CfP: Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft
Sound|Archives

In the context of current debates on the decolonization of archives, the restitution of museum objects, and the examination of colonial history, the question of colonial practices and procedures underlying sound recordings and sound archives gains new urgency. Sound itself is a problematic and mainly strategic concept that exceeds the notion of the audible. It includes disturbing sounds or noises that exceed forms of cultural notation and understanding. Sounds invoke intercultural and technological power relations and should be examined in regard to questions of noise and interference. Media Studies, here not necessarily limited to Sound Studies alone, promise insights into the historical, technical as well as cultural conditions of recording, production, distribution, and reception of sounds, voices, and noise. Building upon anthropological and cultural anthropological research (Rosalind Morris [2008]; Brian Larkin [2008]; investigations into colonial practices (Achille Mbembe [2001]; Britta Lange [2019]; Anette Hoffmann [2020]), studies in the context of imperial warfare (J. Martin Daughtry [2015]; Steve Goodman [2010]), and musicologist questions of «Reason and Resonance» (Veit Erlmann [2010]), the planned issue will raise question about the agency of the sonic but also about historical archives and the status of recorded sound as a historical source in general. In this regard the issue will pay special attention to the reorientation and integration of Sound Studies to the «Global South», which Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes [2019] have programmatically initiated as a «Remapping». On the one hand, this «Remapping» involves uncovering ideological and hegemonic practices. On the other, by paying attention to strategies of disruption and disturbance, as well as to the power relations in sound recording and archiving, references to the postcolonial have to be uncovered. This pertains not only to the recording and production of sound documents but also to the dimensions of listening (Ana María Ochoa Gautier [2014]) and preservation. The question of the inaudible, which can be understood as the flip side of a theory and history of the audible (Jonathan Sterne [2003]), insists on critical perception of sounds and the media of their production. It once again points to the mediality of historiography and, to bring together the titles of two fundamental studies, suggests a «Remapping of Reason». This might be understood as a necessary precondition for all efforts of decolonization.

We propose the following aspects for potential contributions:

- **Recording Systems**: Recording systems known as «Aufschreibesysteme» in media studies (Friedrich Kittler [1985] quoting Schreber) need further examination in the context of Sound Studies. This means discussing the technical apparatuses for recording voices, sounds, and noises, different formats for storage or distribution (Sterne [2012]), as well as transfers and translations between different media and formats. Not only the history of technology is to be questioned. Questions about how different recording techniques for sound produce different acoustic representations, particularly of the Other and of Alterity (David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny [2015]), need to be raised.

- **Filters**: Western cultures, cultural practices and forms of knowledge production can be described, following Gregory Whitehead, as generally involving practices that reduce disturbances and noise (Gregory Whitehead [1990]). From a Media Studies perspective, this can be understood as a problem of filters and filtering systems. For example, transcriptions of audio recordings in anthropology rely on a set of techniques and tools which transform an acoustic environment into text, including, among other things, pencil, paper, alphabets, writing, typewriters, computers, etc. Filtering systems can follow cultural rules or be technically implemented, such as through the characteristics of microphones, playback devices and algorithms. Even the process of digitization itself can be understood as filtering. This is why all audible material needs critical examination against the impression of authenticity. The masked effects of transcription and technical mediation as forms of colonial interference are at stake. Issues of inclusion and exclusion – deciding whether a sound is considered to be understood as signal or as noise – are also relevant here.

- **Sound Archives**: Sound archives are often assumed to be hermetically sealed and unalterable (Miguel García [2017]). Especially in the context of decolonial efforts, it is essential to critically examine sound archives as (often colonial) institutions associated with a particular disciplinary order. As historical sources, sounds may stabilize and contribute to colonial historiography, but, re-examined in terms of their technical production, they may also contradict or refute historical assumptions. This discussion involves the production and transmission of sounds as knowledge as well as strategies for collecting, storing and organizing sound archives. Technical sound recordings can reinforce hierarchies between those recording and those being recorded, either perpetuating historical forms of domination or introducing new forms of control and classification. [See also Recording Systems and Filters above]

- **Classification of Sonic Objects**: While critical studies of visual media, photography and cinematography, have been extensively examined as media of measurement and practices of measuring and classification, the reflection on sound in this context has only recently gained attention. Epistemic and hegemonic strategies differ in the realm of media-based Sound Studies. The voice, for instance, was particularly scrutinized in a colonial context as an object of phonetics and semantics, as a source for evidence, or as a form of agency, but scholars often refrained from listening to and understanding what actually was said and what else might have sounded [Adriana Cavarero [2005]). Britta Lange has raised this point convincingly (Britta Lange [2015]). However, it is not only semantic transcription that allows for an understanding of historical and social situations (Anette Hoffmann [2018]), but also the examination of sonic objects and sonic milieus in terms of the way they shape and determine space, environments and social relations (e.g. in recording and editing) as well as in terms of classification, aesthetics and politics, particularly from a gender-critical perspective.

- **Infrastructures and Distribution**: Sound and sound objects, understood as «boundary objects» (Susan Leigh Star [2000]), are both robust and flexible, enabling the connection and interrelation of disciplines, discourses and techniques across boundaries. Simultaneously, infrastructures – understood as media-technical arrangements – regulate the circulation, distribution, and access to sound, sound archives, and practices in various ways. They also inherently produce political strategies and counter-strategies based on the media-technical prerequisites of the respective infrastructures.

- **Sonic Ecology**: Classification of sound and sound objects require a critical description and reflection, as do acoustical environments produced by media (Sonic Ecologies). Understanding sound not just as an authentic expression of cultural ontologies but much rather as the production of territorial, historical and acoustic ecologies and environments (Dhanveer Singh Brar [2016]), raises questions related to technical genesis, aesthetic, social and political organization, as well as forms of subjectivity and segregation within and alongside such acoustic-media ecologies.

- **Mobility and Migration**: Acoustic media play a crucial role in transcending territories if spatial divisions are subverted or challenged by state, police, or military border enforcement, or through technical standards and formats, as seen in acoustic practices like pirate radio or other forms of clandestine broadcasting (Muhammed Haron [2015], Steve Goodman [2010]). It is also important to explore the experiences of migration and migration movements, as well as the documentation of migration routes in the form of acoustic events and recordings (Vassilis S. Tsianos, Brigitta Kuster [2021]; Tsianos, Ute Holl, Peter Ott [2015]), thus examining identity negotiations on the one hand and circulation of knowledge on the other: between «treks» and «tracks» (Johannes Salim Ismaiel-Wendt, Andi Schoon [2022], Ismaiel-Wendt [2011]).

We invite contributions that engage with the issues and questions outlined above. Considering current transformations in listening and auditory cultures, significantly influenced by media practices and technologies, can enable new connections between acoustic practices of the «Global South» and those of the «Global North». We welcome submissions that not only operate analytically and descriptively at the intersection of Media Studies and Sound Studies but also challenge conceptual definitions and seek innovative and productive ways of thinking.

Focus Editors: Ute Holl, Emanuel Welinder.

Ideas for potential contributions can be discussed with the focus editors before submitting the finalized texts.

Submissions are to be send by **January 31st, 2024** (due to translation into German) to: ute.holl@unibas.ch, emanuel.welinder@unibas.ch.

Authors are requested to conform the citation style and formatting of their texts to the provided style guide:

https://zfmedienwissenschaft.de/sites/default/files/media/allgemein/downloads/ZfM_Styleguide_2022.pdf.

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