The "digital butterfly net" of ethnomusicologists and its impact on audiovisual archiving

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The paper discusses the changing self-understanding of ethnomusicologists from enthusiasts pioneering in forgotten areas of the world to a species of networking researchers using all facilities of the World Wide Web and audiovisual databases. Aside from some unclear interpretations of user rights, there are important ethical challenges to observe, which are based on a fast re-positioning of humanities in the actual field of scientific efficiency. What will remain from the sublime discoverer's attitude and what will be the substance of another quality in ethnomusicological research? Talking about the "digital butterfly net" we should focus on what we call a "butterfly" and how it changes its shape, rather than re-examine its digital being. Finally we have to re-examine our supposedly universal parameters of "scientific efficiency" from different viewpoints, and we should become aware of prospective demands which need to be met by audiovisual archivists and ethnomusicologists in their socio-functional context.

Introduction

In the last decades, ethnomusicologists have continuously changed their aims regarding the material they gather for their own scientific purposes.[75] From today's point of view, it is hard to recall the prevailing sound environment as well as the revolutionary changes regarding sound capture and conservation around a hundred years ago, when the only way to reproduce music was through a further live performance. The option of listening to music and sound from places outside the average living space of developed areas in Europe and Northern America seemed to be unaffordable. Thus the quite awful sound of a cylinder recording was the window to the unknown sound world, and was deemed worth keeping. Compared to first class live sound, the sound was a fascinating mystery. Thus field recordings inherited an aura, which came to take on a life of its own.

In the very first days of field recorded sound, some musically interested people – not yet musicologists – recorded music just because the possibility existed. They carried equipment and material over long distances to challenge technology and to prove their ability to deal with it. The shape of that butterfly seemed to be determined by adventures that had to be survived getting to the field and getting back in 'civilization'.[76] Gouda describes the package coming with the aura:

> Europeans have depicted native peoples as unruly children, for example, or as mystics who wallowed in a spiritual harmony with nature revealed in an existential freedom that most citizens of the modern Western world had long since lost. In this construction native people became idealized 'strangers in paradise', who lived their daily lives without conflicts and contradictions and were unhampered by private property or divisions of labor. (Gouda 2008: 119).

The recorded music and the performing people were more or less a confirmation of the geographic distance travelled and the apparent strangeness of their cultural expressions. Today, while talking with sound engineers or technicians who sometimes accompany field excursions, a few of these attitudes can still be observed. However, real enthusiasts were growing in the shadow of the presumed business, who – although wrongly – aimed at a revived philosophy of musical universality through technological progress:

75 Some of them strongly assert their difference from comparative musicologists. This seems to be fully understandable insofar as comparative musicology is strongly identified with the early Berlin school. On the other hand – just discussing the method of comparison – this association between today's ethnomusicologists, and comparative musicology, does not seem to be a necessary one. Fortunately, such aversions do not affect other fields of the humanities such as comparative linguistics or comparative sciences of cultures. The method of comparison, which is always our independent presump tion, between issues we already know and issues we learn later, cannot be blamed for limited world views and resulting wrong directions that emerged from a few ideas of the early Berlin school of Comparative Musicology. However, even those so-called wrong directions were not completely useless.

76 As for example, Cecil Sharp, one of the first 'hunters' or his predecessor Francis James Child, who was robbing rather than hunting.

…it will not become so as long as our musical vision is limited to the output of 4 European countries between 1700 and 1900. The first step in the right direction is to view the music of all peoples and periods without prejudice of any kind, and to strive to put the world's known and available best music into circulation. (Grainger, Percy, broadcast over radio WEVD, New York, 20 June, 1933 – quoted according to Balough 1982: 113).

Rank growth with principles

When sound recorded in the field became available via broadcasts and on records, the particular aura of field recordings was strongly kept alive, although more than a few recordings were done in well-equipped studios or under comfortable staged conditions all over the world.[77] The guild of early ethnomusicologists – who were not yet called as such, but were emerging in those years of technological news on account of their desire to organize their sublime studies even more effectively, or at least for their wish to ease hard field work consisting of long hours spent with the transcription diary on their knees in strange surroundings and under strange conditions – was initiated by ethnographers such as Jesse Walter Fewkes[78] or Béla Vikár,[79] described by Bartók as "the well-known man of letters and folklorist, who, without any musical knowledge, was the first to have recourse to a phonograph" (Bartók, Suchoff 1992: 60). Bartók learnt, possibly from Percy Grainger, the importance of the phonograph as a working tool in research. Far more influential on later ethnomusicological studies was the work of the Russian folklorist Evgeniya Lineva, who "was perhaps the first person ever to use the phonograph for field recordings, in 1897" (Bird 1999: 121), which is not true (since we know that Fewkes recorded in 1890), but nevertheless it seemed to be important in the competitive relationship among nations of that time. Unfortunately she started to de-personalize recordings through grouping of recordings and averaging out in simplified transcriptions. Hence she had a certain influence on creating musical nationalism, as seen in Stravinsky's compositions, which occasionally incorporate her "scientifically proven" folk chorus style as an indication of being truly Russian (Cross 2003: 16). Her documentation practice was widely adopted among East European ethnographers and later ethnomusicologists.

In Great Britain, as Bird describes in his Percy Grainger biography, the

> system of collecting was almost ideal, but it proved to be a source of argument in subsequent years between Grainger, Cecil Sharp and other members of the folk-song 'establishment'. Not only did it throw into bold relief a sharp divergence of attitude to the basic folk-song material, but it threatened to expose the frequently hit-and-miss and sometimes dishonest techniques of other collectors. Grainger had little faith in the pencil-and-pad approximations of his contemporaries. (Bird 1999: 121f.).

Despite the wide and wild collecting of whatever was accessible, the main purpose of collecting musical expressions as well as spoken folktales, poems or childrens' rhymes of that period was the "scientification" of musicology using the measuring tools of the so-called exact sciences. Frequencies were one of the important areas of discussion. Nowadays some of the very early outcomes appear ridiculous as for example the insight of Ellis himself in co-operation with Alfred James Hipkins, who found that the prevalent notion that pentatonic scales had developed in Asian cultures because of insensitivity to the subtleties of the semitone: "It is found that intervals of three-quarters and five-quarters of a Tone, and even more, occur. Hence the real division of the Octave in a pentatonic scale is very varied".[80] But it did not prevent later errors arising, for the earliest seem always to be the most enduring.

77 For example, Ellis and Hipkins, specialists on temperament and pitch of the Broadwood Piano Company, measured non-diatonic and so called non-harmonic tunings of Asian instruments that were brought to Europe. They studied Central Javanese music during a gamelan appearance at the London Aquarium 1882 and Chinese court music at the International Health Exhibition in 1884.

78 Fewkes made the first 'field recordings' in 1890 among the Passamaquoddy Indians of Maine. He tried to document the existing lifestyle and rituals of the Zuni and Hopi tribes, and made the first phonograph recordings of Zuni songs.

79 The Hungarian Béla Vikár (1859–1945) began recording in the field in 1896.

80 Journal of the Society of Arts, 1884, Oxford University. No page number.

So, we still find similar expressions in many modern scientific works (Gramit 2002: 53; Jackson and Pelkey 2005:145, 162).

As well as the first musicological insights, a major focus within the Berlin school, early records were made for eternity. The year of production was rarely printed on the record label. The belief that the transitoriness of music, dependent on real-time, could be captured on a wax cylinder or on a disc, resulted in the delusion that music could be captured and measured for eternity. Another misconception resulting from the aim of recording for eternity was that these captured musical expressions are fixed for ever and the material itself becomes eternal as well. From the viewpoint of audiovisual archivists who deal with early collections it can be said:

> Both the collectors in the field and those whose sources were totally eclectic were intent on publishing the fruits of their work. It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the means of collecting and between the kinds of song collections that were published. It is also necessary to distinguish between the collecting of songs, by whatever means, and scholarship about collected songs. Although it may appear paradoxical, the first published collections of traditional songs were drawn from eclectic sources, and were followed later by the results of collecting in the field. The term 'song collections' is therefore used for an anthology of songs from various sources; and 'song collector' for a person who collects and edits such songs for publication. A compilation of songs gathered from 'live' informants and performers in the field is regarded as a volume of 'collected songs', and the gatherer and compiler of such a collection is referred to as a 'collector of songs'" (Shepherd 2003: 43).

Increasingly, the world of ethnomusicological research became a world of recorded material rather than of live music practice. Charles Seeger advised Sidney Robertson…"record everything! …Don't select, don't omit, don't concentrate on any single style. We know so little! Record everything!" (Pescatello 1992: 141; also Baranovitch 1999: 159). Unfortunately, many recordings, which were completed in the trance of new technological possibilities, experienced not only a technical but also a descriptive abstraction. Questions like "do you have any Tasmania?", were standard.

Another observation is that collected material was more closely identified with the collector than with the collected subjects, hence it included not only the common abstraction according to regions but also the collector's conceptualisations, and it gained a life of its own. Thus the ethnomusicological butterflies already had to be taxidermically prepared, and this process was done by lower-level colleagues or enthusiastic students.

Early ethnomusicology, which is nowadays often interpreted as an extension of colonial intervention (Bohlman in New Grove 2005: Ethnomusicology, Post 1945 developments), was an eclectic and individualistic field of research, invented to prove emotional presumptions with evolving systematics, rather than a well established scientific fundament of cultural colonialism, or, worse still, of cultural proselytizing. Personal interest, professional and cultural orientations crossed each other in a way that national or other lineages could be (and unfortunately were) constructed from various perspectives. The assumed knowledge was monopolized in private research archives or university libraries; the competition took place in written form. Through those discussions, rather than through real joint achievements of fieldwork and connected recording techniques, came a theory and subject of diverse arguments that followed diverse directions, as, for example, Jeff Titon seems to suggest, stemming from *the one and only*: "fieldwork relied on in-person observation and on data gathering through structured interviews, a method derived from the Trobriand Island practice of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski during World War I" (Titon 1997: 88).

At the same time, ethical considerations circulated, appealing to the researchers' responsibility:

> In all cases, though, 'ethnography' denotes both intensive and extensive study of a human population. While it may involve formal or informal interviewing, it is distinct from journalism in that it is not "covering a story" but 'accounts for lives'. Ethnographers may focus, for example, on one class fraction or ethnic or racial population, one age group or one gender, but they do so within the context of overarching class and racial/ethnic formation, of the specificities of life course, of prevailing gender relations for that population. They may account for lives in the present, but they do so (or at least good ethnographers do nowadays) in a larger historical context" (Leonardo 2006: 207; (see also Shelemay 1997: 189-204).

Developments from that practice existed namely in the approaches of Mantle Hood, Alan Merriam, John Blacking, Gerhard Kubik, Artur Simon and several others, who were pointing to ethnomusicology as a new science worth incorporating into university curricula. Thus

> the identity of ethnomusicology in the practices and products of its scholars and in its academic and pedagogical structures became increasingly canonized in the decades after World War II, while in the decades approaching the end of the 20th century disciplinary boundaries began to blur in new ways, especially in the 1990s, precisely at a historical moment in which ethnomusicology was enjoying its most influential presence among the humanities and social sciences" (Bohlman ibid.).

This recognition had effects on recording institutions and on the recorded subjects themselves, as Aubert and Ribeiro describe:

> Some specialist publishers dedicate themselves to this domain with expertise and discernment;[81] others, mostly concerned with the mass market, make occasional incursions according to the economic potential that such-and-such a fashionable genre or famous artist represents. But these are rare exceptions, and most recordings only have an insignificant financial impact on the market, and therefore on the owners; or rather the performers of the genres in question. It is always useful to proclaim that a part of the royalties and other profits from such-and-such a disc has been given to the community of origin, and that a copy of the recording has been scrupulously restored to them or, if they do not have the means to use it, that it has been transferred to a local expert or representative institution" (Aubert and Ribeiro 2007: 66-67).

Here, the impact on audiovisual archiving becomes clearly evident. The scientific by-product is recorded sound and/or moving images, which make audible and which visualize the past of something that the common ethnomusicologist as well as the common ethnographer tries to understand. This "something" is the aim – the audiovisual outcome serves that aim, but it is not the aim itself. Although Aubert and Ribeiro describe an average case, the real practice seems to apply also to those audiovisual recordings, which were used for research far from their place of creation. Most of these recordings – whatever adventures were connected to their making – are entombed in audiovisual archives of the world with the same gesture of futility for inheriting scholars and their small community.

Controlled growth without principles?

As foreseen by Bohlman (2005) and several other ethnomusicologists, the 'ethno' in ethnomusicology became inconsistent itself due to the enormous growth of technology and migration dynamics which did not only involve living space, but, more importantly, social changes and re-definitions of socio-cultural identities. The discussion about authenticity is becoming ludicrous. Order and distinctiveness are questioned. How can musical expressions as products characterise cultural affiliations in today's world? How representative of

81 Footnote of the author: for example Nonesuch records, Ocora, Pan-Records and others (Post 2004).

diversity in human life is the recorded manifestation? It seems that the more boundaries blur, the more categories rigidify in ethnomusicological discussions.[82] Ethnic pigeonholes still play a central role in many respects and recorded audiovisual material provides evidence even to sometimes contradictory interpretations. Again the material does not represent the recorded subjects, but rather the strength of evidence according to the researcher's opinion.

Blacking once said about Grainger's visions:

> The widely used label of 'ethnic' music implicitly denies the existence of the individual creative impulse, which has enabled people throughout history and in all parts of the world to produce infinite varieties of beautiful music. Percy Grainger hoped that knowledge and appreciation of this variety would become commonplace, so that music might become a universal language (Blacking 1989: 2).

Bearing in mind the actual situation, individualising – or re-individualising in view of early instances of recorded sound – instead of universalising musical language could be a step worth considering.

So, let us accept that butterflies can mutate individually. How does it affect audiovisual archiving?

In the era of growing internet facilities, the average ethnomusicologist, and especially the student ethnomusicologist, finds the most interesting mutations on the internet; the recording quality may be poor but the metadata that can divulge the whole recording, description, storage and access environment of a single recorded item. Networking groups of students can reach all corners of the world and find out where the best ukulele players or *belian*[83] singers are concentrated, which repertoire they play or sing, how often, with which cultural ideology they sympathise, and other less important matters – parts coming together in a completely different butterfly model. Observing this community of modernised researchers, Malinowski might well cry in his diary of structured interviews.

The role of audiovisual archivists, finally, is to provide the wild horde of a new ethnomusicological generation with sound and moving images of respectable recording quality. The more knowledge of environmental and technical details is shared in a welcome democratic way via the internet, the more sophisticated become qualitative demands. Archivists turn into networking networkers and have to manage a huge amount of (more or less competent) requests. Nowadays, everybody seems to have become a little ethnomusicologist.

In the past, access was controlled through "hardware" institutions. Now, access is controlled through a barely comprehensible software market. Collected sound is ordinarily distributed outside of institutions, and cannot be classified or peer reviewed. The amount of possible subjects to be studied is countless. Thus institutionalised audiovisual recordings take on a new function in guiding interests, and promoting – finally – the recorded subjects. For researchers are no longer limited by territorial access, unaffordable recording equipment or travel difficulties, and their aim is changing accordingly. They get away from monopolised knowledge areas of schools and lineages and come closer to the very practice they were claiming as their primary subject: the musical life of people in its vast diversity, embedded into a thoroughly-investigated context of time and space, slowly leaving the cultural circle of ethnic determination and encountering a more holistic view of the music's real environment, not only with regard to actual music practice, but also considering historical reviews and individual fates. This process is no less contradictory, as Aubert and Ribeiro comment:

82 See discussions on cultural 'ownership' of genres, musical instruments, even single songs or pieces, especially as a discursive tool of post-socialist foundations of nationhood.

83 A kind of chant of the Kenyah people on Borneo.

> The music genres of the world have certainly acquired merchant values; but they remain above all human values, in the noblest sense of the term. Their appearance in our immediate environment returns to us today an echo of society we live in: a society in crisis, questioning its foundations due to the recent eruption of plurality, but especially a society in mutation… (Aubert and Ribeiro 2007: 67-68).

Conclusion

Thus audiovisual archivists have to move on to become qualified guides and promoters. Although they always act as individuals, they are called on to respect the whole scientific background. That means the end of generalisation and the end of those once-so-comfortable universal audiovisual archivists who just had to consider all rules of TC-03 and TC-04 and did not need any further updates. The audiovisual archivist, still maintaining the best quality of audiovisual sources, becomes the most important controlling factor due to their competence. S/he should be the butterfly net him/herself. Therefore we urgently need to encourage archiving ethnomusicologists and ethnomusicological archivists to create a new species: the "sound environmentalist".

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