

SELECTED BY: RICK ALTMAN

Giusy Pisano, *Une Archéologie du cinéma sonore* (Paris: CNRS, 2004)

One of the oldest human dreams is the desire to store and reproduce sound in the same way that images can be replicated. Unless sound can be reproduced, it can't be properly studied, stored, or sold, and thus must remain unavailable for scientific and commercial exploitation. The history of attempts to domesticate sound is thus rich and fascinating, as Giusy Pisano demonstrates in her archaeology of sound cinema. This is not a history of cinema sound like Harry Geduld's *The Birth of the Talkies: From Edison to Jolson*. Where Geduld concentrates on those who applied existing ideas about sound to cinema (De Forrest, Case, Sponable), stressing Phonofilm, Vitaphone, and other 1920s sound systems, Pisano offers a complete overview of the ways in which the Western world learned to document and reproduce sound events.

The book's first section explores the sound-oriented myths and dreams of antiquity (the statue of Memnon) and the Renaissance (Rabelais' *paroles gelées*), the magical approach of early moderns (Athanasius Kircher, Giambattista Della Porta, Etienne-Gaspard Robertson), and the 18th century's increasingly experimental science of sounds, with its emphasis on the production of automatons capable of reproducing the mechanisms of the human body. Moving into the 19th century, Pisano concentrates on the all too neglected figure of Thomas Young, one of the first to devise an adequate method for transcribing movement, eventually successfully applied to transcription of the vibrations produced by sound. Though Pisano makes it clear that her principal domain is France in the 19th century, the international nature of

reflections and experiments on sound regularly takes her far afield. The clarity of her summaries of important developments is most welcome.

Once Pisano reaches the mid 19th century, her earlier broad coverage joins the more familiar history of phonography. The usual suspects thus make their appearance here: Léon Scott de Martinville, Helmholtz, Marey, Muybridge, Alexander Graham Bell, Edison, Berliner. In a final section, Pisano provides in-depth coverage of the many late 19th century attempts to synchronize sound and image.

Based on substantial new research into a wide range of documents and materials (patents, laboratory instruments, projection systems, contemporary claims and reviews, catalogues, technical documents), Pisano's work adds substantially to previous work in this domain. Her ability to handle technical writing in several languages gives her work a breadth not seen elsewhere. Whether she is dealing with myth, magic, or science, Pisano does a first-rate job of explaining not only the details of each theory, but also their general import and relation to other theories. The book also benefits substantially from several dozen well-chosen illustrations.

SELECTED BY: THOMAS ELSAESSER

Kirsten Baumann, Rolf Sachsse (eds.), *Moderne grüße/Modern Greetings. Fotografierte Architektur auf Ansichtskarten 1919-1939/Photographed Architecture on Picture Postcards 1919-1939* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2004)

One of the most famous examples of international modernism in architecture is the Weissenhofsiedlung near Stuttgart, a housing complex designed in 1927 by