How does common knowledge sound?

My experience uploading audio files to Commons

Luis Álvarez Azcárraga
(User:Luisalvaz)
Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.*

John Cage
(1912-1992)

* The Future of Music: Credo (1937)
¿Why do we record, share and remix?

• “Remix everything” (Kirby Ferguson).

Poetry  ➔  Poiesis  ➔  To make

• We learn imitating.
• We did not create from scratch, always from someone else’s ideas.
Todo es creación: yo elijo decir lo que fue dicho, que es ahora distinto porque lo transforma ese cumulo de datos convergentes en su punto de intersección me encuentro. Y todo es plagio.

Everything is creation: I choose to say what was said, which is now different because it transforms that cluster of convergent data at its point of intersection I am. And everything is plagiarism.

Ulalume González de León, *Plagios*
Backgrounds

• Dadá (*Ursonate* by Kurt Schwitters)
• Pierre Schaffer and Pierre Henry – *L’objet sonore* (the capacity to record sound on tape or other media).
• John Cage – music as silence (4’33”)
• Murray Schafer - Soundscape
• Dickie Goodman, “The Flying Saucer” (1956)
Remix culture in art and sound art (music)

• Shiner (*The invention of art*) argues that the notion of art, author, authorship and copyright born in 18th century.
  – What does that mean?
    • That this concepts are also political, and were created to control the economy profits and the taste.
    • The author is a temporary concept.
    • Wikipedia is a prove that we can create content in a participatory way.
Authorship

The author has not always existed. The image of the author as a wellspring of originality, a genius guided by some secret compulsion to create works of art out of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, is an 18th century invention.

Anna Nimus,
Copyright, copyleft and the creative anti-commons
• Before the writing era (literacy tradition), it was a common and normal practice to take someone else's work and remix it.

• The abundance of cultural production, also, tends to encourage the reproduction.

“Remix culture is highly dependent on the abundance of cultural production and access to media objects by a large community.”

Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss
Before copyright era

Concerto for 2 Violins in A minor, RV 522, by Antonio Vivaldi

Organ Concerto in A minor, BWV 593, by Johann Sebastian Bach

DEAL WITH IT!
Mechanical reproduction
Copyright to control

• Attali argue that “where is noise there is power”.
• Who controls the noise, also controls the message.
• With the standardization of noise comes the standardization of ideas.
• The industry nowadays also has the power to decide what sounds are available to sample and which are not.
Sinfonia (Luciano Berio), quotations on the third movement

- Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra, fourth movement, "Peripetie"
- Fragment from Mahler's Symphony No. 4
- Paul Hindemith's Kammermusik Nr. 4
- Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé
- Debussy's "Jeux de vagues"
- Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique
- Ravel's La Valse
- Stravinsky's Le Sacre du Printemps
- Stravinsky's Agon
- Richard Strauss's Der Rosenkavalier
- Alban Berg's Wozzeck
- Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony
- Hindemith's Kammermusik No. 4
- Boulez's Pli Selon Pli
- Anton Webern's Cantata No. 2, Op. 31
- Karlheinz Stockhausen's Gruppen

Is this an acoustic remix?
GIRL TALK
What happened?

• Why cannot we use the work of others to create our own version if, in the very essence of our culture, we are always making plagiarism?

  (Suspense silence)

  (Awkward silence)

  (Silence doesn't exist, Nicolas Cage)
The material of music is sound and silence; integrating these is composing.

I have nothing to say and I am saying it.

John Cage
Audio files of “original” music

• “Original” because I argue that there’s not such thing.
• But, there are many valuable works of art that people had share on Commons.
• Music to use as background in a audiovisual production.
• Music to use in a choreography or a play.
Audio files as historical or sociocultural documents

Events of August 7–9

After the Hiroshima bombing, Truman issued a statement announcing the use of the new weapon. He stated, "We may be grateful to Providence" that the German atomic bomb project had failed, and that the United States and its allies had "spent two billion dollars on the greatest scientific gamble in history—and won". Truman then warned Japan: "If they do not now accept our terms, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such numbers and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware."[174] This was a widely broadcast speech picked up by Japanese news agencies.[175]

By August 9,[178] the 50,000-watt standard wave station on Saipan the OWI radio station, broadcast a similar message to Japan every 15 minutes about Hiroshima, stating that more Japanese cities would face a similar fate in the absence of immediate acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Declaration and emphatically urged civilians to evacuate major cities. Radio Japan, which continued to extol victory for Japan by never surrendering,[86] had informed the Japanese of the destruction of Hiroshima by a single bomb.[176] Prime Minister Suzuki felt compelled to meet the Japanese press, to whom he reiterated his government's commitment to ignore the Allies' demands and fight on.[180] The Japanese government did not react. Emperor Hirohito, the government, and the war council considered four conditions for surrender: the preservation of the kokutai (Imperial institution and national polity), assumption by the Imperial Headquarters of responsibility for disarmament and demobilization, no occupation of the Japanese Home Islands, Korea, or Formosa, and delegation of the punishment of war criminals to the Japanese government.[181]
Audio files as historical or sociocultural documents

But he didn’t quit... 😞
Audio files as soundscapes

• A soundscape is as important as a photography.
• If a landscape changes with the pass of time, also changes the sounds of our cities and villages.
• A file of a soundscape is a reminder of what we have lost, but also that what is important to preserve.
Audio files of voices

• With this type of audio file, you preserve two valuable assets, the unique sound (pitch, tone and color) of the voice of a person, and the oral knowledge (the message).

• The quantity of voices that we can collect, classify and share is (almost) infinite.

• The can be also primary sources of oral tradition knowledge.
Where are my audio files?

• Category: Audio files by Luisalvaz
  – Sound effects, voices, documentary.

• Category: Experimentos sonoros y piezas musicales (by Luisalvaz)
  – Musical pieces, experimental and ‘artistic pieces’ (sound art, radioart, hörspiel)
My own remix

• File:Commons remix (sound experiment from audio files on Commons).ogg*

*Available here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Commons_remix_(sound_experiment_from_audio_files_on_Commons).ogg
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
  – Apollo13-wehaveaproblem edit 1.ogg

Necz0r
  – Accordion registers.ogg
  – AccordionBellowsSounds.ogg

PetrohsW
  – Ayotzinapa10meses ohs23 orador09.ogg
  – Ayotzinapa10meses ohs15 avisoCaravanas.ogg
  – PaseDeLista.ogg
  – ProtestasGasolinazo2017 ohs001 fueraPena.ogg

The British Library Board
  – Carrion Crow (Corvus corone) (W1CDR0001425 BD18).ogg
  – Common Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus) (W1CDR0001463 BD1).ogg
  – Common Nightingale (Luscinia megarhynchos) (W1CDR0001376 BD18).ogg
  – Tawny Owl (Strix aluco) (W1CDR0001427 BD9).ogg

ValWey
  – Coquies1.ogg (Grabación de campo realizada en Hatillo, Puerto Rico. Canto de coquies durante la noche.)
Assumptions

• My sound files are lo-fi.
• My sound files are worthless.
• No one won’t hear my sound files.
• I don’t have a professional sound recorder.
• Other platforms, like YouTube or Soundcloud, are better to reproduce sound files.
Better think...

• Lo-fi instead of “no-fi”.
• Every sound is special, unique and (without a recording) ephemeral.
• Maybe not right now, but eventually someone will hear your sound files, and (much better) sampling with them, or use it in his/her documentary film.
• You can record with your cellphone (stop making selfies and start recording a soundscape).
• YouTube and Soundcloud are popular, but in Commons you can add categories, and other people can correct the data and download the files any time.
Conclusions

• The audio files that archives and museums store are very important, but also the sounds that common people enjoy everyday.
• When we remix the sounds that some one else record and share, we’ll get them new life.
• Sharing sound is a political activity.
• Remixing a sound desacralize it.
• Improve the interface and the ways people could actually re-use the files.
• A real ‘commons’ is beyond free licence and public domain, would imply the possibility to share without the permission of any law or public institution.
• If does not include sound is not the sum of all human knowledge.
“...music is to be produced not in a temple, not in a hall, not at home, but everywhere; it is to be produced everywhere it is possible to produce it, in whatever way it is wished, by anyone who wants to enjoy it.”

Jacques Attali,
Noises: The political economy of music
Recommended bibliography

• ISO 690
THANK YOU!

Luis Alvaz / User:Luisalvaz
Important: All the images on this document are unde free licenses and availables on Wikimedia Commons.