

# 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 *Sound Acts* conference in Aarhus, Denmark on 23–25 September 2010. The conference was organised by several partners: the National Research Network on Auditive Culture (<http://auditiveculture.ku.dk/>), the research project Audiovisual Culture (<http://www.ak.au.dk/en>), the research group Nordic Sound Institute (<http://www.urban-sound.org/eng/index.php>), Réseau international ambiances (<http://www.ambiances.net/index.php>) and the Nordic Branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (<http://iaspmnorden.wordpress.com/>). The conference therefore represented a wide range of research traditions.

The aim of the conference was to profile contemporary sound studies and to contribute to the discussion and development of the auditive paradigm in general. The contributions at the conference presented diverse approaches to sound studies as well as a broad variation of genres – from conventional papers, keynote speakers and panel debates to artist presentations, audio walks and workshops. In particular, the final panel discussion marked the open atmosphere of this conference, as it turned into a performance, where the microphone was passed on to the audience who on their part gave up their conventional seated positions and started walking around the auditorium, dismantling the entire scenography.

The conference conceptualised the field of sound studies via four different themes: sound as art, sound in culture, sound in theory and sound in history, and it took as its point of departure a number of questions concerning listening, auditive culture and practices, musical and technological sound production, sound cognition, the design of urban environments, listening as sensual modality and sound arts.

Institutionally, the field of sound studies is characterised by being interdisciplinary, existing in between or as a combination of many different already established academic disciplines and institutions such as Media and Communication Studies, Musicology, Cultural Studies, Performing Arts Studies, Psychology, Acoustics, Architecture and Sound Design. At the conference it was debated whether sound studies benefit from this interdisciplinary status or not.

On the one hand, it can for instance be difficult to raise the sufficient research funding due to the fact that sound studies are not institutionally positioned. On the other hand, one might find an innovative potential in precisely this premise, as a subcultural self-image produces both a strong sense of identity, resistance and in that sense also contains potential creative energy.

In the present publication we have strived to illustrate the diversity and the heterogeneity of the field on the basis of the submitted papers. To the extent possible, this is evident in the topics of the selected papers as well as in the geographical disseminations, as there seem to be tentative regional traditions: For instance, sound studies in France and Sweden seem to be characterised by strong sound and architecture milieus, Finland and Norway have produced extensive acoustemology

research and ethnographic subjects, while Danish, English and Dutch researchers in general seem to deal with sound from a cultural studies and an aesthetic angle.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to present the conference's more artistic or performative presentations because of the standards of an academic journal.

In the current issue we have chosen not to follow the four tracks of the conference; instead, the ten articles are presented in three categories: a historical category, a category concerning the question of how we can conceptualise sound and sounding phenomena and, finally, a category concerning the perception of sound. However, in line with the morphing corpus of sound studies, we could also claim that the contributions could be compared along different axes as well, for instance, addressing questions of urbanity, media and art. Accordingly, each article can be said to be in dialogue with multiple disciplines. These interdisciplinary topics and methods seem to add a certain precariousness to the research at hand, because each subject seems to embark on new academic territories. Thus, a tentative quality might be a premise to present sound studies.

From a historical perspective, the first four articles seek to re-describe historical conditions concerning sound. Whereas it has often been demonstrated how the emergence of new visual technologies (such as the microscope) influenced the development of modern physics and experimental science in the seventeenth century, Penelope Gouk in her article emphasises the important role played by the acoustic technologies used in music production. Charlotte Rørdam Larsen in her article analyses the Danish *Oma Commercials* and the way they refer to sound as memory. Through this analysis the article discusses the complex relationship between recorded sound and time as such. María Andueza Olmedo writes about the historical connection between sound art and the 1960s avant-garde. She emphasises how the inclusion of the audience and the specific space in the avant-garde were important prerequisites to the artistic interest in sound and, hence, to the development of the whole field of sound art. Following the traditions of Gilles Deleuze and Michel de Certeau, Jacob Kreuzfeldt analyses how urban street cries can be understood as *refrains* and used for territorialising the city – in this case the city of Copenhagen in the years 1929 to 1935.

The question of conceptualising sound and sounding phenomena, artefacts and art works must be dealt with continuously. One of the challenges regarding sound artefacts is that they are not (linguistically) founded in verbal language. This creates a need to develop an adequate terminology for describing and analysing them. A further challenge arises as a consequence of the interdisciplinary status of sound studies, as very few established discourses or academic practices exist that one can lean on, which means that these discourses and practices have to be established and developed. In the first of the three contributions oriented towards these questions, Morten Michelsen addresses how we are to conceptualise the recorded sounds

we hear. He proposes a *sound parameter*, which includes the *sound stage*, and uses this in an analysis of two Michael Jackson recordings. In her article Anette Vandsø investigates how we can analyse sound art in a way that includes the intermedial aspects. In an analysis of the American composer Alvin Lucier's canonical piece *I'm Sitting in a Room* she suggests that the linguistic theory of enunciation can be used as a general approach to sound art. In a joint article Ola Stockfelt, Ansa Lønstrup and Torben Sangild analyse the opening signature jingle of the radio programme *RadioLab* and thus debate how we may define and delimit an object of sound. In an experimental setup, the article investigates the production of meaning in relation to a sound object from three different perspectives: a phenomenological, open and non-contextualised listening; a polyphonic listening, focusing on the roles and movements of voices; and a contextualised discussion of the radio jingle according to genre formats.

Sound influences the way we experience the world, and it produces meaning in various ways, both with regard to the phenomenological, bodily experience and to the way in which discourses arise and change through cultural practice. In order to respond to this condition, sound research must reflect upon experiences of the world through sound. Iben Have discusses sound as a perceived phenomenon and its inherent realism in the light of the Danish documentary *Armadillo* (2010). The article uses the concept of emotional realism as a prism to combine analytical observations of the role of the musicalised soundtrack with a discussion of epistemological and ethical issues in relation to the experience of the spectator/listener.

Solène Marry studies what influences sound perception, focusing especially on how people evaluate their sonic environment, by comparing three different public spaces. Holger Schulze in his article uses exemplary studies from the science history of acoustics, musicology and the anthropology of the senses to analyse and re-study the relation between sound and the body, discussing scholars such as Hermann von Helmholtz and Michel Serres.

*Welcome!*

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