

SoundEffects



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience

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Literature, Media, sSound

Editorial

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This issue of SoundEffects is occupied with the relations between literature, sound and media and approaches this interdisciplinary field through philosophical, aesthetic, technological and sociological perspectives, respectively. The issue also includes a double interview by a digital poet as well as two reviews of recent important contributions to the field of sound studies.

Discussions on the connections between sound, literature and media are not a new phenomenon; throughout history sound has been central to poetry, for instance, at several levels. Poetry originally emerged from oral culture, and even though silent reading has been the predominant way of approaching literature since 1800, recitation and performative reading cultures have remained an immanent part of the literary institution and its practices. Sound-recorded literature is another relevant topic of study within the area traversing literature, media and sound. In fact Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877 for the purpose of recording speech, not music (Matthew Rubery, *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies*, 2011, 3), and ever since he tested the machine by speaking the words 'Mary had a little lamb' into the mouthpiece and, to his surprise, discovered that the machine played the words back to him, audiobooks have been delivered through changing media technologies shared with music. In continuation hereof the role of the audiobook as a historic as well as contemporary cultural activity is an obvious example of a meeting between literature, media and sound.

Discussing the relationship between media and literature has been central to writings on modernism as a formal matter, i.e the literacy of literature. Literary modernism seems extremely preoccupied with investigating the formal matters of its own materiality or mediacy. Novels by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce investigate and question the media specific limits of the literary language in terms of both sound and images. In her unpublished autobiography Virginia Woolf claimed:

I am writing *The Waves* to a rhythm not to a plot [...] though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw to the reader. (1976, p. 204)

In this context figure poems and dada-inspired sound poetry also spring to mind. These types of media investigations call for and have generally been found within what we call intermedia studies, which approach pictures and sound as something that is partly immanent in the study and mediacy of literature.

Furthermore, sound and music can be studied as a theme of historical as well as contemporary novels, investigating for instance the power of music and its potential for creating political changes.

Comparably one can consider the book a medium in itself, accentuating a material perspective when studying the role and historical development of, for example, book covers. The materiality of literature is enhanced by N. Katherine Hayles,

among others, who states that ‘materiality is open to debate and interpretation, ensuring that discussions about the text’s “meaning” will also take into account its physical specificity as well’ (Hayles, ‘Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis’, 2004, 1). The meaning of the physical materiality of reading literature seems both extremely important and partly underexposed.

Currently, the technological development of various digital e-book formats, including audiobooks and apps, is radically reframing the relationship between media and literature, thereby underscoring the necessity of approaching the new literary practices as a technological, an aesthetic as well as a sociological matter (Mitchell & Hansen, *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, 2010). The e-book is relatively well described and this issue of SoundEffects wishes to combine this research with the developing field of sound studies, discussing questions like the new roles of literary practices and reading cultures. According to the founder of Audible, which produces and sells what they call spoken audio entertainment, information and educational programming on the Internet, ‘We’re moving toward a media-agnostic consumer who doesn’t think of the difference between textual and visual and auditory experience. It’s the story, and it is there for you in the way you want it’ (Don Katz, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2013).

Illuminating the relationship between literature, media and sound in various constellations might thus involve historical perspectives like reading cultures, recorded literature, institutional perspectives concerning, for instance, mediatization, change of cultural practice, literary institutions, publishers and libraries. But we also need to ask methodological questions. How do we, for example, develop new analytical tools which give us a better understanding of the new media landscape, taking into account the relationship between literature, media and sound? This perspective naturally builds on interdisciplinarity; given severe changes in the field of research (e-books, digital audiobooks and apps) we need to bring together different theoretical paradigms.

This issue of *SoundEffects* is an example of such a meeting where different disciplines, approaches and themes develop this field, both within and between the individual articles. We are very proud to present eight excellent texts: Steven Connor develops a philosophical and metaphorical perspective on the concept of *channels*; Maria Engberg discusses reading as an intersensorial or polyaesthetic practice; Cyril de Beun investigates medial configurations of speech networks in relation to the *Dichtung und Rundfunk* conference; Michael Filimowitz presents a mixed framework for new media art reception; Rasmus Grøn investigates literary experience in relation to the book trailer as an intermedial paratext; Ian Stevesson analyses sound and knowledge in relation to the writings of the English essayist Thomas de Quincey; Elisabeth Reichel discusses the integrative function of music in Richard Powers’ *The Time of Our Singing*; and digital poet David Jhave Johnston interviews

filmmaker Roderick Coover and fiction writer Scott Rettberg. Finally we present two book reviews of *The Sound Studies Reader* edited by Jonathan Sterne and *Sound and Aural Media in Postmodern Literature: Novel Listening* by Justin St. Clair, respectively.

Welcome to *SoundEffects*!