Neutralizing cyber-optimism in the music library

Rene Mäe

National Library of Estonia

Introduction and background

- Initating and carrying out educational projects at the music and art department of the National Library of Estonia

- Looking beyond cyber-optimism: digital technology and the internet do not *always* and *necessarily* have positive effects on education, librarianship and musical heritage

- Library education (*bibliothekspädagogik*) and *information literacy* (cf music literacy, visual literacy, digital literacy, media literacy)

„Even with so much online, the primary source of discographical information is the library, and it takes time and practice to find what one needs (plus a well-funded music section)."

Trezise, Simon. "The recorded document: Interpretation and discography."
The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music (2009): 186-209.

„…in this media-drenched, data-rich, channel-surfing, computer-gaming age, we have lost the art of doing nothing, of shutting out the background noise and distractions, of slowing down and being alone with our thoughts."

„…when everyone takes the fast option, the advantage of going fast vanishes, forcing us to go faster still."

Honoré, Carl. In praise of slow: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed. Vintage Canada, 2009.

„[b]y adopting the tenets of the slow living movement, **libraries can help patrons counteract the negative effects of a rushed life** […] libraries are one of the few indoor places in which people can relax and rejuvenate. Restaurants discourage long stays in favor of quick turnover. Malls, sports venues, and public transit subject people to crowding, advertising, noise, and traffic. As one of the last bastions of leisure, libraries welcome people to stay as long as they like. Users can engage in serendipitous browsing, leisurely reading, personal reflection, and much-needed unwinding"

Dewan, Pauline. "Slow Libraries in a Fast-Paced World." Library Journal, November (2015): 46.
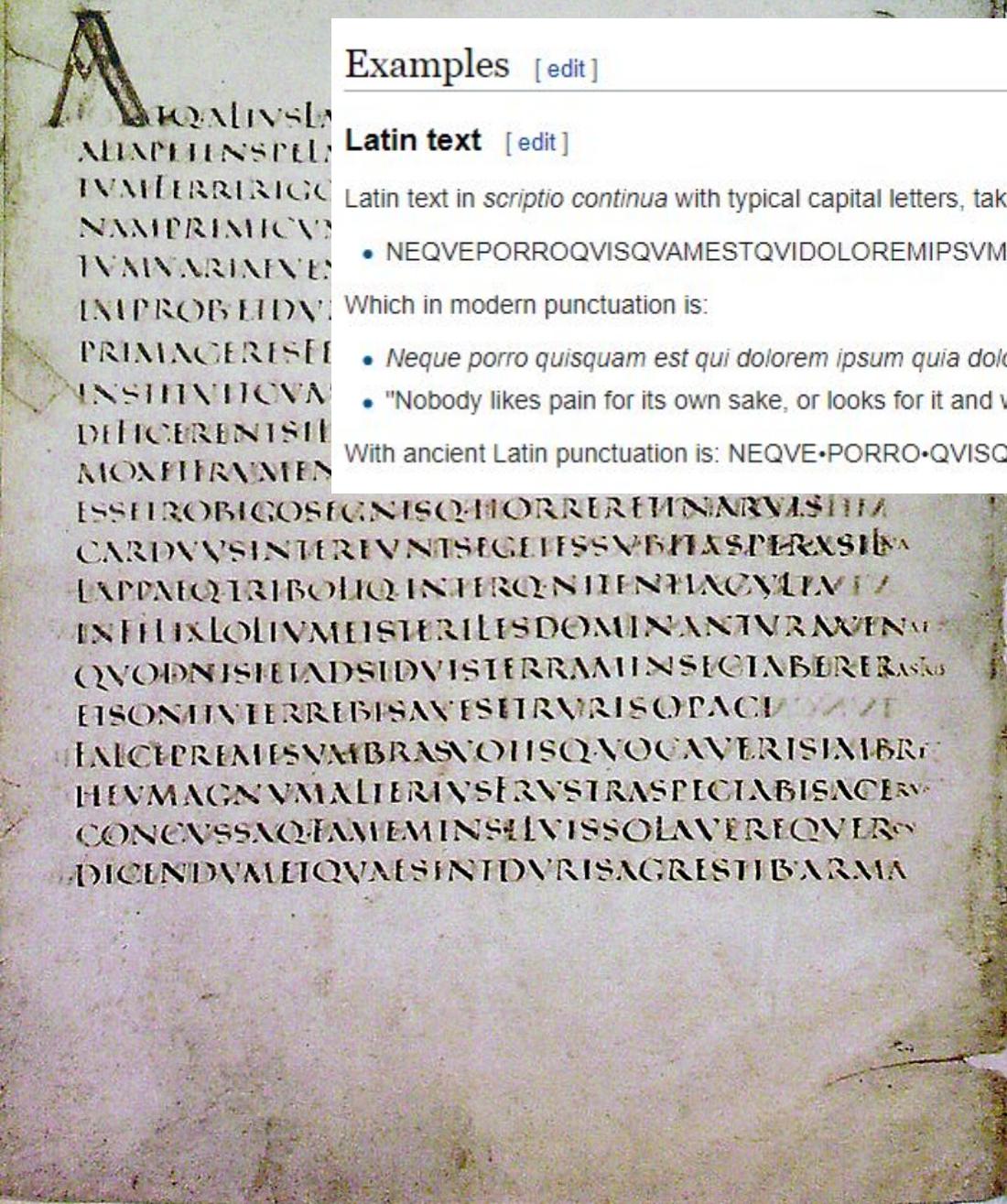
Examples [edit]

Latin text [edit]

Latin text in *scriptio continua* with typical capital letters, taken from Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum*:

- NEQVEPORROQVISQVAMESTQVIDOLOREMIPSVMQVIADOLORSITAMETCONSECTETVRADIPISCIVELIT

Which in modern punctuation is:

- *Neque porro quisquam est qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit…*
- "Nobody likes pain for its own sake, or looks for it and wants to have it, just because it is pain…"

With ancient Latin punctuation is: NEQVE·PORRO·QVISQVAM·EST·QVI·DOLOREM·IPSVM·QVIA·DOLOR·SIT·AMET·CONSECTETVR·ADIPISCI·VELIT

Scriptio continua

"…an early form of writing in which words ran together and lacked punctuation."

Lacy, Meagan, ed. The Slow Book Revolution: Creating a New Culture of Reading on College Campuses and Beyond. ABC-CLIO, 2014.

„Reading better means reading more slowly. There is a quiet movement afoot on behalf of slowness: slow cooking, slow thinking, and yes, slow reading. In reaction against the breathless pace of our computer-driven world, writers on social trends have begun to extol the virtues of a more meditative, involved approach to many parts of our lives, and reading is no exception. Faster is not always better. **Reading for information is not the same as slow, deep reading, reading for pleasure and understanding. Slow reading is as rigorous as it is full of delight.**"

Mikics, David. Slow reading in a hurried age. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Reading, listening and watching...

- ...can be understood as more or less synonymous
- ...are all concerned with meaning-making and (internal and external) communication
- ...are intertwined with each other (e.g. the visual sense as a prerequisite for reading written text)
- ...are included in the more general notion of *information literacy*
- ...are situated, contextual and conditioned cultural practices

Conditions of attendance are „…the conditions – environmental, emotional, sensory etc. – under which one „attends to" a particular medium. The assumption is that **different forms necessitate or benefit from particular conditions in which they can be accessed and attended to.** Reading a book, for instance, calls for adequate lighting, while viewing a projected film calls for darkness. Solitary reading requires relative silence, although some collaborative reading – like a mother reading to her child, or an ESL teacher and student working together – introduces sound into the environment. **Even the physical posture and the degree of mental engagement one must assume vary by medium, and these qualities, too, are influenced by the space in which a medium is accessed**."

Mattern, Shannon. "Resonant texts: Sounds of the American public library." *The Senses and Society* 2, no. 3 (2007): 277-302.

„Scores, text-analogues for musical performance are, in effect stable instruction sets for repeating a musical event. They make possible the repetition and dissemination of the "same" song, chant, or hymn over historical times and geographical space (for those who are "literate"). But **scores may be thought as perceptually, bodily "abstract".** To be "heard" through reading, a special skill like that noted above for musicologists and composers is required. And this is where the much later technology of recording changes everything! **Recording "materializes" a performance, which can then be repeatedly played and perceptually heard.** But, recording is also a *technological mediation* and thus displays features exhibited in any technologically transforming phenomenon."

Ihde, Don. Listening and voice: Phenomenologies of sound. Suny Press, 2007.
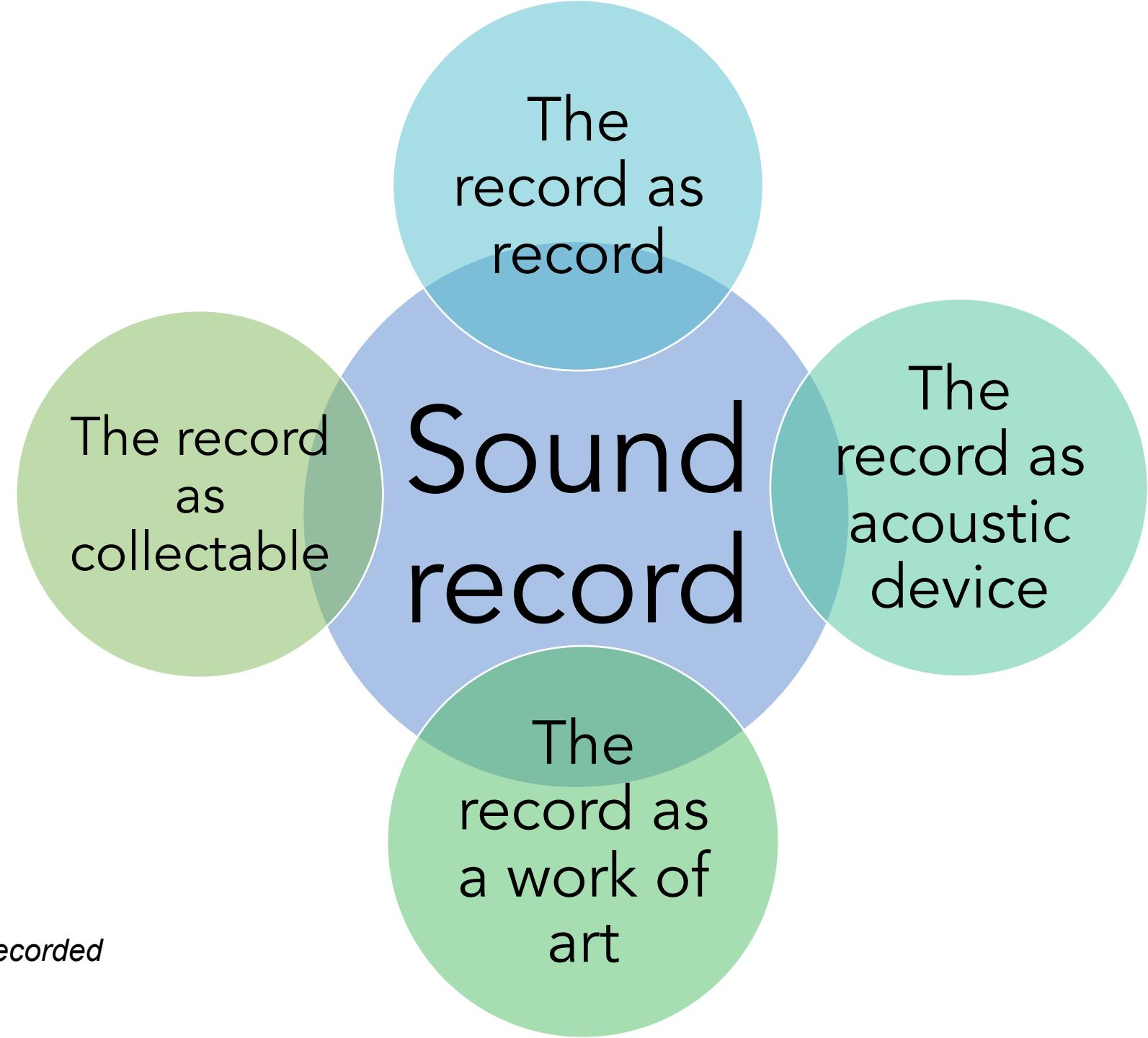
Frith, Simon. "Going critical. Writing about recordings." *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (2009): 267-282.
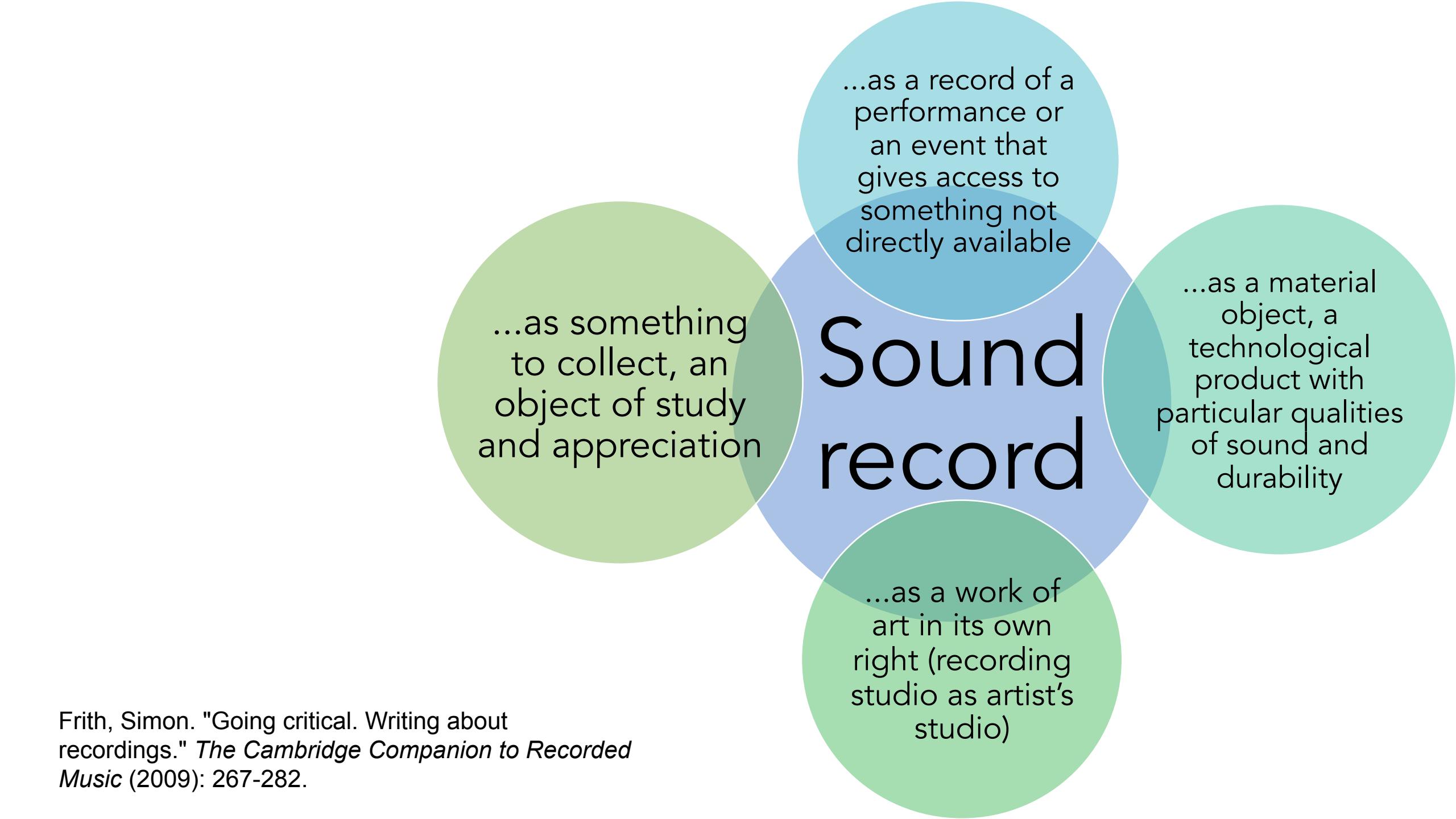
...as a record of a performance or an event that gives access to something not directly available

...as a material object, a technological product with particular qualities of sound and durability

...as something to collect, an object of study and appreciation

Sound record

...as a work of art in its own right (recording studio as artist's studio)

Frith, Simon. "Going critical. Writing about recordings." *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (2009): 267-282.

Slow records: creating and performing conceptual, deep and critical discographies

Towards a framework for hypothetical workshop for students

Points of departure

- What is a record collection? What is a discography? What is a music library?
- How and why does the national library collect, systematize and preserve sound recordings in the first place?
- What are the different forms and formats of sound recordings?
- How do different recording technologies and sound reproduction technologies actually (physically) work?
- What kinds of wider cultutral, political, historical, technological and economic transformations are reflected in the library's music collection?
- What are the different experiential, analytical, contextual ways of listening?
- What are the historical periods best represented in the collection?
- What are the highlights and the gaps in the collection?
- How to communicate and perform different aspects of the collection to the general public and to particular groups?
- How to use discography as a working method in (music) library education?
- Can discographies be performed (rather than written)?

General principles

- Slow
- Critical
- Conceptual
- Material
- Investigative
- Multi-disciplinary
- Multi-sensorial

Working methods

- Individual and joint listening sessions
- Workshop on cataloguing sound recordings
- Music criticism workshop
- Workshop on methodologies in fine arts, performing arts and artistic research

Outputs

- Performative and artistic discographies (e.g. a DJ set, a live concert, an artistic performance, an interactive listening room, installation etc.)
- Critical and conceptual discographies (Focusing on the material, economic, social and political aspects of sound records and the sound recordings collection)

Social impact

- Educating *potential* music critics, music historians and music librarians
- Developing innovative educational methods in music education, cultural history and artistic research
- Enhancing the value and communicating practices of collecting musical heritage

"The total number of Estonian vinyl records ever released is estimated at about **1300-1400 titles, 90% of which have reached the National Library's collections.** Over 8000 titles of Estonian records either on vinyl, laser disc or cassette are stored at the National Library."

"If one wishes to listen to a record listed in the catalogue, it is best to search the electronic catalogue ESTER by matrix or record number (to be found at the end of printed catalogue entries). After entering that number in the ISBN search window, that record's entry and locations are displayed. **Having identified the desired records, you only have to come to the library and put the headphones on.**"

Riisalu, Katre et al. (Eds.). Discography of Estonian Vinyl Records 1954-2010. National Library of Estonia, 2011.

1993
Common music listening room
National Library of Estonia