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Sunderland**

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Rationale for *Sounding Out*:
An international Symposium in Media Sound

The original *Sounding Out* symposium at Staffordshire University in July 2002 was designed to stake out a new territory for Film Studies by raising the profile of sound within the image-sound relationship, whilst contributing significantly to the newly emerging area of sound studies. It aimed to bring theorists into contact with a range of sound practitioners and also to bring together (and into dialogue) a range of scholars already working on different aspects of sound, e.g., radio, video, sonic arts and electro-acoustic music. Keynote speakers and performers were chosen to represent these different areas of scholarship and practice. The event also aimed to bring scholars and practitioners together from around the world in order to identify practices and scholarship not just in the UK but also USA, Australia, Europe and India, reflecting contemporary interest in globalisation. Key themes emerged around issues such as:

- New technologies of sound
- Impacts and effects of media convergence
- Writing and performance for sound
- Voice (both media practices of recording/reproduction and its cultural significance)
- Phenomenology of sound (e.g. the hierarchy of the human senses, perceptions of hearing, etc.)
- The work, role and status of sound designers in the commercial film industry (mainly Hollywood) including aesthetics, narratological conventions, effects and affects.
- Practices and techniques of radio drama, aesthetics and production contexts
- Experimental sound practices (e.g., soundscapes, live mixing)

A subsequent event, *Sounding Out 2* at the University of Nottingham in July 2004, was organised to maintain this intellectual exchange and dialogue, broadening the debate out to areas such as computer games design, audiobooks, personal stereos and ipods. Papers were invited as well as keynote speakers to address three specific sets of issues (or inter-related strands): (a) The Voice, (b) Audiences, and (c) Cultural Identities. The Voice strand raised issues of the human, bodily element of speech, how listeners respond and how performers, writers and producers use these as expressive techniques. The Audiences strand examined the ways listeners used various sound media and explored the contexts and conditions of listening. The Cultural Identities strand investigated a variety of issues around gender, class, race, ethnicity, age and sub-cultural identities/groups. Key themes emerged around issues such as:

- Vocabularies and methodologies scholars use to identify, describe, conceptualise and make sense of sound
- Impact of Dolby stereo on recent and contemporary mainstream film production and exhibition
- Sound space and proxemics (e.g., hearing and analysing spatial qualities of sound)
- Silence: aesthetics and affect
- Film music: aesthetics and affect
- Voice-over narration in fiction films and documentaries
- Listening spaces and environments
- Issues regarding audience research, methodologies and interpretation
- New forms and contexts of experimental radio broadcasting

A third event, *Sounding Out 3* at University of Sunderland in September 2006, built upon and extended research in the areas that had emerged as key issues at the previous two events. Over a hundred delegates attended, from countries such as the United States, Canada, Ecuador, Spain, Greece, Italy,

France, Poland, Austria, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and Norway. The conference included presentations by six keynote speakers: **Ed Baxter** (*Resonance FM*), **Steven Connor** (Birkbeck College, author of *Dumbstruck*), **Andrew Crisell** (University of Sunderland, author of *Understanding Radio*), **John Durham Peters** (Iowa University, author of *Speaking into the Air*), **Gianluca Sergi** (University of Nottingham, author of *The Dolby Era*) and **Adinda van't Klooster** (a new media installation artist from the Utrecht). Complementing these were thirty-four papers presented on a range of topics, including: historical and contemporary debates on the impact of sound on the body and the senses (Kate Lacey), Hindi film songs (Anna Morcom), the photographing of sound and contemporary electronica (Joanna Demers), artistic glossolalia in Icelandic rock music (Hugo Burgos), the use of silence in Madonna's music (Arnt Maaso), black women's empowerment through popular music (Miriam Strube), the work of Hildegard Westerkamp in the films of Gus van Sant (Randolph Jordan), and the acoustic identity of the producer of music programmes on the radio – the case of Greece (Angeliki Gazi). In addition there was a series of audio and audio-visual presentations: Lucy Gough's radio play *The Raft* (2002); animated shorts by Terry Pender, Martine Huvenne and Maurice Wright; Andy Cartwright & Sean Street's award-winning radio feature *Then-Now* (2006); short films by Laurent Bordoiseau, Arnaud Ganzerli & Jerome Blanquet, Bran Evans, Mark Cartwright, Virgil Moorefield & Jeff Weeter, Dennis H. Miller, Bart Vegeter & Filmstad Producties, D-Fuse & Scanner, Nick Cope & Tim Howle, and Adinda van't Klooster & the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (Graeme Wilson, Giles Lamb, Neil Davidson & George Lyle). A recording of a live performance in Ecuador by Hugo Burgos, Daniel Pasquel, Jeff Eckels & Nelson Garcia was also screened. In other words, the event was a rich and fascinating mixture of papers and presentations on sound – past, present and possible future – from around the globe.

Sounding Out 3 was intended to maintain and extend the dialogue between theorists and practitioners of sound, which the previous two events had set in train, promoting new research and sustaining emerging collaborations between practitioners, writers, performers, theorists and historians. It sought

to identify, exchange and promote international perspectives, extending knowledge of sound practices (both production and consumption) to new and emerging technologies (e.g., Podcasting). The on-going effects of globalisation and media convergence remained in focus as a number of scholars sought to understand these in relation to the historical evolution of communication and the electronic mass media. The event promoted new and emerging scholarship on sound practices, technologies, aesthetics, perception, affect, writing and performance with presentations delivered by scholars new to the field of academic research as well as some of the biggest international names in communication studies, radio theory and film scholarship. One of the major issues addressed throughout the conference was the relationship of sound and image, hearing and vision. Having formerly promoted attention to sound as a distinct medium, one motive for this third event was to refocus questions towards the diverse ways that sound and image interact. In Film Studies a new interdisciplinary approach to early cinema has been making increasing use of the concept of 'intermediality' in order to foreground the relations between film and other media (e.g., theatre, music-hall, radio, etc.) thus adding a historical dimension. Similarly, in Radio Studies, scholars have been reframing perceptions of radio and 'radiability' in response to the text and images of digital and web radio.

Sounding Out 4 (4-6th September 2008) seeks to maintain the momentum of the previous events, bringing existing and new members of the network together to explore new directions in sound practice and theory, the interconnections across media and disciplines, to showcase new works and provide a platform for new scholarship from around the world. This event is particularly interested in the twin themes of sound and memory, sound and history but these are by no means exclusive and the debate is expected to be as wide-ranging and forward-looking as on previous occasions. The conference will repeat the format adopted in 2006, with 6 keynote speakers drawn from a variety of media (theory and practice), with three presentations of work and 14 panels of papers by delegates (a total of 40 papers).