

*Melt**

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Glaciers of the french Alps have lost an important part of their surface and thickness over the last few decades, just like everywhere in the world. The phenomenon is steadily accelerating and predicts the disappearance of most alpine glaciers by the end of the century, when their catchment basins are situated at altitudes under 3600 meters.

The measurements that glaciologists have gradually systematized since the 1950s are drawing up a report, updated every-year, of the programmed disappearance of glaciers. People familiar with high-altitude places have, for their part, witnessed the radical changes of landscapes over the course of a lifetime or even, nowadays, over a couple of seasons. Overall, pictures have contributed the most to the media awareness of the situation, notably by showing the current state of glaciers next to photographic archives of the early 20th century.

The sound realm, on the other hand, does not provide with such an obvious information about climate evolution and the transformations of landscapes. Many of the sounds collected in the Oisans and Écrins massifs while working on Radio Glaces and Melt are, in fact, related to the melting process and it would be tempting to hear them as audible manifestations of glacial retreat. The reality, however, is that during colder periods, the same sounds might have been heard at lower altitudes or during shorter summers. Such as they are, sounds of melting glaciers would, at best, only inform about weather conditions at the time of the recording, but they represent neither an objective piece of data nor the acoustic signature of global warming.*

And yet, all of these sounds are indeed specific to the activity of glaciers, from the building of their snowpack upstream (accumulation area) and their slow descending movement at the pace of a few meters to a few hundred meters per year, until they reach a more temperate area downstream, where the melt loss becomes more important than the input from precipitations (ablation area).

Using a variety of recording modes, we have attempted to make the enormous or minuscule vibrations that manifest the glacier's elasticity audible: crashes generated by their movements and reverberated through the solid ice mass, echoes of depths opened by crevasses, variations of cracks, slides, and collapses cadenced on the surface by night refreezing, discreet oscillations and cracklings of captive air bubbles released by the melting ice, various forms of water flows into glacial rills, mills, torrents, or the formation of proglacial lakes... Human activities sometime overlaps with this sonic life of the glacier, as a part of the reality of the milieu: engines of snow groomers and the sliding traffic of skiers are also propagating through the ice.

As it is often the case for researches based upon a process of "field" recording (the resonances of which term are anthropological: referring to a geo-topographic situation as well as to the social or environmental determinations that come with it), the complexity and specificity of sound sources call for some aspects of contextualization, even when the project, as a record or as a performance, deliberately fits within the cultural codes of music. In Radio Glaces, the words of experts were expanding and guiding the listening; here, this piece of writing intends to provide a slightly larger frame and a hint of reflexivity.

This apparent deficiency of our sounds, whereas it would be about objectively documenting reality or being able to produce an esthetically autonomous musical experience, does not appear to us as a weakness or a pitfall. On the contrary, it turns out to be an opportunity for reconfiguring the listening and sensibility during a process of exchange and learning. Talking with glaciologists and geomorphologists, acquainting ourselves with crampons, ice axes or ice anchors, glorious stories of alpinists or concerning projects by the skiing industry, we have slowly encountered the environment we were investigating, and we have learned to listen to glaciers. When the time came to share our listening during performances, we also have shared our experience in the field with the audience, as well as scientific facts or mountain anecdotes, hoping to apprehend together a changing world through new forms of attention.