Editors' Note: September 2021

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Editors' Note

Roopika Risam and Jennifer Guiliano

Welcome to the September 2021 issue of *Reviews in Digital Humanities*! This month, we are delighted to share the second installment of our special issue on sound, edited by Mary Caton Lingold. "Sound" is the first special issue of the journal to focus on a [method](#) and explores a broad range of interventions at the intersections of sound studies and digital humanities. This special issue explores experimental scholarship that blends sensory modalities, sonic histories, and the use of computational tools with large audio collections. Featuring sound demonstrates the journal's commitment to creating spaces to showcase thriving areas of scholarship that do not always register within digital humanities broadly.

This month, we welcome our new editorial assistant, Miranda Hughes, an MA Candidate in English at Salem State University. With prior experience as managing editor of the literary journal *Soundings East*, Miranda has hit the ground running with *Reviews.* We are grateful to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their support, which has created opportunities for graduate students at Salem State University to work on the journal.

If you are interested in editing a special issue of *Reviews*, drop us a note! You can also [submit a project for review](#), [nominate a project you admire](#), [volunteer for our reviewer pool](#), and tell your colleagues and students about the journal.

Questions? Thoughts? Concerns? Contact the editors, Jennifer Guiliano and Roopika Risam, by [email](#) or through the Twitter hashtag [#ReviewsInDH](#).

Guest Editor's Note

Mary Caton Lingold

A central complaint of sound studies scholars is that sound and sonic culture has a tendency to be marginalized, if not exoticized in the academy. In digital humanities, the problem has been especially thorny. Digital humanities work tends to orient around texts, images, maps, and numerical data. The architecture of computing combined with the aesthetics and methods of web culture can pose a challenge for digital humanities scholars working with audio. The specificities of sound and listening as a methodology also require analytical methods that transcend disciplinary borders. My co-editors and

I discuss this in the introduction to our book, *Digital Sound Studies,* where we argue for the value of combining the methods of sound studies and digital humanities. But things are changing on the technology front to make it easier to do all kinds of work with sound in digital environments. And there are, and have always been, outliers swimming against the stream, frolicking on the banks, getting great things done in and about sound.

In fact, when I took up the task of conceiving of this special issue on sound for *Reviews in Digital Humanities,* I faced an embarrassment of riches. There were so many exciting projects to include that it was daunting trying to narrow down the field to a few timely works.[1] I selected projects that represent a breadth of approaches. Each offers something unique in terms of content and methods, but the websites, experimental audio projects, digital archives, and tools gathered here also speak to one another in compelling ways. I highlight the intersections in the thematically organized clusters addressed below.

Many of the projects transcend the academic-public divide in fruitful ways, as do the critical voices of reviewers, several of whom work in cultural heritage, the arts, and academic-adjacent careers. I am inspired by efforts that engage the study of sound and the digital not as a "field" but rather as a set of possibilities for collaborative expression and imaginative critical inquiry. The geographic span of these projects also presses the scope of digital sound work, with sites in Ireland, England, Uganda, and the United States represented in the special issue. In an effort to draw these wide-ranging projects in conversation, in what follows, I briefly survey each of the projects under the umbrella of an organizing theme.

Experimental Scholarship Blending Sensory Modalities (August 2021)

Perhaps because auditory knowledge has so long been marginalized from mainstream academic practice in the Global North, embracing sound has the potential to dramatically redefine the scope and reach of scholarly inquiry. Three projects in the special issue take an experimental approach, blending modalities to embrace the creative and critical as always inextricably bound:

- .break .dance, a project created by Marisa Parham and reviewed by Brittnay L. Proctor, is an "interactive creative non-fiction longform choreo-essay" and an experiential meditation on Black histories, dance, thought, and visual art. Parham uses digital methods to take site visitors on a multi-directional journey that acts as a formal commentary on digital form itself.

- Gulu SoundTracks, reviewed by Damascus Kafumbe, is a collaboration between anthropologist Joella Bitter and Ugandan musicians Black da Massacre, Kaunda, Mellix, and Usaih. The artists composed and produced interpretive musical tracks drawing from recorded soundscapes that U.S.-based Bitter created during ethnographic fieldwork in Gulu, Uganda. The website presents the music alongside original visual artworks that layer and blend the city's landscapes in a multi-layered approach that complements the audio productions.

- Sound Never Tasted So Good, reviewed by KC Hysmith, also reflects an innovative blending of modalities. The "digital album" is an e-book of sorts that records and interprets a pedagogical experiment that Steph Ceraso undertook with students in her course on rhetoric and composition. The live event was a multicourse meal designed in tandem with audio. The project explores sensory rhetorics of sound and eating.

Each of these projects takes entirely original approaches to digital and sonic expressions. The results press digital sound scholarship into new directions and into conversation with voices and experiences that redefine what it means to eat when given a seat at the metaphorical table.

Imagining Sonic Histories (September 2021)

These exciting projects are leveraging new technologies to preserve and study old sounds. The questions they consider include: What happens to the sounds and cultural practices that spring up around audio technologies when the devices age out? How can we document historic soundscapes of particular places? And how do we draw on archival records to uncover sonic histories?

- Mixtape Museum, reviewed by Tanya Clement, spans musical traditions but emphasizes the history of Hip Hop, showing the crucial role of mixtape technology in the development of the genre. The project was conceived by Regan Sommer McCoy, who has built collaborations with other institutions of hip-hop-heritage like the DJ Screw HQ Foundation and Autry Museum, as well as individual collectors and DJs whose stories and memories form the heart of the project.

- The Museum of Portable Sound, reviewed by Rebecca Gates, exists on a single mobile phone, curated with historic field recordings by project creator John Kannenberg. The project reimagines the concept of a "museum" by bringing the

practical affordances and aesthetics of portable audio devices to the knowledge work of museums.

- Sonic Histories of Cork City, reviewed by James Mansell, imaginatively reconstructs the historic soundscapes of Cork, Ireland, while also preserving contemporary sounds of city life. The product of a collaborative effort between musicologist Jillian Rogers, librarian Elaine Harrington, and sound designer John Hough, along with students from University College Cork's Department of Music, the project has enabled a process of engaging with local history for community stakeholders of different stripes.

- Singing Box 331, reviewed by Kate Galloway, also bridges the university and public history in an innovative way. Helmed by scholars Sarah Eyerly and Rachel Wheeler, the project explores the history and legacy of an early archival record of Mohican Moravian hymnody. The scholars worked closely with community members and descendants of the creators of the documents to explore early Mohican and Euro-Moravian musical worship. The project was published as a companion to a traditional scholarly essay in the *William & Mary Quarterly* on an interface conceived by the Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture to bring digital methods to the study of Early American Life.

All of these projects are remarkable for their efforts to preserve and study historical sound in community with members of the public, honoring the historical knowledge of practitioners and descendants connected to historical artifacts of sound and sonic media.

Leveraging Computational Tools and Large Audio Collections (October 2021)

A final group of projects leverage computational tools to make sense of complicated sets of audio data. One of the things that makes audio archives and data sets so difficult to work with is the fact that it typically takes a great deal of time to listen to, index, and interpret audio. New technologies are making it possible to think with and through large corpora recordings like never before. The following projects demonstrate the potential of making large collections more accessible and yield new insights about the audible world:

- Connections in Sound, reviewed by Michael J. Kramer, links 17 collections of Irish traditional music to build insights and conversations between datasets that otherwise remain unintelligible to one another on a practical level. Impressively, the

data-driven project also worked closely with community stakeholders—performers and enthusiasts—to get a sense of the questions and ideas that bring them to the material. These insights helped shape the metadata and schema that establish links between the collections.

- Audi Annotate, reviewed by Craig Breaden, similarly aims to create accessibility around large audio archives by facilitating the production of descriptive metadata and annotations that can make collections accessible to researchers. The fact is that audio collections take enormous human labor and resources to process because of the time it takes to listen to reams and reams of audio recordings. Without the innovations of project director Tanya Clement and collaborators, archivists and researchers face steep challenges that further prevent the study of sound and audio culture in the academy.

- Audible RVA, reviewed by Imani Mosley and led by Andy McGraw, explores the soundscape of Richmond, Virginia. The project looks to many different aspects of sound and music in the city, with a special focus on intimate links between sound and social inequality, emphasizing race and ethnicity. By linking data on sound violations to maps of the city, for instance, the project reveals the way Black Richmonders are heavily policed around musical performance and participation.

Leveraging computational methods, linked data, and mapping tools for the study of sound promises to yield greater understanding of diverse cultural heritage and lived experience.

If these projects are any indication, digital work on sound is alive and thriving. May the work of all these thinkers and makers inspire yet further inquiry, across communities, professions, methodologies, senses, geographies, and time.

As a final note, I wish to thank *Reviews* editors Jennifer Guiliano and Roopika Risam and their team, for supporting and envisioning this issue.

Footnotes

1. I should note that podcasts are notably absent from the work I assembled for this issue, but not because I believe they should be excluded from digital humanities. On the contrary, I was confronted with such a glut of terrific work in academic audio production—including several series dedicated to the study of sound—that I became

convinced that academic podcasting would make for a great special issue of *Reviews in Digital Humanities.* I hope that someone will take up the task some day. ↩