

Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck, eds. 2009. *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

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R. Murray Schafer coined the term “sound souvenirs” in *The Soundscape* (1994 [1977]: 240) to describe what the editors of the eponymous book *Sound Souvenirs* describe as “endangered sounds, such as the sounds of pre-industrial life, that could be captured by recording technologies or stored in archives, and thus remembered after their extinction” (2009:13). Schafer himself, however, only casually mentioned the phrase in tandem with the more predominant concept of “soundmarks,” the sonic equivalents of landmarks (1977:10, 239). Subsequent scholarship also did not explicitly address sound souvenirs as it did other ideas from Schafer’s work, such as “schizophonia,” or the splitting of a sound from its source (e.g., Feld 1994, Truax, 2001, Sterne 2006). Over 40 years later, editors Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck build on *The Soundscape*’s lineage, as interpreted and expanded by Steven Feld (1994), Thomas Porcello (2005), and other works that foreground sound technologies as central to cultural memory; they argue in their introduction that the “sound souvenirs” lining our shelves still have yet to receive significant scholarly attention, and this book attempts to address that gap. Its contributors explore the cultural practices of archiving, collecting, resuscitating, and restoring past sounds in order to probe the links between sound and memory; this includes examining the ephemera surrounding recorded sound—reel-to-reel tapes, vinyl records, and so on—along with the sound-making devices themselves, old and new, from transistor radios to cassette recorders to iPods.

The ambitious collection encompasses twelve chapters in four sections—“Storing Sound,” “Auditory Nostalgia,” “Technostalgia,” and “Earwitnessing”—each attending to different aspects of the connections between memory, cultural practices, and audio technologies. The first section, “Storing Sound,” explores the history of archiving sound recordings, from the supposed permanence of digital file storage to the practice of creating mix tapes. “Auditory Nostalgia” explores the connection between memory and portable audio technologies such as radios, Walkmans, and iPods. “Technostalgia,” refers to the nostalgia for the sound of antiquated technologies: that special analog amplifier, that vintage 1970s synthesizer. “Earwitnessing,” the final section, is titled after another word Schafer defined (1994 [1977]: 272), the aural counterpart to being an eyewitness; the

two chapters in this section investigate sound memories of World War II, particularly the memories of German survivors of the Nazi period, told through sound.

Bijsterveld and van Dijck have assembled an impressive stock of contributors from the fields of science and technology studies and communication studies, many of who specialize in sound studies (including Jonathan Sterne, Trevor Pinch, Michael Bull, and Hans-Joachim Braun). Only one is a musicologist by training, Timothy D. Taylor—dually an ethnomusicologist known for his work on global circulations of recorded music—who writes brilliantly here on performance and nostalgia in the oldies doo-wop circuit. Bijsterveld herself is one of the leading scholars in sound studies; she is the author of *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (2008) and the paper “The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age: Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns, 1900-40” (2001).

Jonathan Sterne, offering a taster of his highly anticipated second book, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* and a follow-up to his 2006 article “The MP3 as Cultural Artifact,” writes on the paradox of digital preservation: “Although digital technology allows for unprecedented ease in the transfer and stockpiling of recordings, the current condition of plenitude is something of an illusion” (64). The minute a hard drive fails, data is lost—completely and most likely irretrievably. Analog recordings may fade, vinyl records and magnetic tape may get damaged and dusty, but a hard drive of MP3s can be lost immediately and forever, and the life span of these digital recordings is far more fleeting than we think.

In “Taking Your Favorite Sound Along: Portable Audio Technologies for Mobile Music Listening,” Heike Weber focuses on the use of portable radios in the 1950s-60s and the emergence of the Walkman during the 1970s and 1980s in West Germany. Weber’s well-researched contribution brings a number of intriguing statistics to the fore. The increase of portable radio sales in the 1950s, she writes, “demonstrated West Germany’s transformation from a postwar economy of scarcity and tight household budgets to a mass consumer society with increasing consumption, leisure and mobility” (71). “Mobile music listening” is not what we may mean it to be today; the average West German “portable” radio in the 1950s boasted high sound quality, but tipped the scales at up to five kilograms (71). Listening to the radio back then tended to be a communal activity; by the time of the Walkman in the 1970s, many West Germans saw headphone listening—and the individualized consumption it portrayed—as rather odd. The “wiring” of headphones to individual listeners was even sometimes compared to a medical transfusion (77-78).

Timothy Taylor's chapter on nostalgia for doo-wop, a form of American "oldies" music, proves another striking contribution. Taylor begins with anecdotal observations from his visits to a small town on the Jersey Shore where the genre thrives to this day. Doo-wop encapsulated youthful innocence and teenage passion—Taylor quotes the lyrics to The Penguins's classic "Earth Angel" to illustrate this—but as compelling of a fantasy as it was, the music had a very brief shelf life. It was quickly replaced by rock 'n' roll, a genre with more "adult" themes, as the 1950s progressed. Doo-wop's rapid rise and fall also helped to make the genre the domain of rabid collectors; Taylor quotes Jeffrey Melnick, who argues that "doo-wop was transformed into a collector's artifact more quickly, more decisively, and more zealously than perhaps any other subgenre of American music" (Melnick 1997:137, 97). Despite its status as a recorded artifact, doo-wop plays out its nostalgia today, interestingly, through live performances—a "technology of nostalgia, or prosthetic memory," as Taylor writes, where performers in these revival groups and listeners act out the "passions of youth and the promise of racial harmony" (106). Continuing to probe the connections between doo-wop and race in the 1950s, Taylor contends that the genre articulated promises of integration and optimism about race. "This was a unique cultural moment in American history," he argues, "where there was perhaps more crossover by African American musicians to white audiences than at any other point in American history" (101).

Trevor Pinch and David Reinecke's chapter, "Technostalgia: How Old Gear Lives on in New Music," examines the musicians and collectors who value vintage synthesizers, such as the Moog Minimoog, and bygone guitars, so much so that a process known as "relicing," in which new guitars are made to look and sound aged, has become popular. Pinch already has a good deal of experience with technostalgia; in his book *Analog Days* (2004) with Frank Trocco, he traced the history and impact of the cultish Moog synthesizer, along with the ARP, Buchla, and EMS synthesizers. In *Sound Souvenirs*, he and Reinecke focus on interviews with four musicians who all profess a fondness for old gear, such as analog synths, vintage amps, and classic Les Paul guitars. But what is striking here is that all four of the musicians are men, several of whom hold positions in academic departments. Do, for instance, female artists share a similar fascination with old '70s analog technology? Do they find value, in Pinch and Reinecke's words, in "the uniqueness of analog sound, its imprecisions and imperfections, and the noise it produces, which [John, one of the musicians profiled] also thinks evokes human emotion" (165)? What about musicians of different cultures, races, ages, and ethnicities? In its small sample of examined cases, Pinch and Reinecke's contribution raises further questions by its exclusivity and the nature of its omissions.

One of the most revelatory pieces is Carolyn Birdsall's chapter, "Earwitnessing: Sound Memories of the Nazi Period." For her contribution, Birdsall interviewed several German survivors of the Nazi era living in Düsseldorf. While many survivors have been repeatedly asked about their visual memories, few have been specifically questioned regarding their memories of sounds. The relationship between trauma and visual images has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Bennett 2005, Kraft 2006, Katalin 2007), but the connections between sound and trauma are less well explored (outside the realm of music therapy and medical literature). During Birdsall's extensive oral history interviews, she observed that her interviewees would often jump out of their chairs or raise their arms to demonstrate how they were forced to perform the "Heil Hitler" salute; some began to stamp their feet while others would begin singing the lyrics to the national anthem. Birdsall uses the cultural geographer Ben Anderson's framework on the role of sound in the embodied process of remembering, with its three categories: "habit memory," "intentional remembering," and "involuntary remembering" (2004). Of her explorations into these three forms of remembering, the involuntary variety is the most striking. Birdsall dwells on the nature of unanticipated memory through this lens of Anderson's concept and Marcel Proust's related idea of "memoire involuntaire," (176). One interviewee still panics and clutches her chest whenever she hears sirens; another said that she can only speak in *Plattdeutsch*, a German dialect she has not used since World War II, when she experiences a shock today (177). The elderly subjects that Birdsall studied had difficulty with their "sound memories," mixing the sounds of the past with the sounds of the present. "While the sounds associated with bombings, such as sirens, were referred to as memories located in the past," Birdsall writes, "the actual event of the bombing was acted out as occurring in the present" (177-178).

Sound Souvenirs is an ambitious volume, with a vision, depth, and expansiveness that stretches far beyond its mere 218 pages. Uniting the four disparate sections under the umbrella of "sound souvenirs" feels unwieldy and somewhat arbitrary at points. This collection is really four separate books in one; each of the four sections could have easily been expanded into its own anthology. The book could also benefit from expanding its scope beyond Western Europe and the United States. Overall, *Sound Souvenirs* is an admirable effort in the rapidly growing field of sound studies, anticipating several entry points for further exploration.

References

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