

Paper, airwaves, screen: from text to audience in African popular culture

CALL FOR PAPERS

University of Bristol, UK
12-13 July 2017

Confirmed keynotes: Lydie Moudileno (University of Pennsylvania), Tsitsi Jaji (Duke University)

Recent artworks, including Bili Bidjocka's *Infinite Writing* and François-Xavier Gbré's *National Printworks*, evoke the fragile material status of writing and reading. They also remind us of the power that each can yield. In the light of development agendas pertaining to education and literacy (e.g. UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, as well as earlier initiatives), this conference will attend to the cultures of reading and reception that emerge in popular culture on the African continent.

The texts of African popular culture form an abundant body of textual, sonic, and visual material: from songs, magazines, romance fiction, and hip-hop lyrics, to blogs, Facebook posts, and urban inscriptions on tro-tros in Accra (Barber, 1987; 2007; Newell and Okome, 2014; Quayson, 2014). Popular culture also refers to the many ways in which these 'texts' are apprehended and read, at a local, national, and/or international scale (Benwell, Procter and Robinson, 2012). This area of research draws on the methods of cultural studies, material print cultures, and the sociology of reception (Charpentier, 2006). The material in question remains relatively under-studied and little-taught, however, due to issues of access and ongoing methodological debate. How can this material be researched (archives; interviews; ethnographic observation (Mbodj, 2013); digitisation; databases)? How is/might it be integrated into teaching across disciplines?

This conference therefore aims to reflect on the critical spaces of reading and listening that occur in and around popular cultural texts in Africa. We seek to engage with the critical vocabulary generated by those spaces of reception at a time of transition for the book object and the reading practices which accompany it. We invite participants to engage directly in their abstracts with the following keywords: reception, education, literacy, entrepreneurship, free time, socialisation.

Individual abstracts and proposals for panels are welcome. Papers on francophone and multilingual topics will be particularly welcome.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Reading cultures in magazines, spoken word poetry, hip-hop, blogs, social media.
- The representation of reading/listening in literature, film, magazines, spoken word poetry, hip-hop, blogs, social media, contemporary art.
- The material production and circulation of the word in Africa
- Reading as education, self-improvement, work and/or leisure
- Audience, free time and unemployment
- Popular literacy initiatives and development (including critiques of this term)
- Public spheres and popular cultural forms
- Activist collectives and new media

Practical information :

Please send abstracts (300 words) with a title and a short biography (50 words max) to: paperairwavesscreen@gmail.com by **15 February 2017**. The languages of the conference are French and English. We plan to publish a special issue from a selection of the papers presented.

Conference organisers: Ruth Bush (University of Bristol) and Claire Ducournau (University Paul Valéry – Montpellier – RIRRA21)

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