

About Helle Breth Klausen

Helle Breth Klausen is a PhD Fellow at the Department of Media and Journalism Studies at Aarhus University. Her dissertation on ASMR furthers her empirical work on the phenomenon that has been going on since 2014 and explores the technologically-mediated phenomenon from a conceptual body/media/aesthetics perspective. She is also an editor of *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research*.

Time and place for the defence

22 August 2022, at 13-16
Building 5335-016 (Nygaard, Peter Bøgh Auditoriet)

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TOUCHING FROM

HELLE BRETH KLAUSEN

A DISTANCE

– Conceptualizing the intimate,
affective and para-haptic potentials
of technologically-mediated ASMR.



'Touching from a distance'

– Conceptualizing the intimate, affective and para-haptic potentials of technologically-mediated ASMR

The dissertation introduces, categorizes and discusses ASMR ('Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response') in a conceptual way and makes some wide-ranging reflections on the ways that technologically-mediated ASMR is potentially able to 'touch us from a distance'.

One of the first and biggest projects to conceptualize technologically-mediated ASMR

This dissertation is one of the first and biggest projects to take on the task of introducing, categorizing and discussing ASMR in a conceptual way. ASMR, short for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, is the name of a multisensory physiological reaction often referred to as 'tingles'. Within the last decade, ASMR has mostly been associated with a genre of triggering videos including whimsical aesthetics on primarily YouTube, allowing viewer-listeners to experience tingles 'on-demand'.

A small-scale study with wide-ranging reflections

This PhD project is a qualitative, small-scale study providing in-depth textual analyses of illustrative ASMR videos in order to make some wide-ranging reflections on the ways that technologically-mediated ASMR is potentially able to 'touch us from a distance'.

Research questions

RQ1: What characterizes ASMR as a technologically-mediated phenomenon on YouTube in relation to the conceptualization of the viewer-listener?

RQ2: What role does sound play in technologically-mediated ASMR?

RQ3: What theoretical concepts can be developed in order to theoretically outline and conceptualize technologically-mediated ASMR?

Introducing relevant theoretical concepts

In terms of introducing relevant theoretical concepts to describe ASMR as a genre, I:

- Suggest using *para-haptic interaction* as a way of describing how ASMR can feel like touch in both a physical and imagined way.
- Discuss the notion of *ambiguity of technology in relation to the ASMR* experience and showcase how viewer-listeners sometimes struggle to obtain an intimate and para-social interaction in ASMR videos due to loud ads, faulty technology and failed attempts to suspend one's own disbelief.
- Explore the concept of *haptic audio-visibility* to describe a form of touching with the eyes and the ears in ASMR videos through interpersonal triggers, direct address and directional touching.

A way of touching from a distance

The central argument of the dissertation is that although the assemblage of technology that enables ASMR videos in some cases might distort the tingly, affective experience, the layers of mediation will in other cases serve to magnify and enhance the experience and make possible media-enabled perceptual and somatic levels of experience (a way of touching from a distance) – levels that would not have been reached without technology.

ASMR as an affective, emotional or cultural labor

Beyond the scope of this dissertation are future inquiries on some aspects that I have only briefly touched upon, for instance ASMR in relation to advertising and as an *affective, emotional or cultural labor*. Research on this would be interesting in terms of addressing the ambiguity of ASMR videos as embedded in the unspoken economy of attention and care on the one hand, while tied up in a digital economical infrastructure of *monetization of videos* through ad revenue on the other hand.

Facts about ASMR

- Not everyone experiences ASMR
- Sound is key within ASMR, and most triggers are auditory
- Some viewer-listeners claim that listening to and watching ASMR videos improves their mental health
- ASMR videos often use hyper-aestheticized styling, direct address, directional touching, caring narratives with personal attention and hyperbolic sound recordings in order to enhance feelings of close proximity and intimacy