

The Reel Living Dead: Tales of Sounds from the Archival Vaults in Memory of Elizabeth Travassos¹

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Abstract: Audiovisual archives were an essential component of the emergence of the fields of comparative musicology and its successor, Ethnomusicology. By the end of the 20th century archives seemed to be less important to the ethnographic study of musical performances. Most researchers analyzed only their own recordings, not those collected by others. This paper suggests that during the past 15 years archives have a renewed ethical, political, and artistic importance. The author describes examples of returning collections to communities for them to use at critical moments in their self-transformation. Collections like those Elizabeth Travassos curated at the Museu de Folklore Edison Carneiro early in her professional career may have continued life in Brazilian culture in spite of the damage inflicted on the recordings by the passage of time.

Keywords: Audiovisual archives. Field recordings. Ethnomusicology. Elizabeth Travassos. Brazil

Da morte à vida: contos sobre coleções sonoras e fonotecas em memória de Elizabeth Travassos

Resumo: As fonotecas tiveram um papel essencial no desenvolvimento das disciplinas de musicologia comparativa no início do século 20 e de sua herdeira, a etnomusicologia. Depois, no final do século 20, as fonotecas pareciam menos importantes e muitos pesquisadores somente analisaram suas próprias gravações, e não as gravações de outras pessoas. O autor descreve exemplos do retorno de coleções para as comunidades onde foram colhidas para serem usados em momentos críticos. Sugere-se que durante os últimos 15 anos fonotecas ganharam um crescente importância ética, política, e artística. Coleções, como aquelas que Elizabeth Travassos se responsabilizou no Museu Folclore Edison Carneiro no início da sua carreira, possam ter uma nova e importante vida na cultura brasileira, apesar nos danos de deterioração e de tempo.

Palavras-chave: Fonotecas. Gravações para pesquisa. Ethnomusicologia. Elizabeth Travassos. Brasil

¹ This is an extensively revised version of a paper I presented at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. I am grateful to the audience for their reactions and questions. A video of original presentation is available online at <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/music/reel-living-dead/>.

This is a paper about how things can have a life many years after they apparently disappear. I present it here in memory of Elizabeth Travassos. She was my student in ethnology at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social at the Museu Nacional in the 1970s and wrote her Master's dissertation on the music of Kaiabi shamans based on field research she did under my orientation in the Parque Indígena do Xingu. The field research was difficult (it almost always is) and her husband Antônio could only accompany her once, but she confronted the challenges with grace and a lot of good humor. Her quick mind and laughter remained with me throughout the subsequent decades as she undertook new research and heavy responsibilities in the development of the collections of the Museu do Folclore Edison Carneiro and of ethnomusicology at UNIRIO and in Brazil more generally. Of all my Brazilian graduate students, Elizabeth was the only one that became responsible for the collections of an audiovisual archive and produced LP discs, as I did after I left Brazil in 1982. We both worked for a time at national museums—I at the Smithsonian Institution and she at what is now called the Museu Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular in Rio de Janeiro where among other things she was responsible for the audiovisual collections. We discussed some of those collections the last time I saw her, at the Palavra Cantada 3 conference in 2011.

Just hearing the word “archive” (*acervo*) is better than a sleeping pill to put most people to sleep. A paper about archives is something you might plan to skip over for something more interesting in this issue of *Debates*. The word calls up images of large damp rooms filled with old abandoned things no one wants anymore, often guarded by discouraging curators and librarians. But old things in musty places are having a renaissance in popular culture today. Films, television shows, and the popular imagination are filled with beautiful immortal vampires who spend their days in the dark. At the same time, in other spectacles, thousands of half-rotted zombies leave their graves to look for human brains to eat. Maybe now, with this popularity of the immortal and the half-rotted, it is a good time to reconsider the importance of audiovisual archives. I can write about dark vaults filled with reel-to-reel and other recordings that can be brought to life and perhaps the reader's imaginings of vampires and zombies will help to understand their significance. Try it.



Figure 1. Like zombies, audio recordings are damaged by the passage of time, but there can be life (sound) in some of them yet (from left to right—a reel-to-reel tape that is losing the material that carries the sound, an acetate recording where the surface layer (with the sound) has peeled off the aluminum core, and a moldy audio cassette).

This paper begins with some observations about archives (especially audiovisual archives—*fonotecas*) and then presents several examples of cases where old recordings emerged from their vaults and had an impact on the lives of the living.

The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of Audiovisual Archives in Ethnomusicology



Figure 2. On the left: Edison Phonograph of the kind used for field recordings in the early 20th century with photo of Jesse Walter Fewkes, who made the first ethnographic recordings in March 1890 when he recorded Passamaquoddy songs in Maine, USA. (Photo from Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr015.html>). On the right, author's battery operated UHER tape recorder from the 1960s with a 5" tape reel.

It is almost a commonplace to say that the systematic study of the diversity of the world's music and the establishment of Comparative Musicology, a precursor of Ethnomusicology, was made possible by the invention of the wax cylinder recorder and the establishment

of specialized archives to collect and analyze them. The Vienna Phonogrammarchiv, founded in 1899, was immediately followed by the Berlin Phonogramm-archiv in 1900. While the Vienna archive concentrated on the music of Austria and its colonies, the Berlin archive acquired recordings from all over the world. It had a professional staff that not only analyzed recordings, but also hosted specialists from other countries and trained them as archivist-researchers. Soon institutions established on the Berlin model began to be founded in other European countries. The collections of these archives served as the raw materials for research, and the methodology of music research increasingly included making audio recordings.

When Franz Boas wanted a specialist in musical analysis to train as an anthropologist and join him at Columbia University, he wrote to the Berlin Phonogrammarchiv and they sent over George Herzog, who had worked there. Herzog arrived at Columbia University and for a time did extensive research and made major contributions to early U.S. ethnomusicology.² Herzog soon established an archival collection of his own and did extensive transcriptions of other people's recordings as well as making his own on field trips to North American Indian communities. Herzog took the archive with him to Indiana University in 1948 and it became the Indiana University Archive of Traditional Music.

When Mantel Hood, who had studied in Europe and done fieldwork in Indonesia, wanted to establish an Institute for Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States in 1960, he thought an audiovisual archive was an essential component of it and established one at the Institute in 1961. Other U.S. institutions also founded archives as they established their programs in ethnomusicology—among them the University of Illinois, University of Texas, University of Washington, Columbia University, Harvard University, and Wesleyan University. In Brazil, the School of Music of UFRJ has an important archive (see BARROS, 2014) and the Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro also started one after its establishment in 1958. For a time archives

2 Bruno Nettl, in his recent book, *Becoming an Ethnomusicologist—a Miscellany of Influences* (NETTL 2013), presents an excellent account of George Herzog's career in the United States and his (later neglected) importance to the development of ethnomusicology in the U.S.A.

were considered a central part of training, research, and analysis in folklore and ethnomusicology

There was a period, from the 1970s through about 2005 when archives seemed to be less relevant to ethnomusicological research (discussed in SEEGER, 1986 and 2006 and SEWALD, 2005) than they were earlier thought to be. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl, for example, went from seeing them as essential (NETTL, 1964:17) to probably not justifying all the energy of putting them together (NETTL, 1983: 272). Archives by then seemed to be archaic survivals of an earlier comparative musicology, and a number of university programs stopped funding their archives. Most ethnomusicologists were making their own field recordings and confining their analyses to the recordings they had made and the synchronic data they collected in their own fieldwork. If the search for the meaning of a performance is the objective of our research, then the sounds themselves are of little use without in-depth discussions of their meaning. The anthropological approach to music appeared to do away with the need for archival collections and to make the sounds collected by others almost irrelevant for analysis (though Alan Merriam, the author of a book of that title, made extensive audio recordings and some film recordings).

More recently, increased attention is being given to how archival collections can be used to benefit both ethnomusicology and local communities. I discussed the transformation of ethnomusicology through audiovisual archiving in “New Technology Requires New Collaborations: Changing Ourselves to Better Shape the Future” (SEEGER 2006). At the time I was getting a little bored by ethnomusicological ethnographies. I envied those research fields that had been transformed by new technologies in ways that could benefit the general population—for example DNA analysis that can free people unjustly imprisoned for crimes they did not commit or for the preparation of improved medications. Then I realized that Ethnomusicology *does* have a sub-discipline where technology has transformed not only its methodology but also its potential. That area is audiovisual archiving. The apparently antiquated collection and storage of performances has a new potential in the age of digital cataloging and Internet file sharing. It seemed to me that ethnomusicologists could make better use of these emerging technologies for collaborative investigation, documentation, and sharing in ways that were neither imagined or possible in the pre-Internet era. More re-

cently, and in the same spirit, Carol Landau and Janet Topp Fargion wrote “We’re all archivists now” – the title of their introduction to the *Ethnomusicology Forum* special issue *Ethnomusicology, Archives, and Communities: Methodologies for an Equitable Discipline* (LANDAU and FARGION 2012). While I don’t think new modes of archiving and sharing collections are the only way to make ethnomusicology a more ethical discipline—another is the collaborative methodology of Samuel Araujo and associates in Maré (ARAUJO, 2013)—I have no doubt that the organization, preservation, and especially dissemination of archival collections can change our discipline as it helps communities transform themselves.³

Taking Recordings Out of the Vaults and Back to the Communities

It is essential to bring long-hidden collections out of the archival vaults and into the hands and lives of contemporary communities, as well as to make new collections collaboratively. When the time is right, community members can overcome the sonic deficiencies of poor recordings or damaged sound carriers to make good use of them. It is also increasingly possible to improve the sound and remove the veil of hiss and crackles that hides the original sound. And unlike the emergence of zombies from the graveyard, archival collections feed brains rather than feed on them. They offer new perspectives on the past and resources for the present. And if, like vampires, the older collections appear to be immortal and make collector/archivists out of younger generations, unlike vampires the shared digital collections can stand direct sunlight as well as darkness, and can be used 24 hours/day.

The Fox Indians. One of the reasons I devoted so many years to audiovisual archiving was something that occurred shortly after I had been appointed director of the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music in 1982. I had been hired as Alan Merriam’s replacement in the Department of Anthropology and asked by the Dean to direct the archive part-time. I was trying to figure out what archives were good for. One day we received a letter from some Fox Indians, in the USA. They wrote that they were no longer able to perform a ceremony because

3 See also ZEITLYN (2012) on archives and anthropology.

no one knew the songs anymore. Their parents had forgotten them. They knew that someone had made recordings of the ceremony many years before, but they did not know who had done so or where those recordings might be (remember, this was before online library catalogues made information that a lot easier to find). As it happened we did have the original wax cylinders, which had been recorded by a scholar many years before. We made a copy and sent it to the community, who thanked us and said they were now able to perform the ceremony again.

At the same time I was teaching a course where we were reading Karl Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. I was particularly struck by a sentence in the second paragraph:

... just when [people] seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honored disguise and borrowed language (Marx 1977: 10).

Removing this from the context of the 1848 revolution and considering many of the independence and civil rights movements in the world, it seemed to me that Marx was right about how people turned to the past in moments of profound transformations, but possibly wrong in his dismissal of this as entirely negative. It seemed to me that when communities are in the process of transforming themselves, they may look to their own past to create models that are not based only on those of their former oppressors. One source of that past would be information in archives. Furthermore, if they only looked to the past in moments of transformation, then the role of audiovisual archives would be to preserve and have available the oral histories and other traditions of communities so that, at the right moment, they could use them as tools of their own self-determination.⁴ Archiving was not

only an ethical act but also a political one. This would justify the tedious and expensive work of organizing, preserving, and finding ways to make collections available.⁵

The return of early field recordings to local communities. The Fox Indian case I described above is just one of many examples of what is often termed the “repatriation” of archive collections in the past fifty years. These repatriation projects have often (but not always) been deemed very important by members of those communities. Some examples include the Library of Congress Wax Cylinder project that returned many collections to American Indians in the U.S.A. (GRAY 1997), the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies returning pre-WWII recordings to members of a number of local communities (NILES, 2012), and the return of Australian Aboriginal recordings to some communities there (PARADISEC 2014). The Kisêdjê asked me to send them copies of my audio recordings in 2003. I had deposited the originals at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music in 1974. The archive made digital copies and I sent them to the Kisêdjê. They listened to them and began to transcribe the stories (figure 3) and used some of the music and narrative as background for some of the videos they were producing with Video nas Aldeias.



Figure 3. Young Kisêdjê analyzing and transcribing author's 1970s recordings of myths & songs as well as recent recordings made by themselves in 2010. Photo by author.

4 I later noticed that the traditions of the past were sometimes used by ethnic groups as justification for asserting their superiority or antiquity and for attacking other groups. The issues of “self-determination” can be quite complex, and my perspective on the possible influences of archival collection is now more cautious than in the past.

5 This situation is, of course, quite complex since the holdings of the archives are also determined by attitudes at the time as well as technology available. Whereas written records have often been written by the powerful and those serving them, the actual voices and words of the not-very-powerful are often parts of field collections even though they were made in a situation of unequal power. In a short article like this, whose purpose limited, I am not addressing this further, but see ZEITLYN 2012 for an anthropological discussion of archives.

Sometimes the specific status of an oral document makes it especially significant. The myths and songs of Australian Aborigines were declared admissible in court proceedings to demonstrate their right to land. Suddenly some of the old and nearly forgotten contents of audio-visual archives became extremely valuable proof of land use and enduring rights (KOCH, 1997). After the end of Apartheid in South Africa the information in some South African archives was extremely important in restoring memory and in some cases property ownership. Several more ways of bringing archived materials to communities archive materials for the benefit of local communities are described in LANDAU and FARGION (2012).

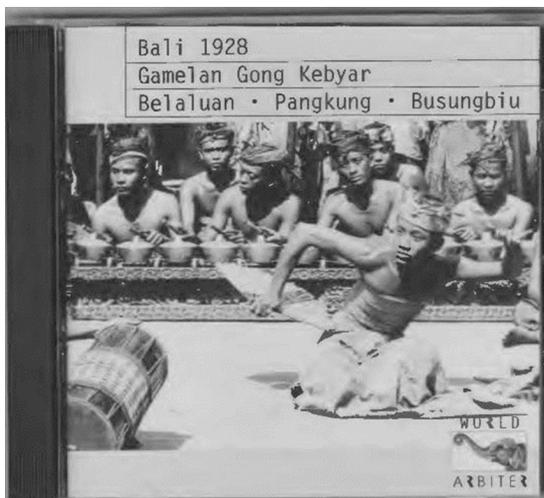


Figure 4. CD cover of the reissue of some rare 1928 commercial recordings of Balinese music.

Commercial Recordings. Although field recordings can be especially useful because they not only feature music but often include oral narratives, oral histories, and a variety of perspectives on events, sometimes the return of commercial recordings can have a profound impact on local communities. One example of this is the extremely rare pre-WWII commercial recordings of Balinese music that were produced then mostly destroyed by their distributor in Indonesia in the 1930s. Only a few copies remained in private collections and archives. Ethnomusicologist Edward Herbst spent years assembling and digitizing the recordings and writing extensive notes for CDs and online publications on World Arbiter Recordings (HERBST, 2011). What is remarkable about the pre-WWII record-

ings is that their sound is quite different from the gamelan sounds that emerged after the profound disruptions of the war and Indonesian Independence. These differences are of great interest to contemporary Balinese musicians, and they are using the remastered discs to critique and renew contemporary traditions.

Restudies. Sometimes a trip to revisit an area where earlier recordings were made can be very fruitful as a research device and also for the community members. Nazir Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin followed the itinerary of Arnold Bake in India and prepared a very interesting report and film about the process (JAIRAZBHOY, 1991). In Brazil, Carlos Sandroni did a similar restudy of the locations where Mario de Andrade made his famous collection trip in the Northeast. Michael Iyanaga discusses repatriation as a field method in Bahia (IYANAGA MS). Taking copies of earlier recordings back to share with community musicians, even if they are only a few years old, can sometimes be deeply moving to them and also lead to creative reinterpretations of the past and commitment to the perpetuation of older traditions. In other cases, the musicians may appear to be unmoved.

Collaborative Projects. Researchers are increasingly undertaking joint projects with the communities with whom they work to produce CDs, films, and books together. The recording and film-making is often done by members of the community with some technical advice from outsiders. The projects are controlled by the local communities as well, and they benefit from their commercial distribution if that happens. The NGO Video nas Aldeias (<http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009/>) is a good example of this kind of systematic collaboration, and there have been a number of excellent collaborative productions by researchers elsewhere in Brazil and around the world. These collaborations are an extremely important part of ethnomusicology and anthropology today.

Reconfiguring the relationship between musicians and archive. In one case, making archival recordings available for sale with the permission of the original performers transformed the relationship between an archive and members of several musical communities. The Archive and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) in New Delhi, India, as part of an access project of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in Washington DC, signed contracts with the performers of selected outstanding recordings in its collections in order to make

them available on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings as part of the Global Sounds project (for ARCE recordings available visit <http://www.folkways.si.edu/search/collection/arce>). In the initial phase, each artist was paid an advance on eventual download royalties and signed a new contract allowing for the commercialization of selected archival recordings. (The original fieldworkers often did not have the artists sign any agreements at all.) Paying artists directly for downloads of archival materials was a novel change from the tendency to ignore artist rights altogether. But just as important was the change in the artists' attitude toward their recordings and the archive. They supplied the archive with improved translations of their songs, improving the documentation for the earlier recordings. They also offered to record new songs for the archive, thus adding to its collections. In this way they became active participants in the work of the archive. While this could only be done with artists who could be located and asked to sign a contract (none of those asked refused to sign it), this project is an indication that it is possible to reshape relationships between artists and archives in a way that benefits them both.

The challenges for audiovisual archives in Brazil

In the 1980s, the Museu de Folclore (now the Museu de Folclore e Cultura Popular) in Rio de Janeiro hired three social anthropologists trained at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. One of these was Elizabeth Travassos, whose tasks there included working on a variety of museum projects. At one time she was in charge of the audio recordings in the extensive archive of folklore and endeavored to improve their organization and preservation. Many of the recordings are outstanding, some of the collections are quite large and there has been a sustained effort over the years to organize and preserve them. Elizabeth produced at least one LP record to make some of the recordings available to a larger public. Over the years we talked about the difficulties of archival collections and also of the frustration of producing LP recordings when there was no good distribution system for them to reach those who most wanted them. This used to be a problem for all independent record labels in the world and was exacerbated by the "unpopularity" of the music

on many of them produced. All of this has changed with the emergence of the Internet for sharing information and sound and video files.

The internet, and the opportunities it offers as well as the expectations it creates, can be a serious problem for field collections in audiovisual archives. Commercial recordings are copyrighted and at least the rights to distribute them are known. Most of them cannot be posted on the Internet by archives but are available on commercial sites. But most researchers who made field recordings before the 1990s did not get written permissions from all of the participants, and certainly not for Internet distribution. There was no Internet then, the music was not popular, and in most cases the purpose of the recordings was for research, not for public access. With the development of the Internet, all of those recordings could be made available—but the archives do not have clear permission to share them. As a result, most archives have been reluctant to make their field recordings available except through a few carefully selected examples where artists or their heirs have given permission to post them like the Indian music described above. As a result, precisely at the moment the recordings could be most widely distributed to members of communities and interested people around the world they are now unavailable. Many do not even appear on search engines most people use to find information.

A practical solution to this may be emerging. In the past few years, some important archives have begun to distribute their field collections without obtaining permission from all the artists and heirs. The advantage of the Internet over a commercial recording is that is possible to remove items from a website without the expense and trouble of recalling and destroying a run of compact discs. The British Library posted hundreds of recordings of British folk music online (the overall site is called Sounds: <http://sounds.bl.uk/>), with a clear statement of how they could be used and also a notice that if any artist felt that he or she did not want their material posted there, they could contact the Library, which had a procedure for removing materials from the site (<http://sounds.bl.uk/Information/Legal-And-Ethical-Usage>). The staff was also careful not to post materials they knew would be sensitive. For those an in-person consultation is required. When Memorial University, in Newfoundland Canada, posted all the recordings of one fieldworker, all the artists

and heirs seem to have been happy to have the recordings online, where their grandchildren could learn them and through which they can be remembered (<http://www.mun.ca/folklore/leach/>). As it turned out, no one wanted to have their materials taken down. The U. S Library of Congress selected a few collections for distribution on its website (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/List-Some.php?category=Performing%20Arts,%20Music>), my favorite being the John and Ruby Lomax collection of southern music from a field recording trip posted there (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/lohtml/lohome.html>). Not everything can be made widely available, however. For example, access to some recordings at the Library of Congress has been restricted by American Indian tribes to members of their own tribe and certain Australian Aboriginal recordings are highly restricted by age, gender, clan, and tribal membership.

On my recent visit to the website of the Museu de Folclore e Cultura Popular I could find no indication that the recordings from its vaults have been made available through the Internet or through other more targeted forums. The difficulties are great, but the opportunities are also great and I think it would be beneficial to communities as well as to the general public to be able to view and listen to the recordings, respecting the right of communities to control secret or private information that may have been recorded. For this, new kinds of partnerships are required. For future collections, it is up to today's researchers to discuss the potential uses of the recordings they are making with the individuals or communities they are recording and to get permissions and restrictions for current and future technology. Without that information, the zombies will remain in their crypts, the vampires only come out at night, and the recordings will remain unheard.

Elizabeth Travassos, in the years she worked at the Museu de Folclore, thought its collections were important and that the musicians should be heard. I think it is only a question of time until some of those recordings become available to the public online, and then, her work at the Museu do Folclore e Cultura Popular will be brought from the vaults and into the 21st century. Like vampires and zombies, the music will emerge from dark and silent archival vaults. But it will not emerge on its own. It requires the dedicated work of curators, archivists, engineers, technicians, and promoters. I hope the resurrec-

tion of the old recordings will be completed before they deteriorate beyond recovery. Even if we are not all archivists now, we all do have a stake in making the collections of the past that were collected and curated by our teachers and colleagues, available to generations of the future in an ethical and collaborative way.

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