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**Jonathan Sterne (ed.):
The Sound Studies Reader.
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This is, indeed, an imposing book: in 46 very different (edited and excerpted) articles with a wide span of subjects, theories and methodologies, this anthology marks another decisive and clearly strong interdisciplinary step in the ongoing construction of a not yet fully consolidated research and study field. Like the object (or subject) of study itself, the field of sound study is still *in movement*, on its way, preceded by other anthologies such as, for instance, Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.): *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003), Christoph Cox and Dan Warner (eds.): *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (2004), and a book that is almost strikingly in sync with this one: *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (ed. by Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, 2012). Whereas Bull and Back focus on listening cultures, Cox and Warner are concerned with the aesthetic-philosophical, art and the sensorial. Whereas the other 2012 publication from Oxford University Press presents only *newly* written articles that, like *The Sound Studies Reader*, cross many disciplines such as acoustic ecology, sound design, urban studies, cultural geography, media, culture, communication studies, sociology, and literary studies, *The Sound Studies Reader* anthologizes older texts, including canonical ones (by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Don Ihde, Jacques Attali, Murray Schafer, Friedrich Kittler), all written in the 46 years between 1965 and 2011.

So, this take on sound studies is complex and advanced – It crosses many disciplines in a theoretically ambitious and, sometimes, pretentious way. It is also often difficult to read in spite of the fact that intentional readers are explicitly thought of as newcomers “whose primary academic calling is not at first blush sonic” (SSR: 10). It might seem that the ori-

entation towards newcomers means, first and foremost, that *the traditional musicological* angles and texts of restricted technical code are left out. Otherwise, the texts chosen are readable *and* quite demanding for a newcomer. But this is also a part of the special challenge it is to study and write in the field of sound.

The editor has made two important choices, though – namely, to edit and shorten many of the texts down to approximately 10 pages and to group the articles into the following six groups: Part I: Hearing, Listening, Deafness; Part II: Spaces, Sites, Scapes; Part III: Transduce and Record; Part IV: Collectivities and Couplings; Part V: The Sonic Arts: Aesthetics, Experience, Interpretation; Part VI: Voices. Altogether, this grouping seems to cover and somewhat systematize the content – and it points to the most obvious way to read the book: to search for themes, inspiration, interests or to pick something by chance and not read it from a beginning to an end as I unfortunately did!

Since Jonathan Sterne himself is an expert in media and (the history of) technology and a culture researcher and teacher in Canada (and the US), the articles chosen naturally come from his own field, his local contexts and interest in articles about the historical use and meanings of the telephone and radio, sound in film, voices, noises of the avant-garde and futurists, synthesizers, the cassette and the Walkman, recording studios, micro vibration, the iPod, phonographs, gramophones, laughing machines and more. But there are also articles that focus on the sound of a whole country (cultures in the Americas), the sound of spaces, buildings and architecture, the use of cassette sermons in modern Egypt, the phenomenologies and politics of listening to voices, immersive underwater soundscapes, sound art and sound, modernity and history. Some of the articles seem very local, indeed, although it is not explicitly stated or contextualized. Obviously weakly represented, however, are articles about music: its aesthetics, practices, cultures and affordances. This is a pity since it is exactly in those fields of study that very thorough work has been done on analyzing, describing, theorizing, and discussing sound as a phenomenon. Furthermore, it is also in the milieu of the aesthetic disciplines around musicology that sound studies at universities in Denmark and other Nordic countries have been initiated and developed (through projects, networks, conferences and workshops) since around 2005; whereas media and communication studies as disciplines are latecomers to Denmark, only newly arrived in the field of sound studies. Out of the musicology and aesthetic research milieu came one of the two newly-launched online journals in the field: *SoundEffects*, based at Aarhus University, DK) <http://www.soundeffects.dk/> and the other, *Sonic Studies* in the Netherlands <http://sonicstudies.org/>.

What, then, is the overall agenda of the book, its strength and competencies? It was rather difficult from reading Sterne's introduction (Chapter 1) for the first time to grasp the meaning or relevance of the concept of sonic imagination – whether it is a nodal point, a focus, an aim or a strategy of the book. Should sonic imagination be the result or the precondition for the field of sound studies? Should it be an ideal or a tool for studying sound or, perhaps, the historical ground or root for the overwhelming amount of today's actual

sonic phenomena, processes, features and aspects? Or, perhaps, it should more be viewed through the widespread modes of thinking current today in academic studies and research in the arts and humanities and sociology as an applied tool for the demands of late capitalist society and its need for innovation and creativity? Imagination rhymes with innovation, but it also rhymes with vibration, sensation and transformation. The latter three point toward a common stratum of movement, transgression and ever-ongoing changes – in epistemology and ontology. Moreover, they and imagination point toward shifting relations (or contexts), which might lead us to the notion of sound as a *shifter*: it works like a *relay*, changing significations and functions – making “the not yet there” a factual possibility. The ability to create change and shifts in function and signification is grounded in *imagination*: what we can imagine may come true. So, we might understand his *sonic imaginations*, which is the title of the introduction, as a parallel to Sterne’s reference to the notion of “sociological imaginations” as the possibility of conceiving social and political change when he writes: “It is tempting to call sound studies a response to our changing sonic world – and it is that” (SRR: 2). At any rate, he is wisely very reticent to attempt to fixate or define the exact meaning of sound.

Instead, he refers to others who have tried to encircle what we can epistemologically ascribe to sound – for instance, Steven Feld’s term “acoustemology,” which describes “one’s sonic way of knowing and being in the world,” based on Feld’s anthropological methods in studies of exotic cultures (SRR: 8). However, Sterne ends up with his own interpretation and definition:

Sonic imaginations denote a quality of mind, but not a totality of mind. In addition to carving out their own intellectual spaces within other fields, *sound students* [my italics] facilitate the sonic imaginations of scholars who might deal with sound in their work even though it is not their primary concern. Just as concepts of the gaze and images bounce back and forth between studies of visual cultures and much broader fields of social and cultural thought, so too do concepts with a sonic dimension like hearing, listening, voice, space and transduction (to name just a few) – and sound itself. Figurations of these terms already populate whole fields whether they are consciously attended to or not (SRR: 9).

So, the focus and overall principle of Sterne’s understanding and definition of sound studies is clearly *interdisciplinarity*: it should be a *sine qua non*. Furthermore, there is a clear ambition to provide sound studies a necessary upgraded status in *grand theory* or late modern theory. The occupation with, interest in and qualification of sound (studies) has hitherto been rather weak, virtually unmentioned in grand theory. This book provides evidence of and convinces us that sound studies are needed and central to understand the world of yesterday and of tomorrow.

Almost in parallel with the publication of *The Sound Studies Reader* and mentioned in a note (SRR: 12), a group connected with Danish universities, together with colleagues from the Netherlands, Germany, the UK and the Nordic countries, has established the interna-

tional *European Sound Studies Association* (ESSA), which held its first conference in Berlin (October 2013) and its second in Copenhagen in June 2014. ESSA seems to be needed to develop a stronger impact from Europe on the international sound studies field in the future. In this work, *The Sound Studies Reader* will obviously be very important as one of the milestones of or standards for future sound studies.

With respect to the use of *The Sound Studies Reader* in teaching, it is an open question whether, at this stage in the development of the field, it can function at the undergraduate level: some of the articles can. But, surely, *The Reader* is an excellent collection and source of inspiration for all – newcomers as well as old hands – in sound studies research that crosses disciplines, methodologies and theories. It is also a “must” for academics in the humanities and sociology who have not yet encountered or dared to incorporate sound studies in their interdisciplinary study and research.

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