



Film Sound in Preservation and Presentation
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In the dissertation “Film Sound in Preservation and Presentation” the nature of film sound is investigated through the perspective of film preservation and presentation, i.e. the cultural and social practices aimed at the preservation, restoration, presentation of, and access to film heritage.

The point of departure of the research is the consideration of the hegemony of the visual in Western cultures and societies. The hegemony of the visual can in fact be detected also in film studies: film, from its inception, has been defined as a fundamentally image-oriented medium, in which the image and visual component has predominance over the sound component. Furthermore, sound can be considered as being *lost in transience*: the transitory and ephemeral nature of sound, the difficulty to define it easily through the language, and the impossibility to duplicate it as an event are the main reasons for the underestimation of sound in film and film preservation studies. The consideration of the hegemony of the visual and the transience of sound prompts to argue that the nature of film sound has yet to be investigated in all its core dimensions and components by film theory and film preservation theory.

With this premise, the dissertation aims to investigate the different dimensions of film sound that emerges from preservation and presentation practices, recurring to some key concepts: the material dimension (carrier, *physical trace*), the human and technological dimensions (*dispositif*), the textual dimension (text), the institutional dimension (physical space, institutional context), the performative dimension (*performance*), the experiential dimension (*cinematic soundscape*), and the memorial dimensions (*film sound souvenirs, mnemonic trace*).

The first chapter traces the memorial dimension of film sound, elaborating on the concept of *film sound souvenirs* in relation to individual and cultural memory. In this discourse a special attention is given to social and artistic practices in which the concept of noise emerges as a mark of the recorded sounds of the past (*soundstalgia, cracked sounds*).

The observation of social and artistic practices related to recorded sound of the past lead to the second chapter, where the memorial dimension of film sound is analyzed on a theoretical level. In order to conceptualize how recorded sound relates to our individual and cultural memory, the notion of *media memory* is elaborated, recalling Sigmund Freud's famous *mystic writing pad* model and its interpretation by film historian Thomas Elsaesser. Next to the concept of media memory, also the notion of *audiovisual trace* contribute to understand on a theoretical level how film as trace can become part of cultural memory. The concept of trace is considered in a double meaning: the *physical trace*, the inscription of visual and aural data on a carrier, but also to a *mnemic trace*, intended as the trace that a film leaves in cultural memory.

The following two chapters are dedicated to analyzing case studies that involve film sound preservation and presentation practices. Chapter three presents the case of the preservation of early sound systems, focusing on the *Biophon*, *Chronophone*, *Phono-Cinéma-Théâtre*, and *Vitaphone* systems. These early sound systems are characterized by the separation of image and sound in two different carriers: the image is recorded on film while sound is recorded on disc or cylinder. The separation of image and sound raises relevant issues for film preservation and presentation, which can help to define some dimensions of film sound, such as the carrier, *dispositif* and text. The consideration of these systems is also significant with regards to film historiography: the fact that these systems date from before the so-called "coming of sound" of the late 1920s induce the question of why these systems were not considered as part of the sound period, and what is the consequent conception of sound sustained by film historiography.

Chapter four focuses on film sound presentation practices through the analysis of the case of the EYE Film Institute Netherlands, in the activities of which an experimental tradition in film sound presentation can be detected. A particular attention is given to the institutional dimension of film sound, which refers to the space and context of presentation, and to the experiential dimension, that how film sound is perceived and experienced by the audience in a particular cinematic event. Using the concept of *soundscape*, here it is explored how film sound is perceived and experienced in the new EYE venue, and how the space and institutional context influence film sound experience.

In light of the socio-cultural and theoretical considerations on film sound made in the first two chapters and of the case studies analyzed in the third and fourth, chapter five presents a theoretical model for defining film sound. On one hand, this model contributes to film theory, since it helps to define the dynamic and transitory nature of film sound, its different dimensions, and the interrelations between the different dimensions. On the other hand, the model can serve as a potential tool for arriving at and interpreting decisions in preservation and presentation practices, through the identification of the relevant aspects of film sound that are to be considered when preserving or exhibiting film heritage.

The theoretical definition of film sound is constructed on three conceptual nucleuses: film sound as *material form*, *trace*, and *performance*. These three concepts, considered as interrelated, can in fact offer a model for describing and understanding the all the different dimensions of film sound that emerged from preservation and presentation practices analyzed in the case studies: the material, human, technological, institutional, experiential, and memorial dimensions.