crowdsourcing should be aware of the approach's significant limitations and biases, and of the need to sort through and verify large amounts of information of uneven reliability. Furthermore, crowdsourcing tends to work better when the goal is to quickly compile and share knowledge that is already available, rather than as a means to engage in original research. Crowdsourcing cannot replace more traditional historical methods, but as a means to broaden exposure to and engagement with historical questions, it is a powerful tool.

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Sounding Out Social Media

Reading an online article in *The Appendix* about the nature and use of sound by historians, I was struck by the case made for the greater integration of sound into our practice.[1] Moreover, it seemed to me that, in the form of SoundCloud (https://soundcloud.com/), there was a potential archive, and in some senses unwitting archivists, awaiting if not discovery then a more comprehensive engagement by historians that would allow us to achieve just such a goal.

New platforms such as SoundCloud provide opportunities to collect data and to experiment with sound; to ponder innovative ways of thinking about and communicating our histories. At the same time, however, we need to be mindful of SoundCloud being an active and evolving social media community, to whom we have obligations, rather than merely existing as a static repository of sonic information. It is the community behind SoundCloud, as much as the material contained within, that renders it a potentially potent tool in the historian's arsenal.

SoundCloud was launched in 2007 and, dedicated to the sharing of sound, it quickly became an incredible force on the landscape of social media. As such, it is populated primarily by amateur and professional music-makers, posting their various musings and mashups that are disseminated through both private and public networks.

While the sounds are visualised in a waveform, there are no additional accompanying images; SoundCloud is rather, although not entirely, avisual. The utility of these graphics is what differentiates SoundCloud from other forms of social media, such as YouTube, that still privilege the visual even while integrating the aural. While YouTube certainly offers many possibilities for experimentation in its own right, SoundCloud provides us with a more convenient form through which we can examine how sound alone might be used in our scholarship: as a data source, or an analytic or reconstructive tool.

Indeed, removing ourselves from the textual and the visual temporarily might be productive for re-orienting our thinking away from what has really structured our discipline since its inception. The textual is primary both within historical scholarship and, more broadly, within social media; whether we are talking about journal articles,

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[1] Michael Schmidt, "'Nancy Grows Up," the Media Age, and the Historian's Craft', *The Appendix*, created 3 September 2013, http://theappendix.net/issues/2013/7/nancy-grows-up-the-media-age-and-the-historians-craft, last accessed 31 January 2014.

books, Facebook or Twitter. Even the image-based sites such as Pinterest or Instagram, while themselves certainly not insignificant, are often addendums to these other modes of communication.

The question of whether there is room in this virtual, sonic landscape for historians is a real one, however, for few historians currently use these sites or work with sound as deeply as they do text (a heading under which even oral history could fall in certain circumstances). I am yet to find more than a handful of articles producing work in relation to SoundCloud, none of which are by historians.

Yet SoundCloud is full not only of musical output but of recordings of everyday life, and personal and professional narratives. Audiobiographies, as they are called, are usually short clips, often around the ninety second mark but that can stretch outwards to resemble more traditional oral history files as well, that introduce a person and their interests. My own experience taking a class in the anthropology of sound led to the recording and posting on SoundCloud of the banal clicks of a typist hitting keys on a keyboard, the squeak of an opening door and the hum of a climbing elevator. For the social or cultural historian these narratives and remnants of everyday life can be invaluable sources providing access to the minutiae of daily existence.

These sounds, however, are decidedly contemporary. Not all, perhaps even most, clips on SoundCloud will be immediately useful to every historian, especially those working across earlier periods. Although incorporation is not impossible in these instances, there are distinct challenges to integrating these noises, personal expressions or musical creations into more traditional forms of historical scholarship.

SoundCloud has other uses, however, encompassing those who may otherwise be unable to draw on its rich holdings directly. In particular, it seems worth considering what potential there is for collaborative projects focusing on the analysis of soundscapes. Whether through deconstruction or reconstruction, SoundCloud might enable us to think of environments (events and people) as, in part, sonic producers and productions.

Analysing sound offers the possibility of illustrating complexity within, and the depth of, a particular environment in a new fashion. Aside from drawing our attention to aspects of the past that we might otherwise have overlooked (or, more appropriately, been deaf to) sonically measuring distance and density provides new perspectives on our understandings of place and space, as well as the events happening within, and the people integrated into, those areas.

Although the usefulness of the sounds themselves is significant, it seems that SoundCloud users, more comfortable working with and manipulating complex and layered sonic sources, might also have something to offer the historian. In some ways, their craft differs little from ours in the presentation, construction or interweaving of complex narrative threads into a coherent whole, but our focus is text and theirs is sound.

How to think in terms of aural data, of cacophony, and of harmony, of distance and speed and of the implications for relationships within these delicate ecosystems, is what SoundCloud users often do, even if sometimes unwittingly. Active collaborative ventures, or indeed the process of learning by osmosis, may help historians, in the short term, to conceptualise and convey their histories in these ways.

Should we take up SoundCloud as a multipurpose tool, however, we need to be mindful of the differences between a traditional archive and a community. Failing to understand SoundCloud as a dynamic space in its own right, populated by individuals with a stake in the medium, puts us at risk of a superficial engagement that may fail to effect any radical

re-conceptualisation of how we think about sound or present (it in) our work. By merely mining SoundCloud, as consumers, we may end up reverting to older styles of expression or analysis founded in text. Rather, we need to think of ourselves as contributors, engaging with the medium while benefitting from the experience of its members.

Moreover, guidelines for acceptable practice need to be developed to ensure that we are aware of our obligations to these other users, maintaining this as a collegial and productive digital space, and avoiding inadvertently burdening or exploiting this global, sonic community. The challenge for historians is not only considering how to use SoundCloud, if we choose to at all, but how to recognise its contribution, and how to give something back to the community that has enriched our work.

A foray into a world in which the language is not one of letter-form but of waveform could produce an incredibly productive dialogue. We might begin to understand different forms of expression or find ourselves able to draw upon and develop an expertise that deals with aural narrative, rather than the textual with which we have become comfortable. While we need to think seriously about how we use the material on the site, another of the challenges is determining how to interact with, and what our obligations are, to this community. Historians have to find a way to not only pillage SoundCloud but to give back as well; in other words, to be mindful of the social in social media.

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