



# Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

## The sound of time, an experimental perspective on Digital Humanities resources and research.

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# **The sound of time, an experimental perspective on Digital Humanities resources and research.**

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## **Introduction**

At the foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in 1808 it was called the Royal Institute of Sciences, Literature and Fine Arts. Artists and researchers were considered equals. But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the disciplines grew apart. Only recently this tide is turning. In 2014 the KNAW founded the Society of Arts where artists can share ideas with researchers and other artistic disciplines (KNAW, 2019). Within the field of Digital Humanities this trend is now followed by the Meertens Instituut. At this institute collaborations between experts of different disciplines such as computer scientist, scholars and digital curators are already frequent and now a new perspective has been added: that of an artist. Elise 't Hart, artist and founder of the Instituut of Domestic Sounds, started in October 2018 as the first 'Artist in Residence' of the Meertens Instituut. Her project is called 'What does time sounds like?'. The aim is, beside making works of art, to explore experimental ways of questioning and researching digital data. The (re)introduction of an artist's creations in a scientific environment raises the methodological question what the scientific significance of the artist's work is. This paper investigates the affordances this new approach produces.

## **Ticking clocks**

The Meertens Instituut has a rich tradition in studying Dutch language and culture (Meertens, 2019). It possesses numerous collections and more than six thousand hours of digital audio recordings (NDB, 2019). Traditionally the focus of the researchers is on the dialects, the stories and the songs one can hear in the recordings. Other sounds, such as the squeaking of a staircase, the tinkling of coffee cups and the ticking of clocks are ignored. But for 't Hart those are the sounds that bring you back to, for example, the living room of your youth or that of your grandparents (Elisethart, 2019). These sounds are therefore at the center of her interest. She systematically documents and contextualizes the recordings. Then she transforms them into works of art: into podcasts (Nieuws, 2019).

## **New perspectives**

The introduction of the artist 't Hart's perspectives into the field of Digital Humanities results not only in digital works of art, it also performs as a catalyst in three different ways. First of all, the podcasts attract additional audience among the general public and thus contributes to

the validation of the Meertens Instituut (Dijksterhuis, 2018). Secondly, it generates a renewed interest in the use of digital collections among scholars. A consortium of researchers and collection specialists is now working on a project plan to build a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) around one of the collections 't Hart uses. This VRE will focus on the collection of Louise Kaiser. Kaiser was an experimental phonologist and the first lecturer of the University of Amsterdam (Arias, 2019). And thirdly, it opens up new perspectives on existing research. At the Meertens Instituut, as part of a PhD project concerning domestic interiors, interviews were recorded (Horst, 2008). Domestic sounds were not considered in this study. The ideas of 't Hart are now part of a dialogue with one of the researchers that was involved and they could add new a dimension (of domestic sounds) to data analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The introduction of an artist within the field of Digital Humanities generates new works of art and it acts as a catalyst in three different ways. It contributes to the validation, it generates extra interests in the exploration of digital resources and it opens up new perspectives on research. A recursive side effect of this project is that at the end of the project, as it is the policy of the Meertens Instituut to document project results, the works of art will become part of the collections of the institute (Collectie, 2019).

## **Resources:**

Dijksterhuis, E. (2018, November 28). 'Het is het geluid van nostalgie'. *Het Parool*, pp 16.

Horst, H. van der (2008). *Materiality of belonging: The domestic interiors of Turkish migrants and their descendants in the Netherlands*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: University of Amsterdam.

## **Websites:**

<https://arias.amsterdam> (accessed 20 March 2019).

<https://www.elisethart.com/#/instituut-voor-huisgeluid/> (accessed 20 March 2019).

[https://www.knaw.nl/nl/de-knaw/akademie-van-kunsten?set\\_language=nl](https://www.knaw.nl/nl/de-knaw/akademie-van-kunsten?set_language=nl) (accessed 20 March 2019)

<https://www.meertens.knaw.nl/> (accessed 20 March 2019).

<https://www.meertens.knaw.nl/ndb> (accessed 20 March 2019).

<http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/cms/nl/nieuws-agenda/artist-in-residence> (accessed 20 March 2019).

## **Digital Archives:**

Meertens Instituut (KNAW). Collectie behorende bij het project: 'Hoe klinkt de tijd', 2018-2019 (2019). Collection nr. 1116.