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Sonic Humanities: Sound Archives, Listening Practices, and Cultural Memory

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ABSTRACT

Sonic Humanities examines the intersection of sound archives, listening practices, and cultural memory, positioning sound as a critical medium through which societies preserve, interpret, and negotiate their histories and identities. This study explores how sound archives function as repositories of collective memory, cultural heritage, and historical knowledge while highlighting the processes of selection, preservation, cataloguing, accessibility, and destruction that shape what becomes audible or forgotten. It investigates listening practices as socially and culturally embedded activities that influence how individuals and communities experience, interpret, and transmit sonic histories. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from sound studies, anthropology, archival studies, digital humanities, and cultural memory theory, the study demonstrates that sound is not merely an artistic or sensory phenomenon but a primary source for understanding social relations, migration, identity formation, political struggles, and community experiences. The paper further examines technological transformations, including digitization and generative auditory data, which have expanded access to sonic materials while creating new ethical, legal, and preservation challenges. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive archival practices, Indigenous sound knowledge, community participation, and equitable access in shaping future sonic humanities research. Ultimately, Sonic Humanities provides a framework for understanding how sound archives and listening practices contribute to the preservation of cultural memory and the continuous reconstruction of collective identities in changing social and technological environments.

Keywords: Sonic Humanities; Sound Archives; Listening Practices; Cultural Memory; Digital Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Sonic Humanities investigates sound archives, listening practices, and cultural memory to understand how sound shapes collective identity, cultural heritage, and historical interpretation [1]. Available since the Gramophone era, sound archives have proliferated since the 1970s. Increasingly, musicologists, media historians, and archival scholars examine sound selection, preservation, accessibility, and cataloguing. Such questions are central to understanding sound archives as sites of cultural memory and knowledge production, shaping what remains audible [2]. Listening practices involve the shaping of sound from the interconnectedness of human beings and their sociocultural material [3]. Sound emerges as a crucial dimension illuminating collective and cultural identity. Everyday listening reflects broader social and cultural configurations and highlights the materiality of sound. Sound marks dominant, suppressed, and contested aspects of historical processes, extending from sonic ephemera to cultural heritage [1]. Sonic cultures remain unfinished. Sound characters and archival formations coexist across local, national, and global scales and articulate the past differently. Sound archivists and artistic, social, and community actors pursue multi-vocal collective cultural memory through sound arts, heritage, and restoration. The sound archive remains under-theorised [2]. Listening practices, sounds, or sonic cultures or habits are frequently overlooked. Sound archives are used as an entry point into the sonic humanities: gas lamps, lighthouses, shipbuilding, sugar plantation life, shopping malls, urban common spaces, kinship, child rearing, long-distance worship, et cetera [3]. Material science drones and the sonic arts occupy urban environments within

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globally resonating architectures. The sonic humanities articulate sound as an analytic alongside, in conversation with, and within the digital, visual, social, and other humanities [1].

Sound Archives: Histories, Methods, and Repertoires

Sonic humanities articulate an understanding of sonic phenomena at the intersection of cultural memory, archival practices, and listening [3]. Cultural memory determines how societies remember, forget, recast, and make sense of the past in the present, contributing to a sense of identity [4]. A long-standing answer to the question of how cultures remember “collectively” identifies archives: “sound archives” comprise institutions and activities that document, preserve, and make accessible sound after its ephemeral existence. Institutions such as the *Phonothèque nationale de France*, the British Library, UNESCO, and the Library of Congress have assembled significant collections, while key repertoires, the field recording, the oral history, the radio documentary, and the sound map, illustrate different archival paradigms and corresponding epistemic shifts [5]. Sonic artefacts in sound archives convey aspects of cultural memory, recomposing understandings of nationality, migration, diaspora, displacement, postcoloniality, globalisation, transnationalism, and truth. Sound is thus addressed in sonic humanities as a primary source of cultural memory [1]. Cultural memories, according to Jan Assmann, comprise “the sum of the ways in which culture preserves and communicates the experience of the collective”. Cultural memory determines how societies remember, forget, recast, and make sense of the past. It comprises both the awareness of the past and the specific contents of that memory, contributing to a sense of identity [6]. A long-standing answer to the question of how cultures remember “collectively” identifies archives: “sound archives” comprise institutions and activities that document, preserve, and make accessible sound after its ephemeral existence, essentially the sounds of a community [6]. Institutional sound archives began to be established in the late nineteenth-century, with several of the earliest being the Berlin Phonogram Archive (1880), the *Phonothèque nationale de France* (1888), the British Library (1888), UNESCO (1945), and the Library of Congress (1897) [6]. Institutions or initiatives that, while never formal institutions, exhibit the characteristics of sound archives include the University of California Berkeley and the International Association for the Study of Popular Music United Kingdom branch. Several crucial aspects of sound archives have informed their formation and have thus remained storeys beneath the banner of sound archives, and thus secondary, bar the norms of analysis and interpretation, to the sonic dimensions to culture and cultural memory [7]. A major sound archive that too acts as an illustration of sonic humanities is the PIRAT: Collection of Electronic Music archive [8]. The archive consists of a series of field recordings of the private soundscapes of local musicians across Switzerland recorded between September 2014 and October 2015; stock material from these recordings is manipulated artistically or pedagogically by means of variable rerecording or digital processing techniques. Sonic humanities may address or concern not only sound archives but also the other components within the framework centers [6].

Archive Formation and Destruction

Though aural artifacts surface in myriad formats recordings, notations, transcription scores, performance documents, or printed journals or reviews, the very notion of considered preservation implicates a broad episteme of accessing the past [9]. To pursue sound archives, particularly practices, methods, or studies of listening, entails an essential understanding of how records are formed and eventually unmade. Auditory writings coalesce into archives for various motives and purposes [2]. Certain electrical or electroacoustic sound scripts do not possess universal assignable reference points, while others lose archival positioning and hence the capacity to interrogate cultural history or sound continuities [10]. Studies of sound archives have rarely traced their destruction and concomitant remaking. Global archival sites have produced large quantities of audiovisual inscriptions; yet audio remnants of significant public and private discourse, cultural articulation, or artistic provenance continue to vanish at ratio commensurate with acquisition [11]. The preservation-impaired disappearance of vast audio holdings qualifies as an urgent inquiry, especially as priority archives are formed for Canadian circumstances [12]. Much projected digital-semassivity, meanwhile, engenders fresh investigation and phenomenological reflection respecting how erstwhile aural events can be sustainably remediated, rendered live, and with what expressive agency, furthermore without either memorabilia collectivity or a superfluous postmodern conceit of paraphrase [3].

Cataloging, Metadata, and Accessibility

Cataloging and the creation of metadata for audio records remain the most complicated parts of sound archiving. Many archivists do not know whether their main archivist documentation should favour collection-level descriptive information, general or specific documentary forms, contents of an audio document, or a two-level approach [2]. The availability of audio archives on the Internet has increased the debate over accessibility and the required documentation and collection formats, much like the similar debate that arose in visual images archiving. Recent collaborative projects provide a framework that could meet both new and old needs [3]. Today's cataloging increasingly follows the Contemporary International Rule for Archival Description, which encompasses

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description requirements for the whole archive as well as individual audio documents, and incorporates functional principles that the archival document will inevitably evolve over time [4].

Sound as Primary Source in Cultural Memory

Sound is understood as a primary source in the shaping of cultural memory. Academic studies examining the nature and pursuit of cultural memory investigate how auditory experiences and environments engage with memory formation across various social and cultural contexts [5]. These studies have explored the influence of soundscapes, sound recording, and the sonic dimensions of cultural phenomena in the transmission and establishment of cultural memory, cultural identity, social cohesion, and cultural difference within specific communities [6]. Moreover, sound has been central to anthropological, ethnographic, and ethnomusicological inquiries into the nature of audio media and its dual roles as an archive of the past and as a contemporary medium for transmitting cultural knowledge and history [5]. Cultural memory theorists approach the study of culturally significant sound from diverse vantage points [12]. The study of acoustic environments and sound recording examines how specific sonic materials inhabit audio streams, how they are organized into soundscapes, how they are encoded by media technologies, and how the interplay among these elements cultivates ways of listening that shape the salient experiences, meanings, and memories of epochal events, cultural history, and social relations in everyday life [13]. The notion of community sound archives addresses classical archival questions relating to acquisition, conservation, accessibility, and use while specifically foregrounding sound as a multimodal medium of memory recording and transmission [6].

Listening Practices: Methods, Audiences, and Interpretive Frameworks

Sound studies often neglect listening in favour of analysis of sound itself, and sonic archives sometimes attract more attention than individual listening practices [7]. Cultural studies has investigated listening communities and its practitioners, examining recorded music listening [6], public performance, radio, and sound in the gallery. Enquiry into sound and identity is also prominent [7]. Everyday listening, its social and cultural determinants, and the ways it relates to memory has been described, while ritual dimensions and the configurations of the listening community and of sound installation offer further avenues [8]. Listening methodologies accordingly risk undertaking various approaches in combination, yet sampling limits and representational issues abound [9]. Psychoaesthetics provides access to sound's direct effect upon awareness through perception. Roger Scruton has declared sound neglected as an aesthetic phenomenon, and Frith (1996) has drawn attention to the absence of a psychoacoustic dimension within cultural studies [10]. Psychoacoustic data relating to sound, space, and attention may therefore illuminate individually distinctive listening responses, potentially establishing a connection between analysis and received experience that clarifies interpretative claims [11]. Attention to affect in sound studies further connects psychoacoustic observation with the emotional response often through memory that characterises a reception [12]. Psychoacoustic and phenomenological approaches to experimental noise inform exploration of a currently unfashionable boundary of sound one lacking a canon, championed figures, and attendant notation. Anomaly summons attention across spatial, temporal, and material planes, opening routes toward silence [13]. Listening practices thus contribute insight into how sonic archives configure cultural memory, supporting attention to institutional governance, technical classification, and curatorial strategy in setting the wider context [14]. Sonic archives cannot by themselves recover cultural memory; additional exploration of sonic legacies needs to clarify how memory arises from sound in everyday life and within established listening communities, along with networks of inherited discourse [15]. Yet such knowledge endorses and refines archiving and connected activities while developing a conception of cultural-mnemonic recovery mediated specifically through sound, enabling further probing of practices involved [16].

Habits of Listening in Everyday Life

Sonic sounds constantly flood our ears, whether we consciously try to hear distinct sounds or ignore them. Such existing sonic streams linger through our thoughts, memories, cultural heritage, or collective histories [17]. Soundwalking and sound recording give other kinds of sonic relationships, transforming the aural ambiance of places [1, 8]. Existing in the sonic environment the other people making sounds, natural atmospheres, traffic or factory machines sustaining this awareness and avoidance can lead to a critical listening that invites a transitory surge of auditory imagination hovering between what is and what could have been [1, 9]. Humans modify the environment beyond mere movement through quieting, intensifying, distorting, or blending actions; daily life already participates in sonic materialism [11]. By listening to the surrounding sounds and by a distinctive auditory engagement those sounds become sonic archives [8]. Two externally rooted concerns arise from these incessant articulations of rhythmic and metric patterns. Existence in the contemporary environment resonates with these concerns, yet certain traces had been embedded into the environment long before deliberately composing, perpetuating, and activating rhythmic and metric arrangements centering on or drifting away from

the utterly conditioned temporal alignment [9]. The sounds of others usher in a historical engagement, perhaps triggering a duplication of a nonidentified stance constantly built into being [10].

Ethnography of Listening Communities

Everyday listening takes place within a nexus of sociocultural determinants that influence its practice and shape its associative networks; these influence whether sounds enter memory, and if so how they are processed, related, and retrieved in future encounters [7]. Ethnography of listening communities investigates listening habits in circumscribed locales or among specific social groupings [8]. The premise is that the exploratory identification and description of listening practices, shaped by local conditions and social factors, can reveal how and why individuals periodically select particular sounds from the deluge of available sonic data. Attention is directed to ethnographic methods of sampling and representation crucial to producing accurate accounts of guiding influences without reduction to a singular or homogenized perspective [10]. Sound studies situates sonic phenomena within a framework of interpretation, proposing various analytical angles that inform theoretical understanding of socioacoustic phenomena such as sound objects, sound culture, soundscape and other ontological delineations [11]. Psychoacoustic parameters that formalize perceptual data fall within the province of physical science, yet perceptual response resonates with individual experience and condition, connecting interpretation with experience, intellect, and emotion [12]. Qualitative frameworks of testimony elucidate how sonic material informs sense-making processes and cultural memory, thus extending and amplifying rather than overriding and constraining the deductive analysis of perception [13].

Psychoacoustics and Affect in Sound Studies

The role of psychoacoustics in relation to affect emerges as a significant theme within sound studies [14]. Psychoacoustics provides insights into how listeners perceive sound in terms of pitch, loudness, timbre, and location, while works by literary theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Victor Shklovsky, and whose concepts resonate in the study of sound [15]. Bakhtin's, notion of polyphony refers to the coexistence of distinct voices a Bakhtinian "carnival" aspect exuded by changes in sentiment that creates emotional excess, along with the varieties of sound shaping reception [16]. Bakhtin characterizes a voice emergence dynamic as giving speech an authorial, or otherness quality. Shklovsky's principle of defamiliarization facilitates esthetic perception and engagement through the extra-semiotic qualities and layering of language, an approach similarly applicable to the mix of sound source and selected recording elements [17]. Such perceptual data consequently remains a vital point of entry into sonic artifacts and projects of collective memory [9]. Interaction between psychoacoustic attributes and expressive content emerges within an investigative framework. Sound serves as a primary medium of communication, conveying an array of messages alongside the verbal. The non-verbal dimension delivers diverse, polyphonic content directed toward listeners' intuitive understanding [10]. Psychoacoustics remains a vital tool for apprehending and articulating the myriad qualities embodied in the sound medium and by extension, a significant analytical avenue into sonic archives and the embedded political tensions [11].

Cultural Memory and Sonic Legacies

Social soundscapes and the politics of recording and preservation shape cultural memory, sonic legacies, and relations to the past [12]. Sonic archives possess considerable agency in the mediation and management of memory and its social and political implications; memories are naturally mediated and animated in their re-contemporization through sound archives [13]. In lieu of broader history, institutions curate sound archives according to political interests shaping recognition and disqualification. Independent sound institutes exist, yet still suffer constraints from state authorities and mainstream media [14]. In public memorials and commemorations, gaps and dissonances emerge between diverse memory-gathering practices, and the design of places of remembrance limits commemorative options available to people. Temporal experiences of the past in collective memory undergo radical transformations in periods of rapid technological and social change, challenging archival, regulatory, and documenting strategies; technological and temporal discontinuities in recording practices further disrupt, augment, or obscure the past [15]. Such transformations are perceptible in aboriginal migration toward urban centers, leading to journeys along audible residues of territories in endless re-exploration [16]. Within these discontinuities, sonic archives become a primary means of anchoring temporal experiences and shaping memory work; an expansive activation of archival recordings opened possibilities for intervening with public memory, addressing silences produced by dominant political and societal structures. Definitions and conceptualizations of sound archival and preservation undergoing widespread change and extension owing to the ubiquity of sound and the manifold forms of sonic practices within contemporary societies; archives are being conceived, formatted, and established on sound records and institutions are emerging dedicated exclusively to sonic archival activities. Sound constitutes the prime and fundamental source of Memory, which Sophia Wang proposes as Memory defined through an understanding of wider spectrum [17]. Faraday Museum serves as the test of sound materials on social media through institutional dissemination and data governance

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related-self-defined archive [1, 8]. Sound Archives encountered exploitive clarinet and negotiation suppression clarinet pieces sound archives are taken seriously by academic and civil rights movement to create a dual national soundscape rise community voice in sonic archives [9].

Memory Politics and Soundscapes

Soundscapes are integral to memory politics, shaping collective remembrance and historical narratives [10]. Soundwalks and audio compositions deepen the sense of place and reinforce cultural memory through oral histories and musical rituals [10]. Memorial events often utilize sound to evoke emotional responses and foster social cohesion. Sound technologies play a role in public commemoration, highlighting the affective atmospheres associated with collective histories. Digital memory collapses the distinction between archival and lived memory by combining storage and interactivity [11]. New media provide access to sources previously unavailable and raise questions about their democratic function and interpretive authority. The internet has become an arena for contests over memory interpretation. For example, families of 9/11 victims claimed interpretive authority through their suffering, opposing political and commercial narratives [12]. Critics argue that studies on the politics of memory often overemphasize sites of memory and neglect how audiences interpret and make sense of these sites. Addressing this, communication studies can explore how voices are privileged or marginalized and how memory is shaped, appropriated, or challenged by new media [11].

Sound Destinations: Public Spaces and Rituals

Public rituals serve as important markers in group and individual memory as they are embedded with strong emotion and constructed narratives [12]. Whenever such rituals take place in selected sites, they become sound destinations. Memorials become vital rehearsal for national or political identity [13]. When the sound destination becomes embedded into extra-ordinary public demos or the rituals become overtly political, the dual sound destination concurrently points towards the funeral of the previous social order and the ritual of constructing the new order [14]. These are sonic examples from various cultural background including space designing of the large mass dance in PRC, the Burok ritual performed during the cornerstone laying ceremony in Singapore, the composition premiered in Democrazy concert during the Asian financial crisis, and post-2011 Arab spring sound cities in Khartoum, Cairo and Sanaa [12]. Records of spatially-oriented sonic data generate a better understanding of spatial and temporal qualities of sound and their social meanings. Sounds of public space fostering conviviality have been stored in sound junk shop located in McDonald's throughout Taiwan [14]. Recordings are annotated with traces of conversations indicating how sonic details of public space affect the engagement of the people [15]. Sound collection of familiar spaces within the community and their related sounds and conversation mark the sonic map the space starts in the community [13].

Technological Mediation and Temporal Discontinuity

In the wake of the Digital Turn, preserving archival materials has become more difficult, as successive emergent technologies impose temporal discontinuity between the recorded medium and current listening experiences [16]. Today, users listen to sound recordings without the ability to perceive the various materials supports carrying or reproducing these traces and layers of information [14]. Recordings that may have once been heard in a specific historical context are now conjoined or juxtaposed with other recordings from widely different epochs and situations [17]. Changes in technology also foster new modes of attention, engagement, temporal focus, and modes of aesthetic experience. The record industry gradually developed a more homogeneous, universal, and standardized type of sound that worked almost equally well in a broadcasting transmission, or a recording, or in "live" performance [5]. Because, within an emergent technology, it became possible to actualize sound in temporally discontinuous ways, multiples, and reproductions or "transaudiences", Yves Citton new modes of engagement and experience arose [6]. In the early stages of the recording medium, translations and reproductions of a pre-recording-now-in-the-medium works, genres, styles, discourses, and pretreatments also had accompanying composite media such as scripts or scores [7]. Records of contemporary materials hence tended to remain relatively concentrated on them. At the intersections of several disciplines, the sonic humanities analyse the practice of listening from a broad range of perspectives permitting mixtures of music, literature, sound, image, and technology [8].

Interdisciplinary Approaches and Methodologies

Sonic Humanities occupy the interdisciplinary field that investigates the role of sound in shaping human experience [9]. As an emerging domain, it takes on a set of questions, platforms, technologies, objects, etc. from sound studies, but it addresses new objects for inquiry and at different spatial and temporal scales. Often combined with time-based media, sonic materials enable broader understanding of human life and constitute a more direct mode of communication [10]. As such, Sonic Humanities approach can yield different, often unexpected, and at times poetic understanding of things, events, and phenomena taking place across routine and extraordinary human lives [11]. Sonic Humanities interrogate sound archives, listening practices, and cultural memory [9]. A sound

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archive by any definition widens the notion of an archive to historical, physical, sound, public events, felt space, and temporal elements [1]. Following the standard historical synopsis, sound archive-specific institutions and repertoire exemplifying and delineating archival paradigm shifts are outlined historically within major epochs [7]. Individuations of sound history determine the emergence or expansion of sound archives, while also partially dictating the accompanying repertoire [12].

Digital Humanities and Generative Auditory Data

Extended and intensively data-driven forms of analysis for audiovisual and sound data have emerged out of the Digital Humanities. Analyses of large cultural datasets raise questions about data governance, reproducibility, and the limits of interpretation [13]. Generative auditory data, computer sound that is generated rather than recorded, can serve to explore and extend the concept of “data-as-thing” [14]. A historical archive of orality, sound, and listening is equally, if not more, crucial for shaping a sonic humanities. Such an account opens avenues for the theoretical and methodological integration of sound studies and anthropology, examining how sonic-material entities and generative phenomena embody sociality and cultural forms [15]. The respective concepts of sound, archival sound, artifact, environment, emergence, landscape, legacy, materiality, place, practice, and transmission intersect in distinctive institutional, discursive, infrastructural, and public modalities of archive and recording practice [16]. Significant dissimilarities also emerge in the archive sites, sound-generating phenomena, social practices, and content-addressing notions circulating within and across these formations [17]. National archives and community archives provide an important comparison in site, governance, access, and community engagement. A national sound archive in its various national and institutional forms locates the sound-archival enterprise alongside associated library, film, photo, video, and media formations within the field of cultural memory, complementing each component that is situated within its own archive [1]. The distinction between oral-history interview holdings and other speech, field-recording, performance, and sound documents illustrates further modalities of the sound archive [2]. Community sound archives often align such holdings with narrative, cultural-heritage, and community-expression agendas, extending either in conjunction with or substantially beyond oral history towards sound ecology, remembrance, sharing, storytelling, transmission, and vitality [4].

Sound Studies and Anthropological Perspectives

Sonic Humanities investigate how sound archives and listening practices underpin cultural memory. Archival holdings shape historical knowledge and collective identity while listening constitutes a key everyday practice of social and cultural meaning-making. Interdisciplinary case studies examine national sound archives, oral histories, and sonic memorials [1]. The scope of sound practice encompasses the dimensions of sound creation and performance [2]. Sound humanities address wider engagement with sound as disciplinary concern and the systematic recording and analysis of sound recording focuses on ethnomusicology, sound studies, and oral history [1]. The term “sonic humanities” denotes published scholarship that situates sound within humanistic studies, and on the production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of sound throughout broader cultural contexts [3]. The prefix of sonic distinguishes the materiality of individual artifact and artifact-formation from the generic term sound [4]. The deliberative prefix of sonic alerts that oral and sonic archives comprise a broader spectrum of experiences over sound, even if listening-preparation centers on sonic as sonic-related [5].

Legal, Ethical, and Provenance Considerations

An archive is often perceived as a repository. Authorized institutions collect material and reclaim it from materiality. Society reclaims its past through documentation [3]. The scarcity of sound archives reveals problems of ownership and aesthetic privilege. The proliferation of recording devices, such as smartphones and the cheap amplification of sounds, enables the crowd to record, collect, compose, and share sound [4]. Recording is generally treated as a commonplace act. Listening is assumed to be free, spontaneous, and widely shared. Sound archives and cultural collections hold reminders of the particular, the precious, and the slow. Cultural records are a means to recover forgotten histories [5]. Sound takes on new importance as a means to formulate an archive in the shadow of scanning technologies. Sound recordings demand an expanded notion of the cultural archive. Freely available, licensed, and openly accessible recordings reinforce but never replace their counterparts in private collections, granting greater power and visibility to authors, artists, estates, and corporations [6]. Recorded works demand a cultural and artistic, rather than merely commercial, archive. A sound archive is also a social network, a collection of time-based practices presented publicly through material form [7]. One community archive opens access and restores agency beyond the artistic and cultural elite; artists are enabled to engage with sound in times of transition and have instantaneous widespread public circulation. Sound open channels of history and memory and an awareness of colonization, the nuclear age, and political violence [8]. The vernacular collection of sound requires a new perception of the sound archive, of collecting, training, expertise, heritage and selection. Situating sound within the archive introduces fresh questions of publicness, assistance, guidance, and attribution. Sound archives recruit and empower [9]. Vernacular sound invites listening as a cultural, memorial, historical, and

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contemporary act. Sound formats such as forces and processes require new approaches to transmission [10, 11]. The existence of supported sounds, places, or spaces that carry significance in privatized music amplifies the importance of social meaning [12, 13]. Sound is addressed as a social nuisance. Sound clutters public environments [15].

Case Studies in Sonic Humanities

Sonic archives, often categorized as oral history archives, sound record archives, and ethnomusic archives, offer audio recordings along with metadata but neglect the public [2]. National sound archives document a country's sound heritage. Community sound archives emerge from a grassroots interest where local sound material is documented and preserved for the community [3]. The government can develop an infrastructure for national sound archives to secure audio material at the community level [4]. Oral histories concern sound- and phonetic-based audio. Ethnographic field recordings equipped with consent procedures are collaborative projects where both the collector and the sound contributor are present or aware of the archive. Community sound archives should adopt a collection strategy based on citizens' preferences aligned with their community sound needs [5]. Community sound recordings and public domain require a clearer indication that the contributor and collector are aware of the consent and collection process. Sonic memorials constitute public remembrance and public art projects [6]. Supporting formal frameworks such as public art frameworks foster quality projects in sonic humanities applicable to outside communities and internationally [1].

National and Community Sound Archives

Sound archives help communities integrate the sonic past into collective memory and identity. The Australian National Film and Sound Archive has offered access to sound recordings since 2007 [3]. Museums Victoria began a Conversation Starter program in 2011 to encourage deep listening of archived sound recordings and public discussion about their significance, especially regarding place [4]. In each venue, informal conversations among accessible groups have moderated responses to sound excerpts. These frameworks promote inclusivity and community participation in the construction of cultural memory and heritage [4, 5].

Oral Histories and Field Recordings

Archival sound recordings are now widely recognized as important cultural documents that can underpin diverse musical and artistic practices, including electroacoustic music [6, 7]. The use of oral histories and field recordings has become increasingly widespread [8]. Collection of oral histories and field recordings raises core issues of cultural memory; the relationship between literacy and the uses of sound; modes of establishing rights to, obtaining access to, and maintaining control over ethnographic documents; appropriate strategies for acquiring these documents; the values of preserving the original recording and/or the subsequent electroacoustic realization; and ways of indicating the kind and degree of alteration that have been applied to the documents [9]. Archiving projects featuring personal testimony or field recording materials have been undertaken by a variety of community organizations—public sound archives, libraries, arts councils, and heritage initiatives, and many want to make significant contributions to the sonic-archiving and memory-discourse frameworks pioneered in local/wider contexts by emergent-sound-archives initiatives which already respond to key constituent issues [10]. Most oral history and field-recording materials consist of interviews, conversations, or environmental sounds captured directly in the moment of recording, and concern the description of a person, place, or event in the here-and-now. However, the sonic palettes of oral histories and field recordings have in many electroacoustic works been subjected to extensive re-mixage and temporal or spatial re-organization that radically decouple them from the original referents, creating distinctive kinds of memory work [11]. The tangibility of sound recordings, unlike photographs, written documents, and other forms of archiving that have to be dug out and re-converted into a currently comprehensible state, has allowed artefacts such as beams-of-a-light-conversation to remain in circulation and continue to resonate in selective discursive moments [16].

Sonic Memorials and Commemorative Projects

Commemorative projects intentionally engage with the concept of cultural memory, establishing dialogues between pre-existing stones and sonic proposals as reminders of the meanings attached to them as well as invitations to remember [17]. The stone memorials unveil perspectives on events pertaining to a history of violence and trauma; hence the nature of the sonic proposals develops the lines of inquiry into what they invite audiences to listen for and what other pasts those memorials might be associated with in the listening twenty years after [10, 11]. Personal and collective memory remains salient not only in the inscriptive decisions but also within the affordances of the sites and strategies implemented through sound [8].

Challenges, Gaps, and Future Directions

Sonic Humanities concern themselves with the production, circulation, and reception of sonic materials sounds, listening practices, and cultures [9]. Engagement with these materials from across the human sciences has flourished in recent decades, but without recourse to sonic archives, such efforts remain dangerously incomplete.

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To counter the pervasive elision of sound from collective memory, Sonic Humanities emerge as a global, interdisciplinary enterprise directed toward the study of sound archives, listening practices, and cultural memory [10]. Sonic Humanities at once develop arguments, offer perspectives, and showcase practices across a diversity of scales. They consider the semiautonomous formation and destruction of sound archives, describing national recording initiatives and wide-ranging community projects as they unfold in varied sociocultural contexts [11]. They investigate listening practices, examining sonic materials encountered during every day commuting and domestic activities, as well as longer-form sound situated within artistic, ceremonial, and public contexts [12]. They explore the cultural memory enabled through sound archives and the listening practices enacted upon them, revealing community identities and broader historical narratives within longstanding and emergent sonic legacies. Sonic Humanities also integrate diverse disciplinary frameworks and modes of description [13]. Attention to generative auditory data complements digital humanities perspectives among the social sciences. Anthropological listening studies extend the interpretive-historical work of sound studies by augmenting acoustic scrutiny with longitudinal ethnographic engagement [14]. The digital turn inspires both renewed interest and intensified uncertainty regarding the futures of sound. Questions around Indigenous sound knowledge, support of Sonic Humanities among underrepresented communities, and the whereabouts of recorded sounds arise from fieldwork with national sound archives [15]. Collective intelligence remains inadequately theorized as a foundation for comparative understanding, yet cross-disciplinary collaboration with law and the practices of sound archives emphasizing rights, ownership, and stewardship has produced a robust overview of emergent legal and ethical challenges [16]. Collaborative livestreamed events themselves remedial engagements with temporality hold disruptive potential for global conversations regarding the significance of sound. In extending the breadth of international partnership and soliciting engagements from an expanded constellation of actors, Sonic Humanities can accelerate their establishment as a distinct field [17].

Equity of Access and Indigenous Sound Knowledge

Centring Indigenous sound knowledge is crucial for communities as well as for pursuing equity of access. Principles of Indigenous data sovereignty invoke self-determination, responsibility, local control, and equitable benefit [10]. Models for sonic engagement that challenge unequal power relations and promote respectful listening, recording, and sharing have been developed in various Indigenous contexts and shared across networks [11]. Sound archives have blossomed across Asia since the late twentieth century, yet they still have the potential to undermine Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and roles in cultural memories [12]. Political instability, regional conflicts, and colonial histories hamper equitable development, provision, and usage of Asian sound archives and sonic-material programming [13]. Attention to the value of sound and various sonic practices in everyday life would promote active and multidimensional language memory, identity construction, and historical interpretation across diverse contexts and genres [14]. Sound archives and their sonic-material programming can help amend inequitable access and material shortcomings for archive uses, while active listening that draws on people's lived realities and historical continuities offers an alternative to engagement through often unattainable artifacts of record [15].

Preservation in the Digital Turn

Sound archives have gained renewed interest since the 1990s due to the emergence of various digital formats. However, the preservation of sonic artifacts remains crucial because, as with other media, material degradation threatens analog still-content archives [14]. Digital archives face concerns about diminishing access to legacy formats and disappearance of media. SONUS infrastructural projects and digital-sound archives have been devised to reinforce many cultural memories and legacies [15]. The utility of digital platforms hinges on the persistence of the underlying material and formats; therefore, continuous analysis throughout the material's lifecycle can safeguard their viability [2]. Digitization of recordings, whether sound or video, constitutes preservation to curtail media-downstream obsolescence that could render digital content unavailable [16]. Study of the older and more desktop-recording-oriented segment of the CCRMA collection, housed on three-inch and one-quarter-inch tapes, audio cassettes, and MiniDisc has shown that these digital-content recordings remain fully accessible and connectable through the appropriate devices [15]. Consequently, initial focus has shifted to the physical integrity of media, with the support of fresh collections and an ethos valuing the original objects, environments, and documents [16]. Since a wide variety of media continue to circulate and contribute opportunities for joint projects with diverse partners, endeavors towards the long-range movement of collections have persisted [17]. Initially established to promote the preservation of a vast collection of acoustic and electroacoustic music before its imminent obsolescence, mainly in the form of digital tape, research involvement has shifted toward the maturing of those circumstances, largely via prescriptive analyses geared toward mapping the dimensional dispersal of preservation challenges [17]. Drawing on the arrangements formed, an additional segmentation of preservation activities highlights three primary trajectories: preservation within analogue formats residing in current

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accessibility; the preservation-rehabilitation and augmentation of digitally-captured objects previously readied for preservation yet remaining rendered through environments that invite deterioration; and, far more rarely yet possibly with even greater impact, restoration operations directed toward Media and Sound Arts constructs exhibiting the clearest synergies with preservation initiatives already underway [15].

Methodological Refinement and Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

The sonic humanities framework, which foregrounds active modes of listening and the artifacts that accompany those practices, remains a promising, yet underutilized entry-point for investigating the archives of sound within sound studies [15]. To expand upon this initial engagement with the field, the sonic humanities construct detailed maps of the theoretical landscape surrounding sound archives, listening, and cultural memory. The topics under consideration highlight pressing methodological and ethical issues while modeling viable cross-disciplinary collaborations that resonate with sound studies communities [16]. Clarifying these aspects not only strengthens ongoing work in the sonic humanities but also channels the epistemological insights from sound studies into the adjacent humanities, where listening practices and sonic artifacts confront their greatest institutional and disciplinary obstacles [15]. Already, archival practices have much to offer sound studies in the areas of theory, method, and ethics [16]. Countering dominant epistemologies in many sound studies paradigms, sonic-cultural memories collected from vivifying to draw on the vocabulary of Giorgio Agamben yet constellational invoking W. J. T. Mitchell's term artifacts remain accessible long after the moment of their production [17]. Reciprocally, sound studies frameworks are stimulating work in the humanities, inviting scholars to interrogate archives assembled as tangible, audible, and other-than-visual traces of cultural expression. Projects set forth the concurrent invitation and challenge of connecting established archiving practices with emergent frameworks emanating from neighboring fields [7].

CONCLUSION

Sonic Humanities offers a significant interdisciplinary framework for understanding the relationship between sound, memory, identity, and cultural heritage. By examining sound archives and listening practices, the field demonstrates that sound is not an ephemeral experience but a powerful historical resource capable of preserving collective narratives, revealing marginalized histories, and shaping contemporary understandings of the past. Sound archives serve as important spaces of cultural memory, yet their formation, preservation, accessibility, and interpretation are influenced by institutional structures, technological changes, and social power relations. Consequently, questions of ownership, representation, and ethical stewardship remain central to the future development of sonic archival practices. The study highlights that listening is an active cultural practice through which individuals and communities construct meaning, maintain traditions, and engage with historical experiences. Everyday listening, oral histories, soundscapes, and sonic memorials illustrate how auditory experiences contribute to belonging and identity formation. Furthermore, technological advancement has transformed the possibilities of sound preservation and dissemination, enabling broader access while introducing challenges related to digital obsolescence, metadata management, and the continuity of archival materials. Future directions in Sonic Humanities require greater collaboration among archivists, researchers, communities, technologists, and legal practitioners to create inclusive and sustainable approaches to sound preservation. Particular attention must be given to Indigenous knowledge systems, community-based archives, and underrepresented sonic histories to address inequalities within existing archival structures. By embracing interdisciplinary methodologies and ethical frameworks, Sonic Humanities can continue to expand the understanding of sound as a vital source of cultural memory, historical interpretation, and social connection. Ultimately, the study of sound archives and listening practices reveals that societies do not only remember through texts and images but also through the voices, rhythms, and sounds that continue to shape human experiences across time and place.

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