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SOUND ARCHIVES, TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH, STATE

Archives as hoards or treasure chambers of carefully preserved, unique documents were established in Ancient China, in Ancient West Asia, and through the ages in many civilizations and for many different purposes. As the International Council on Archives (UNESCO) puts it in their mission statement,

“Archives constitute the memory of nations and of societies, shape their identity, and are a cornerstone of the information society. By providing evidence of human actions and transactions, archives support administration and underlie the rights of individuals, organizations and states. By guaranteeing citizens’ rights of access to official information and to knowledge of their history, archives are fundamental to democracy, accountability and good governance.”

Since the first archives of *recorded traditional music*¹ were created around 1900 by academic institutions (Vienna, Academy of Sciences; Berlin, University), the purposes, means, contexts, and social functions of sound archiving have evolved in multifarious and often unforeseen ways. This paper explores some of the relations among sound archives, research goals and means including the role of evolving technologies, and the perceptions of the social functions of archives of traditional music in contemporary nation states.

How It Began: Technology Prompts Inquiry

The invention in 1877 by Thomas Alva Edison of a method to record sound, and to reproduce recorded sound at will, anywhere, anytime and for any purpose, initiated eventually a host of technological, economical, social and intellectual processes. The importance of the Phonograph for the rise of comparative musicology, a branch of Western musicology that itself was but a fledgling academic discipline in the late 19th Century, is well enough known to require further discussion here.

Initially the phonograph, a rather crude and unsatisfactory contraption that used tin foil as a recording medium, was not taken seriously and considered a curiosity rather than of any practical, serious, let alone scholarly usefulness. But before the end of the 1880s, recordings of “serious” music were made on wax cylinders and recognition of its potential began to spread. In the domain of oral traditions research, the phonograph was apparently first tested and systematically used² by Walter J. Fewkes in 1890 (Fewkes, 1890, 1891). Fewkes, an ethnographer, was himself musically illiterate. He asked Benjamin Gilman, a music psychologist at Harvard University who had not been present at the recording sessions and had himself no contact with the Zuni, to study the phonograms. Gilman asserts in his publication:

“By the aid of the phonograph what would appear to be a very accurate reproduction of the music to which it has been exposed can be brought to the ears of any observer to be examined at his leisure. It can be interrupted at any point, repeated indefinitely, and even within certain limits magnified, as it were, for more accurate appreciation of

changes in pitch, by increasing the duration of the notes. A collection of phonographic cylinders ... forms a permanent museum of ... music, of which the specimens are comparable, in fidelity of reproduction and convenience of study, to casts or photographs of sculpture or painting” (Gilman, 1891: 68).

The phonograph then was used as part of the ethnographer’s tool kit – along with the pencil and the photographic camera – for the comprehensive description of native cultures that were known to approach extinction.

The enthusiastic vision of the scholar Gilman forecast an attitude that has remained alive and well among some music scholars to the present day: the belief that a music recording contains all there is to learn about that music. Archives the world over are filled with recordings about which very little, if anything is known, and which are still regarded as valuable documents and a comprehensive information basis for musicological research. But the danger and limitation of such a view was soon recognized and addressed. In his review of the Gilman publication, the German psychology professor and grandfather of comparative musicology, Carl Stumpf wrote in 1892:

“To get an accurate and complete picture, particularly one that permits conclusions concerning the psychological foundations of art, it will always be indispensable to immediately experience live music. (Only this immediate experience will provide) the many small but significant observations which can be made only of actual singing, with regard to posture, the manner of performance, even facial expression, the momentary freshness or exhaustion and so forth - occasionally with questions to the singer.

In this regard, music research can be based even less on phonograms alone than archaeology and art history can be based on collections of photographs and casts.....at the very beginning of the new era of research which the new technique has introduced, there be no ambiguity about the limits of its significance” (Stumpf, 1892).

Sound Archives and “Universalist” Scholarly Inquiry

As a research psychologist, Carl Stumpf was interested in the structure and functioning of The Human Brain as a universal phenomenon, a line of inquiry into universal or global issues that I shall call “universalist” here. The perception of music structures and the concepts of consonance and dissonance were among the avenues of inquiry he utilized. Phonogram recordings allowed him to measure and confirm direct observations, and to include music from practices, which he could not directly observe. This provided the motivation for establishing a collection of phonograms at the Psychological Institute of Berlin University, the collection that in 1905 became officially the Phonogram Archive.

However, his assistants at the Psychological Institute, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and Otto Abraham, developed their own ideas. With the steadily growing collection of recorded music from many parts of the world on hand, they began to inquire into the **history** of musical phenomena viewed in the context of assumed universal evolution. The Berlin Phonogram Archive became the fountain head of a new academic discipline, Comparative Musicology, an enterprise that could not

have evolved without the availability of a large collection of recorded music. This branch of music and culture research depended on the theoretical concepts of cultural evolutionism and its applications in ethnology, in particular, Culture Circle Theory (Kulturkreislehre), and its practice was associated with “arm chair research”, laboratory studies remote from the cultures under investigation. Hornbostel did very little fieldwork, Marius Schneider wrote his 2-volume History of Polyphony (Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit) without even having visited a non-European country ... the questions raised by comparative musicology were made both possible, but also limited by the sound archive as a data base. Issues of musical processes, acquisition and social functions were beyond the reach and the interests of archive-based comparative musicology.

These questions came to the fore only in the second half of the 20th Century, in particular in North America under the influence of cultural-anthropological thought and in the context of Mantle Hood’s “participation in the learning process” school. Fieldwork in a single ethnic group and the functioning of cultures had been at the core of American anthropological research (which ideally included the domain of music) since the 1880s, but while sound recordings were made as part of anthropological research, this did not lead to the establishment of sound archives for musicological studies until the second half of the 20th Century. By that time, the increasingly anthropological orientation and the call for the immediate participation of the musicological researcher in the learning process in the Mantle Hood fashion in American ethnomusicology had begun to shift the focus from musical structures to social structures. A recent survey of articles in the journal Ethnomusicology has shown that only a small fraction refer to music recordings in developing their arguments, and even fewer to recordings made by someone other than the author (Sewald, 2005: 4).

Music research based on recordings, and in particular, on recordings found in archives, is often considered suspect by contemporary American ethnomusicologists. For instance, when Mantle Hood reviewed my doctoral dissertation, he criticized my study of early 20th Century musical practices in Papua New Guinea for being based on phonogram cylinders rather than on direct observation. Whereas at the turn of the 20th Century, sound archives generated new directions in *universalist* musicological thought, fifty years later new directions in *universalist* musicological thought made sounds archives irrelevant – at least in North America.

Sound Archives and National Music Research

As mentioned above, the earliest sound recordings undertaken for scholarly purposes were made not by a musicologist, but by an ethnographer and as part of an ethnographic study of Zuni culture, a *particularist* enterprise in the realm of American internal colonialism. Later in the same decade – the last of the 19th Century, urban American search for an American cultural identity turned for a while to the music of American Indians as the “true American”, but this sentiment did not last. Elsewhere, and in particular, in nation states emerging from large hegemonic empires and colonial rules, one’s very own music was elevated to the status of national symbols. Usually it

is the oral traditions of rural populations that became the object of systematic study, collection and preservation in formally established archives.

A famous case is that of Hungarian folk music where we have a confluence of nationalism, universalist-musicological thought and sound-archival expertise. Bela Bartok, dissatisfied as a Hungarian-nationalist composer with the non-Hungarian domination of urban musical practices and styles began to collect Hungarian rural music for use in his compositions. In his search for scientific confirmation of his ideas about “genuine Old Hungarian” music, he encountered the linguistic theories that postulated the

Ural- Altaic family of languages, of which Hungarian as well as Turkish, were parts. Hypothesizing that music and languages behaved similarly in the evolution of culture, collected recordings in supposedly related and contrasting domains, Bartok undertook comparative studies of music structures - his study of Turkish folk music (Bartok, 1976) is an outstanding example – and urged the creation of national archives of recorded folk music in both Hungary and in Turkey. These archives were created for national purposes – in the service of national identity and the safeguarding of national heritage – and thereby became national concerns both for their functioning and their maintenance.

The establishment of national sound archives, or more precisely, of sound archives for national purposes such as the forming of a cultural identity and the preservation of national heritage is now a practically global phenomenon.³ A survey undertaken 35 years ago for the International Folk Music Council, later renamed International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) lists 145 institutions, organizations and collections in 41 countries of all five continents along with their aims, purposes, and sources of support, and today the list would be much longer. It covers most of what one might call young nation states and even political processes aiming at the creation of a nation state. For instance, the regional authorities of Kurdish Northern Iraq have the creation of a national sound archive on their agenda. “Old nation states” with culturally diverse populations also have institutions with explicitly national policies. In the United States of America, the Archive of Folksong of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., established in 1928, “serves as a national centre for the collection, preservation and cataloguing of authentic American folklore materials, particularly on recordings and in the area of folk music” (see Kennedy, 1973). This is a government-maintained institution subject to government policies. The question what constitutes “authentic folklore materials” is a political question and subject to changes in national policies over time. Research that draws on such national archives or that feeds into their holdings often becomes subject to national policies, as well.

Social Functions, Social Support, and the Maintenance of Sound Archives

Operating any archive – and certainly, any sound archive – calls for the investment of funds, time and skills. Depending on the intended purposes, it may also require the will and commitment to maintaining it ideally in perpetuity.

I have reviewed brief the two major types of motivations that have historically led to the establishment of formal archives of recorded traditional music: universalist research and national research, serving quests for universal insights – for instance, the history of mankind or the structure of the human brain – or insights into matters of national concern – the “authentic” national style or the scope of a national repertory and its preservation.

Let us now consider some of the problems that arise with the attempts to maintain such an archive. A brief look, again, at the history of the Berlin Phonogram Archive may be instructive. It began as a collection of Edison cylinder recordings in the Psychological Institute of Berlin University, informal and without a budget of its own until 1905 when it was made official, but still essentially supported by the Psychological Institute. Private donations and the independent means of its unsalaried head, Erich von Hornbostel, were used to meet material needs. After what was then believed to be The Great World War, in the great inflation of 1921, these sources dried up. Thanks to Prof. Stumpf’s and Hornbostel’s personal connections, the Phonogram-Archive was administratively attached to the Hochschule für Musik, the Berlin State Conservatory – not a research institution, but remained physically at the University. The following decade was a time of budgetary constraints, but increased scholarly activity based on archive resources. There was also, significantly, the launching of the first series of commercial recordings from archive holdings, the legendary Demonstration Collection, intended for teaching and exchange purposes.

In 1933, at the dawn of the Third Reich, von Hornbostel left Germany, and the Phonogramm-Archiv was administratively and physically moved to the Völkerkunde-Museum in Berlin-Dahlem where the collection enjoyed a relatively secure though intellectually isolated existence until its virtual destruction at the end of World War II. However, copies (copper galvanos) had been made of most cylinders over the decades, originals had been moved into storage outside Berlin and most of them from there as war loot to the Soviet Union - in short, by the mid-1990 about 90% of the original phonogram recordings were re-assembled in Dahlem either as originals or as copies, on magnetic tape or eventually as digital files. Meanwhile, close connection with academic teaching⁴, regular demonstrations and exhibitions for Museum visitors, the commercial LP and CD publications of the Archive, and the scholarly and publicistic activities of the Archive staff have kept the institution in the public eye. Nevertheless, there was a crisis at the time of the 100th Anniversary of the Archive: as part of a re-organization of the entire Museum, the archive was to be abolished as a distinct institution within the Museum, with the consequent loss of budgetary autonomy and specialized personnel. The UNESCO recognition of the Archive as World Heritage and international intervention succeeded in averting this threat.

I could adduce other examples of loss through violence or neglect, but let this be enough. There are lessons to be learned from this story, and they are widely applicable:

1. Archives of traditional music cannot exist as an end in themselves. Created in response to a social need, they must maintain their social relevance in changing social environments.

