



Call for Papers  
**Sound, Text, and Context:  
Artistic and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Aurality**

Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin  
15-16 February 2023

Sound, as an ‘object’ of historical, anthropological and epistemological enquiry, is elusive and its sources are dispersed. However, as Alain Corbin showed more than two decades ago in his *Village Bells*, it is possible to work on novel questions of sound and sound perception on the basis of relatively traditional sources (Corbin, 1994). More recently, Nancy Hunt has suggested a new reading of the sources, old and new, through the senses, through fields of hearing and sound, to create an “acoustic register” (Hunt, 2013). This echoes a larger trend in social sciences, especially in audiovisual anthropology, aiming at the mobilization of the “senses” in order to displace the focal from the visual in processes of production knowledge and its reception (McDougall, 2006; Pink, 2010). Challenging this domination of the visual in social sciences also questions the production and reception of scriptural sources in studies on and with sound.

Ziad Fahmy, in his elaboration on Middle Eastern sound studies, has also stressed that many different forms of typical written sources (memoirs, letters, diaries, official documents, travelogues, literary sources) include records of what was heard (Fahmy, 2013; 2016). Is it possible to research and write about sounds and listening by relying even on silent sources, including written materials from the archives, literature in different languages, ego-documents, scientific writings, newspapers, legal documents, musical notes, court records, as well as visual sources such as photographs and silent movies? On the other hand, what can we learn from sonic sources, from the (re)production and circulation of sound itself when textual sources are missing?

The conference intends to closely engage with multiple and multidirectional relations between sound, text, and context in an interdisciplinary perspective. On the one hand, prior to the invention of sound recording technologies, the sounds that we do research about and analyze have left behind only textual evidence in the form of written descriptions, comments, poems. It is also interesting to note the linguistic richness in sonic terminologies, which are capable of literally describing an endless variety of different sounds. But we, as researchers, often do not have the possibility to sensorially experience the sounds themselves. This gap separating historic sound and documentary trace is the result of the face-off between our “listening imagination” (Smalley, 1996) and the silence of historical documents and scholarly discourse (Fauser, 2005). On the other hand, the sounds of certain instruments, musical

compositions, machinery, animals, can possibly be reproduced (and so re-experienced), however, it is impossible to reenact the context of how they were listened to in the past. We argue that the echoes of aural worlds of the past are captured through the written word and that sonic memories reach us exactly in the form of an echo that carries the soundscape (Hendy, 2016; Boum, 2020). Sound without textual or visual sources, can also be the focal of social sciences research on contemporary phenomena. Scholars from different disciplines have debated on the ontological meaning and epistemologies of sound and knowledge production, especially in the fields of sonic/sound ethnography based on diverse methods investigating its social and material production as much as its consumption. The use and the reflection on sound is deeply embedded in the experience of the ethnographer with practices of field recording and ethnographic cinema. Other approaches include but are not limited to visual, cultural, and technology studies.

The meeting stresses the fruitfulness of a combined artistic and scientific approach to aurality. We aim to bring together an interdisciplinary group of social sciences researchers following different theoretical approaches (from cultural history, microhistory, history of ideas, history of science, anthropology, geography, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, cinema, musicology) and to initiate an exchange between arts and sciences. We want to facilitate the development of a dialogue between social scientists and those who work on subjects related to art, works of art, and artists themselves. The primary geographical focus of the meeting will be Europe in its global relations, with a particular focus on the Mediterranean. We are especially interested in (post)imperial and (post)colonial structures and encounters, which facilitated not only the circulation of (sound) devices, technologies, and expertise, but also the migration of people and their sonic practices, as well as artistic and cultural mobilities. The chronological focus of the conference is predominantly on the modern and contemporary era, conceived roughly from the nineteenth century until the present.

The conference will foster a new interdisciplinary dialogue, the outcomes of which will be published possibly in an edited volume or a special issue. We invite researchers to propose original and unpublished research abstracts including but not limited to the following questions:

- How are sound collections, sound recordings and sonic archives incorporated into the study of (post)imperial, colonial, and cultural otherness?
- How do technical possibilities of sound production change the research design in social sciences?
- How might silence, both in its sensorial and metaphorical senses, as much as sounds, “unmute” the past?
- How can we assess the effects of the *sensorial turn* as a new way of considering sound in social sciences and art?
- How does the theorization on “sonic things” affect the perception of what has or has not been categorized as “sound”?

The languages of the conference will be **French, German, and English**. There is no registration fee. We are trying to secure funding to cover the travel and accommodation costs for participants who cannot call on financial support from their institution. Applicants should indicate in their paper proposals if they would need to avail themselves of such support.

Please send your paper proposals with max. **250 words** with a short resume in a single document by **30 November 2023** to [maksudyan@cmb.hu-berlin.de](mailto:maksudyan@cmb.hu-berlin.de). We especially encourage submissions from doctoral students and young researchers and welcome artistic as well as academic presentations. The organizers will inform the participants of their decision by **15 December 2023**.

### **Partners**

Centre Marc Bloch (CMB)  
Paris 1 - Pantheon Sorbonne  
Université Franco Allemand (UFA)  
University of Cambridge

### **Organizing Committee**

Prof. Nazan Maksudyan (CMB / FU Berlin)  
Dr. Julio Velasco (CMB)  
Louis Petitjean (P1, UniBO)  
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