Old-Fashioned and Outmoded? An Ethnographic Assessment of Sound Archives in Ethnomusicologies

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Czech Republic 2005
“Use” as Tactics of Usage

A tactic describes “ways of operating” or “making do” that allow an individual to make (often ad hoc) use of “chance offerings of the moment”

(de Certeau 1984, xii, 37)
Research Question

• What is the nature of research practices that ethnomusicologists use to make archival sound useful?

• Significance
  – Understanding how ethnomusicologists use recordings as research tools
  – Understanding “archival use” & “users”
  – Lack of evidence-based knowledge
Methods

- Identify “ethnomusicology archives”
- Semi-structured interviews
- Observant participation
- Interpretation of ethnomusicology studies

**Goal:** Identify & elaborate critical areas of research use for archival sound
Archival ennui
(Vallier 2010)

Ambivalence

colonial
(Seeger 1986)

emphasis on behavioral, ethnographic approach
(Merriam 1964)

Lack of sufficient context
(Topp Fargion 2009)
Repatriation

Community Archiving

Diachronic & comparative study
(Sewald 2005)

Relavance

Preservation

Collaborative Archiving
(Ruskin 2006)
Recordings . . . of many uses, a few

• Four uses for recordings suggested by Stock (2010):
  1. Documentation of field research
  2. Learning performance practice
  3. Historical research
  4. “Playback tool” (also described as “feedback interview,” Stone 1982)

• Recordings as “records,” “data” (Topp Fargion 2009)
A 2010 survey of the Association for Research Libraries (ARL) reported a 300% increase in visual, audio, and moving-image materials since 1998, while print increased by 50%.
Archival Use
Activities utilizing archival materials in search of information relevant to a research need
(after Conway 1986)

Archivists understanding Users

Information-Seeking

Scholarly Primitives

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Emerging Themes

- Orientation
- Access Networks
- Information Seeking (IS)
### Orientation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unstructured (Tactic)</th>
<th>Structured (Strategy)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>We never had a formal, like ‘Here’s the archive!’ It was someplace that we would [socialize].</strong> (A04)</td>
<td><strong>• Reference Interviews</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>the director also wants to have . . . some individual contact with the researchers. Not to look over their shoulders, but to sort of find out, OK, what are you finding in these materials?</strong> (R02)</td>
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### In the Field

one of my contacts, was able to get me entrance to the archives and I hadn’t even imagined that they would let me do that. ... Just going and knocking on the door isn’t going to get you anywhere.  
(R07)

### Enriching Descriptions

anyone who comes in is a potential resource for them. So they want to give them their space and get information from them.  
(R02)
# Networks as Info-Seeking Tools

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<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Tactics</th>
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<td>It’s usually just either they come in in person and we just chat with them, we’re a fairly small collection . . . I know all the [researchers] on a first name basis. (A01)</td>
<td>I’ve messed around with these collections for a long time and a lot of my friends are fantastic musicians . . . I’ve been involved in lots of talking about these tunes. (R01)</td>
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<td>I try to rely on memory, when I’m [in the field] I ask as many people as I can. (R02)</td>
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Implications: Research Networks as Finding Aids?

- Importance of research networks and contacts
- Emphasis on text searching even though indexed material is audio/video
- Receiving information about recordings via (face-to-face) discussions
Implications:
Usage as Tactics

• As research specialization increases, generalizability of tools decreases
  – Researchers may be content with own tools & methods
  – Also true for formats, contents, etc?
Thank You!

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