

Karin Bijstervald, José van Dijck (Hg.): Sound Souvenirs – Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices

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Two decades of *sound studies* has transformed the understanding of the history of film sound, early sound technologies, acoustic architecture and the sound practices of the avant-garde. On a theoretical level, trite technocentric teleologies and simplistic ideas of acoustic reproduction have been debunked. Overall, however, the academic study of sound remains small-scale and diffuse, with little discursive structure or institutional underpinning, leaving much unexplored territory in the history, aesthetics and sociology of sound. The volume *Sound Souvenirs*, edited by Karin Bijstervald and José van Dijck, works in one such uncharted area, offering a preliminary exploration of the complex relations between sound and memory, music and technology. Largely written by historians of Western Europe, the twelve essays address how sound, music and audio technologies interact in a range of “cultural practices of remembering” (S. 16). Concepts of memory are broadly defined here. They include the epiphanic recall of past moments, formal or informal rituals of collective memory, the technical memory of storage media, as well as connotations of ‘pastness’ associated with specific sounds. The range of material is broad too, from references to transistor radios in German pop music to the cultural significance of *Top 2000*, an annual Dutch retro-pop radio broadcast, from the changing connotations of the theremin to sonic memorialization in military cemeteries.

Amidst this thematic diversity, two qualities are shared by most essays. First, there is notable care in unpacking layers of mediation and meaning-creation. Bas Jansen’s essay on the pleasures and desires associated with the mixed-tape music compilation is exemplary, deftly maintaining distinctions between past somatic-emotional investment and later vernacular narrations of the experience. Second, although technology – its marketing and domestication, its relations to the body and the imagination, its specific kinds of nostalgia – is a central theme, the contributions largely avoid reification, with a combination of empirical and interpretative approaches. Thus, Trevor Pinch’s and David Reinecke’s essay on the significance of analog equipment in the American alternative music scene eschews any normative

reinscription of analog/digital distinctions. Rather, the authors – like their amusing and articulate interview subjects – offer a detailed analysis of the semantic and affective nuances of the sound of vintage guitars and amplifiers, in the context of a happily hybrid analog/digital production environment.

Throughout, the use of interview and diary material emphasizes the intimate and the everyday, with analysis often honing in on small private surpluses of memory, meaning and satisfaction. However, as more than one contributor suggests, this does not imply a strict dividing line between the public and the private. Rather, it is repeatedly shown how sound, music and sound technologies are privileged loci for the negotiation and redefinition of this porous boundary. In this vein, Karin Bijsterveld's and Annelise Jacobs' investigation of the "domestication of the reel-to-reel tape recorder" (S.21) uses marketing materials and consumer testimonials to reconstruct the device's affective phenomenology in the home, distinguishing the mobile reel-to-reel from other technologies located in the living room and basement. Their notable essay also reveals striking discrepancies between imagined and actual functionality: manufacturers sold the reel-to-reel as a "family sound album" (S. 25) but this was stubbornly ignored by consumers, who preferred to use their new gadgets to record and play back commercially-produced music.

Inevitably, there are limits and lacunae. The volume might have benefitted from more systematic linkage to broader debates, precisely because the studies so often raise questions which go beyond their narrow remit and well-defined objects. Although there is some local use of theories of cultural analysis (notably from science and technology studies), there is little sustained or general reflection about sound and memory, aside perhaps from Jonathan Sterne's meditation on historical loss as the necessary ground of sound-archival practice. One or two more general pieces might have been a counterweight to the micrologies and – more generally – given preliminary structure to a barely-researched field of inquiry. On the whole, however, this original collection should be useful and stimulating for those interested in the social life of technologies and sounds, and in the acoustic construction, experience and transmission of memory.

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