and for whom sound provides a unique gateway into understanding the world around them (Francoeur 2022). Among these is Feld (2000), the coiner of the term “acoustemology” – that “union of acoustics and epistemology ... [that emphasizes] the primacy of sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world” (184). Galloway (2018) is equally attuned to sound’s informative qualities, insisting that an “experiencing of sound is a special kind of knowing” (451). Along with other sound-driven researchers and creators, both consider sound to be a medium that gives us access to information distinct from that which we access through visual or textual media. For example, Feld (2017) contends that sound better captures and conveys relational dynamics between different kinds of bodies, be they human, animal, plant, technological, or otherwise (85). In a similar vein, geographers Gallagher and Prior (2014) draw our attention to oft overlooked “data” that sounds provide, that isn’t necessarily tangible or visible, but which tells us about those “hidden or marginal aspects of places and their inhabitants” (269; see also Butler 2006). In revealing information that tends to go unseen and hence unnoticed, sound provides a unique insight into diverse cultural, social, environmental and identity-related issues.

To capture this specific information, one must adapt one’s methods. Listening to sounds, along with recording, editing, assembling, and analyzing them, all demand specific methodologies. Paying special attention to the practices of sound researchers and creators reveals a crucial element inherent in their approach: the importance of the body. The body is mobilized at every stage of the sound process, transforming it into an “audio body” (Francoeur 2022). As Schulze (2013) affirms, “Sounding and listening are grounded in the corporeality of human beings” (196). Feld (2000), for his part, considers producing and hearing sound to be “embodied competencies” (184). What is clear is that sound is infiltrative. Whitehead (cited in Weiss 2001) provides a graphic description of sound as “a material for the whole body” that enters through “a hole in the head” and gets “conducted through nerves and bones” (63). Levine (1994) compares the effect sound has upon us to empathy: “Sound is as deep as empathy, invading the body, creating a mimetic presence where there was once none. It penetrates the body, seeps into it, compelling it to resonate” (163). Sound walking pioneer Andra McCartney (cited in Drobnick 2004) describes hearing as something “not only done with the ears, but also with every fibre of our beings as vibrations of sound move into our bodies” (179). Along the same lines, Nancy (2007) speaks to the tactility of sound, to the way “sound is like touch, or in fact is touch - with its force and oscillations literally vibrating through our bodies” (27). Similarly, Sliwinski (2022) considers listening a “radical” act: “The experience of listening involves acoustic waves entering the body and vibrating the tympanic membrane and tiny bones of the middle and inner ear. To listen, in this

respect, involves being penetrated, indeed, being literally moved by sound” (622; see also Burd 2023; and Augoyard and Torgue 2005).

The audio body even picks up the inaudible. Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior (2017) see sound in terms of “kinetic oscillations” (620), Sterne (2003) likens it to a “little piece of the vibrating world” (11). In fact, descriptions of sound bear a striking resemblance to descriptions of affect. See, for example, Waitt, Buchanan, and Duffy’s (2020) discussion of the sonic: “When considered from an affective perspective, the sonic involves more than sound, and is constituted by a nexus of inaudible and audible processes that modulate the body’s capacity to act and be acted upon, connecting or disconnecting people and things” (2135). Affect’s ephemeral intensities, forces and amplitudes (Lutz 2017; Stewart 2017; White 2017) find a concrete illustration in the *modus operandi* of sound waves.

These descriptions of the distinct features of sound lead us to reflect on audio journalism: on the specific knowledges that are produced of sounds and – equally important – of silences; and on the particular methods required to elicit such knowledges – in this case, the mobilization of the audio body. To this end, we turn now to how these particularities of sound interweave with journalism in general, and inform an epistemology of audio journalism more specifically.

### ***Identifying the Distinctive Characteristics of an Epistemology of Audio Journalism***

Ramsälv, Ekström, and Westlund (2023) sum up the relationship between different genres of journalism and the knowledges that develop out of them as follows: “The diversification of news journalism creates essentially different epistemologies: What it claims to know about, how it knows, and how these claims are justified” (4). They provide a fitting starting point for growing an epistemology of audio journalism out of the particularities of sound.

The term “audio journalism” incorporates a wide range of formats, and these in turn are shaped by factors such as subject matter, authorship, the time and space available to produce them, where they are to be aired, and how they are to be listened to. At its most basic, audio journalism consists of a news report in which a narrative voice relays written words to a listening audience. In its more elaborate form, “deep dives” (Dowling and Miller 2019) take the listener on an audio journey into the depths of a topic. These latter are the most helpful to us in developing an epistemology of audio journalism: those podcasts that delve deep (see Lindgren 2023, on award winning podcasts), exploiting the potentialities of sound.

Deep dive journalism involves adding in extra layers of information to that contained in words, spoken or written, or to that which can be readily observed. Deep diving sheds light on the unspoken, on the unwritten. Sounds are used to add texture and render knowable the unobvious: relational dynamics between different kinds of bodies, for example; the hidden aspects of places and their inhabitants; unique cultural, social, environmental or identity-related issues. In short, deep dive journalism expands upon what we can know about any given subject.

As explained earlier, taking advantage of sound’s distinctive qualities means adopting methods that can effectively collect and showcase them. It means finding ways to gather

information that relies on more than traditional interviewing techniques and that goes beyond merely collecting distinctive sounds. This is where the audio journalist's body can act as a "tool," as a "sensor" (Francoeur 2022): picking up on information not contained in human speech; alert to affects circulating in a given environment; attentive to audible and inaudible data. In lending itself to being interpellated, infiltrated, touched, and moved by ambient noises and silences alike – in opening itself to milieu-based data that can confirm a journalistic angle, or conflict with what is actually being said by an interviewee – this sonically focused body becomes a site through which place becomes "known" (Galloway 2018, 461) and upon which "social contradictions play themselves out" (Geurts, p. 13). Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior (2017) refer to this capacity to aurally sense one's way into a place and pick up on its nuances as an "amplified sonic sensibility" (620). Galloway (2018) suggests that the listening body is ideally equipped to unearth that which is not immediately apparent in an environment.

In terms of Csordas' (1993) somatic modes of attention, the audio body in sensor mode is a body on high alert that needs to simultaneously "record" and "process" sound. That processing means adopting or morphing into a "transducer" body (Francoeur 2022). As a transducer, the audio body acts as a filter, converter, mixer and analyzer of the heterogeneous sonic stimuli it is recording and processing. As Hagood (2014) explains, "transductive analysis encourages fresh consideration of the relations between processes, agents, time-spaces, and logics involved in the transduction" (115). It requires a multimodal analysis in which the journalist has to dig deep: mobilizing corporeal and cognitive resources; juggling a multitude of sense and sonic pathways. Aspects of this process are well captured by Steensen et al. (2022) in their discussion of "the epistemology of source criticism" and the challenges of assessing truth claims: "They involve a lot of self-reflexive, deliberative epistemological labour which is relevant to the understanding of how and why truth-claims are made" (2131).

In other words, the sensor and transducer audio body must pay as much attention to the information to be found in the rhythms and intensities of background noise, as it does to the "grain" (Barthes 1982) of individual voices – to those personal intonations, modulations, and inflexions (Kanngieser 2012). It must remain alert to silences, sighs, snorts, words, phrases and phrasing; to the expressed and the inferred; to levels of sincerity and what the speaker's way of saying something reveals about that person's motivations. At the same time, its own interpretation of the sound data being collected must be continuously reviewed and questioned.

As the audio body in its dual capacity as sensor and transducer becomes more practiced, so too comes proficiency. That accumulated experience and insight finds its way into the audio journalist's "depository" body: a body at once shaped, at once sharpened, by all the journalistic transduction that sonic immersion has afforded it. As Francoeur (2021a) suggests, this is "a body that cannot help but be affected, marked, changed, by what ... [has been] deposited in and across it" (218). Because it carries the knowledges of the sensor and transducer body, the depository body is quick to turn the sound-rich content generated through somatically-based, sound-sensitive gathering and analyzing techniques into a distinct kind of journalism.

It follows that these specific gathering and analyzing techniques lead to distinctive presentation formats. Through the superimposing of multiple layers of information, and through the interweaving of text and texture – of the spoken and the non-spoken

– (Wodak 2013), audio journalists manage to produce news stories that amplify reality, and sometimes even resignify it – rendering reality “more real than real” (Francoeur 2022, par. 5). This kind of audio story has the power to pull the listener’s body in: providing an immersive sound experience similar to that experienced, in situ, by the audio journalist; taking the listener on a sonic “deep dive” à la Dowling and Miller (2019). According to Lindgren (2023), audio documentaries of this kind “can invite a more complex and nuanced appreciation for socio-political realities than in more traditional news models” as well as create “a greater identification with particular characters and social groups” (706).

In sum, audio journalism produces a distinct form of knowledge, just as audio journalists – using their sensor, transducer and depository bodies – are distinct kinds of knowledge producers, and immersive audio documentaries, with their ability to inform the listener at multiple levels, a distinct kind of knowledge product.

In the section that follows the processes involved in producing and presenting three experimental audio documentaries are detailed. These grounded experiences serve to illustrate, in a concrete way, the specific methods used by the audio journalist, the specific formats to which this kind of audio journalism gives rise, and the specific knowledges it generates.

### **Methodology: Documenting News Production Through Sonic Immersion**

A practice-based research approach specific to podcasting was adopted for the sound immersions described below. Practice-research is an emerging focus in Podcast Studies (see Beckstead and Llinares 2025; Jorgensen and Lindgren 2022). Podcasts here are as much a research tool as an object of analysis, where practice leads to theoretical insights. The sound immersions themselves (launched in 2019 and still ongoing at the time of writing) involve sonically documenting news production, with a focus on the conditions in which news is produced and on how journalists describe their role in this process. Out of the resulting recordings, sound compositions are created. The title of this foray into qualitative audio research (Gershon 2024) is “*Occuper et préoccuper l’oreille citoyenne*” and its primary objective is to foreground audio journalism formats and the way in which information is conveyed through them. More specifically, finished news stories are put into dialogue with the working conditions and journalistic processes that accompany their production, as well as with the journalists’ own comments, explanations and critical self-reflexivity regarding the stories they produce. The project goes counter to dominant trends, where transparency and self-reflexivity on the part of journalists – an essential ingredient of the elite podcast format (Dowling and Miller 2019; Lindgren 2023) – tend to be relegated to the background. In “*Occuper et préoccuper l’oreille citoyenne*,” journalistic self-reflexivity provides the main narrative thread.

Interweaving the news story of the day with the circumstances surrounding its production helps to deconstruct journalistic authority (Matheson and Wahl-Jorgensen 2020). It reinforces the fact that journalism is just journalism: nothing more, nothing less. It liberates journalism from the conceits of its own self-image: from itself. It shows how journalism is a discourse – most notably about journalism – and how it is a construct. It reveals what lies behind journalistic rhetoric: behind the language of facts, of truth-telling, of a disinterested pursuit of the truth (Francoeur 2012; Matheson 2004; Matheson

and Wahl-Jorgensen 2020). Again, all of this flies in the face of current trends, where the primary objective of “meta journalism” is to lock in journalistic authority. As Carlson (2020) explains: “Beyond practice, journalists cultivate the epistemic authority to produce news as knowledge through discourse about journalism. [...] This overt interpretive work aims to enhance journalistic legitimacy and the public acceptance of journalism’s truth claims” (234; see also Perdomo and Rodrigues-Rouleau 2022).

The project began with a sound immersion in the multi-platform newsroom of the public broadcaster Radio-Canada (<https://ici.radio-canada.ca>), out of which four podcasts were created and analyzed (Francoeur 2021b). This early experience led to unexpected discoveries that pointed to the importance of the body in audio documentary production. Thus alerted, a focus on the body was incorporated into the next stages of the project: an embodied approach to journalism research within the art-based research-project framework (Hölsgens, de Wildt, and Witschge 2020). Paquin and Noury (2020) insist that changing course is part and parcel of research-creation, and encourage researcher-creators to adapt their project as new insights emerge. Two further sound immersions were conducted in 2021: one at the local weekly *Infodimanche* (<https://www.infodimanche.com>), the other in a hyperlocal online media start-up called *Montsaintroch* (<https://monsaintroch.com>). Then two others were conducted in 2024 and 2025: one with an independent reporter and one at Agence France Presse (<https://www.afp.com/en/our-offer/afp-fact-check>) in Paris. All resulted in sound compositions varying from thirty minutes to an hour. The rationale for choosing five very different sites – a public broadcaster, a local weekly, a hyperlocal online media startup, an independent reporter and an international press agency – was that it would allow for a comparing and contrasting of journalists’ daily working realities in as wide a range of news organizations as possible.

So as not to miss out on anything the selected reporters said, the uni-directional microphone was deliberately placed close to their mouths. This also served to create a feeling of intimacy with the speaker and, for confidentiality purposes, make it harder to identify others working in the newsroom.<sup>1</sup> The recorder stayed permanently on while reporters spoke, capturing background noises like tapping keyboards, a car starting up, slamming doors, the general hustle and bustle of a newsroom. When putting the sound immersions together, recognizable voices other than that of the selected reporter were for the most part edited out – an exception, for example, being that of a government minister making an announcement at a press conference. In other words, only the voice of the selected reporter drove each of the finished podcasts, providing detailed description on how they went about their research, assembled their interviews, edited their stories or negotiated the organizational puzzles, ethical issues, and deontological questions.

The documentarist kept a written record of her self-reflective insights and made notes detailing her scripting and mixing processes. Throughout these experimental sound immersions the documentarist-researcher mobilized her sensor, transducer, and depository audio body. The resulting sound montages are multi-layered in terms of how the information is delivered and what it reveals about journalistic working conditions.

Combined, these experiments in bodily recording and sound-sensitive composing provide a wealth of sonorous material with which to work practically and theorize fruitfully. Conducted in the spirit of “hybrid ethnography” – where “shorter, concentrated periods of fieldwork at several sites are used in lieu of the extended immersion of traditional newsroom ethnography as an attempt ‘to maximize ethnographic observation

within a compressed time” (Usher 2018, 210; as cited in Coddington 2020, 370) – the findings of these audio experiments attest to the rewards of such an approach.

## What the Audio Body Found Out

### *The Featured Journalists’ Work was Organized Around Formats, Quotes and Convergence*

Each sound immersion began in the same way: the documentarist donned her headphones and started recording, immediately engaging her audio body. This act alone was akin to pressing a “sound mode” button: attuning the documentarist to the sonic backdrop of each news producing milieu; precipitating a heightened awareness of the sounds and silences accompanying each audio journalist’s pursuit of the news story of the day. The sites themselves, however, differed significantly, and each field experience – from keeping up with the frantic hubbub of a multi-platform newsroom, to shadowing a reporter working for a local weekly, to disappearing into the “multi-universe” of the Editor in Chief of a hyper-local online start-up<sup>2</sup> – presented the documentarist with distinct challenges.

With its multiple sound fragments emanating from a barrage of simultaneously unfolding activities, the multi-platform newsroom kept the documentarist’s sensor body on its toes. The multi-platform journalist guarantees a round-the-clock feed of live news to radio and television. At the same time, technical directives are always being exchanged back and forth with TV- and radio- and web-based production team members via telephone, text, email and other people working in the newsroom. Add to this cacophony the hurried exchanges with colleagues over the “hot” topic of the day, the incoming calls from sources suggesting future stories, and the constant click-clickity-click of keyboards ensuring that the news never stops... In short, a frenzy of activity that contrasts sharply with the pace of other obligations that make up the multi-platform journalist’s day – a lengthy press conference, a laborious technical briefing, an interview with a hesitant expert – and results in a rhythmic dissonance of sorts: yet another sonic shock wave rocking the documentarist’s sensor body.

This tumult of audio fragments continues to resonate in her transducer body, providing important clues about the working environment of the multi-platform journalist: its fragmented nature; how it is multi-layered and multimodal; how it is the poly-informational milieu *par excellence*. In fact, it is only when the reporter goes on air that the fragmentation stops, that sound becomes linear, that there is a sense of calm. Now, the multi-platform journalist’s energies are single-focused. When words come, they are fluid, considered, collected.

Analyzing the ebbs and flows of this sonic patchwork led to an observation: going on air is what punctuates the multi-platform journalist’s day, is what provides the thread.

Everything else is organized around that moment, around this question: What do I need when I go on air? The reporter uses the standard journalistic formats to organize the fragments, and they provide the fixity required to orchestrate them. If the reporter’s day is lived out in a storm of fragments, keeping the ship on course is dependent on never losing sight of that next appearance on air. These findings culminated in a sound composition entitled “*Maître du travail fragmenté*” (“The master of fragmented work”) in which the news story of the day – a piece about expanding access to medical assistance in dying – also featured (Francoeur 2021c).

Immersing the documentarist's sensor body in the rhythms of a local weekly gives rise to observations of a different order. Here, the beat is regular: telephone calls, online research, verbal exchanges with team members, the taking of notes, the tappity-tap-tap of editing. The journalist hums between calls, creating a sonorous filament linking one call to the next: a kind of soothing refrain. The documentarist's sensor body detects another regularity: a sonic crest, ever so subtle but a peak nonetheless, when the journalist manages to "score" a good quote. In fact, the dogged pursuit of usable quotes around which to build news stories is the driving force of this journalist, whether conducting an interview on the phone or in person.

Another snippet of information emerges from the sonic fabric of this journalist's work environment: the intimate tone her voice takes on when talking with regular sources. A police officer, a municipal councillor, the local fire chief, a provincial election candidate — is on a first name basis with all of them, and the exchanges are cordial, even warm. This journalist is closely connected to the locality she serves: a sound-based finding reinforced by another, when she speaks about what motivates her, about her faith in journalism, and about her commitment to the weekly. The intensity of her feelings are audibly tangible when she speaks of her hopes for her community, of her desire to participate in its development and revitalization. Likewise, a stridency creeps in when she expresses the challenges of navigating between her roles as "militant" activist and straight-shooting "diagnostician" of community disfunction — for example, there's a rundown bio-methanation plant in need of upgrading, there's the delicate issue of integrating immigrants.

This largely smooth-flowing sonority punctuated by moments of emotional intensity travels through the audio documentarist's transducer body. Porous, permeable, this body perceives the melodic linearity but also the eruptive interludes: those expressions of excitement, intimacy, engagement and integrity on the part of the journalist. Along with that day's featured news story about a new fire alert system, these insights find their way into a sound composition entitled "*L'info continue dans un hebdo*," ("The news never stops at a weekly") (Francoeur 2023a).

A multitude of sonic ambiances greet the sensor body of the audio documentarist as she immerses herself in the distinctly fluid world of the Editor in Chief at the start-up. The day kicks off in a park, where the Editor is meeting with a consultant who specializes in financial programmes for start-ups. Next, a videoconference with colleagues to discuss their coverage of the ongoing electoral campaign. After that, a meeting with a local community radio host to draw up a plan for sharing resources to guarantee maximum coverage of events going on in the area. The wind rustling through the trees, the staccato of online voices, the background babble of a radio programme ... All of these make up the soundtrack over which nervous laughs punctuate the sharing of confidences — *it's tough wearing the multiple hats of entrepreneur, editor in chief, and sometimes journalist*.

The transducer body of the audio documentarist manages to separate out the competing and sometimes contradictory strands of this sonic mishmash so that the start-up Editor's all-out efforts at convergence shine through: *Can we run a story on the best brunch in the neighbourhood AND convince restaurateurs to buy up some ad space? While we're at it, why not jump in on questions neighbourhood residents are asking on social media networks about a mural that's gone up on one of the restaurant walls: who's behind it? who sponsored it? And ... Does converging the roles of journalist, entrepreneur, and editor in chief actually work as a workload reducing strategy?* The findings of this

exercise in multiplying convergences at multiple levels led to the sound composition “*Info hyperlocale: des actus au coin de ta rue*” (“Hyperlocal news: the latest scoop at the corner of your street”). No news story of the day was featured, as none was produced by the Editor in Chief that day (Francoeur 2023b).

As this section demonstrates, the mobilization of the audio documentarist’s body as sensor and transducer enables access to information that is critical to understanding the conditions under which the news is produced: the fragmented reality of the multi-platform newsroom and the importance of those accepted and time-tested journalistic formats for organizing the fragments; the constant quest for quotes at a local weekly where militant activism and the affable cultivation of quotable sources go hand in hand; the concerted efforts at convergence in an online start-up. In each of the sites, the audio body manages to “peel away the palimpsestic layers of meaning that characterize a place” (Galloway 2018, 461). In turn, the documentary podcasts (as well as the multi-modal analyzes inherent in them) give listeners access to those worlds in all their multi-layered, sonically-diverse richness.

### ***Affect Dwells in the Silences***

There were times when the journalists said nothing, giving the documentarist an opportunity to confront her sensor and transducer body with silence. A natural reaction would be to see the absence of sound as an interruption in the sound-gathering process. In fact, these silences were full of information, alternatively composed of deep thought, charged with adrenaline, or expressive of great fatigue. Capturing these intensities “on tape” also gave the audio documentarist the chance to observe the workings of affect across a given milieu, as well as around and through the bodies of the journalists with whom she was interacting.

For example, the multi-platform newsroom reporter went absolutely silent when he was thinking deeply, or listening to extracts of an interview – seemingly unaware of the texts pinging on his mobile devices and the emails piling up in his inbox. When he broke his silence and attempted to explain what was going on, he was incapable of finishing a sentence. His body had become as fragmented as his environment.

For her part, the journalist at the weekly always paused, held her breath, following the arrival of a quote. The promise it held – the excitement of building a story around it – was palpable: a fleeting hyper-charged moment of silence that contained the journalist’s drive, energy, and anticipation.

As for the silences of the editor-journalist-entrepreneur at the start-up, they were charged with anxiety. For example, she was explaining how search engines thwarted her efforts at precision: she would have liked to use the key word “canopy” for a news story on the air quality in her neighbourhood but knew that this would not work in her favour when it came to online referencing. The silence that followed this explanation hung heavy in the air: her obsessiveness, the powerlessness she felt in the face of search engine optimization, even the realization that such preoccupations were distracting her from getting on with doing journalism ... All of this angst was articulated in that silence.

The documentarist’s audio body was sensitive to the vibrations emitted by the journalists when their silences swelled with affect. From an epistemological point of view, the silences also revealed that her sensor and transducer body could be an effective detector of elusive affect.

### ***Time is Sculptable***

Another finding is that time expands and contracts when conducting sound immersions in journalistic work places: a second can feel like ten and conversely, ten seconds can feel like one. The fragmented time of multi-platform news production, the linear time of the weekly, the absence of any well-defined time structure at the online start-up: each of these temporalities left their mark on the documentarist's audio body and in turn, influenced the pacing and rhythm of the final sound compositions.

For example, a second in *"The master of fragmented work"* is a multi-layered jam-packed unit, whereas time stretches out in *"The news never stops at a weekly"*: the occasional burst of éclat before it marches on. As for the "liquid" seconds of the convergence-minded Editor in Chief at the start-up (see Deuze's (2008) description of "liquid journalism"), time in *"Hyperlocal news: the latest scoop at the corner of your street"* advances, turns back, continues, detours round. In other words, the rhythms and arrhythmias of journalistic production infiltrated the documentarist's audio body and, through her *sculpting* of time in the resulting sound montages, not only became an important narrative device, but concretized her research findings concerning the malleability of audio documentary time.

### ***A Special Intimacy is Generated Through Listening***

Yet another finding emerged from the actual act of listening to the compositions. As the composer of the podcasts but also as their first listener, what became evident for the documentarist was that podcasts like those produced as part of *"Occuper et préoccuper l'oreille citoyenne"* make listeners feel intimately connected to the people they "meet" in them. One can be moved in a visceral way by the plight of each of the featured journalists. The self-questioning – *"can I say this like that?"*; the things that didn't go right; the sharing in on the journalists' small daily triumphs and disappointments; just the length of the journalists' working day ... All of these can make a lasting impression on listeners and affirm that listeners do not have to haunt the corridors of a newsroom to inhabit the minds and bodies of journalists (Francoeur 2023c).

### **Discussion: The Body as the Beating Heart of Audio Journalism's Unique Epistemology**

Audio journalism uses specific methods, presents information in a specific way, and produces specific knowledges. The approach discussed in the article involves mobilizing ones audio body to act as a sound-collecting sensor and a sense-making transducer, remaining open to being penetrated by both the audible and the inaudible, and creating sound compositions out of somatic immersion so as to build an understanding of news production as tangible activity interwoven with intangible affect. The resulting audio documentaries appear to have the power to transport listeners into the minds and bodies of those journalists who appear in them.

More specifically, the article points to ways that the audio journalist can "think audio" and enter into "sound mode." In effect, the journalist steps into her audio body, pulls it on, wears it. When this documentarist donned her audio body and went to work, the "many different registers of sound" (Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior 2017, 621) washed over and

infiltrated her. Capturing them was just one of the tasks. Filtering, analyzing, sorting: so multilayered, this process; so much to navigate in terms of “aesthetic, compositional and timbral qualities,” in terms of “affective, material and embodied characteristics” (Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior 2017, 621). Equally challenging was the process of formatting the material so as to do justice to what had been collected and analyzed.

The “affective” is important here. In this article it has been linked to the inaudible, to the “pregnant pause” that arises in and out of silence. Though primed to pick up on and spin analysis out of sound, the sensor and transducer bodies of the audio documentarist became increasingly adept at “hearing” affect’s passage as work on *Occuper et pré-occuper l’oreille citoyenne* progressed. This is because the audio body adopts “a visceral approach to sound, recognizing how sound produces physical intensities or ‘gut feelings’” (Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior 2017, 626). It picks up on the vibrations of affect: those all important forces that are behind “what moves and matters in human life” (Lutz 2017).

As discussed earlier in the article, the audio body incorporates a third function: that of a “depository.” The depository body is a storehouse, both of past somatic experiences and of the corporeal knowledge base built of them. It enables the audio documentarist to become more proficient at conducting sound immersions. It explains how, from one sound composition to the next, her listening and interpretive skills become more refined. It is due to her depository body that the audio documentarist was able to work fruitfully with the affect-charged silences of the journalists, and by extension, the malleable nature of time. It took all three immersions to fully grasp how affect and time were operating in the context of news production. The depository body, quietly assembling an “indexed memory” (Frias 2001, 29) out of each sound immersion experience, made these revelations possible. The fact that each of the three sites had very different rhythmic qualities to them – different timing, if you like – was something that went from being a minor detail picked up in the course of conducting sound immersions, to an organizing principal for the whole project once the depository body had assimilated the data (see Table 1).

What all of this points to is the appropriateness of terms like “deep dive” (Dowling and Miller 2019), “extreme narrative journalism” (McHugh 2019; cited in Lindgren 2023), “supercharged” and “hyperintimacy” (Berry 2016) when it comes to talking about what makes the compelling documentary podcast stand out. These terms attest to the processes of picking up on and collecting “immaterial” data, of analyzing that data in a multi-modal fashion, and of creating of that data a sound composition that permeates the body of the person who listens to it. They speak to the purpose of the exercise: to take listeners on a virtual journey, not just into the experiences of another, but into that person’s very mind, body, core. They hint at how to do it: a multilayering of sounds to create a sense of immediacy and “thereness,” a sculpting of time that evokes affect. And they underline the key to it all: the audio documentarist’s sensor, transducer and depository body.

## **Conclusion: Why Communal Vibrations are a Matter of Public Interest**

This article contributes to shaping an epistemology of audio journalism: an epistemology which is distinct and unique, combining as it does the particularities of sound with elements of journalistic epistemology. The result is a “special truth” that not only comes to be known, but is experienced and shared, through communal vibrations. Parks (2022) insists that “truth is *both* factual and affective” (195, italics in original),

**Table 1.** Sensor, transducer and depository audio body.

Sensor body	<b>Multi-platform newsroom</b> Simultaneously unfolding activities - live news, technical directives, exchanges with colleagues, telephone calls, texts, emails; Varying paces-press conference, technical briefing, interview with a hesitant expert.	<b>Local weekly</b> Rhythmic regularity; Humming as a soothing refrain; Sound gap around a good quote; Intimate tone with sources; Intensity of engagement.	<b>Hyper-local online start-up</b> Multiple meetings on multiple topics with multiple background noises: wind through the trees, online voices, background babble of a radio programme; Nervous laugh.
Transducer body	<b>Multi-platform newsroom</b> A multi-layered, multimodal, and fragmented working environment; Linearity of on air presences; Organized around standard journalistic formats. Sonic composition : On and off air rehearsing of the journalist's script for each piece; Incoming requests for participation in different broadcasts - which the reporter declines; The reporter confiding that it isn't humanly possible to do more; The reporter reproaches himself for failing to find a dissenting opinion to balance out his report; The news story about expanding access to medical assistance in dying.	<b>Local weekly</b> Smooth-flowing linearity punctuated by eruptive interludes; Centrality of good quotes in launching a news story. Sonic composition : Behind the scenes of a press conference where, in pursuit of a good quote, the journalist interrogates the mayor, the chief of police, and PR personnel; The journalist confiding about what motivates her, her faith in journalism, her commitment to the weekly, her hopes for her community; Cheerful warm greetings between the journalist and the people she meets and rubs shoulder with; The news story about a new fire alert system.	<b>Hyper-local online start-up</b> Multiple efforts at multiple convergences at multiple levels. Sonic composition: Following the Editor in chief as her day unfolds, and culminates in not having produced a story.
Depository body	<b>Multi-platform newsroom</b> Picking up on the unspoken: A multiplatform newsroom reporter's body is as fragmented as the environment; "Sculptable time": multi-layered; fragmented.	<b>Local weekly</b> Picking up on the unspoken: excitement about a good quote, a good story; "Sculptable time": linear.	<b>Hyper-local online start-up</b> Picking up on the unspoken: a sense of powerlessness; "Sculptable time": liquid.

elaborating how journalism involves "the institutionalized distillation of *feeling* in the public interest" (183, italics in original). This article demonstrates how audio journalism lends itself particularly well to both evoking and showcasing the distillation process of which Parks speaks.

Following Bird (2025) the next step of the research is to test out whether the type of podcasts produced in the context of "*Occuper et préoccuper l'oreille citoyenne*" could serve as a prototype for learning more about current concerns such as public trust in journalism and about the future of democratic participation (Beckett and Deuze 2016; Miller, Fox, and Dowling 2022). To paraphrase Lindgren (2023), podcasts of this type invite a more complex and nuanced reading of the realities facing journalists today, as well as create a greater sense of identification with journalists, than do more traditional news models (706).

It is worth mentioning here that the finished sound compositions were presented in the context of open public listening sessions that took place across seven Québec

municipalities during Press and Media Week in Spring 2023 and 2025 (FPJQ 2023, 2025). Through social media outlets, the public was invited to come along and listen collectively to excerpts from the sound compositions, and then to participate in an open discussion with the documentarist and the journalists featured in the podcasts. The synchronized bursts of laughter and communal sighs emanating from the audience during these public listening sessions attest to how the bodies of listeners, journalists and the audio documentarist herself were vibrating in unison: simultaneously constituting and constitutive of the same affective field. This was entirely in line with how affect works. Affect, after all, is “collective” (Manning 2010). Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior (2017) apply a repertory of richly evocative descriptions to the act of “listening to bodies listening” (622) and to what we witness when we do: “rhythmic synchronization”; the “resonance or tuning of two interior universes.” They also draw attention to where affect is to be found:

in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise) and in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds and in the very passages or variations between those intensities and resonances themselves. (625)

One of the primary aims of the podcasts produced in the context of this research project was to free journalism from its own preconceptions and presumptions: to demonstrate how, at the end of the day, journalism is *just* journalism. Interestingly, the reactions during the public listening sessions pointed to a more nuanced conclusion on the part of audience members. Feelings of empathy, a sense of gratitude, of admiration even: journalism emerged as anything but “just” journalism. What this suggests is that transparency and self-reflexivity on the part of journalists *does* enhance “journalistic legitimacy and the public acceptance of journalism’s truth claims” (Carlson 2020, 234), even when it is not its aim. What this also suggests is that, whether freed from its own conceits or not, journalism still has pertinence in some people’s lives, still performs the role of bringing people together. If the multi-level, multimodal analyzes undertaken as part of “*Occuper et préoccuper l’oreille citoyenne*” attest to this, they also confirm the potential of the audio documentary format in terms of its power to reach out and *into* people, and the epistemological significance of that reach. This should come as encouraging news to those audio journalists who might be questioning the relevance of what they and their bodies do on a daily basis.

## Notes

1. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities at the Université du Québec à Montréal in 2019.
2. Only these three sound immersions had been completed at the time of writing.

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