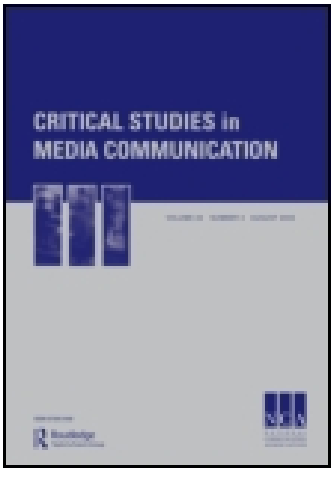

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Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory

José van Dijck

Recorded music is vital to the construction of personal and collective cultural memory. My examination of the interrelation between personal and collective memories of popular music assumes both that human memory is simultaneously embodied, enabled, and embedded, and that (re)collective experiences are constructed through narratives. Analysis of an online set of narrative responses to a national radio-event, the Dutch Top 2000, shows that we need public spaces to share narratives and to create a common musical heritage.

Keywords: Popular Music; Cultural Memory; Sound Technologies; Recorded Music; Autobiographical Memory

Introduction

In recent decades, recorded popular music has commonly been studied as either a vital component of people's personal memory or a constitutive element in the construction of collective identity and cultural heritage. Psychologists and (neuro-)cognitive scientists have extensively researched the role of music in the relation between emotion, individual identity, and autobiographical memory (Mather 2004; Meyer, 1961). Sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists, from entirely different academic perspectives, regard recorded music to be part of our collective cultural memory and identity (Lipsitz, 1990; Connell & Gibson, 2003). Shared listening, exchanging (recorded) songs, and talking about music create a sense of belonging, and connect a person's sense of self to a larger community and generation. However, autobiographical and social memory should not be considered separate

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domains; there is an intricate and recursive connection between personal and collective cultural memory (Van Dijck, 2004). People nourish emotional and tangible connections to songs before entrusting them to their personal (mental and material) reservoirs, but they also need to share musical preferences with others before songs become part of a collective repertoire that, in turn, provides new resources for personal engagement with recorded music. My main contention here is that musical memories become manifest at the intersections of personal and collective memory and identity. Naturally arising from this contention is the question of how personal and collective memory intermingle: How does recorded popular music stick to our individual minds, and what makes it become part of a collective memory?

Analysis of the interrelation between music and memory is based on the assumption that the human's recovery of the past is simultaneously *embodied*, *enabled*, and *embedded*. Autobiographical memories are embodied in the brains and minds of individual people through everyday routines and unconscious practices (Bluck, 2003). As I will elaborate below, specific affects and emotions are attached to particular songs, a connection that is literally located in the body/mind because the human process of remembering is, as Prager (1998) claims, an "active, interpretative process of a conscious mind situated in the world" (p. 215). Moreover, musical memories are enabled through instruments for listening. This was true before the advent of recording technologies, and still holds true in the age of mechanical and digital reproduction. People become aware of their emotional and affective memories by means of technologies, and surprisingly often, the enabling apparatus becomes part of the recollecting experience. Songs or albums often get interpreted as a "sign of their time" in part also because they emerge from a sociotechnological context (Morton, 2000; Taylor, 2001). Finally, remembrance is always embedded, meaning that the larger social contexts in which individuals live stimulate memories of the past through frames generated in the present (Connerton, 1989; Misztal, 2003; Olick & Robbins, 1998). Specific cultural frames for recollection, such as Internet forums or radio programs, do not simply invoke but actually help construct collective memory.

Using cultural theory to explore the connections between personal memory and collective heritage, between individual affect and social effect, I analyze here the interrelation between personal and collective memories of popular music as they are constructed through stories *of* and *about* musical memory (Nelson, 2003; Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). Recollective experiences are often articulated in personal stories, and the analysis of narratives about music and memory will form the core of this article. To analyze the intertwining of personal and collective memories of recorded music, I turned to an online set of narrative responses generated through a national radio-event, the Dutch Top 2000. Every year, since 1999, a public radio station in The Netherlands (Radio 2) organizes a widely acclaimed five-day broadcast of the 2000 most popular songs of all time, a list entirely compiled by public radio listeners who send in their personal top-five favorites of pop songs.[1] During the event, the station solicits personal comments (both aesthetic evaluations and memories attached to songs). Besides having disc jockeys read those comments aloud during the live broadcast, they are also posted in their entirety on an interactive Web site. In

addition, the station opens up a chatroom. The result is an extensive database of comments and stories, constituting an intriguing window on how recorded music serves as a vehicle for memory.

Analysis of these stories will help us understand how human memory is concurrently an individually embodied, technologically enabled, and culturally embedded construction. First, the online comments, posted in response to individual songs ranked in the listing, will be analyzed in terms of embodiment—the word "body" referring to both brain and mind. How do individuals endow recorded music with emotion and affect? Second, memory narratives often betray a distinct technological awareness: How did recording and listening technologies enable a specific recollection? Third, there is the embedded nature of the Top 2000: how do social practices, such as communal listening and exchanging recorded music, and cultural forms, such as the Top 2000, actually shape collective memories of the past? Remembering through music requires public spaces to create a common musical heritage and identity.

Embodiment: Recorded Music, Memory, and Emotion

For a variety of reasons, we invest emotion, money, and time in compiling personal reservoirs of auditory culture. Like photographs or diary entries, music has a mnemonic function; listening to records helps inscribe and invoke specific events, emotions, or general moods (Balch & Lewis, 1996). Recorded music also has a formative function: young people in particular construct their identities while figuring out their musical taste.[2] Building up a repertoire in one's memory (an inventory of familiar songs) and accumulating selected items of recorded music (a material collection of sound items) are considered an important part of one's coming of age. In Western countries, recorded pop songs are often signifiers of individually lived experiences; people select items of music to gauge their taste against those of others, and savor them in order to procure a sense of continuity. Albums or songs are items of culture that we select and collect to store into our minds or in our private "jukeboxes," to recall at a later time. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (1999) has argued that recorded music can create emotional responses and realize personal and social identities.

We often casually remark that certain music "gets stuck" into our minds and comment on how some songs "get under our skin." Yet, how music gets nestled into our personal memories remains an enigma. Different parts and functions of the brain (cognitive, emotive, somatosensory) are involved in the remembrance of music. Repeated listening certainly helps; our cognitive memory can even be trained to retain melodic sequences for longer periods of time. As cognitivist scholar Patrick Colm Hogan (2003) states:

> The tendency of working memory to cyclic repetition combined with the exaggerated accessibility of a simple and frequently repeated tune gives rise to a situation in which the song is likely to cycle repeatedly through working memory.

> When this continues for a long time, we refer to it as 'having a song stuck in our head.' (p. 14)

The ability of recorded music to be replayed endlessly in exactly the same performance aids the build-up of auditory memories in people's minds; in addition to having a mnemonic function for the individual, repetition of music through media inscribes experiences in the human psyche (Kittler 1999, p. 89). Lisa Gitelman (2003) notes that "the phonograph introduced the intensity of true repetition to the performance of mass markets" (p. 65). Being exposed to particular songs over and over again enhances their popularity, both in the private mind and in collective experience.

Retaining all the music we hear in our lifetime is impossible; some mechanism must account for why only certain melodic rhythms get stuck in our long-term memory. In explaining why music gets "under the skin," cognitive scientists often refer to somatosensory reflexes and emotions as key factors in memory formation (Bourtchouladze 2002). We commonly think of intuitive responses to music as articulations of taste, but aesthetic pleasure and dislike also result from simple emotional arousals. A manifestation of our core consciousness, the perceptions of sounds may elicit direct physiological responses, such as shudders or body hair standing on end. As comments posted to the Top 2000 show, people often recall physical reactions. Many of these comments briefly express a simple emotion or aesthetic judgment ("this song makes me happy"). Yet, numerous comments bear witness to a listener's somatic response: "this song sends shivers down my spine" or "each time I hear this song, I get goose flesh."

These visceral reflexes, however significant in explaining emotional like or dislike, cannot satisfactorily account for how music gains a permanent presence in our autobiographical memories (Baumgartner, 1992). Two complementary explanations are possible. The first—neurocognitive theory detailing the brain's and the mind's involvement in constructing personal memory—will only be touched upon briefly, because the second explanation, stemming from a cultural-semiotic perspective, expounds on the first. Antonio Damasio (1999) distinguishes emotions from feelings, since feelings occur only after we become aware in our brain of emotional arousals (pp. 183–194). These feelings are then inscribed as mental image maps, maps that mutate with each recall. Moreover, during acts of reminiscence, remembrance and projection become inseparable. If Damasio is correct, memories of songs are more durable when we affectively invest in making them stick—that is, by constructing meaning for and around a musical item. But how do songs make sense to us in the long run? Damasio explains autobiographical memory as a function of extended consciousness that involves emotions and feelings. In addition to storing the sound of an object we hear, our memories also retain emotional reactions to it, as well as our mental and physical state at the time of apprehending. Out of that sensation or feeling, we create a (non-language) map or image of this event in our core consciousness, a "story" that also becomes verbally present in our minds by the time we focus on it. Upon later recall, recorded songs work as triggers, bringing back waves

of emotion, the specificity of a time, an event, a relationship, or evoking more general feelings. This "wordless storytelling" precedes language and happens entirely inside our brain; memory for recorded songs appears to hold longer when people turn emotion-infested sounds into internal narratives. Damasio also speculates that verbal stories, books, and so forth derive from the wordless stories first created in our minds.

Damasio's emphasis on internal narratives is surprisingly complementary to cultural-semiotic theory relating musical memory to individual and social identity. Turino (1999) approaches music as a system of signs; he uses Peirce's notion of indexicality to explain how music is not *about* feelings but rather involves signs *of* feeling and experience (p. 224). Musical signs, he says, are sonic events that create effects and affects in a perceiver the way a falling tree creates waves through the air. Rational effects or conscious responses are responses that involve reasoning: the interpretation or appreciation of music. The "secondness" or affect of music lies not in the sounds or words per se, but in the emotions, feelings, and experiences attached to hearing a particular song. Musical signs thus carry strong personal connotations betraying an emotional investment; at the same time, however, members of a social group share indices proportional to common experiences (see also Frith, 1987). In sum, musical signs integrate affective and identity-forming meanings in a direct manner.

Damasio's neurocognitive speculation and Turino's cultural semiotic conjecture cannot be empirically tested, but applying narrative analysis to stories telling how people feel are affected by recorded popular music offers an insight into the connection of personal and collective memory (Kuhn, 2000). Many respondents to the Top 2000 create images or stories around certain songs to help them communicate a particular feeling or mood, or to express one's affective ties to particular songs. These stories explain how people came to invest emotionally in a song and how they retained that attached meaning—a meaning they like to share with a large anonymous audience. As Damasio predicts, recall includes the experience of listening and the emotive state at the time of apprehending. Compare, for instance the first reaction to John Lennon's song "Imagine" to the next comment, posted in response to the U2 song "With or without you":

> It was 1971, I was waiting on a boat someplace in Norway when I heard this song for the first time. It was such a perfect day, everything was right: the weather, the blue sky, the peaceful tidal waves in the fjord matching the melodious waves of music. There are moments in life that you feel thoroughly, profoundly happy. This was such moment, believe me. (posted by Jan from Eindhoven)

> My father died suddenly in November of 1986. That night we all stayed awake. I isolated myself from my family by putting on the headphones and listening to this song. The intense sorrow I felt that night was expressed in Bono's intense screams. I will never forget this experience, and each time I hear this song I get tears in my eyes. (posted by Jelle van Netten from Woudsend)

Memories tied in with extreme pleasure or intense sorrow, like those above, are likely to stick in our minds, due to the brain's tendency to store sound perceptions along with their affects and somatosensory impact. The (explicit) narratives created out of these memories echo both universal and intimate experiences.

But memories are not always tied in with *specific* affective experiences; they may also evoke the mood of a time, place, or event when the song first became meaningful. Some songs trigger a more general mood or atmospheric sensation—an almost Proustian invocation of the past. The Beatles' "Penny Lane" seems especially conducive to such invocations of sensory moods:

> When this song first came out, I was three years old. Every time I now hear this record I can see a picture of my grandmother's living room, because I lived there at the time. This is very odd, because I can't remember anything else from that time, and this record puts me back into that time and place. It is my very first musical remembrance. (posted by Anja from Rosmalen)

Thus, a general longing for the mood of a past era is associated with lived experience, even if the experience is somewhat blurred and sensuous. Mental maps are partly derived from the object itself, and partly from the auditory, visual, olfactory, or other perceptions triggered in our minds (Damasio 2003). Respondents also frequently report smells and tastes to be invoked by familiar songs.

Anja's comment implies that the memory aroused upon hearing the song duplicates the original listening experience stored in one's memory. The idea of a record reiterating the same content each time it is played is subconsciously transposed to the experience attached to hearing the music. People's expectation to feel the same response each time a record is played, stems from a craving to relive the past as it was—as if the past were a record. Many of us want our memory of the original listening experience to be untainted by time or life's emotional toll. This is improbable. Instead, the "original listening experience" may be substituted by a fixed pattern of associations, a pattern that is likely to become more brightly and intensely colored over the years.[3] Memory changes each time it is being recalled, and its content is determined more by the present than by the past. "The age of recording is necessarily an age of nostalgia—when was the past so hauntingly accessible?—but its bitterest insight is the incapacity of even the most perfectly captured sound to restore the moment of its first inscribing. That world is no longer there" (O'Brien, 2004, p. 16).

Cognitive research confirms that musical remembrance alters with age. Schulkind, Hennis, and Rubin's clinical study shows that young adults tie in recorded music with memories of specific autobiographical events; in contrast, seniors use familiar songs as stimuli to summon more general memories and moods from the past.[4] Recorded music infested with feelings elicits stronger—albeit less specific—autobiographical memories later on in life. Since the narratives posted to the Top 2000 Web site do not systematically disclose the respondents' ages, I cannot confirm or disprove the researchers' empirical observation. In general, though, respondents who give clues to their age as being over 45 tend to refer more to nostalgic moods triggered by specific

songs than respondents who identify themselves as young adults. (But most songs featured in this collective ranking were popular in the era when baby-boomers came of age.)

Two Australian cultural geographers (Connell & Gibson, 2003) confirm the observation of neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists that musical memory is an emotional investment. They argue that "music can evoke memories of youth and act as a reminder of earlier freedoms, attitudes, events; its emotive power . . . serves to intensify feelings of nostalgia, regret or reminiscence" (pp. 222–223). And yet recorded music may also construct a cognitive framework through which (collectively) constructed meanings are transposed onto individual memory, resulting in an intricate mixture of recall and imagination, of recollections intermingled with extrapolations and myth. One listener, in response to the same Beatles' song mentioned above, comments on the oddity of certain music invoking an historical time frame she never lived through:

> This song elicits the ultimate Sunday-afternoon feeling, a feeling I associate with cigarette smoke, croquette [the Dutch variant of the hamburger] and amateur soccer games. This feeling marks my life between the ages of five and fifteen. A nostalgic longing of sorts, although I have to admit I was not even conceived when this record became a hit song. (posted by M. Klink from Leiden)

The respondent transposes the general mood of an era onto her childhood, even though these periods are distinctly apart. Perhaps she has projected a general impression of a decade, generation or Zeitgeist onto this particular song (Kotarba, 2002). Recall and projections thus curl into one story, even when the respondent realizes that remembrance cannot be rooted in actual lived experience.

So, narratives about music often braid private reminiscences into those of others or connect them to larger legacies. Certain songs become "our songs" when they are attached to the experience of a collective, be it a family or peer group. Verbal narratives help in the conveyance of musical preferences and the feelings associated with them, to the extent that it becomes difficult to tell "lived" memories from the stories told by parents or siblings (Misztal, 2003). This does not mean, of course, that children uncritically adopt their parents' memories or musical taste; young people construct their own favored repertoire by relating to peers as well as to older generations, either positively or negatively. Assorted comments posted to the Top 2000 Web site illustrate this. One respondent, reacting to the Doors' hit song "Riders on the storm," writes:

> One of the things my father passed on to me was his musical taste. His absolute favorite was Jim Morrison and as a child, I would sing along with every Doors' song. Remarkably, my father thought Riders on the Storm to be one of the worst Doors' songs, but I think it's one of their best. (posted by Joanna from Heerlen)

Another listener attributes her fondness for Carly Simon's pop song "You're so Vain" to fetal exposure:

> When my mother was pregnant with me, in 1973, my father bought her this album as a present. They played the record innumerable times. As long as I am aware, this

> has been my favorite pop song, but I only found out about my parents' story several years ago. Who knows, listening to music in the womb may have an effect on a person's musical taste! (posted by Harriette Hofstede from Dordrecht)

Musical memories can thus be understood as an intergenerational transfer of personal and collective heritage, not only by sharing music, but also by sharing stories. Like photographs, recorded songs relate personal memories. That older people are eager to pass on their stories along with their preference for certain recorded music is therefore not surprising.

Damasio's conjecture about the mind's involvement in autobiographical recall suggests that narrated audio-impressions help glue recorded music to people's cultural memory. Understood in terms of bodily affect, the mind is a sewing machine that quilts personal memory onto recorded music, stitched together by emotion and feelings. Whether tied in with specific experiences or general moods, stories appear a distinct aid in remembering the "mental associations" attached to a particular kind of music. We want the story to hold the "original affection" for future recollection. Yet stories, like records, are mere resources in the process of reminiscence, a process that often involves imagination as much as retention. In other words, our personal musical repertoire is a *living* memory that stimulates narrative engagement from the first time we hear a song up to each time we replay it at later stages in life.

Enabling Technologies: Recorded Music and 'Techno-Stalgia'

Technologies and objects of recorded music are an intrinsic part of the act of reminiscence. While their materiality alters with time (generating resentment), their aging may partially account for our very attachment to these objects. Personal memory evolves through our interactions with these apparatuses (record players, compact disc players, radios, etc) and material things (records, cassettes, digital files); both are agents in the process of remembering. Media technologies and objects are often deployed as metaphors, expressing a cultural desire for personal memory to function *like* an archive or storage facility for lived experience. The record's presumed ability to register—to record and hold—a particular mood, experience, or emotional response can be traced back to the record's historically ascribed function as a material-mechanical inscription of a single musical performance. It is almost a truism to expect technologies and objects to "replay" the presumed original sound of a song, notwithstanding our awareness that objects and apparatuses—like bodies—wear out over time.[5] The "thingness" of recorded music is unstable. Yet this knowledge does not prevent a peculiar yearning for the recreation of audio quality as it was first perceived, evidenced for instance by the recent "vinyl nostalgia" accompanying the surge in compact disc sales (Katz, 2004; Rothenbuhler & Peters, 1997). People who use recorded music as a vehicle for memories often yearn for more than mere retro appeal: They want these apparatuses to reenact their cherished experience of listening.

Comments posted on the Top 2000 Website illustrated the importance of technology. Many respondents mentioned the sound equipment through which they first heard a particular song, emphasizing how it defined their listening

experience. Recalling the Beatles's song "The long and winding road," a woman wrote:

> The first time I heard this song I almost snuggled into my transistor radio. This was the most beautiful thing I had ever heard. When I got the Beatles' album, I remember pushing the little Lenco-speakers against my ear (they were sort of the precursor of the Walkman). Whenever this record is played again, I get on my knees, direct my ears downward, pushing them toward the speakers on the floor. I still want to live in this song. (posted by Karin de Groot, from Rotterdam)

Here, the experience of listening seems inextricably intertwined with the (primitive) equipment that first enabled its broadcast. Needless to say, the reenactment never brings back the equipment and context of the original sound—a fact the respondent is very aware of—but certainly brings about the intended affect.

In other instances of reminiscence, the role of technology should be understood indexically rather than metaphorically, as it stands for taking control over one's sonic space. Memories of the original listening experience often allude to a newly acquired freedom to listen to these songs, alone or with friends, outside the living room (where the soundscape was usually controlled by the musical taste of parents). The 1960s ushered in a period of "private mobilization," to borrow Raymond Williams' (1974) renowned term, so many respondents, recalling impressions from that era, addressed sound technology's bearing upon their coming of age. Many are still committed to radio sounds (especially transistors and car radios). In contrast to personal stereos (record players or tape recorders), radio sound is ephemeral yet material in its texture. Listening to music on the radio often allows for a momentary "inside" sensation that the listener is part of something larger; it creates relationships between self and others that contribute to an individual's sociality (Rothenbuhler, 1996; Tacchi, 1998). Narratives that testify to the liberating role of music technology abound on the the Top 2000 site, as with this reaction to Herman's Hermits' song "No milk today":

> Because this was the first song to wake me up to the phenomenon of pop music in the years 1966–1970, it reminds me of how magical it felt to just listen to my small transistor radio, often secretively, because I needed to hide it away from my parents. When I listen to this song now, I turn up the sound as much as I can, preferably when I am driving my car and listen to old tapes. (posted by Maarten Storm from Leusden)

For this poster, hi-fi equipment was (and remains) a technology that endowed him with the liberty to create his own sonic space. Many similar posts attested to the importance of stereos in forming an autonomous sense of self and the mental–physical room to develop one's personal musical taste. Some respondents said their attempts to capture favorite songs played on the radio resulted in tapes of very bad quality; yet, they still treasure their amateur recordings not despite, but *because of*, their obvious technical shortcomings.

Awareness that things and technologies inevitably lose fidelity underscores their quality not only as objects but also as agents of autobiographical memory. Many respondents to the Top 2000 site remember the song in the gestalt of an object they

once bought. For instance, Liesbeth was 11 when Paul Simon's "Kodachrome" become a hit. She wrote: "I liked this song immediately and purchased the single with my hard earned savings. Even after 30 years, I still cherish this object." Objects also become agents once people start to rerecord music. By fiddling with lo-fi tape recorders to catch radio broadcasts, or by playing vinyl records over and over again—even as their quality deteriorates as a consequence of multiple use—these acts somehow contribute to the intensity of recorded music stored in memory. One anonymous respondent admitted: "This album finally collapsed on my record player, completely worn out by its relentless owner. I tried to obtain a vinyl replacement, but was unsuccessful."

Audio artifacts and technologies apparently invoke a cultural nostalgia typical for a specific time and age. The ability of digital recording techniques to meticulously recapture a worn out recording and reproduce its exact poor auditory quality may offer only partial solace to a cultural yearning. Every new medium authenticates the old; each time a new audio technology emerges on the scene, the older ones becomes treasured as the "authentic" means of reproduction or as part of the "original" listening experience (Auer, 2000). In the digital era, scratches, ticks, or noise can be removed from tapes to clean up old recordings; they can also be added to make a pristine recording sound old. Sound technologies thus figure in a dialogue between generations of users, as seen when young musicians sample original pop songs into digital sound experiences, or when teenagers use old telephone sounds as ring tones on their cell phones. The dialogue with outdated technologies, frequently used in contemporary pop songs, symbolizes recorded music's ineffable historicity. Paradoxically, sound technologies are concurrently agents of change and of preservation.

Incontrovertibly, the materiality of recorded music influences the process of remembering. "Recorded music" has become the rather generic container for vinyl albums, cassette tapes, compact discs, and MP3 files stored in computers or on disks. But the status of these items varies, and that variation affects their function in memory formation (Sterne, 2006). Music listened to from live radio, records, cassette tapes, or MP3 players has a different emotion attached to it. Prerecorded CDs or records are more valuable as objects to hold on to and collect. MP3s or cassette tapes have a different function; they are more like a back-up or backlog. Music theorist Mark Katz (2004) surveyed young downloaders of recorded music, finding that a large majority of respondents still buy prerecorded CDs, often after having listened to them in rerecorded form or after having shared them in whatever mechanical or digital form: "The tangibility of the CD is part of its charm. A collection is meant to be displayed, and has a visual impact that confers a degree of expertise on its owner" (p. 171). In semiotic terms, the indexical function of the musical sign is bound up with its auditory materiality: Hearing a familiar song on the radio constitutes a different memory experience than playing that very song from one's own collection, perhaps even more so when these recordings are played from MP3 formats. As one respondent to the Top 2000 put it:

> It is so strange: I keep most songs [featured in the Top 2000] on CDs and I have the entire list of songs stored in MP3 format on the hard disk of my PC, so I can listen to these songs any day any time. And yet, I only swing and sing along with my favorite songs when I hear them on the radio, during this yearly end-of-the-year broadcast. (posted by Jaap Timmer, Winterswijk)

The transfer of emotive affection from the brain onto the technology and materiality of audio recordings shows how memory acts out in the spaces between individual reminiscence and shared experiences. These same narratives disclose how materiality and technology often become integral to memory, something that is unlikely to change with digital equipment.

Embedded Memory: Shared Listening and Exchange

Memories attached to songs are hardly individual responses per se; recorded music gets perceived and evaluated through collective frameworks for listening and appreciation. Individual memories almost invariably arise in the context of social practices, such as music exchange and communal listening, and of cultural forms like popular radio programs, lists of hits, live concerts, and so on. These social practices and cultural forms appear almost inseparable from the memory of actual songs; as a sign of their time, popular songs create a context for reminiscence.

Through these practices and forms, individual memories become vehicles for collective identity construction. Sociologist Tia de Nora's (2000) ethnographic study of how young adults use audio equipment in everyday life shows that recorded music helps individuals evolve into social agents. Throughout their lives, people build up mental and material reservoirs of musical preferences; selected songs may become meaningful when they are consigned aesthetic value, when they are associated with lived and shared experience, or when linked up with spatial configurations. Since the introduction of sound recording in the last decade of the nineteenth century, sonic experiences have been assigned meaning as collective memories through performative rites, like shared listening and exchanging music (Frith, 1996). Listening to recorded music has always been a social activity: listening with peers or sharing musical evaluations with friends helps individuals to shape their taste while concurrently constructing a group identity. The sociability of listening to pop music therefore becomes an inherent part of people's memories, as one Top 2000 respondent commented:

> It was 1976, and with a number of friends I organized disco events for the local soccer club. These events always turned into choose-your-favorite-pop-song tournaments. The Top 2000 reminds me of these days. (posted by Henk Vink)

A large number of 2000 comments relates how groups of people—varying from three-generation families at home to labor crews and office personnel—stay tuned to the non-stop five day event and listen *as a group*. One woman wrote that listening to the Top 2000 during a house remodeling project facilitated previously deadlocked communication between a grandfather, parents, and children. The radio event

engenders collectivity at the same time and by the same means as it generates collective memories.

Some sound technologies, by nature of their hardware, promote listening to music as a solo activity, but can still be deployed towards social activities. Ever since the emergence of the Walkman in the 1970s, personal stereos have been associated with the construction of individual sonic space. British sociologist Michael Bull (2000) argues that personal stereos function as a form of "auditory mnemonic" through which users reconstruct a sense of narrative urban spaces that in themselves have no narrative sense. Indeed the Walkman— and more recently, the MP3 player and disc players—are designed with individual urban listeners in mind. Nonetheless, these recording technologies also serve as collective listening instruments. An 18-year old respondent to the Top 2000 Web site addressed this in commending the 1961 song "Non, je ne regrette rien" performed by Edith Piaf:

> Last summer, half a dozen of my class mates drove to France to celebrate our high school graduation. We played a lot of oldies, and as both cars had their own iPods attached to the stereo system, we sang along as loud as we could with our self-compiled repertoire. Now we've all gone off to different colleges, but next month we'll have a reunion and I'm sure we'll bring our iPods along, so we can bring back some cherished memories. (posted by Willem van Oostrum from Utrecht)

The rather novel use of plugging the iPod into the car's stereo system to sing along is inscribed in the narrative recollection of a generation of young adults; they consciously create their own sonic memories, using the newest devices to recreate golden oldies.

Besides collective listening, remixing and exchanging songs is an important means for constructing a collective platform for shared memories. Interventions in prerecorded cultural forms propelled by the music industry are more than symbols of individual appropriation. Through rerecording, mixing, and remixing ready-made formats (such as albums), people invent their own memory products. They use the available templates as input for creating idiosyncratic compilations. Compiling one's own favorite tapes has become a popular social practice. Mix tapes typically have a strong emotional and personal aspect. They anchor personal memory; each replaying rouses the expectation of a familiar, anticipated order embedded by its maker. That order of songs is reified on tape and in memory as a coherent, customized unit of musical replay.[6] Good and lasting compilation tapes tend to become personalized albums—unique recordings made to stick to one's mind while also sharing one's taste. If any feature stands out from the plethora of "mix and burn" software products currently available, it is their capacity to compose musical collages to generate, incite, or control feelings, occasions, emotions, or frames of mind.[7] Self-compiled mixes provide a contextual narrative for channeling concrete feelings or experiences; they "burn" certain impressions into the mind, consigning audio-image maps to memory.[8]

Idiosyncratic compilations are commonly not restricted to private use but can be shared with friends or, increasingly, with unknown recipients via playlists and home-burned CDs. MP3 files lend themselves particularly well to multiple and effortless

exchange, although this digital materiality has recently become the center of a controversy over stealing and freely downloading recorded music. Digital mixes of songs copied onto compact discs or playlists, made for sharing or distributing on the Internet, are both continuations of and variations on earlier auditory exchange rites. The mix-and-burn culture, favoring the reconfiguration of digital songs into playful aggregations, signifies an individual's desire to contribute to the formation of communal tastes and group identity. With the advent of CD-burning software, mixing and burning compilations has become technically easy, so the social practices of sharing music and (symbolic) gift exchange are increasingly part of the apparatus' script. Many comments in the Top 2000 chatroom testify to listeners' inclination towards audio-creativity by offering their own compilations of, for instance, live recordings of songs played on the radio, or by announcing a home-made CD featuring the b-sides of singles selected in the Top 2000. Chatting at times functions as a platform for the exchange of home-made selections, thus becoming a venue for sharing creative recollections—a way of embedding one's idiosyncratic choice in a community of listeners.

The Top 2000 as Collective Cultural Memory

The Dutch Top 2000 nicely illustrates how "mediated memories" are shaped precisely at the intersections of personal and collective memory. Mental mappings, sound technologies, and sociocultural practices constitute the channels for shaping individuality, while concurrently defining the larger collectivity we (want to) belong to—ensuring autobiographical as well as historical continuity. Through embodied affection, enabling technologies, and cultural embedding, recorded music becomes part of our collective memory at the same time and by the same means as it gets settled into our personal memories. Viewed from a neuro-cognitive angle, we often engage with recorded music by stitching emotion or lived experience onto musical impressions, hence conjuring up mental maps—internal stories that are later recalled as part of our musical memory. Theorized from a semiotic-cultural perspective, personal emotions and affects attached to songs are articulated in explicit memory narratives that people like to exchange. These stories are not only about emotions triggered by music, but directly bespeak musical memory as it relates to personal and group identity. Through collective experiences, embedded in social practices and cultural forms (shared listening, rerecordings, exchanging music compilations), people construct collective reservoirs of recorded music that "stick to the mind" and, in terms of collectivity, become our cultural heritage.

Building a national heritage of favorite popular music is obviously the goal of the Top 2000, and an important contribution to its success. The eminent value of creating collective musical repertoires, as American historian William Kenney (1999) points out, has proved vital to the "ongoing process of individual and group recognition in which images of the past and present could be mixed in an apparently timeless suspension that often seemed to defy the relentless corrosion of historical change" (p. xix). The Dutch Top 2000 constructs and reflects a national consensus about

which pop songs at a particular moment constitute national heritage. Even if only 15% of the songs are of Dutch origin and/or are performed in a language other than English, the selection is a quintessentially national event. The importance of this list to the formation and (re)confirmation of Dutch identity appears in many comments posted by expats and emigrants tapping into the event from all over the world. Without exception, they praise the station's initiative in making this event available through Internet-broadband. As one respondent residing in Australia claims, "the Top 2000 enables you to travel to the homeland of your youth, coming home without leaving home." The event produces a collective, national identity because the memories invoked are themselves the result of a particular kinship between listeners and nation.[9]

But as important as creating a cultural heritage may be as a key to understanding the Top 2000's popularity, its success as a national event—more than half the population of the Netherlands plugs into the annual event—can hardly be explained by the nation's craving for a collective repertoire. The significance of this event in the formation of collective memory cannot be overstated. Of course, there is no unified collective memory; instead, there are numerous networks, platforms, and sites for constructing versions of a communal past. Collective memories are achieved through negotiation and consensus building among remembering subjects. It is in the public spaces between individuals, technologies, and communities that memory gets shaped and negotiated. The process of narrating, discussing, and negotiating musical heritage and personal versus collective identity is far more important than the ultimate result. Interactive participation of listeners is the goal, not the means by which a ranking gets compiled.

One might argue that the collective nature of the Top 2000 can just as well be explained by its trendy catering towards a participatory, (inter)active audience; the event, after all, fits in well with the current boom of audience-participation contest shows on radio and television. However, among the counterarguments, it is not a coincidence that the event is staged through public rather than commercial radio. Staging the Top 2000 is unlike oldies listings by commercial stations catering to retro-experience. Again, virtually all songs featured in the Top 2000 can be heard on the many commercial oldies stations, by downloading them from the Internet, or pulling them from one's private collection. Cultural historian Paul Grainge (2000) distinguishes nostalgia as a commercial *mode* from nostalgia as a collective *mood*. With the Top 2000, nostalgia emanates from a collectively experienced mood, in contrast to a conception of nostalgia as a consumable stylistic mode espoused by Top 40 and oldies commercial stations. Grainge is right that oldies stations reflect the industry's imperative to find profitable market segments and niche consumption. Grainge's concept of nostalgia as an experienced mood links up with my definition of mediated memory: it connects personal affect and emotion to collective identity and heritage via recorded music.

In addition, I think the participatory, interactive nature of the Top 2000 is geared towards discussion and exchange, rather than boosted by commercial call-in activities. The combination of radio-event, Web site and television broadcast offers

space for consensus-building on a national heritage of pop songs, while simultaneously serving as a podium for collective nostalgia and communal reminiscence. Audience participation is, of course, a constitutive element of the ultimate ranking list. It is the desire to couple personal memories with collective experience and the need for a platform for the exchange of musical memories that constitutes the repeated success and public impact of this event.

The extensive archive of responses generated by the Dutch Top 2000 opens up new perspectives on the importance of public space for sharing personal stories and constructing a collective musical kinship, which in turn feeds individual creativity and identity. The commercial domain, although an important provider of resources for a common culture, seems to have less and less tolerance for the need to build collective reservoirs, public involvement, and creative exchange. Virtually void of commercial push-and-pull mechanisms, the Top 2000 offers space for narrative engagement and gives room to what U.S. legal scholar Lawrence Lessig (2002) calls a "creative commons." While (digital) culture, according to Lessig, opens up ample opportunities for strengthening the public domain and for promoting individual creativity, the commercial music industry often impedes exchange and participation. The Top 2000 encourages both individual and collective memories; attaching emotion to recorded music is not only necessary to the formation of personal identity, but is instrumental in imagining collectivity. Indeed, the public domain or the creative commons is vital to maintaining a vibrant heritage of old and new music; it provides individuals with cultural resources to understand their pasts and guarantees a shared interest in a communal future.

Notes

[1] Started as a one-time millennium event in 1999, the Dutch national public radio station (Radio 2) invited listeners to send in their personal all-time-top-5 songs, resulting in a collective Top 2000 (see http://top2000.radio2.nl/2005/site/page/homepage). The response to this one-time event was so overwhelming that the station decided to repeat it the next year, and a tradition has continued. In December 2004 and 2005, over one million Dutch citizens sent in their personal Top 5s. In 2005, almost 6.5 million people listened to the radio broadcast, 5 million people watched the accompanying daily television shows and the Web site registered 9.2 million page views in just five days. Cast against a population of 16 million, the event engaged more than half of all Dutch people over 12 years and older. The comments used in this article are derived from the 2004 database; this database is no longer publicly available but is archived by Radio 2. The comments used in this article were originally in Dutch; all translations are mine, and I have identified the respondents in the same way they identified themselves. I thank Kees Toering, station manager and initiator of the Top 2000, for making all statistics and archives available.

[2] I concentrate on popular (rather than classical or experimental-artistic) music and its affective commitment to memory, because pop music is more conducive to the kind of mental mapping and narrative recall that is key to my argument. Other kinds of music may create a different connection to identity and memory.

[3] A few cognitive psychological studies show that older adults' memory grows more positive over the years; older adults are more motivated than younger adults to remember their past in emotionally satisfying ways, and older adults' positive bias in reconstructive memory

reflects their motivation to regulate emotional experience (see Kennedy, Mather, & Carstensen, 1994).

[4] Clinical psychologists Schulkind, Hennis, and Rubin (1999) had younger adults (18–21) and older adults (65–70) listen to songs that were popular between 1935 and 1994, but only appeared on the hit lists during a defined period (in contrast to evergreens). Subjects were asked whether each song reminded them of a general period or a specific event from their lives.

[5] On the material temporality of recording, see Sterne's (2003) discussion of "triple temporality."

[6] The emotional value of mix tapes or specific sequences of songs is also keenly exploited in the production of "elevator music" or "muzak." Commercial companies specializing in the compilation of music for stores, waiting rooms, or other venues work from the same cognitive-psychological insights that sonic environments may be conducive to particular moods. For more, see Owen (2006).

[7] Websites for mix-and-burn software (iTunes, Blaze Audio, The Music Tablet) tend to address users as "interactive creators" who "transform music buying into an instant creative experience." Art of the Mix, which promotes the swapping of mixed CDs, lists several reasons for creating playlists and burning them onto a CD, including "the romantic mix, the break-up mix, the hangover mix, the airplane mix, and the sick-in-bed mix," to match fleeting moods and personal circumstances. See http://www.artofthemix.org/writings/history.asp

[8] Some studies of undergraduates show that current mood influences memory; see, for instance, Bower and Forgas (2000). Mather (2004) concludes that among younger adults, negative mood increases the likelihood of remembering negative information.

[9] In December 2005, a national discussion erupted in Dutch newspapers when listeners voted a new number one song to top the ranking—*Avond*, a song in Dutch, composed and sung by Dutch artist, Boudewijn de Groot—thus defeating the longtime English number 1 (Queen's "Bohemian rhapsody").

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