

TOWARD AN ONTOLOGY OF AUDIO PRESERVATION

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Current preservation efforts for audio media rely heavily on digitization. But what is lost when recordings are migrated away from older formats? How does the physical medium of a recording relate to the sound of a recording, to a musical score, or to a performance? Can a mass-produced recording be regarded as a work with multiple instances, like an editioned print? Such questions are critical in understanding the myriad values audio recordings may carry. As items composed of relatively unstable modern media, recordings share commonalities with contemporary art, and their preservation may be usefully informed by the ethics of the museum world. However, these complicated artifacts are usually archival in nature, and as such must be regarded as innately historical objects with a practical function. This talk explores the meanings of recordings and their physical media, and places the recording within the lifetime of a musical work in an attempt to inform future preservation strategies.

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