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Klänge als Cultural Property: Technik und die kulturelle Aneignung der Klangwelt

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Abstract: Wie kommen Gruppen und Akteure zu «ihrer» Kultur, und wie werden aus alltäglichen Phänomenen besondere, geschätzte Kulturgüter (Cultural Property)? Welche Bedeutung hat Technik für die Entstehung von klingendem Kulturgut? Die Studie erforscht am Beispiel der alltäglichen Klangwelt und aus der Perspektive einer anthropology of the senses die sinnlich-ephemere Dimension der Entstehung von Cultural Property und Cultural Heritage: die Beziehung zwischen Gruppen und ihren Kulturgütern und die Stabilisierung dieser Verbindung durch Performances, Medien und Archive. Die Arbeit verbindet die Themenfelder kulturwissenschaftliche Technikforschung, Sound Studies und Heritage Studies. Auf der Basis von Interviews, Rundfunkarchivalien und weiteren ethnografischen Daten werden in empirischen Fallstudien aus der alltäglichen Klangwelt die maritime Klanglandschaft Flensburgs, klingende Erinnerungsorte im Rundfunk und Politiken der Archivierung des audiovisuellen Erbes untersucht. Technik ermöglicht die kulturelle Aneignung von Klängen: Archiv-, Speicher- und Medientechnik bilden die Voraussetzung für die Verwandlung der flüchtigen Alltagskultur in dauerhaft verfügbare immaterielle Kulturgüter, die für Identitätspolitik und ökonomische Wertschöpfungen valorisierbar werden. Drei Modi kultureller Aneignung im Alltag werden konturiert: Wahrnehmung, Semiotisierung und Archivierung. How do cultural groups and actors come to “their” culture, and how do certain cultural phenomena of everyday culture acquire the special and valorized status of cultural property? What is the role of technology in the development of sounding cultural property? This ethnography explores the sensory-ephemeral dimension of cultural property and cultural heritage. The study is informed by an anthropology of the senses and searches both for the relationship between cultural groups and their “ephemeral” cultural property as well as its development and establishment through performance, technology, and archives. The volume comprises three case studies on the everyday sound world: a local touristic harbour festival, individual and collective signature sounds, and heritage policy in the realm of sound archives.

Other titles: Sounds as Cultural Property: Technology and the Cultural Appropriation of the Soundworld

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[English Summary, pp. 223–226]

Sounds as Cultural Property – Technology and the Cultural Appropriation of the Soundworld

How do cultural groups and actors come to “their” culture, and how do certain cultural phenomena of everyday culture acquire the special status of treasured cultural property? What is the role of technology in the development of sonic cultural property? This ethnography explores the sensory dimension of cultural property and cultural heritage. The study is informed by both folklore studies and the anthropology of the senses. It investigates the relationship between cultural groups and their ephemeral cultural property, and its development and establishment through performance, repetition and re-contextualisation, and archiving. Technology allows for the cultural appropriation of the soundworld: archives, storage and media technologies provide the basis for the transformation of diffuse everyday culture into a well-defined and permanently available form of “intangible” property that can be circulated and valorised in identity politics as well as an economic resource. The volume comprises three case studies on the cultural appropriation of the everyday soundworld: a local touristic harbour festival, individual and collective signature sounds, and heritage policy in the realm of institutional sound archives. Three modes of cultural appropriation are examined that for the most part take place subconsciously: perception, semiotisation, and archiving.

The term *soundworld* is derived from the phenomenological term (and concept) *lifeworld* and gives emphasis to the social construction and culturally shared meaning of everyday sounds. Sounds (including mediated sounds) are omnipresent elements of our everyday world and are acquiring increasing attention in the humanities. This interdisciplinary study combines the sociocultural study of technology [kulturwissenschaftliche Technikforschung], sound studies and heritage studies, the latter currently of great interest in folklore studies and anthropology. It will be argued for a broader understanding of the concept of cultural property to include not only the certified forms of cultural property, i.e., as cultural heritage or as culture protected and promoted by intellectual property rights. Rather, it focuses on forms of the cultural appropriation of sounds by means of their perception, staging,

musealisation and archiving – processes that largely take place apart from formalised cultural politics. At the same time these practices of cultural appropriation form the basis for the formalised and reflected appropriation of cultural elements, e.g., as certified cultural heritage and property. In other words: cultural property [224] does not emerge with the definition or application of legal protection but in everyday perception and practice.

The soundworld was chosen as the object of study because it has to date only seldom been the subject of formal cultural appropriations, exceptions being provided by the sphere of music, which is protected by copyright/intellectual property law, and by audiovisual heritage initiatives. But cultural property does more than encompass the legal appropriation and protection of “culture”. The study investigates the diversity of modes of cultural appropriation. On the empirical basis of interviews, the analysis of archival radio materials and other ethnographic data, the case studies examine the role of steamboat sounds for the maritime soundscape and the touristic image of the city of Flensburg, the intertwining of memo-politics, media texts and individual sound memories which are often referred to in historiography as *lieux de mémoire*, and the practices and policy of (national) audiovisual heritage in the context of institutional media archives.

The study argues for a reconsideration of the concept of cultural property. It starts from the discussion of sensory perception in phenomenological theory. Informed by phenomenology, the anthropology of the senses does not separate perception from cultural interpretation: The study argues for a reconsideration of the cultural dimension of sensory perception in the study of popular culture in order to reveal the role of ephemeral aspects of cultural property – that is, the formation of a peculiar relationship between groups and their cultural elements as a precursor of processes of conscious appropriation. The first chapter is an attempt to liberate the idea of cultural property from its often implicit association with legal concepts by pointing out the diverse readings of the appropriation concept. The canon of issues in the interdisciplinary study of cultural heritage and cultural property often remains limited to the circulations of cultural knowledge and expressions (i.e. traditional medicine, secret/sacred knowledge, folklore) in a globalised world and is more often than not attributed to a commodification or even misappropriation of indigenous knowledge by “Western” actors. These studies often explore legal and ethical questions concerning the appropriation and commodification of cultural elements – cultural elements that are already highly valorised and symbolically or economically treasured, such as folk music, or iconic bells. But how do sounds become soundmarks at all, sounding cultural property or, more generally, value-laden elements of everyday life?

If we understand, second, culture in the broadest sense as the *modus vivendi* for dealing with the lifeworld, the phenomenon of cultural appropriation must extend beyond the legal and economic aspects of the term – that is, the attainment of complete control over a good (commodity) and its use. Cultural appropriation then includes other facets of the relationship between [225] actors and the culture they imagine to be particular to them. Appropriation acquires a practical aspect as it is theorised in social and cultural study of science and technology: cultural appropriation as the development of routine practices and webs of significance vis-à-vis technologies. A further important aspect to the idea of appropriation originates in the phenomenological anthropology of the senses. Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Helmuth Plessner and footed in the most current literature on sensory anthropology, perception is seen as the most basic mode of understanding of the world. Perception and knowledge form a unity of the senses [Einheit der Sinne]. This mode of appropriation associated with interpretive patterns and values in relation to the world is for the most part unconscious. Rarely an object of documented cultural politics, it must be analysed on the basis of a sensory ethnography. This phenomenological premise forms the basis for a sensory-informed anthropology that looks not to banish the ephemeral aspects of culture from ethnography but methodically and explicitly include them.

The processes of the emergence of meaning and of the valorisation of particular cultural elements are traced in three case studies on the everyday sound world (chapters 3–5). The first case study examines cultural heritage politics in the northern German city of Flensburg as these effect the soundscape of the harbour and its presentation. Commencing from the perspective of soundscape studies, the first goal is to describe taxonomically the sound of the Flensburg harbour. The senses become the first mode of cultural appropriation of a city, not only theoretically but also methodologically. In the mind's eye emerge, as a survey of passersby verifies, water, seabirds and ships. But this does not coincide with everyday reality, the car traffic being by far the most dominant sound of the historical harbour. The repeated staging of a harbour atmosphere with the help of summer festivals – with roads closed to cars, maritime music and steamboat's horn concerts – has an important influence on the acoustic perception of the city. Contributing to a tourist-friendly image of Flensburg as a city with a vibrant “maritime heritage”, this has become a major factor in the rejuvenation (and gentrification) of the urban districts around the harbour.

The soundscape is perceived in completely new ways when media technology comes into play. The second case study examines the semiotisation of individual sonic elements in everyday media contexts. On the basis of interviews and radio archives it will be examined

how sounds become meaningful codes of collective memory in individual narratives (or not). Using Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), the layers of meaning of mediated sounds and the inscriptions of (media)technology in everyday life will be explored. The term sites of memory underlines that a canonised and reflected culture of memory does not exist per se but is socially [226] constructed, i.e., marked by sedimented layers of meaning around a historical date or site. The layers can be examined by means of a media archaeology. A comparative study follows between a sound with little connoted meaning – everyday traffic – and a well-coded *lieu de mémoire* – John F. Kennedy's “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech (1963). Since it is often difficult for interviewees to put auditory knowledge into words, it proved effective to resort in addition to media texts to examine collective interpretations. Recordings held in radio archives were thus used to examine the historical dimension of this kind of everyday tonal knowledge. The narratology hypothesis that individual recollection is often framed in collective memory and that media texts and interpretations are vital to the development of collectively remembered sound codes is affirmed.

With the possibility to store and disseminate sounds, they become a medium of “simultaneous collective reception,” as Walter Benjamin puts it, and could be used in the service of nationalised cultural memory politics. The third case study deals with the memo-political appropriation of the sound world as sounding cultural property. Two concepts of the archive are examined: first, archives (plural) in the media-archaeological form as institutions of cultural memory and the technological prerequisite of a collective memory. Radio and cultural archives are witnesses of the first institutionalised memo-political appropriations and valorisations of the sound world: as UNESCO Memory of the World or as national audiovisual heritage as defined by national archival strategies. Secondly, the archive (singular) is examined in a Foucaultian sense as a metaphor and powerful dispositive consisting of institutions, discourses, rules and actors that control discourses of “truth” and establish the order of what can be said.

In an outlook, the modes of cultural appropriation of the soundworld are located in their relationship to an emerging cognitive capitalism. It is shown that the valorisation of the sound world is most successful both in terms of identity politics and monetary economics, when they are free of legal-archival restraints, for example, culture and ecotourism, public folklore, and the cultural politics of “living traditions.”

Not least, the soundworld forms an integral part of this work: sounds accompany the case studies on line (<http://www.zora.uzh.ch/111069/>).