

**1st international conference of the
European Sound Studies Association**



FUNCTIONAL SOUNDS

AUDITORY CULTURE AND SOUND CONCEPTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

**OCTOBER 4 – 6, 2013
HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN**

Organising Chairs:

Morten Michelsen, Københavns Universitet/Denmark
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Founding vice-chair of the European Sound Studies Association
Principal investigator of the Sound Studies Lab

in cooperation with the
Sound Studies Lab



ABSTRACT

When you turned on this computer you had to listen to disjointed system sounds, start up chimes, alert noises and auditory warning signals, perhaps accompanied by your favourite music in the background or on your headphones; this morning, when entering the building, you involuntarily set off the security alarm and the guards quickly materialized looking as if they would beat you up if you did not instantly produce your electronic identification card; as you made a cup of coffee in the kitchen at work or home, the automated (or humanly operated) coffee/espresso machine emanated a wide range of hissing, beeping and crumbling noises, and while drinking it you read a newspaper article about sound torture; later, when you enter a subway station sounds announce almost any action taking place down there, together with sounds from phones and game consoles; in bed at night you can't sleep because of the annoying sounds coming from the traffic outside.

QUESTIONS

In these and many other ways functional sounds are core elements in contemporary culture. The conference aims to show and discuss how functional sounds are taken up – as objects of study and as design practices – by artists, sound designers, architects and scholars of art and architecture, by those who study anthropology, musicology and sociology, and to what effect? Do functional sounds merely make our world more 'functional', more stable, controllable, and surveillable, or does a critical study of functional sounds have the potential to destabilize and reconfigure practices, discourses and disciplines? Presentations might touch upon the following questions:

- In what ways do functional sounds organize and regulate life, in what ways do they avoid regulation?
- In what ways and at which levels of consciousness do they inform everyday life for individuals and for smaller and larger groups?
- Can sounds be representative of sexes, genders, ethnicities and other categories of humans?
- Can everyday auditory cultures be regarded as semiotically coherent cultures, or do they work as large series or bundles of non-related signs?
- How do citizens think about the auditory culture(s); how do they verbalize it/them?
- In what ways do functional sounds create and monitor borders and how do they ignore and transgress borders?
- How do they heal and cause illness (tinnitus, nervous breakdowns, etc.)?
- How has sound been used as a weapon, how has it become a means of torture, a nuisance, or a tool of oppression?
- How do sounds afford, how do they inhibit?

AIMS & SCOPE

Inviting speakers from a range of geographical and disciplinary locations and involving practitioners as well as theorists, the conference asks how functional sounds have become and are still becoming an essential part of everyday culture and what its potentials are for new critical and inventive ideas for future research and artistic practice.

The conference will focus on existing as well as emergent and cutting-edge approaches to functional sound design, sonification, auditory culture, everyday soundscapes, artistic concepts and popular culture. In particular, the conference will encourage presentations that include both theoretical and practical aspects and presentations that address everyday contexts within which sound - in its relation to media, technology, and the arts - is constitutive for new ways of thinking, listening, and becoming.

The conference also aims to examine, explore and critically engage with the issues and implications created by the growing field of sound studies. The ubiquity of sound in everyday communication and our daily sonic environment is not a new phenomenon; but the study of non-verbal communication through sound has only recently gained more attention in the academic realm. As part of what has been termed an auditory turn (Meyer 2008), recognition of the research of Canadian and worldwide acoustic ecology since the 1960s and the more recently established auditory or sound studies (Bull/Back 2003, Cox/Warner 2004, Schulze 2008, Bijsterveld/Pinch 2011, Sterne 2012) has grown to become an integral part of a variety of fields of study.

SIX STREAMS ON FUNCTIONAL SOUNDS

Papers, presentations and lecture performances, as well as soundwalks, installations or audio pieces are invited on any of the following 6 streams (detailed descriptions below):

- Stream I **Methodologies of Sound in the Humanities**
- Stream II **Cultural Politics & Sonic Experience**
- Stream III **Sonic Artistic Practices & Research**
- Stream IV **Sound Design Practices**
- Stream V **Soundscapes of the Urban Future**
- Stream VI **Pop & Sound**

INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Sound Studies Lab

This conference is organised and hosted by the DFG-funded research project Functional Sounds at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. This research project explores how human beings experience mediatized, non-verbal auditory signs, so-called functional sounds – and how a design theory of auditory signs might be described in terms of a cultural theory.

The conference is also part of the Sound Studies Lab (also DFG-funded): a research environment that invites young and experienced scholars and artists to do research on the sonic and sensory aspects of individual lives and in heterogeneous societies, cultures and historical eras since 2011. The main research studio of the lab is currently located at the Institut für Kulturwissenschaft at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Website: <http://www.soundstudieslab.org>

European Sound Studies Association (ESSA)

Moreover, this is the first international conference of the European Sound Studies Association (ESSA), founded in July 2012 to provide an international, interdisciplinary and interprofessional organization for promoting the study of sound. The founding members of this international academic association are (in alphabetical order):

Karin Bijsterveld (NL), Barry Blesser (US), Michael Bull (UK), Mark Butler (US), Marcel Cobussen (NL), Björn Hellström (SWE), Erik Granly Jensen (DK), Anahid Kassabian (UK/US), Jacob Kreutzfeld (DK), Tellef Kvifte (N), Charlotte Rørdam Larsen (DK), Ansa Lønstrup (DK), Morten Michelsen (DK), Holger Schulze (GER), Mark M. Smith (US), Jonathan Sterne (CAN/US), Ola Stockfelt (SWE), Jean-Paul Thibaud (FRA), David Toop (UK), Heikki Uimonen (FIN), Simon Zagorski-Thomas (UK).

Website: <http://www.soundstudies.eu>

Journal of Sonic Studies

Selected articles of this conference will be published in two special issues of the peer-reviewed Journal of Sonic Studies (Leiden&Nijmegen/The Netherlands) and the peer-reviewed SoundEffects (Kopenhagen/Denmark).

Websites: <http://www.sonicstudies.org>
<http://www.soundeffects.dk>

ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

Abstracts for papers, presentations and lecture performances, as well as for soundwalks, installations or audio pieces should be submitted electronically to:

conf@soundstudies.eu

by January 15, 2013.

Please use the submission form provided on:

<http://www.soundstudies.eu/2013conference/>

to provide your contact details and abstract.

Abstracts should be max. 1.200 characters/200 words.

NOTE: Forms that do not contain all the required information will not enter the peer-review process, and as such are not eligible to be part of the conference. The programme committee will decide which papers belong to which streams but would very much like suggestions for most relevant stream (as listed in the form).

We will acknowledge receipt and respond to all paper proposals submitted.

We will get back to you with a concrete invitation by **April 15, 2013.**

For further details about the conference please visit:

<http://www.soundstudies.eu/2013conference/>

Stream I **Methodologies of Sound in the Humanities**

Programme committee: Erik Granly Jensen (DK), Sylvia Mieszkowski (FRA/GER),
Holger Schulze (GER)

This stream focuses on the multi-faceted ways that sound as a functionalized phenomenon can and has been studied in the humanities. Sound is perceived here as an important avenue into theorizing literature and other cultural productions such as music, visual arts, and theatre. The functionality of sounds, especially the narrative functions of the sonic as a methodological approach, is of great interest. The aim of this section is to move beyond theoretical dichotomies (between the visual and the sonic, the oral and the written, the performative and the objectified) and to explore cutting-edge methodological approaches that investigate the manifold implications and functionalizations of the sonic – such as identity constructions, aspects of gender, race and ethnicity, or of notions of time and space – in literary texts, musical productions, or theatre and dance performances. Questions that might be discussed in this context are: How do sound studies scholars speak about sound and how can they display or represent a sonic experience in their research publications? What is the special focus that sound studies can contribute to different disciplines and research strands – and how is interdisciplinarity actually manifested by this?

Stream II **Cultural Politics & Sonic Experience**

Programme committee: Julian Henriques (UK), Carla Müller-Schulzke (GER), N.N.

Against the backdrop of the various approaches on the cultural politics of artistic production and perception that have become integral to cultural studies, social anthropology and literary theory in the last decades, this stream seeks to investigate more thoroughly how functional elements of sound have constantly crossed and challenged geographic, political and cultural borders. This panel encourages contributions that address, for instance, the functional sounds of protest marches, the use of highly functionalized sonic weapons, or the transgressive and at the same time very functional power of bass-oriented club music. Questions encouraged in this context could include: Which kinds of sonic practices, media, texts, and technologies are used in order to challenge racist, essentialist and Eurocentric ideas of culture? What are the new relationships of the global and the local, centre and periphery, mainstream and sub-culture, etc. that are negotiated through sound? What is the function of music as a form of critical noise and as a form of participation? How do people listen differently and produce sound differently within a world that is in constant flux? How does sound become a matter through which people envision collectivity, agency and change?

Stream III Sonic Artistic Practices & Research

Programme committee: Marcel Cobussen (NL), Heikki Uimonen (FIN), N.N.

In a rather exceptional movement, the last decade saw not only a rising amount of substantial and methodologically precise research in the field of sound – but this development was at the same time paralleled by the rise of ever more diligently conducted research by means of artistic practices in the field of artistic research. In this stream we offer artists as/and researchers the opportunity to present and discuss the aesthetic and heuristic findings of their work in the field of sound: In what respect does artistic research of the sonic (especially functional sounds) add new aspects to traditional research methods? What are the specific forms of sonic knowledge that are to be explored and that research should focus on in the realm of the arts? How has sound gained an aesthetic, discursive and analytical function within artistic research? How has research on the sonic been hybridized, and how will it be transformed in the future through the new approaches of artistic research into sound? How should research institutions of the present expand their established research practices, admission processes, publication environments and criteria for evaluating research in order to integrate artistic research on sound in an adequate and meaningful way?

Stream IV: Sound Design Practices

Programme committee: Max Schneider (GER), Alexandra Supper (NL/AT), N.N.

The practices of designing sound with a more or less functional purpose are manifold, and they are often grounded in very mixed and idiosyncratic personal biographies of professional training. But a wide range of professional practices, businesses and aesthetics has been established in recent years. With this stream we intend to give researchers and professionals in this field the opportunity to discuss and present approaches, seemingly unsolvable problems and even the institutional question of how to implement a hearing perspective in design briefings that might not be concerned with the auditory in the first place – but are in dire need to do so. Questions that are encouraged include: How do designers present their concepts and drafts to an audience that is less familiar with the specificities of audio design than with specificities of visual design? How is a functionalized sonic experience related to the other senses and to kinaesthetic perception?

Stream V: **Soundscapes of the Urban Future**

Programme committee: Michael Bull (UK), Anahid Kassabian (UK/US), Jacob Kreutzfeldt (DK)

Whereas one initial inspiration for the study of soundscapes – originated at the Simon-Fraser University around 1970 – was the preservation of historical or contemporary soundscapes as a kind of world heritage of auditory culture, this stream aims at reversing its listening perspective. Since sound design and sound studies are part of the auditory transformations contemporary cultures will undergo in the coming years, it is necessary to take into consideration that social, political, cultural and technical developments of the present will result in certain tweaks and twitches, changes and revolutions in the very near future, not least in our functional soundscape. So, the questions at stake in this stream are: How will an urban or post-urban agglomeration of the future sound (taking in account the manifold functional notifications and warning signs)? How will we bear being enclosed or entangled by so many sources of mediated and highly functional sound productions in almost every square meter of technologically advanced societies? Does sound design and audio branding need a Bauhaus-revolution, a new HfG-Ulm (worldwide one of the most influential schools of design – as founded in the 1950s e.g. by Otl Aicher, Max Bill and others in Ulm/Germany)? What are the challenges for sound designers – starting with the functional sounds of electro-mobility and ending with the myriads of nano-loudspeakers in technical gadgets everyone does now and will then carry around, attached to their bodies in the next decades (at least in the more wealthy parts of this planet)? How has and will listening change in the context of these explosions of sound?

Stream VI: **Pop & Sound**

Programme committee: Morten Michelsen (DK), Jens Gerrit Papenburg (GER), N.N.

Popular culture since the themed-20th century has been perceived to a large extent via aspects of the sonic in youth culture. This might have changed in recent years, but sounds, vibrations and kinesthetic sensory perception of the sonic remain core elements in popular culture as well as the distinctive value of an appropriate sound design. Consequently, in this stream we look for contributions that explore the functionalized sonic, its experiential and its historical ramifications by manifold examples of popular cultures: the functional sounds in computer games and sports glissants (surfing, skating, parkour et.al.), on the dancefloor and while creating with sound processing software, in using mobile apps and when attending a rock or dance music open air festival; when consuming in shopping malls and whilst being lost in a new or alien city. How have the function and the affective dimension of specific sounds and sonic experiences changed over time and in the process of transcultural hybridization? What specific sonic functionalities and dysfunctionalities get to be explored these days by the most advanced examples of popular culture?