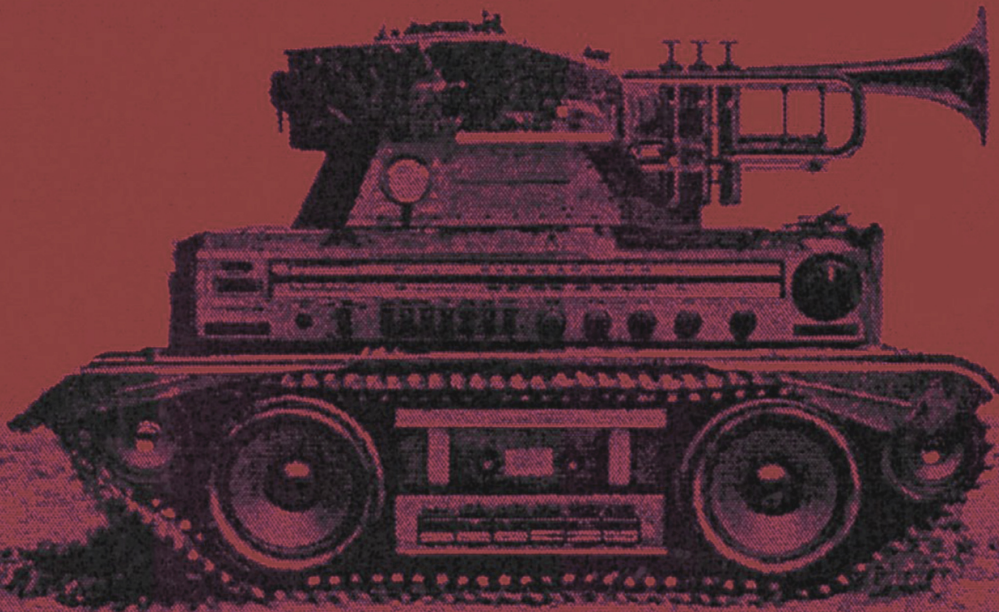


Conversations in sound and power:

An interdisciplinary workshop



Raadzaal
Achter Sint Pieter 200
Utrecht University
31.03.17

Keynote: Martin Daughtry (NYU)

conversationsinsoundandpower.wordpress.com



Universiteit Utrecht



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



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Conversations in Sound and Power
University of Utrecht
31.03.2017

This one-day international workshop brings together academics from various disciplines working on sound and power, with the aim of showcasing a diverse range of scholarship across the social sciences, arts and humanities in order to discuss current and new directions in the study of the politics of sound broadly conceived.

How do physical and psycho-social environments influence how we perceive sounds, and how do sounds influence how we perceive a place? How does music shape our being in the world and our experience of everyday life, of violence and of different power actors? How do we study music and sound? Which new ways are there to think about methodology, and what does the focus on sound bring to our epistemological understandings of different disciplines? How does sound enter into practices of testimony and witness?

During this day, insights from anthropology, history, media studies, musicology and geography will be brought to bear on these issues and questions introduced above. We hope to achieve a sense of the multiple possibilities of studying the relations between sound and power. As this will be an explicitly interdisciplinary day, the focus will be on the exchange of experiences and practices, rather than on formal topics and themes, although we are interested in addressing sound, power and environment; sound and conflicts; and aural methodologies.

Approaching sound and music from different disciplinary perspectives and across different cultural contexts can shed light on the relations between power structures and perception: what is perceived as normal sound, which sounds do we notice, or continue to hear, which sounds are perceived to be noise, who is allowed to produce certain sounds? Changes in technology also contribute to changes in the aural textures of everyday life, while differentiated access to a such technologies can in turn have consequences for existing power structures. We also seek more sensory views on these topics. Non-representational theories in geography and beyond have strongly influenced social science conceptualizations of sound through research into the various affective and corporeal economies of sound.

Past and present conflicts have, as recent research has demonstrated, profound aural dimensions which remain under-theorised and under-researched. From sonic weapons and tactics of control through to the role of sound in practices of witnessing and ethnographies of experience in conflict, new modes of thinking how war, sound and affect collide and re-shape both theory and empirical practice.

Also, growing research has been done about the role of music in conflicts. State and non-state power actors, like police, gangs and local militias have tried to seize control over music and musical events, deciding which music can be played and trying to regulate what the message is that the music can convey. But music has a power in itself, as its influence on its audience can never be determined unilaterally by the authorities, or by musicians, DJs or any other actor. Furthermore, the place in which music is heard, and other contextual characteristics, have consequences for how audiences experienced it.

The intersections of sound and power compel us to ask broader questions about our research methods and analysis. Whilst we do not hold to the apocryphal statement that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture”, the translation of sensory media into language and vice versa presents us with challenges. It is precisely these challenges that we hope to address by bringing together academics and practitioners from diverse fields.

Draft Program

09:00 - Registration & Coffee

09:30 – Introduction, Welcome & Opening Remarks

09:45 - Keynote - Martin Daughtry (NYU) with Discussant Ton Robben (University of Utrecht)

11:00 - Coffee

11:15 - Session 1 - Sterre Gilsing (Utrecht University), Otávio Raposo (CIES, Lisbon), Karin Bijsterveld (University of Maastricht)

12:30 - Lunchbreak

13:15 - Session 2 - Niall Martin (University of Amsterdam), Toby Heyes (Manchester School of Art), Marie Thompson (University of Lincoln)

14:30 – Jaber Fayad (Higher Institute of Music, Damascus)

15:00 – Roundtable, Carolyn Birdsall (University of Amsterdam), Annalisa Butticci (Utrecht University) & Rivke Jaffe (University of Amsterdam)

15:45 - Closing

16:00 Drinks (Location TBA)

Session 1 (11:30am – 12:45pm)

Insurgent performances: music and power at Rio de Janeiro's favelas

Dr. Otávio Raposo

One of the most important groups of breakdancers in Rio de Janeiro is located in Mare, a neighborhood composed of sixteen favelas (shanty towns), and home to around 140.000 people. Based on my ethnographic research in their dance spaces, I'll discuss how these young people have become active participants in a circuit of events and championships, where digital platforms (social networking, blogs, and youtube) are central to its diffusion. B-boy identity and dance performances have a special meaning in their lives, as they are an efficient way to gain respect and visibility. They seek, therefore, a singularity that rejects stigmatizing representations that are usually associated with, living in a favela and belonging to a disadvantaged social class.

Endowed with a theatrical aggressiveness in break dance championships, the dancers "fight" each other through the dance with the aim of proving that they are better than the opponents, a way to stand out of the crowd for its virtues of good dancers. On the other hand, the collective effervescence provided by music and dance in these environments transforms all participants into a community of meaning and belonging, whose differences, segmentations and rivalries are nullified. Impeccable performances in breakdance events are their moments of glory; unforgettable moments to give them the feeling of being admired, as part of an internationally-respected culture. By winning dance battles, they project their visibility, represent themselves as powerful rather than deprivation and jump symbolic barriers that confine them to the label of "favelado".

Silence as violence in Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

Sterre Gilsing (University of Utrecht)

When we think about violence and the sounds of violence, gunshots and screams come to mind. Maybe we imagine the sound of people running and fleeing, maybe the sounds of walkie-talkies used for communication by perpetrators, maybe the stressed voice of someone giving commands. In this paper, however, I want to add silence to the discussion of violent sounds. What happens when daily life sounds are absent, but also before mentioned sounds are not heard? I discuss examples of silencing practices I encountered during my ethnographic research in favelas in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro. During my fieldwork, I found that in the case of police operations silence, as experienced by inhabitants from these neighborhoods, is not just an awaiting of violence to come, but rather violence in itself. Moreover, I zoom into silencing practices around funk proibidão music to elucidate how sonic power struggles unfold on the level of popular culture. Police prohibits funk parties in general or a certain type of funk songs to regain authority in favelas but in many cases these actions mean a loss of legitimacy.

“Mystery Voice”

Prof. Karin Bijsterveld (University of Maastricht)

“Mystery Voice” is a commonly used title for guessing games in radio broadcasts that center on the identification of the voices of well-known people active in the public domain, like politicians, sportsmen or musicians. The games draw on humans’ widely acknowledged ability to remember and recognize the voices of persons they are familiar with. Yet security services have a longstanding interest in identifying the voices of *unfamiliar* subjects, like those of spies, criminals and dissidents—the mystery voices par excellence, usually recorded through systematic eavesdropping. A case in point has been the Ministry of State Security in the former German Democratic Republic that eavesdropped widely, both on foreign and its own citizens. Against this background it developed a keen interest in technologies and techniques of speaker identification, such as audio analysis and the “voice print.”

How did Stasi employees slice sound to this purpose? And why did their auditory work not become as powerful as the Stasi had hoped for? Empirically, this paper is based on hundreds of documents from Stasi’s former archives. Theoretically, it draws on *modes of listening* in the sciences to clarify Stasi’s identification practices, and distinguishes between the *logics of forensics* and the *logics of monitoring* to understand why these practices undermined the Stasi’s intended politics of sound.

A Century of Zombie Sound

Dr. Toby Heys (Manchester School of Art):

This presentation takes for granted that, firstly, perceptible sound is only a subset of a broader vibrational continuum and secondly, that it encourages the conceptualisation of a third dimension between the real (what is known) and the imagined (the fictional or speculative). It situates sound in this third dimension, as that which lurks in, alludes to, or exposes the darker aspects of death/ the afterlife/ non-presence/ and the otherworldly. It is proposed that an alternative analysis leads to the discovery of evidence that enriches the traditional approach to sound, by drawing out its connections to transmissions between the living and the dead: such as EVP and stone tape phenomena; warfare (such as the use of sonic weapons in recent US wars in the Middle East); lazarian economies (based on digitally re-vivified dead young African-American musicians as laser-lit holograms such as Tupac and ODB); alien life (such as the unexplained oceanic ‘bloop’ and Jupiter’s VLF radio emissions); morbid musical composition (such as Rilke’s theory of a ‘primal sound’ resulting from placing a phonograph needle onto the cracks of a human skull), and the sound of artificial intelligence such as the relationship between human and machine voice, from Turin’s vocal anomalies to the voice of Siri and Google’s new robots.

Sounding Gentrification: Noise, Power and Social Space

Dr. Marie Thompson (University of Lincoln)

Gentrification and its displacements have been the focal point of much recent academic and activist praxis. The transformations induced by these economic, social and aesthetic processes have often been understood in relation to the visual. Cafes, delis and restaurants are seen to open. Abandoned warehouses are seen to become galleries, studios and workshops. Waterfront recreational developments become visible; while the ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures of blogposts and news articles illustrate the transformation of an area. This paper examines the accompanying auditory politics of gentrification with reference to three examples: the noisy ambivalence of music venues in the ‘creative’ city; the use of music as an audio-affective deterrent in privately owned public space; and the sonic disruptions of anti-gentrification protests. I suggest that the resistive and displacing noise of processes of gentrification both raises crucial questions around sound, power and urban space; and presents important challenges to acoustic ecology’s ‘aesthetic moralism’.

Radiant language and entangled listening: Noise in Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer*

Dr. Niall Martin (UvA)

Abstract: This paper approaches the topic of sound and power through an examination of the function of listening in Svetlana Alexievich's oral history of the Chernobyl disaster, *Chernobyl Prayer*. It considers some of the ways in which Alexievich's attention to listening as an ethical and material practice encourages us to reflect on the phenomenological construction of the sonic as source. As her text makes clear, the Chernobyl disaster has radical implications for ideas of human agency and biopower in the early 21st century. By invoking the concept of noise, I aim to explore the entanglement of these revised ideas of power and agency with models for thinking the relationship between the sonic and the textual. What, I ask, are the wider implications of Alexievich's 'Chernobyl' for our understanding of the conditions and possibilities of oral history in the early Twenty-first century?

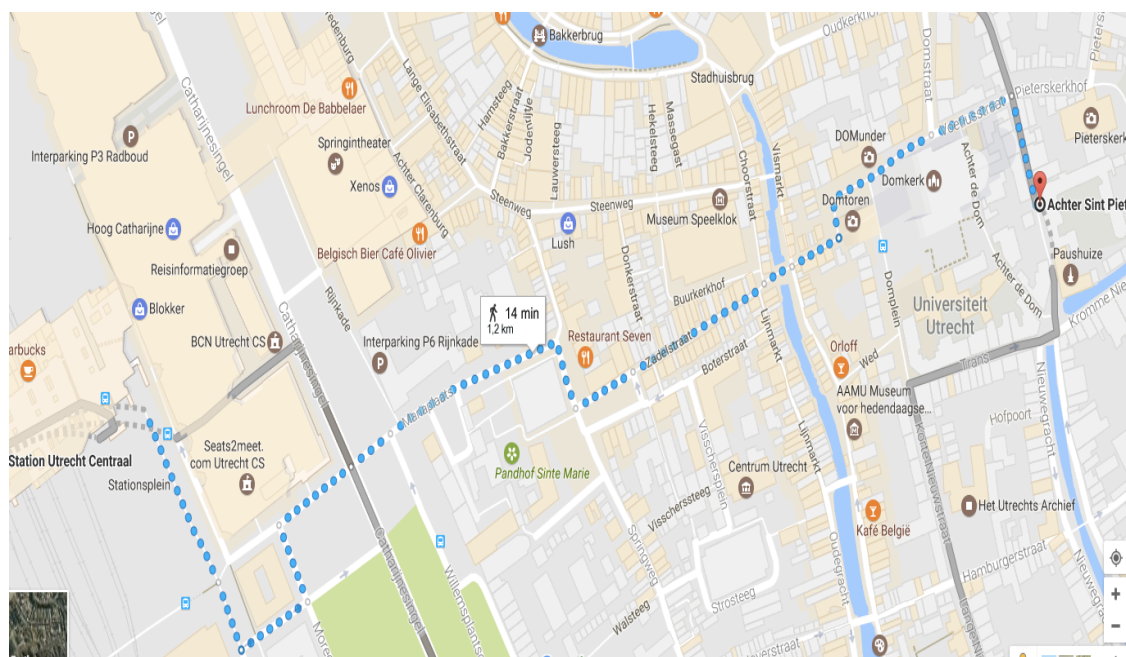
Location Details



How to get to Utrecht.

If coming from Amsterdam/Schiphol airport by far the easiest way to get to Utrecht is by train. Trains go 4 times an hour and you can buy a ticket at the vending machines (to Utrecht Centraal train station). In Holland we also use a chipcard system, but it is not worth it to buy a chipcard unless you are planning to travel around more. Arriving at the Utrecht Centraal train station you can either walk to Achter Sint Pieter (25 minutes) or go by bus which will take you about the same amount of time as the bus leaves from the other side of the trainstation. You can take bus number **50** (direction Wageningen) or **77** (direction Bilthoven), getting off at the bus stop Janskerkhof.

Directions from Utrecht Centraal



Notes on Contributors

Dr. Otávio Raposo is postdoctoral researcher in Anthropology at the Centre for Research and Studies, University Institute of Lisbon, and on scholarship by the FCT. He's participated in many research projects about urban studies, youth, segregation, art and migrations in Portugal and Brazil. He is currently addressing artistic practices and the civic engagement of young people from the outskirts of Lisbon, as well as the public politics addressed to them. He's made many documentaries, including "Nu Bai. Lisbon's Black Rap".

Sterre Gilsing is a PhD candidate at the department of cultural anthropology at Utrecht University. Her research on funk proibidão in Rio de Janeiro is part of the Popular Culture of Illegality project which explores the aesthetic dimensions of popular culture and how they are related to power regimes.

Prof. Karin Bijsterveld is full professor at the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Maastricht University, and works on the cultural history of sound. Her key publications are *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (MIT Press, 2008), the *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford UP 2012, with Trevor Pinch), *Sound and Safe: A History of Listening behind the Wheel* (Oxford UP 2014, with Eefje Cleophas, Stefan Krebs & Gijs Mom) and a special issue on Auditory History for *The Public Historian* (2015).

She is currently finishing the book-length essay “Sonic Skills” (Palgrave Pivot, see also <http://fasos-research.nl/sonic-skills>) and exploring a new project on the GDR Stasi and its program on audio analysis.

Dr Toby Heys is a Reader in Digital Media, Research hub Leader for Media and Leader of the Future Technologies Research Centre at the Manchester School of Art, which resides within Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK. He is currently the primary investigator on ‘Enlight’ - A pan European sound and light production/residency/festival project funded by the European Cultural Fund for 2 years. He is also a Co-Investigator on a 3D printing graphene project funded by the EPSRC for 3.5 years. Heys is a member of the sonic research unit AUDINT (www.audint.net). They are currently preparing an anthology called ‘Unsound : Undead’ for publication through Univocal and will be producing an installation for Sonar in Istanbul in 2017. His work with Professor Robert Saucier from UQAM in Montreal includes large-scale interactive robotic installations that are exhibited in galleries and museums across Europe and North America.

Dr. Marie Thompson is a Lecturer in Media, Sound and Culture at the University of Lincoln, UK. She is the author of *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury, 2017) and the co-editor of *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*.

Dr. Niall Martin is an Assistant Professor in the department of Literary and Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam. His research is concerned with the ways in which the concept of noise can be used to frame and focus issues of globalization. A monograph which incorporates some of that research – *Iain Sinclair: Noise, Neoliberalism and the Matter of London* was published by Bloomsbury in 2015 and is coming out in paperback this month.