

LISTENING WITH/IN CONTEXT: TOWARDS MULTIPLICITY, DIVERSITY, AND COLLABORATION IN DIGITAL SOUND ARCHIVAL PROJECTS

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Abstract

Despite increasing attention to the preservation and development of sound archives in academic research and cultural heritage institutions, they are yet to be more substantially embraced in larger theoretical debates on archival theory and practice. Fraught with contested histories through the legacy of ethnomusicology, rooted in the enterprises of colonial imperialism, now in the era of mass digitization and distribution, many sound collections are attempting to develop ethical and empowering methodologies that support community involvement and a vigorous remediation between sound and visibility. Addressing this confluence of concerns, this article considers the ways in which contemporary digital sound archival projects are encouraging an engagement with cultural history and memory in innovative and complex ways, mobilizing the affordances of digital tools and community-based support material with careful attention to the negotiation between its sonic and visual constituents. Through an analysis of two case studies – The Roaring ‘Twenties and Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive – this article examines how contemporary digital archival projects activate and remediate sonic documents and their contextual counterparts to invite a diverse, multifaceted, and multi-sensory encounter with history, memory, knowledge, and the past.

KEYWORDS: digital audio projects, community archives, cultural history, digital humanities

Steering away from the supposed novelty and emergence of sound in the humanities, which often reinforces the supremacy of vision and further perpetuates other dominant discourses, scholars are increasingly recognizing that sound is not just (or either) ephemeral object or event, but a key method of framing history. With the arrival of digital technologies, new questions and opportunities arise about how digital tools can contribute to a rigorous reconstruction of historical soundscapes, performances, and ways of knowing to re-establish and re-sound the complex, interconnected, and multifaceted relationships between histories, events, places, voices, and communities. Through two examples of digital sound archive projects, The Roaring ‘Twenties and Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive, this article examines how sound can be used as a method to situate cultural experiences and historical sonic events in a way that is more diverse and embodied for contemporary listeners through a methodology that is attentive to the contextual and situated aspects of the recordings as well as the necessary visual and textual components in their re-presentation online. The Roaring ‘Twenties is an extension of a book published by the project’s creator, Emily Thompson, titled *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2004), that historicizes the “intersection of the evanescent and the concrete,” meaning the interaction between the ephemeral vibrations of sound with the material world that attempts to control its vibrations (Thompson 2021). The website (<http://nycitynoise.com/>) dedicated to the sounds of New York City circa 1930 adds to the growing body of other similar projects utilizing historical sounds but is explicitly historically minded to “evoke the original contexts of those sounds, to help us better understand that context as well as the sounds themselves” (Thompson 2021). Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive is an ongoing collaborative archival project spearheaded by faculty and students at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada to digitize, classify, describe, and provide access to audio files from the long-running Indigenous radio broadcast called *Smoke Signals*, produced and hosted by Indigenous activists, educators, community leaders, and Elders Dan Smoke and Mary Lou Smoke. Beginning in 2019, the Smokes donated their wealth of cassette tapes to the project,

then co-led by Paulette Rothbauer, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, and Marni Harrington, retired Associate Librarian and former Library Director, where Indigenous students and Master of Library and Information Science students worked together to organize and transcribe the recordings, and develop the website on Omeka, an open-source web publishing platform for sharing digital media-rich collections. The content is unique, representing a distinct history, and the online digital repository highlights and honours this period, putting listeners in dialogue with this past in a multi-media format that directly involves Dan and Mary Lou. Careful consideration of the audience is paramount for both, as the project development and realization involves meticulous and detailed transcription of the radio broadcasts, and with The Roaring 'Twenties Thompson states, “we consciously kept multiple audiences in mind, and we aimed to speak to range of different groups through our design” (Thompson 2021). In uniting both projects, the aim is to elucidate the potential of the convergence of sound artefacts and recordings with digital methods and attention to context and audience, revealing how these contemporary digital projects activate and remediate sonic documents and their contextual counterparts to invite a complex, multifaceted, and multi-sensory encounter with history, memory, knowledge, and the past. A key influence for this paper is what Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2019) designate as an ethics of care to digital archival collections where “digitization is more than a singular event, but rather becomes perceived as part of a larger series of steps to developing an ongoing ethical relationship between records’ creators, subjects, users and communities” (160). An ethical feminist approach to digital archival projects then is culturally situated, mutually dependent, and involves an ongoing relationship between different stakeholders and participants (Caswell & Cifor 2019). Before turning to these case studies, first I will outline pertinent scholarly debates addressing the multifarious status and functions of sound archives, the various ontologies and characteristics of sound as a medium and modality that inform the preceding debates, and the exigencies and concerns with digital access, preservation, and tools, in order to articulate the contours and confluence of these subjects, and the myriad implications and stakes of these questions.

In turning to the small but mighty body of literature on sound archives, it's clear that although academic research and cultural heritage institutions have made measurable strides in the interest and development of sound archives, especially following the digital turn, they are yet to be more substantially embraced in the theoretical debates on the archive. According to archival studies scholars Kate Eichhorn (2009) and Anette Hoffman (2015), sound archives have received scarce attention, likely due to their disciplinary specificity and the hermeneutic form of many of the collections. More recently, in the anthology *Digital Sound Studies*, the editors argue that because of the fraught histories of early sound collections, many of the institutions now housing them are grappling with questions of how to preserve this material equitably in an era of mass digitization (Trettien et. al. 2018). Equitable preservation means asking what it might mean and look like to return digital sonic artifacts to their communities of origin as well as how to rightfully frame, activate, and engage with these digitized materials. For the editors, “digitization would seem like a promising way to ensure that communities have access to their cultural heritage, but because reliable internet is a rare and costly commodity in many parts of the world, and especially in the global South, transmitting data online is untenable” (Trettien et. al. 2018, 8). Furthermore, since audiovisual recording technologies are ever-changing, developments in format and deterioration mean that there is a greater imperative to safeguard, remediate, and mobilize these recordings in archives as time goes on (Seeger & Chaudhuri 2018). In Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri's (2018) study of audiovisual archives, they focus on a form of “emerging archive” – community-based archives that specialize in audiovisual recordings for research and shared

community heritage is vital because “in some cases these recordings have been made possible for communities to renew traditions that were long abandoned and nearly forgotten” (4). Consideration of their longevity and future uses, in the form of digitization, activation, and potential remediation, is paramount in these varied but intersecting circumstances. As Rebecca Dowd Geoffrey-Schwinden (2018) writes, “a turn to diverse media in the presentation of audible history will encourage a vital rethinking of the performance of archival research as well as scholarly production and reception” (232). It is within this turn that I locate my case studies, where scholars, archivists, and collaborators have become encouraged to rethink their approach in working with sound recordings, opening alternative methods and opportunities for their collecting, hosting, and presenting materials to the public.

Nonetheless, the particularities and exigencies of sound, sonic artefacts, and audio recordings within an archival framework endure. Musicologist Peter McMurray (2015) argues that when archival objects surpass the sensory and media logics of the repositories that hold them, they exhibit a quality of “archival excess” delineating the margins and classifications that exclude their existence (264). They do not fit neatly into the catalogues, finding aids, and other archival inventories that support and maintain most collections and thus they exceed the capacity of the archive for order and containment while prompting questions of the classificatory logic of the archive based on strict guidelines of what kinds of materials get valued and saved. Even if sonic documents are acquired, the question then becomes how they get integrated into these systems of classification and made available for public audiences. But, as McMurray specifies, it is precisely because of their evasion that the archive can come into being. Archives exist because of their limit, because of what is not included, and on the other side. For McMurray, musical instruments, recording devices, and other sensory archival objects are often excluded from the collections, debates, and practices, and yet this exclusion is fundamental to its logic. As points of material rupture, these “boundary objects” are where the “enunciative possibilities” of an archive, discipline, or discourse can begin to break apart (265). By exceeding protocols and confronting complacent systems of record-keeping, organization, and presentation, these objects have the potential to radically extend how the archive can be studied, experienced, and understood. Thus, sound documents in the archive are disruptive and resistant, holding potential for otherwise experiences and encounters in archival contexts, and with history, knowledge, and the past.

Importantly, the characteristics of sound as a medium cannot be ignored when discussing sound archives. Artist and scholar Brandon LaBelle (2008) writes, “Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates” (ix). For many contemporary sound studies scholars, these relational aspects and propensities are what make sound and listening have political and ethical implications. Tara Rodgers (2018) suggests that listening bodies are sonic-political transducers whereby sound absorbs individuals and is then converted into kinetic and social modes of engagement with the potential to mobilize diverse forms of political activity. Rodgers states, “Sound enrolls the listening body in a web of material connections that transect boundaries of subjects, species, organic and inorganic matter, and bodily interiors and exteriors” (236). Thus, it is material, metaphoric, discursive, networked, and, indeed, contributes to our understanding and experience of the world, in the past, present, and future.

Yet, it is precisely this ephemerality and evanescence of sound as a medium that makes the sound archive “a compelling contradiction” Kate Eichhorn (2009) declares, that challenges the very promise and aims of the archive to order and preserve through its evanescence, ephemerality, and transience (185). As Eichhorn observes, “nowhere is the archive’s creative potential more apparent than at its limit, the point where it fails to fulfil its promise of preservation and order. A sound archive naturally approaches this limit” (185). In conjunction with this ontological paradox, of the archive striving to preserve something which can never be fully captured and contained, there is a problem that arises from the tension between aural information and metadata found within the files of many sound archives. What one hears and what one reads may differ in subtle ways or appear to be entirely incommensurable. This chasm is what motivates Anette Hoffman’s (2015) development of a method for listening to sound archives called “close listening” – an attempt to grasp as many audible features as possible of the audio recording (75). This includes all seemingly inconsequential details on the track, everything one can hear despite its lack of documentation in the metadata, for example, as Hoffman delineates, “the noise of a rotating cylinder or scratched record (which can deliver clues on how often the record has been played); the recordist’s announcement (the ‘acoustic tag’); the languages, performative, and musical genres documented on the recording; the features of the voice of the speaker and singer, together with accent, pauses, and background noises” (535). What this makes clear is that sound archives may be antithetical to what is noted or described in the descriptive metadata, revealing that archived sound material often speak or sound out beyond what has been designated or attributed to them by archivists. “Sharp contrasts between the audible and what was registered in the written documentation,” as Hoffman notes, “often announce the logic of archiving” (535). Hoffman decisively calls upon a change in terms of engagement that requires more than a theoretical re-conceptualization, but to sound out acoustic collections with new methods of listening to recordings that analyze acoustic files beyond their archival status as mere documents or specimens. An attempt to bridge this divide and consider sound recordings as part of their wider social, cultural conditions, also involves a reconsideration of the division in sound studies and the way sound is conceptualised and approached on a methodological level, largely between the ontological turn and auditory culture, and in considering sound as either object or event. Alongside “close reading” to sound archives, Hoffman (2020) draws on Rodney’s Harrison’s (2013) “reassembling” – which is a systematic reconnection of recordings with associated documentation that is often stored elsewhere, in other public repositories and holdings, and beyond the institutional confines. Hoffman says that these two strategies – close listening and reassembling – can substantially reframe engagements with sound archives. While this article does not directly enlist these approaches, the creators of the digital archival projects in the case studies enact consonant versions of both by identifying, mapping, registering, and attending to additional elements and extra archival materials to enhance the meanings of the recordings.

Acknowledging the consequences of the proliferation and acceleration of new media and digital technologies, Diana Taylor (2010) points out that the digital raises new issues about collective memory, knowledge production, and their transmission in the so-called era of the archive. Technologies provide new paths for our futures in the reshaping of the present and the past through different forms of access, preservation, and engagement with cultural memory material. In an earlier work, Taylor (2003) turns to the role of performance in the transmission of cultural knowledge and social memory, urging us to think more seriously and robustly about embodiment as an epistemological framework that complicates prevalent notions in Western discourse around knowledge production, preservation, and archives. By taking performance seriously as a system of learning,

storing, and transmitting knowledge, this framework allows us to expand what we understand as “knowledge” (16). Performance, here, functions as an episteme – a way of knowing, not simply an object of cultural and historical analysis. As many contemporary sound scholars articulate, sounding and sonic phenomenon can be a form of performance and event especially while listening is a multi-modal experience involving visual stimuli, haptic sensations, tactile perceptions, and kinesthetic responses. In Taylor’s critique of ethnographic representation, “The unidirectionality of meaning making and communication also stemmed from and reflected the centuries-old privileging of written over embodied knowledge (8). Writing’s link to colonial power is based on the way that writing separates the source of knowledge from the knower, separating knowledge from the body. While all transmitted knowledge is mediated in multiple ways, as Taylor makes clear, it is the forms that this mediation takes that can differ widely depending on the medium, original source, and context.

Some archival scholars agree that the digitization of archival documents is a force for good and a way for wider audiences to engage with the materials, mobilizing the recordings and moving them outside of the sequestered environment of the archive (McCarty Smith et. al. 2019). In other words, access should be prioritized, and digitization facilitates collaborative, transcultural research, which is one of the conditions of these multifaceted archival objects. However, as Hoffman maintains (2020), digitization does not automatically remove all the barriers, challenges and fallacies that are embedded within archival materials. Issues of searchability, language barriers, partial access, and racializing categories often continue to persist in these digitized contexts. For Perla Olivia Rodríguez Reséndiz (2014), if there is no access to the document, then the document is meaningless. As such, preservation and access are synonymous. Rodríguez Reséndiz also reminds us that for a long time, access to audio materials was highly dependent on the availability of playback equipment and the creation of copies for users. Despite the greater attention and increased access to these works, the systematic preservation and consultation of these recordings is complicated by their diversified nature. The data and larger insights contained within them offers a multitude of information on their cultural and artistic life, which goes far beyond their audio signals and the metadata articulated in the cataloguing process. These events are never a neutral operation, which means that more fulsome and complete access must involve the entanglement with wider contextual information, which is not often easily available or attainable, especially in cases of archival collections created under colonial conditions that are comprised of materials from multiple disparate communities.

Decisively, the collaboration between digital humanities and sound studies holds many possibilities for transforming silent and text-centric cultures of communication into rich multi-sensory experiences that accommodate fresh approaches and diverse ways of knowing. By joining sound studies in meaningful conversation with digital media, digital platforms can be harnessed to amplify underrepresented voices, produce new variations of academic research and outputs, as well as new modes of experience and knowledge transmission. Thinking with the aforementioned propositions – the disruptive potential of sonic objects and sensory artefacts within the archive and the potentialities of digitization and digital tools for mobilizing archival documents and generating collaborative engagement – by analyzing two case studies, The Roaring ‘Twenties and Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive, this article elucidates the ways in which these contemporary digital projects activate and remediate sonic documents and their contextual counterparts in ways that are politically resurgent, challenging dominant approaches to sound archives, and regenerating debates about public knowledge.

These two digital sound projects are especially distinct in their use of the affordances of digital infrastructures, technology, and tools in ways that are collaborative and comprehensive especially in comparison to other existing similar projects. For instance, while the online collection of poetry PennSound¹, which is comparable in scope to the parameters of the two case studies, provides basic descriptive metadata embedded in each downloadable MP3 file, endeavours to provide all the bibliographic information with accurate metadata, as stated in its online Manifesto (2003), a single poem can be separated from its environment. By divorcing the sound from its larger contextual setting and milieu, this approach has the potential to erase the multiple tangential but crucial relationships that formed the event and recording. The curators of SpokenWeb², another online collection of sound recordings, Annie Murray and Jared Wiercinski (2012), point out that while most digital sound archives foreground listening, their structure is typically multimodal, which means that the visual elements of online collections of digitized sounds need careful consideration. This includes the elements of site navigation, audio visualization, design, and other various functionalities. Both notions – ensuring the acknowledgment and reinforcement of social circumstances and relationships, plus a keen attentiveness to visuality, which is essentially another significant relationship – are foregrounded in the two selected case studies.

First, The Roaring ‘Twenties is described on its web interface as an “interactive exploration of the historical soundscape of New York City.” It was originally conceptualized and built by Emily Thompson, sound historian at Princeton University, and Scott Mahoy, design specialist at the University of Southern California in 2013 and produced through the multimedia journal *Vectors* of the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at the University of Southern California. It is a rich, complex, and densely layered project that constructs a digital collection of sound to deliver a wealth of historic sound recordings. The aim is not only to provide access to this sonic information, but to evoke the multitude of contexts and meanings of those sounds through multiple forms of engagement. Thompson and Mahoy explored the Municipal Archives of the City of New York, cataloging over 600 unique complaints about noise in the late 1920s while reproducing over 350 pages of these materials. The digital project also includes dozens of excerpts of Fox Movietone newsreels and early sound experiments that captured and remediated the sounds of New York City, as well as hundreds of other photographs and print materials that focus on noise. Using digital tools, the myriad conditions of these lost and forgotten sounds is recouped. As an assemblage of historical documentation on what New York residents considered *noise*, a socially contingent category, the historical acoustemology³ of these various moments in time is emphasized (Geoffroy-Schwinden 2018). Through this narrow curatorial focus, we are presented with a historical uncovering of how residents, at that time and place, heard, interpreted, reacted, and indeed contributed to their soundscape.

To organize and present these discrete materials, The Roaring ‘Twenties employs three complementary interfaces or sections to “plot a course through the content”: Sound, Space, and Time. These nodes are not merely thematic but offer rubrics and theoretical

1 <https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/>

2 <https://spokenweb.ca/>

3 This term comes from ethnographic research done by Steven Feld in the 1990s with the Kaluli people in the Bosavi rainforest region in Papua New Guinea. Combining “acoustics” and “epistemology,” the concept denotes a phenomenological understanding of the world through sound that fuses embodiment and relational ontology where connectedness via sound is a condition of being and knowing among human and non-human ecologies.

entry points from which to engage with the materials. A new version of the website is underway that will replace and improve the original Flash-based version, which is announced to viewers upon entering the current iteration. Currently available is a draft version-in-progress with a new team, revised, and recoded in 2019 by Emily Thompson and Ben Johnston, produced through the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning at Princeton University.

Although this project brings together a vast array of materials, it does not deploy a distanced or cursory overview or presentation. Instead, Thompson's background as a historian largely informs this thorough and nuanced approach with what she calls a "historicized mode of listening" in the online Introduction – invoked in her gathering and reassembling, and in the subsequent visitor's experience. Thompson's approach thus is attentive and attuned to differentiated audiences. Amassed through detailed mining and care, the material is presented using a stylized multimedia interface and common Internet tools that allow visitors to linger with the artifacts, following different routes and crafting their own connections and conclusions. Visitors are granted agency to participate in the work of re-historicizing sound, implicating them in the replication and re-enactment of sonic artifacts. According to Rebecca Dowd Geoffrey-Schwinden (2018), this process is significant for "transforming historical audition for modern listeners from a mere sonic event to a sonic experience" (238). Furthermore, this online format mimics the experiential, nonlinear process by which we experience sound and accrue sonic knowledge in real life across axes of physical experience and psychological interpretation (238). Not only does Thompson offer detailed introductory notes contextualizing the project, methodology, and different tools users may come across in their journey, but book-ending the triad of Sound-Space-Time is an Info section that provides background and links to additional resources. The Historical Narrative item in this section links to a chapter excerpt from Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and Culture of Listening in America 1900-1933* (2004), a key influence that forms much of the foundational research for this digital project, as well as one of the first extensive studies on acoustic cultures. Users can also access a digitized copy of *City Noise: Noise Abatement Commission New York City* from 1930, another primary resource for the project. The About the Noise Complaints page states, "The collection offers a unique view into the city's past. It documents not just the noises of New York, but also the attitudes and language of its citizens. These letters help us to recover the texture of daily life on the streets and in the dwellings of the seven million people who called the New York City home at this time." For instance, turning back to the Sound page, which features a visual representation of the different categories from the Noise Abatement Commission of 1930, the groupings range from Traffic, Transportation, Homes, Streets, and more; each then with its own sub-categories. As another example, Collection Deliveries, Garbage, includes both noise complaint documentation and digitized film reels, where the former were mostly made in Manhattan about the disposal trucks. The videos depict a single shot of street cleaners, a civic campaign enactment with two little boys to clean up the streets, and a clean-up drive on the Lower East Side. We are presented with a range of material, audiovisual and text-based, broadly related to the thematic of garbage, sketching out the different ways in which were people were hearing, thinking, feeling, and engaging with garbage in 1920s New York City.

In the Space category, links to various newsreels, newspaper clippings, and city documents are plotted via two versions of a New York City map, both a digitized historic version from 1933 and a contemporary Google map, whereas the Time section organizes the historical information using a timeline structure and graphics. These two nodes present both a spatialized representation and a chronological history, re-inscribing the

social and historical complexity of these sounds as more than objects, but as interconnected events in time and space. This encourages a novel way to listen to the archive – one that is more historically minded – and a way to recontextualize online audio content. The merging of vintage stylings with contemporary markers of the Google map with its bright, colourful standardized design of highways, land masses, and bodies of water serve as reminders that the past is always mediated and incomplete, filled in through the technologies and methodologies of the present. Through its diverse structure and form, including hundreds of buttons, drop-down menus, items, and paths, this digital sound archive project foregrounds slowness and attention, encouraging intimacy, entanglement, and discovery at one’s own pace and direction.

In the Introduction to the project, Thompson writes, “The best work in aural history is as much about listening as it is about sound, recovering the meaning of sound as well as the sound itself. To recover that meaning we need to strive to enter the mindsets of the people who perceived those sounds, to undertake a historicized mode of listening that tunes modern ears to the pitch of the past.” This digital space, then, dedicated to marrying these worlds – sound and listening, visual with audio, past and present – attempts to recreate and more fully understand and situate sonic cultures through a diversity of digital tools, archival documents, and sonic artifacts.

Formally launched in 2019, the second case study is the Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive, an ongoing collaborative project to organize, digitize, describe, study, and provide access to the audio recordings from the long-running Indigenous radio broadcast called *Smoke Signals*, produced and hosted by Indigenous activists, community leaders, educators, and Elders Dan Smoke and Mary Lou Smoke. It features nearly 35 years of radio shows featuring interviews with notable Indigenous artists, musicians, writers, scholars, spiritual leaders, and politicians. The project involves many team members, primarily out of Western University in London, Ontario, whose Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) and the FIMS Graduate Library provide ongoing support. As stated on their online website, the goal of the project is to provide an open-access database and repository of these rich and historically significant materials for the public to read, listen, and engage with.

In many ways, the Smoke Signals Archive project works in tandem with the material itself, and the contexts from which the radio show worked out of and within, including notions of responsibility, reciprocity, interrelationship, and community, providing an entry point into invaluable knowledge and an Indigenous grassroots worldview. Project lead, Paulette Rothbauer, has said that ultimately the project is an “act of reciprocity” and a way to “honour the many contributions Dan and Mary Lou have made over the years – not just at Western but across and beyond southwestern Ontario as activists, storytellers, teachers and community leaders” (Ferguson 2022). Now the longest-running Indigenous radio program in Canada, the Smoke Signals Radio Show started in the 1990s on CHRW, the campus radio station at Western University in London, Ontario to explore the nuances of Indigenous culture, customs, and beliefs by featuring guests with diverse worldviews and stories. In 1990 Dan and Mary Lou Smoke were asked to host a

short guest segment on the Oka Crisis.⁴ Within a year, they were offered their own recurring timeslot on the station, and Smoke Signals has continued ever since. Dan Smoke, a member of the Seneca Nation, Killdeer Clan, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory; and Mary Lou Smoke, a member of the Ojibway Nation, Bear Clan, from Batchawana Bay on Lake Superior; have carved a space for meaningful discourse to showcase the multifaceted and diverse forms of Indigeneity for widespread audiences in local, national, and international communities (Rothbauer et. al. 2021).

Making this content publicly accessible, faculty and students from Western University have been working with Dan and Mary Lou to create a digital archive to showcase selected episodes from the 1990s to the 2000s. The themes that arise in the episodes cut across issues of activism and social justice movements that are still extremely relevant today. The archive also functions as a celebration and a form of remembrance of the work and legacy of the Smokes in and beyond the community thus becoming an act of reciprocity to honour their contributions.

Importantly, this digital project emerges out of direct consultation with the creators of the sounds and community it involves, and therefore is deeply collaborative, which is where the throughline and emphasis on context emerges – context through collaboration, marking entanglements in and through this digital space. For instance, when first arriving on the site, visitors are presented with a welcome note from Dan and Mary Lou Smoke in the form of an embedded YouTube video where they offer a few words of welcome and background information on the radio show. This video not only functions as a framing device for the archive and grounds the material in the embodied voices of the radio show hosts, but also sets the tone for the kind of archive that they created – highly personalized, informal, and friendly. The ability of communities to create and manage their own audiovisual heritage enables possibilities for these communities to participate in negotiations and awareness around cultural ownership, previously neglected land rights, local social issues, and the revival of certain cultural traditions. As a thoughtful, humble, relaxed, activist archive, it functions as a memory bank for many members of the Indigenous communities that the radio show seeks to serve, entertain, inform, and support.

The collaborative methods the research team uses to transcribe, describe, and contextualize the digitized recordings is a crucial aspect of this project. For archivist and archival theory scholar Gracen Brilmyer (2018), archival descriptions are sites embedded with power structures and often where complex histories are under- or misrepresented, and, thus, carry potential for political re-framings, nuance, accountability, and transparency (96). In the Smoke Signals digital archive, well-researched and contextualized descriptive notes and comments are provided with the digitized audio, and transcribers are credited on each document, highlighting the importance of their work and what Caswell and Cifor (2019) call the feminist ethics of care in archival digitization: “care might take the form of active listening, acknowledgement, and compensation” (166). Each episode is broken into its constituent segments, and each segment contains a PDF transcript, along with basic metadata. Within each transcript, words in boldface correspond to the

4 In 1990, a dispute over the proposed development of a golf course on Kanien’kéhaka (Mohawk) lands in Oka, Quebec led to a historic 78-day standoff between protesters, Quebec police, and the Canadian Army. Eventually, the protest ended, and the golf course expansion was never built, but the land was purchased by the federal government. They did not establish the land as a reserve or organize a transfer of the land back to the Mohawks of Kanesatake.

system of tags used to organize the website content. Culturally specific meaning is provided via the tags which include proper names and concepts richer than those typically found in standard library authority files or subject headings, for example: Inuk, Ann Arbor Powwow, Haudenosaunee, Killdeer Clan, Robert Mirabel, Pine Ridge Reservation, Coalition Against First Nations Genocide, plus many more titles, phrases, keywords, and locations. While transcripts and tagging are common practices in oral history collections, the significance and novelty of these approaches here lies within the degrees of collaboration in developing and realizing these different elements, which as mentioned, involved a team of Indigenous students and Library and Information Science students, totalling 18 different members over the years. The tags provide correct names of people and places that were often misspelled, wrongly identified, or altogether absent from traditional colonial archives. This web of detail and precision is brought to fruition through the careful and meticulous process of transcription, where the team members were able to think through the importance of these materials and make ethical decisions about how to approach the information, demonstrating what Brilmyer (2018) calls “archival assemblage,” whereby an assemblage approach to records creation and description politicizes archival material and offers a more nuanced entry point for records description. In this way, transcription also becomes a form of care, labour, close listening, observation, and attunement. The Smoke Signals Radio Show Archive thus is a site for learning and reflection on Indigenous media production and broadcasting, critical community voices and listening, which is especially important when contextualized against colonial and racist ideologies, and with the rise and recognition of autonomous Indigeneity.

These case studies show us that by (re)historicizing sound through collaborative methods and digital tools that enable contextual webs of understanding and relation, sound collections can become intimate, interactive, and accessible, inviting us to listen and learn through diverse paths, temporal and spatial frameworks. While they each approach sound, sonic material, and creating media-rich collections differently, they present versions of digital sound projects where visitors can configure their own relationships to sonic documents, and their wider social, political, and historical threads, in unique and intricate ways, because as Thompson (2015) states, “Simply clicking a ‘play’ button will not do” (95). Movement through the recordings and information is not linear or prescribed. The crucial and necessary focus on context when it comes to sound archives forms the central principle to enact a more embodied and diverse engagement which accounts for the ontological complexity of sound.

In The Roaring ‘Twenties, sound is presented as part of a web and network of relations in time and space. In Smoke Signals, the sound of Dan and Mary Lou’s embodied voices and the additional sounds and aural textures of the radio show create a sense of familiarity and connect us to different events and issues through firsthand accounts and perspectives. In aestheticizing and narrativizing the archive through an approach that serves the material and acutely represents the cross-cultural and trans-historical intersections that are so crucial to these specific collections, they produce sites of multiple interpretations across not only time and space, but between multiple subjects, objects, and texts, creating systems in which both content and context engages the visitor’s historical imagination. Transcribing the audio works becomes a form of ethical labour and care involved in the process of remediating these aural documents and bringing to life their crucial contributions to history and alternative forms of knowledge. While accessibility is not a direct or explicit consideration in these projects, the diverse contextual information that is provided alongside the audible sonic artefacts offers an engagement across numerous modes of access. The multiplicity that each one is both grounded upon and produces elucidates the potential of digital sound collections to transform

archival modes and models into rich multisensory experiences that endeavour to re-establish, re-build, and re-thread the intricate and complex relationships between different sites, times, places, and communities. Due to their emphasis on multiplicity and diversity, digital sound projects such as these engage in alternative modes of knowledge production that resist dominant narratives and reopen debates about what constitutes as public knowledge and how we can present, re-present, and engage with its vastness.

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