Sound

Jorinde Seijdel

Open 9 examines the role of sound in the public domain. After all, public space is manifest not only visually, but also, and to a considerable extent, acoustically: its public nature hinges on visibility as well as on audibility. All the same, the accent in cultural or social analyses of the public space still often rests on the visual. Despite sound's ubiquity and inescapability, it is usually regarded as being merely illustrative, a minor consideration or nuisance. Marshall McLuhan took a critical stance on the dominance of 'visual space' as the 'linear, quantitative mode of perception that is characteristic of the Western world'. In his view, however, this traditional space was being superseded by the 'global village', constituted by the electronic media, which he likened to 'acoustic space', a mythical, tactile, organic and integral space that is characterized by solidarity.

Though this now seems largely utopian, it is clear that technology and new media amplify the auditory space, or add an extra dimension that has aesthetic, ethical and political implications. For this reason alone, involving the role of sound in reflections on public space and in its design is as necessary as taking the visual into account. In recent years there seems to have been an increasing sensitization for the auditory aspects of everyday life and the public domain. Within 'cultural studies', 'sound studies' has emerged as a serious area of research that focuses on the history of audio media, on reflection about the nature of sound and listening or on the role of sound in modern experience and perception. In the visual arts, research is focused on the potency of sound as an aesthetic, meaningful or communicative element in relation to social or spatial environments. The medium of radio, which has proven itself capable of embracing digital culture, seems to be undergoing a veritable cultural revival, and is also being extensively explored artistically.

In *Open* 9 there are essays about the way in which sound and audio media play a role in urban public environments, and how they can propagate publicness or indeed sabotage it. Jonathan Sterne, whose published work includes *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2002), underscores how 'acoustic design' or 'sonic architecture' can be deployed as a tactical instrument in the politics and design of urban culture in order to manage spaces. In their 'pop analysis of the urbanization process', Alex de Jong and Marc Schuilenburg were inspired by Peter Sloterdijk's 'spheres' concept. Using techno, the architecture of Archigram and 'Urban' youth culture as examples, they argue that spheres lead to a shared urban experience. Within the specific context of the city, Caroline Bassett examines the qualities of the auditory space created by mobile telephony, which make possible a new, mobile subjectivity. In the literary essay 'The Multiplication of the Street', Dirk van Weelden writes about the changing relations between radio and publicness based on his fascination for the physical aspect of listening to radio. In the column 'Listen and Learn', Siebe Thissen calls into question the protection of copyright by the music industry with respect to 'audio bloggers' on the Internet.

Open 9 also features a range of international artists from different generations. They explore the possibilities and conditions for sound and public space in their work, as well as the limitations. Based on an interview, Brigitte van der Sande discusses the work of Moniek Toebosch, a performance and audio artist in whose work sound has played a critical role from the very start. Ulrich Loock analyses Max Neuhaus's sound artwork *Times Square*, which was installed invisibly on Broadway in New York City in 1977. Artist

Mark Bain discusses his critical intercourse with sound and space in a text about repressive and subversive sonic techniques. For a performance at the Kalvertoren shopping centre in Amsterdam, the German collective LIGNA wrote an evocative 'monologue for a broadcaster's voice' about the future of radio art. Jeanne van Heeswijk and Amy Plant designed a new sound medium, the Vibe Detector, as a means to gain an understanding of urban transformation processes. The device was tested in a neighbourhood in London. A series of logbook fragments that sprang from this, as well as documentary photos, illustrate how 'fleeting layers of sound' can reveal what is happening in a specific area.

As a supplement to *Open* 9 there is an mp3 disc that includes work by Toebosch, Bain and LIGNA. Besides the audio version of the above-mentioned monologue by LIGNA, *Dial the Signals!* , a radio concert for 144 mobile telephones, is also included. The disc also includes a special compilation of radio programmes that were made in autumn 2005 and broadcast during *Radiodays*, a project by participants in the 10th Curatorial Training Programme at De Appel in Amsterdam. One of the curators, Huib Haye van der Werf, made an audio selection including interviews with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Suchan Kinoshita along with programmes by Raul Keller, Guy van Belle and James Beckett for *Open* 9.

Read and listen!

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Tags

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