

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE
Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
Deadline March 15, 2015



Courtesy of AT&T Archives and History Center

Testing Hearing: Science, Art, Industry

Conference, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, Germany, December 4-5, 2015 organized by Alexandra Hui (Mississippi State University), Mara Mills (NYU), Viktoria Tkaczyk (MPIWG).

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What are the boundaries of hearing? By what parameters has hearing been measured and defined? From individuals to populations, humans to plants to whales—who and what have been the subjects of hearing tests? When does hearing become feeling? How has hearing been tested by new instruments and practices? How has hearing been used as a means of testing other phenomena, instruments, and practices?

The “Testing Hearing” Conference will be one of the inaugural events of the new MPIWG Research Group “Epistemes of Modern Acoustics” (See <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/RGTkaczyk> for more information on the research group). The organizers propose a three-part approach to the intertwined subjects of testing and hearing:

1. Hearing tests as cultural practices. The conference will approach hearing tests as situated in the dual histories of scientific experimentation and medical diagnosis, broadly defined. Hearing tests, usually of threshold and range, occur within various scientific disciplines, the arts, and industry. For this conference, testing is regarded as a cultural technique of assessment, standardization, and calibration (of both equipment and the tests themselves) and not necessarily open-ended experiments.
2. Perceptual and cultural challenges to the boundaries of hearing. Across the sciences, the arts, and industry, auditory thresholds have been defined and maintained through an interplay between experimental subjects and psycho-techniques (historical tests of “perfect pitch,” sensitivity to loudness or frequency, and the determination of cross-perceptual thresholds, for example). In turn, these tests rely upon particular modes of defining and representing hearing ranges, from descriptive accounts to statistical graphics. The conference would also like to explore the consequences of such threshold tests—the relationship between measurement and identity, cultural possibilities for “normal hearing,” policy changes, the creation of new sounds and devices, etc.
3. Hearing tests as tools for the evaluation of data, selves, communities, and objects. Complementing its explorations of hearing as an object of evaluation, the conference will explore hearing as a tool of evaluation that puts human individuals and communities, animal species, plants, and non-organic materials to the test. This approach calls for a focus on the use of sonification and audification in various fields to analyze non-acoustic data. It also includes the inverse: the graphic representation of sonic data such as in forensic science, underwater acoustics or bioacoustics.

We invite scholars from all relevant disciplines to submit a paper proposal of up to 500 words and a curriculum vitae to Birgitta von Mallinckrodt: bvmallinckrodt@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de by March 15. Applicants will be notified of decisions by April 15. Accommodation and travel costs to Berlin for participants will be covered by the MPIWG.