

International Conference, June 17-19, 2016, University of Munich
Sight meets Sound: Critical Media Studies and the Ethnographic Project

Organizer: Prof. Dr. Frank Heidemann, University of Munich
Prof. Dr. Richard Wolf, Harvard University
With financial support of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft)

Call for Papers:

In this conference, we bring experts oriented toward the visual together with those focused on sound to ask the question, "What kinds of knowledge can be apprehended and communicated through the conjunction of the visual and the sonic?" By "apprehension of knowledge", we mean specifically the work of ethnography—investigating society and culture through fieldwork in the broadest sense. By "communication," we mean analogues of writing ethnography: creating ethnographic films and designing sonic ethnographic projects (sound installations and collages), but with special attention to the effects of joining image (still or moving) with sound. We note some of the special challenges and invitations suggested by the sight-sound interface. In everyday life, visual and aural information may operate together, one drawing attention to the other. For instance, the sounds of footsteps followed by the creaking of a door draw our eyes to the door opening and set forth further expectations (to see the face of someone we were expecting perhaps, or the face of a stranger). After seeing lightning we expect an auditory gap before hearing the thunder. We may perform a quick calculation telling us how far away the lightning is.

In ethnographic fieldwork we may note not only the conjunction of sight and sound in everyday activities, but also those situations in which one element of the pair is suppressed: rituals performed in complete darkness, or situations which prohibit certain kinds of sounds. What can it mean in local terms to remove sight or sound from the sensory context?

Visual anthropologists are interested, in part, in "reading" culture through visual means: Murals, graffiti, popular television programs, advertisements, cartoons, sand designs, scroll paintings, indigenous maps—all rich sources for the visual anthropologist. Communicating knowledge, visual anthropologists use still or moving images to tell stories in ethnography without relying entirely (or at all in some cases) on scripts, captions, or verbal theories.

A growing number of scholars in anthropology have become attuned to the cultural aspects of sound, including but not limited to what may be locally recognized as music. A new kind of experimental ethnography challenges the researcher to use arrangements of sound (sequential or overlapping, and manipulated to varying degrees by electronic means) to convey insights in ways that extend beyond the logocentric form of traditional ethnographies.

For “communication,” then, we have two possible models for representing ethnographic knowledge that go beyond the word—one through (primarily) visual means and one via sound. One question arising from the creation of such new ethnographic work is the degree to which visual and aural communication can be de-linked to communicate each on its own terms. That is to say, a visual image need not be “accompanied” by a supporting sound but rather set in counterpoint with a challenging information-packed audio construct. Whether in visual, auditory, or some combined form, ethnographies that transcend or push the limits of the verbal lie at the boundaries of science and art. They retain some of the ambiguity of true field experiences and demand the viewer/listener to take part actively in the process of understanding the objects of anthropological knowledge. In this conference we will ask scholars involved in visual and sonic media in different ways to bring challenging work to the table for discussion and set in motion collaborations between those who have been, until now, oriented primarily toward either the visual or the sonic. The goal will be to create a series of short ethnographic pieces that attempt to work out or work through some of the challenges that these pairs of visual-sonic ethnographers experience in their collaborations. The more general goal will be to increase the sensitivity of anthropologists to visual and sonic data in ethnography as well as challenge them to use visual and sonic tools in the presentation of critical new work.

Konferenzprogramm:

Friday, 17. June 2016

12.00 Registration and Lunch

13.30 Opening: Vice-President of LMU and Dean of Faculty 12

13.45 Introduction

Frank Heidemann, University of Munich, and Richard K. Wolf, Harvard University

14.00-14.45 Keynote: David MacDougall, Australian National University
“Sound as a key to tactile sensation in cinema”

14.45-15.00 Coffee Break

Session 1 Kinaesthetics

15.00-15.45 Birgit Abels, University of Göttingen
“Kinaesthetics, sight and sound in Sama Dilaut Musicking (or, the impossibility of (not) researching atmospheres)”

15.45-16.30 Rainer Polak, University of Cologne
“Ethnographic and scientific approaches to the cultural aesthetics of rhythm in West Africa”

16.30-17.00 Coffee Break

Session 2 Ethnography and Videography

17.00-17.45 Masha Vlasova, Yale University
“Video/Still: three pieces in transition”

17.45-18.30 Michael Kushell, Harvard University
“Audience videography and/as audio-visual ethnography in regional Kabuki”

performance”

Evening Lecture

- 19.00- Special Lecture: Peter Gallison, Harvard University
19.45 *“Camera and Keyboard”*
- 20.30 Conference Dinner

Saturday, 18. June 2016

Session 3 Co-ordinated Senses

- 09.30- Frank Heidemann, University of Munich
10.15 *“Synergies of rhythms in movement and sound in South Indian rituals”*
- 10.15- Valerie Hänsch, Bayreuth University
11.00 *“Troubled senses: Vision, sounds and the engagement with unfamiliar environments in moments of crisis”*
- 11.00- Coffee Break
11.30

Session 4 Listening and Place-Making

- 11.30- Patrick Eisenlohr, Göttingen University
12.15 *“Urban aspiration, ritual place-making, and aural dimensions of witnessing in Shi'ite Mumbai”*
- 12.15- Kristin Kastner, University of Munich
13.00 *„Listening to narratives and viewing photographs – Encounters with West-African migrants“*
- 13.00- Lunch Break
15.00

Session 5 Filmprojects in Progress

- 15.00- Christian Suhr, Aarhus University
15.45 *“Eyes of certitude: A film project about Muslims in Denmark and Egypt who learn to see by listening to the Quran”*
- 15.45- Federico Spinetti, University of Cologne/ University of Alberta
16.30 *“The Enemy - A Partisan Hymnbook”*
- 16.30- John Paul Sniadecki, Northwestern University
17.15 *“Sonic Slippage, Visual Splinters: mutual haunting and mutual play between sight and sound in YUMEN (2013)“*
- 17.15- Coffee Break
17.45

Evening Lecture

- 17.00- Richard K. Wolf, Harvard University
18.15 *“Visual interaction and the master-disciple relationship in South and Central Asia”*

19.00 Evening Program to be announced

Sunday, June 19, 2016

Session 6 Ethnography and the Senses

- 10.00- Peter MacMurray, Harvard University
10.45 *"Audiogustation: Taste, sound and death in Turkish Islam"*
- 10.45- Markus Verne, Freiburg University
11.30 *"Visually producing sound. The case of Malagasy Heavy Metal"*
- 11.30- Coffee Break
11.45
- 11.45- Friedlinde Riedl, Weimar University
12.30 *"Felt-Body in the field: Possibilities and limits of affective involvement versus reflective perception in musicological research"*
- 12.30- Judith MacDougall, Australian National University
13.15 *"The invisible in ethnographic films and the sound track"*
- 12.30- Finger Food
13.00

Closing Lecture

- 13.00- Ernst Karel, Harvard University
13.45 *"Disjunction, discrepancy, and doubt in sonic ethnography"*

Final Discussion

- 13.45- Frank Heidemann, University of Munich, and Richard K. Wolf,
14.30 Harvard University