

International conference

LITERATURE, MEDIA, SOUND

28-30 November 2013

ABSTRACTS KEYNOTES

Mark B.N. Hansen: "Sound's Futurity"

My paper will explore the potential of sound to operate as a vector of futurity and as a revelation of the implication of the future in the present (or alternately, of the present's potential to impact the future), as this has been theorized by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. I am particularly interested in registers of sound that operate beneath the thresholds of human audition. Dubbed "unsound" by sound theorist Steve Goodman, these "not-yet-audible" dimensions of sound operate in the interstices of human perception and affect humans as infraempirical sonic particles that prime experiential potentialities. In his consideration of subjective intensity, Whitehead argues that the present is, as it were, always already acting in the very immediate future, or more precisely, that the potentiality of the present to impact the future exerts a certain force on the future. I propose to consider how the domain of sonic phenomena – a domain which is distinguished by the fact that it exceeds the domain of human sense perception – furnishes a fruitful ground for considering how this implication of present potentiality in future actuality operates, and more fundamentally, how it can be engineered to solicit certain effects and to broker specific types of future experience. To this end, I shall explore the operation of sonification as it has been deployed in scientific research on sound as well as by artists working in the medium of sound.

Stig Hjarvard: "Books in a Mediatized Age"

The book is one of the oldest and still most important media, but during most of the twentieth century it has developed partly independent of the wider media culture and media industry. The publishing and reading of books have to some extent been considered outside the realm of popular media like film, television, magazines and internet. Influenced by the literary institution (defining the book as art or high culture) and educational institution (defining the book as the preferred medium for learning) the book has been a symbol of civilization. With the growing technological, institutional and aesthetic convergence between the media, the book is finally becoming integrated to a digital media culture. In this presentation I will discuss the transformation of the book culture in view of both the rise of the e-book and the broader media convergence.

Maria Engberg: “The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore, Upgrade Soul and the Challenging Sounds of Polyaesthetics”

My talk takes two quite different tablet-based multimodal literary narratives as bookend examples of how sounds, multimodality, touch and motion configure a new phase of the mediatization of literature. The iPad app of the Academy-winning animated short film, *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore* (2012) charts a wellknown trajectory of adding animation aesthetics to the touch-and-gesture interaction of the iPad. *Upgrade Soul* by opertoone (2013) on the other hand remediates graphic novels, with added sound effects, music and innovative panel construction and reader interaction. Both applications/works are examples of a host of challenging and fascinating combinations of literature, media, image and sound that defy genre constructions, go against a modernist notion of avant-garde media-innovation, and thwart reader habits. Interestingly, unlike digital literature whose main historical forbears can be identified to the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde and that functions primarily through a gift economy (works are published and freely available online), works released as pay-for-access apps such as Mr Morris and Upgrade Soul attempt to gain economic as well as aesthetic ground. The talk will discuss a reconfigured understanding of aesthetics, what I call polyaesthetics, which in part builds on John Dewey’s sense of art experience, the Greek notion of aisthesis as perception as well as theories of media design. The design and analysis of works like Mr Morris and Upgrade Soul call for new analytic frameworks, and a thorough grasp of the profound changes in media culture.

Matthew Rubery: “How to Read a Talking Book”

The United States Library of Congress’s Talking Book Service was established in 1934 to provide books for war-blinded soldiers and blind civilians who could not read braille. The first recordings included the Bible; the Declaration of Independence; and plays by Shakespeare. This presentation traces a series of controversies that arose soon afterward among the blind community over the appropriate way to narrate a talking book. Audiences faced a choice between a deliberately understated style that privileged the printed book and a theatrical style that took full advantage of sound-recording technology. Such disputes raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy of reading practices among people with visual disabilities and, ultimately, what it means to read a book.

Steven Connor: “Channels”

My talk will develop some ideas about the materiality and immateriality of media as they are enacted through the idea of the channel. A channel can have a physical form (pipe, waterway, groove or wire), but can also represent a logically-associated stream of information transmitted in parallel or sequence (a radio, TV or internet channel). I will review the maritime, telegraphic, radiophonic and informatic uses of the idea of the channel, and consider some examples of writing, such as Ambrose Bierce’s ‘The Word-Way in Panama’ and A.R. Ammons’ ‘long thin poem’, ‘Tape for the Turning of the Year’, in which the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ (Michel Serres) manifestations of channels converge and commute. Rather than the erasure of the very concept of medium announced by Friedrich Kittler, the concept of channels permits an understanding of media as inhabiting and participating in volatile oscillations between material and immaterial conditions.