

# SoundEffects



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience

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## Editorial

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This special issue of *SoundEffects* presents a number of papers given at the international conference *Audio-visibility – on the experience of audio-visual art, artefacts, and media texts*, Aarhus University, May 26-28, 2011. The conference was organized by the collaborative research project *Audiovisual Culture and the good sound* sponsored by the Danish State Research Council for the period 2009-2012.

Sound is one of the most overwhelming and omnipresent 'interferences' in modern life – and at the same time one of the most volatile and transient human experiences. Each individual can – with mobile media like the iPod or smartphone – be accompanied by her own individual soundtrack, and thus 'score' the experience of everyday living. Sound as such cannot normally be seen but both heard and felt, which makes it fundamentally multi- or synaesthetical. Caused by the increasing amount of mobile media our multi-sensuous reality, appealing to all the senses, seems to be reduced to exactly an *audio-visual* culture and what could generally be considered its electronically mediated version. In relation to the massive amount of *audio-visibility* we can state that the research and the broad field of *sound* discourse in an *audio-visual* context are still inadequate when it comes to the qualitative exploration of aesthetic reception, theoretical and epistemological questions, dimensions, and themes. We are still hesitant and insecure in our knowledge of how *audio-visual* phenomena and works of art may influence us, how we experience it and (inter)act with it, and what kind of experience, knowledge and understanding a predominantly *audio-visually* mediated but still multi-sensory culture facilitates and engages us as late modern human beings. The call for papers suggested that the relations between sound and “a good experience” can be explored through genealogies of sound and listening and through reflections on the interactions of sound, listening/hearing and other sensory experiences.

By emphasizing but not separating the *audio* aspect, the aim of the conference was to develop and strengthen audio-visual studies as a multi-faceted interdisciplinary field drawing on many disciplines such as acoustics and sound studies, musicology, film- and media studies, anthropology, geography, cultural and urban studies, digital and audio design studies etc.

The conference was organized into the following four themes reflected in the 11 articles that make up this special issue:

## **I: Sound Styling in Film and Television Genres**

Genre is of central importance in any field involved with questions of aesthetics and communication. In film theory fictional genres in film and television series are usually defined by content and visual features and sometimes also by their intended

effect on audiences (e.g. comedy and thriller). But what does a film or TV genre sound like? Is genre marked by particular soundscapes and/or musical stylings and effects? How do the various elements of the soundtrack and their audio and audio-visual interplay contribute to the conventionalization or transformation of specific film and TV genres and our perceptual engagement? What are the relationships between sound, music and film/TV genre?

The call for papers invited papers that address the importance of sound and music to questions of film and TV genres in general, to the discussion of specific genres, and to the reading of a genre specific work. The themes were addressed in relation to the specifics of different sound forms such as music, sound effects, and vocal dialogue, or in relation to broad questions of narrative forms and strategies in film and TV series.

## II: Strategic Communication

Sound considered as a semiotic resource for meaning-making in strategic communication (TV advertising, radio spots, web ads, and music for shopping) represents an emergent field of research and analysis. However, the documentation in the field of research is spread out among different disciplinary areas with few or no mutual references. This is mainly due to historical boundaries between disciplinary areas resulting in distinctive focal points as well as diverse terminologies and paradigms. Thus the study of music and speech is traditionally considered a matter for musicologists and linguists respectively while the study of other sonic phenomena does not have any particular disciplinary “home”. There also seems to be a paradigmatic divide between, on the one hand, hermeneutic and qualitative approaches to media and communication research (with affinity to social semiotics and discourse analysis), and experimental and quantitative approaches in the subfields of advertising research and market communication with special focus on consumer behaviour.

By any means, sound in strategic communication is often integrated in *co-textual* formations and *contextualized* (in discursive and social formations) thus contributing to an overall emergent, multimodal whole. Consequently, the meaning of music, speech, sound effects and the like is not only determined by their apparent sonic quality, but certainly also by inter-organizational relations to simultaneous and co-operating semiotic sources, and a synthesized whole that qualify the meaning of the parts.

The aim of this theme was to bring together research contributions from different scientific paradigms and institutional practices which concentrate on the textual, co-textual and contextual study of sounds as strategic communication in multimodal genres and settings which appeal to more than just one sense.

### III: The Audiovisual Exhibited – sound in the (fine) arts

The exhibition of audio-visual works and the use of sound as artistic material in the (fine) arts have developed during the last decades both in practice and in theory. This situation raises a number of different questions and discussions.

**Methodological and theoretical:** How does the concept of the audiovisual relate to inter-art and intermedial studies? What kinds of definition and genre problems do we face when (visual) art discourses expand into the domain of the auditory – and vice versa.

**The field of multisensory art:** In what way should we understand the increasing artistic interest in the audio-visual in a broader “multimedial” and multisensory sense, which is not necessarily attached to media theory and analysis (media discourse, digital aesthetics) but relates to interdisciplinary examinations such as “sensory history” and “the visualization of sound”. This calls for both adequate (empirical) description, discussion and, possibly, new theoretical and empirical frameworks.

**The audio-visual art practice and the museum:** How do museums practise their exhibition of sound/image (visuals) in new constellations and within the curating practices of the classical museum. Many of today's artists operate in the field between or including both sound and image – not only in *video art* (by now a historical category?) but also by exploring the potential, in which sound/image relations are synthesized and combined in new settings and frameworks. How do we experience and how can we understand those practices?

### IV: Mobile mediated audiovisuality

We naturally associate sound with the source that produces it. We instinctively look for a bird when we hear chirping or for the truck when we hear its roaring, and we are in some sense aware of the orchestra playing the concert we are enjoying whether it is live or recorded. Since the invention of the phonograph in 1877, the area of sound reproduction has been subject to comprehensive transformation. Digital MP3 files have made it easier than ever not just to share and distribute sound but also to carry 60 hours of sound with you wherever you go. These possibilities seem to have a direct influence on several different aspects of music, sound, and audiovisuality: How we listen, what we listen to, and where the listening takes place.

The mobility of audiovisual experiences is not limited to music and sound. Using the mobile phone, we can log on the internet to write e-mails or read the newspaper. We can watch movies and listen to the radio or to music from our private collections. Using these audiovisual media players is already second nature to a lot of people. They become tools for navigating both in and between the realms of private

and public spaces. These mobile audiovisual devices are right at hand in everyday situations and thus they affect our social interactions and the experience of our surroundings.

This theme focused on the implications of the mobility of audio- and audio-visual media, on questions such as how does mobility affect audio- and audio-visual experiences, expressions, productions, and consumption? Which terminologies and methodologies are available for analyzing this mobile trend and how are these related to other approaches to audio- and audio-visual experience?