The majority of work on the archive to-date has engaged with image- and text-based archives, frequently calling our attention to their silences and gaps. Ernst Karel and Veronika Kusumaryati artfully and intelligently address the dearth of critical media work on the sonic archive in their newwork, *Expedition Content*, a 78-minute augmented sound piece that premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2020. Cleverly, this (mostly sound) work begins with a description of the semantic value of the image.

*Expedition Content* starts with a nearly four-minute conversation in which a few members of the 1961 Harvard Peabody Expedition to Netherlands New Guinea discuss the effects of filters on photographic images. Life magazine photographer Eliot Elisofon speaks with ethnographic filmmaker and Harvard Film Studies Center Director Robert Gardner, the expedition organiser, and two recent Harvard graduates who will be supporting the expedition, Sam Putnam and Michael Rockefeller. Michael—the great-grandson of John D. Rockefeller, founder of Standard Oil Company, and son of Nelson Rockefeller, then-governor of New York—was tasked with taking photographs and recording audio, producing thirty-seven taped hours for the expedition’s audio archive.

Elisofon advises that they avoid using fog filters during the expedition, since it would alter the image in ways that would work against its “scientific purposes.” He says: “the only thing the expedition can do is hope to create reality, or a sense of reality and, you know, when you start getting into semantics, what is real?” He offers his opinion of the documentary aims of their work: “I think what the expedition, in a way, has to do aesthetically is not to ever alter it so it become false, but that it becomes as natural as possible [...] to attempt to achieve what I would call naturalism, if we could use that word.” Elisofon asks Gardner if he agrees, and the latter responds: “Not exactly.” The conversation is cut by the intrusion of another voice, distorted by radio static, which describes the origins of the tape’s contents as “Cambridge, Massachusetts in America. Gardner, Harvard Peabody Expedition” which according to Karel and Kusumaryati, is a sonic rupture that is in the archival tape itself, not an editorial decision. Thereafter, the sound-space dramatically shifts to the reverberant soundscape of a village in the Highlands of western New Guinea for several minutes. We hear Hubula villagers speaking to one another in close proximity to their pigs as a small airplane passes overhead.

"These sonic breaks in time and space present listeners with a puzzle throughout the work, whereby they must critically engage with the multiple overlapping times of the sounds heard: the time of the recording, of the archive as its cataloged by archivists, of the editing of the archive itself into *Expedition Content*, and of the present moment as the work unfolds."

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33 Gardner’s ambivalence in this response is telling, since “naturalism”, or the pretense of naturalism, is not what his filmmaking is exactly known for. From the film that Gardner would ultimately make from this 1961 expedition, *Dead Birds* (1963), to his later equally acclaimed and commercial film, *Ferocious Blues* (1986), Gardner’s artistry stands out, evidenced in his camera movement and framing. Increasingly, with each of his films, we are frequently aware that what we are seeing is his unique vision.
The Archive

Expedition Content draws from the 37 hours of tape recorded by Michael Rockefeller documenting the encounter between the 1961 Harvard Peabody Netherlands New Guinea Expedition and the Hubula, also known as the Dani, in the Central Highlands of New Guinea. This multi-modal expedition was remarkably fruitful in that it produced the ethnographic film Dead Birds (1963), two ethnographic monographs by Karl Heider, two photo books, and author Peter Matthiessen’s non-fiction book Under the Mountain Wall.35 Sound recordist Michael Rockefeller mysteriously died later the same year, when his boat capsized on a return trip to New Guinea to collect artefacts for his father’s new ethnological museum in New York. According to Kusumaryati and Karel, the Rockefelleres donated the audio archive of analogue tapes to the Peabody Museum in 2005, which later sent the tapes to the Indiana University Archive of Traditional Music to be digitised.

Expedition Content activates the archive, not merely for its verbal or informational content, but as it presents Michael Rockefeller’s own fumbling attempts to use his microphone. As I was listening, I wondered at times if Rockefeller was even listening. It seems certain that he was not monitoring the sound as he recorded much of the time, since the levels are occasionally hot, or clipping. At other times his descriptions of the sounds heard are impoverished. Rockefeller is revealed increasingly as an unreliable guide in 1961 New Guinea, which at times sounds present, immediate, or acute; at other times, is completely lacking because of mistakes Rockefeller made during his recording. Describing his recordings as either “occupational sounds” or “sounds of nature,” Rockefeller labels what he records either in advance or after recording, describing phenomena we purportedly will hear, or have heard, but occasionally, either due to recording malfunction or negligence, they are not present in the tape.36 Rockefeller catches his mistakes throughout the work, whereby they either remain on the tape, or are occasionally hot or clipping. At other times something other than the recorded is present. Rockefeller writes about the temporality of the archive, not merely for its verbal or informational content, but as it presents “insider ethnography,”37 which is the application of the methods of ethnography, in this instance, to a context that is one’s own. Although Lucien Castaing-Taylor took the reigns of the Film Study Center at Harvard University, which Robert Gardner founded, and the Harvard Peabody Museum, both institutions that Karel and Kusumaryati have collaborated with or worked within. Although Lucien Castaing-Taylor took the reigns of the Film Study Center at Harvard University in 1997, and later founded the Sensory Ethnography Lab, evidence of Robert Gardner’s influence and legacy are tangible in these spaces. When I was a graduate student at Harvard and active in the Sensory Ethnography Lab, Ernst Karel was the Assistant Director of the Film Study Center at Harvard University (2007–2018). Occasionally, when I would go to his office and ask to be allowed into the Film Study Center at Harvard University, which Robert Gardner founded, and the Harvard Peabody Museum, both institutions that Karel and Kusumaryati have collaborated with or worked within, Karel would show me an old trunk filled with equipment that had apparently been used on Gardner’s expeditions.38 As an anthropologist and filmmaker trained at Harvard, Kusumaryati too must have felt much of the archive, including Rockefeller’s, was a residue of the colonial past of West Papua, but to engage us with the temporality of the archive, not merely for its verbal or informational content, but as it presents the institutional critique is most evidently inflected as archive fever or desire as it opens the archive to the future.39 Derrida argues that an archive is therefore never complete, since we cannot know all of the meanings it will ultimately contain.

36 Derrida, Archive Fever, 24.
38 For my film Manakamana (2007) my co-director Pacho Velez and I used Gardner’s Aaron, the same camera that was used for Forest of Rites (1968), as well as other films shown by Film Study Center and Radcliffe Institute Fellows over the years. All of this is to say that Gardner’s presence was, in fact, tangible.
The Archive, Augmented

Nearly twenty-three minutes into the piece something surprising happens. A flash of blue awakens us to attend to the first subtitles of the piece. A Hubula woman speaks to Rockefeller, addressing him as “little brother” and asks him when he’d arrived. He does not respond and the tape continues to roll. She laughs and says, “this is how we wash sweet potatoes,” before admonishing him to move farther away. She continues and comments on her work, at times for his benefit, and then asks him, yet again, to move farther away, although apparently he either does not understand or ignores her directive. Subtitles continue for some of the remainder of the work, punctuating it with translated texts for songs and exchanges between Hubula people. Although much will likely be said about the one moving image shot that rolls about an hour into the piece, which is an odd kind of thrill to see in a work that otherwise eschews representational images, it is nonetheless a mysterious inclusion. If anything, its enigma awakens us to the opacity of the archive yet again.

Expedition Content then cuts to the sound of raucous expedition members as they party. We hear them as they drink, parody jazz musicians, discuss sleeping with some of Hubula women while their husbands are asleep, and make racist jokes. At one point Elisofon says, “What, does this sonofabitch got a recorder going? Have you got the recorder going?” which Rockefeller denies. Elisofon evidently knew that these conversations would tarnish their reputations, and yet this raucous section ends with Rockefeller, who knowingly recorded it all, telling an extended racist joke that elicits joyous laughter from the expedition party.

When Rockefeller’s boyish voice returns to describe more occupational sounds, his mask has been removed, as has that of the entire expedition party. We hear them as they drink, parody jazz musicians, discuss sleeping with some of Hubula women while their husbands are asleep, and make racist jokes. At one point Elisofon says, “What, does this sonofabitch got a recorder going? Have you got the recorder going?” which Rockefeller denies. Elisofon evidently knew that these conversations would tarnish their reputations, and yet this raucous section ends with Rockefeller, who knowingly recorded it all, telling an extended racist joke that elicits joyous laughter from the expedition party.

While the credits roll, we hear the forest. As we have for much of the piece, we continue to hear the tape itself as it punctures the “sounds of nature.” Our hearing is filtered by our knowledge of the expedition party’s unabashed racism and the violent colonial apparatus that enabled it in the first place. We understand that the “naturalism” that Elisofon posited as their aesthetic aim before the start of the expedition was always an illusion, one that Expedition Content will not entertain.

Coda