



# VOICE, SOUND, AND ATMOSPHERES: RELIGIOUS FEELINGS AND BEYOND

A workshop held at Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity,  
Göttingen, 7 February 2019

**Conveners: PATRICK EISENLOHR (Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen) and PETER VAN DER VEER (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen)**

Following up on the publication of Patrick Eisenlohr's *Sounding Islam* (2018) the workshop aims to interrogate the felt dimensions of religion and religious recognition combining perspectives from the anthropology of media, the anthropology of semiotic mediation, and sound studies, but also thinking beyond these fields in drawing on neo-phenomenological approaches to atmospheres. One of the key themes of the symposium are the crucial roles of sound and voice in the field of religion, in particular the sonic incitement of sensations that are often difficult to translate into language. From a range of different perspectives, including those that go beyond the field commonly referred to as religion, we seek to interrogate the nexus between sound and emotions, affect, and atmospheres that play such a prominent role in the study of religion and religious mobilizations.

A crucial background to these research themes that participants of the workshop will engage with is a series of recent transformations in the study of religion, politics, and the public sphere. The study of religion has seen a large-scale shift from issues of belief and propositional doctrinal content to its somatic and material aspects. In a closely related shift, the study of public spheres has witnessed a turn away from its deliberative aspects to questions of affect and emotions. Indeed, "populist" political mobilizations around the world testify to an apparently widespread refusal of the deliberative register of the political. This lends the related yet distinct categories of affect and atmospheres a new urgency, as they seem to be pivotal for understanding contemporary and at least partly media-driven transformations of public spheres.

Affect theory and phenomenological perspectives on atmospheres provide two distinct approaches to these new sets of questions that contemporary public religion raises. They are both driven by the need to grasp what cannot be discursively specified, both seeking to specify the moods and felt currents that are reshaping contemporary public spheres. Yet they diverge on whether such felt currents or collective effervescences and signification inhabit separate realms, as Massumian affect theory tends to argue, or whether, as seen from a phenomenological perspective the two can be seen as deeply intertwined.

Participants will debate the merits of these different approaches while addressing issues of voice and sound from interdisciplinary perspectives. They will thereby focus on practices of sounding and recitation from ethnographic and other perspectives, trading insights on methods through their multiple approaches. Through this, we aim to gain a better understanding of the larger issues of the felt dimensions of public spheres, including their religious dimensions, and problems of religious diversity and recognition.



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**Thursday, February 7, 2019**

**10:00**            **Opening remarks**

**Patrick Eisenlohr** (University of Göttingen) and **Peter van der Veer** (MPI-MMG)

**10:30**            **Keynote**

**Jan Slaby** (Philosophy, FU Berlin): "Haunted Atmospheres: On Affect, Temporality and the Weight of the Past"

**11:30**            **THE EMERGENCE OF ATMOSPHERES**

**Andrew McGraw** (Music, University of Richmond): "Sonic Atmospheres in an American Jail"

**Birgit Abels** (Music Studies, University of Göttingen): "Suggestions of Movement"

*13:00*            *Light lunch*

**14:00**            **ANIMATION, PUBLIC SPHERES, AND ATMOSPHERES**

**Rainer Kazig** (Geography, CNRS/École d'Architecture de Grenoble): "Exploring the Sonic Dimension of Public Spheres with the Concept of Atmospheres: Perspectives, Issues and Challenges"

**Daniel Fisher** (Anthropology, UC Berkeley): "Mourning with Musical Media: Celebrity, Circumspection and Recorded Sound in Northern Australia"

*15:30*            *Coffee break*

**16:00**            **RELIGIOUS CHANT, SECULARITY AND ATMOSPHERES**

**Jeffers Engelhardt** (Music, Amherst College): "Difference at the Intersections of Secularity and Choralities"

**Patrick Eisenlohr** (Anthropology/Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen): "Sonic Privilege: Atmospheres and Affect"

**17:30**            **Final discussion continued with dinner.**

Remarks by Professor **Peter van der Veer** and Professor **Patrick Eisenlohr**





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## Participants:

**Prof. Dr. Peter van der Veer (MPI-MMG)**  
**Prof. Dr. Patrick Eisenlohr (University of Göttingen)**  
**Dr. Jeffers Engelhardt (Amherst College)**  
**Dr. Daniel Fisher (University of California, Berkeley)**  
**Prof. Dr. Jan Slaby (FU Berlin)**  
**Dr. Andrew McGraw (University of Richmond)**  
**Dr. Rainer Kazig (Université Grenoble Alpes/CRNS)**  
**Prof. Dr. Birgit Abels (University of Göttingen)**  
**Dr. Ying Diao (MPI-MMG)**



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