

Understanding Management Strategies and Usage Tactics in Ethnographic Sound Archives

Jesse A. Johnston, MSI, PhD
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Ethnomusicology

the study of people making music
(Titon 1984)

- Field recordings as primary unit of documentation
- Archives as epistemic infrastructure (Hedstrom & King 2006)



@jesseajohnston

Illustration: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr015.html>

Ambivalence

Archival ennui describes a “mental weariness, dissatisfaction, boredom, listlessness and a lack of interest in archives in terms of both using them for research and supporting them”

(Vallier 2010, 42)



“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

- How does research practice in sound archives influence their management?
- *Significance*
 - Audiovisual materials
 - Understanding “archival use” & “users”
 - Lack of evidence-based knowledge

Methods

- Identifying archives (sampling)
 - Significant field recordings holdings
 - Research or education mission
- Semi-structured interviews
- Thematic coding (analysis)
- Goal: **Identify & elaborate critical areas of management that impact use**

Semi-structured interviews

Role	Abbreviation	Number	Mode
Archivist	A	5	Phone, email
Researcher	R	2	Phone, videochat



Emerging Areas

- Orientation
- Usage Patterns
- Information Seeking (IS)



Orientation

Structured

- Lacking!

We never had a formal, like 'Here's the archive!' It was someplace that we would [socialize].

(A04)

Informal

- Reference Interviews

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?

(R02)

Usage Patterns

Low On-Site Usage

there is very little in-house use of our collection

ethnomusicologists use the Archives infrequently

(A05)

Going Digital

About one third of the archive, the sound archive here, is now on the Web. . . . It's a really fab project. You can do a lot of searches for, you know, kind of meta tags and information. . . . That very website has changed the way that I work.

(R01)

IS: Access Points

Archivist Strategies

What would change most would be the point where we get a really good webpage that describes the collection well and will steer people, we can get our webpage bookmarked by various people who do research. (A01)

We do get more and more reference inquiries . . . [based] on Google searches. (A02)

Researcher Tactics

In terms of finding other recordings, it's a guessing game. There are no resources online. (R02)

Most queries are sent by e-mail (A05)

We don't have any more information than what's on these printouts so you can just go through them one by one (R02)

IS: Networks

Strategies

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)

Tactics

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)

I try to rely on memory, when I'm [in the field] I ask as many people as I can.
(R02)

Discussion

- Orientation
 - Include discussion of AV in all collections with holdings
- Access Tools
 - Access copies
 - Do websites suffice?
- Information seeking
 - Varied descriptive practices
 - No federated search

Discussion: Usage Tactics

- As complexity of format, content, and analysis rise, generalizability of tools decreases
- Researchers may be content with own tools & methods
- *Listening* as “scholarly primitive” (Unsworth 2000), a generalizable research activity

Current and Future Directions

- Priorities
 - Increase researcher n , add administrators
 - Finalize and implement online instrument
- Significance of findings to archival practice

Thank You!

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@jesseajohnston

jajohnst@umich.edu

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@jesseajohnston