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Everything that rises does not converge: narrative, mobile media, and the audio-visual

This paper explores the acoustic economy of contemporary public spaces through a consideration of their narrative qualities – and also asks what happens to narrative as it is produced in these conditions. This might suggest a familiar trajectory - a walk in the city with Michel De Certeau perhaps. However, although I do draw on De Certeau's work in this paper my intention is not to pit the voice of the narrative user against the visually biased perspectives of city planners and strategists; in an era of pervasive new media users themselves are builders of one kind or another – and the architectural view may operate a many scales. This does not alleviate the necessity to address the question De Certeau posed through his poetics – which was one of social power. Here then, my starting point is this altered distribution; it is this altered economy of bodies, discourses, materials and technologies, stasis and mobility, vision and aurality, narrative and representation that provokes new enquiries.

In the paper I consider various the narrative elements that arise and co-constitute, even organize, various 'spaces in common' (I distinguish these from common space as a shared public project) characteristic of the contemporary and highly mediated urban environment. The focus is on narrative rising – but not on its resolution. The focus is on characters, combinations, plots, resolutions, affinities gestured towards but never fully articulated or completed; on the 'everything' that rises but that does not fully converge. One way to think about this might be through the category of ambience, but this does not necessarily get at the reaching towards story, as well as the falling back from it, and implies also a background activity. Instead, once again turning to De Certeau but this time to his work on voice, I pursue parallels between the glossolalic impulse to speak - so that voice is given even as meaning is refused, and what I term 'narrativish' and understand as the at once offered and denied promise of the tale.

In this paper various forms of 'narrativish', including the tangled story-threads, ambient beginnings, transient contributions, false endings, that are characteristic of highly mobile/highly mediated public spaces, are thus explored first in relation to glossolalia and its refusal to resolve into meaning (de Certeau). The arguments made are developed in relation to narrative temporality and the 'sadistic' or 'satisfying' closure narrative 'expects' (Barthes and de Lauretis), and also in relation to Michel Chion's exploration of cinema and the senses. One wager here is that the hierarchical completion of the audio in the visual Chion finds in cinema may increasingly be reversed in the sonically driven and uncompleted 'narrativish' zones of contemporary everyday life and its public spaces.

Ends.