



Greeting

The Humboldt Lab Dahlem was a project of the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) in cooperation with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). It developed new forms of presenting artefacts of the Ethnologisches Museum (Ethnological Museum) and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Asian Art Museum) of the Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (National Museums in Berlin) in Dahlem for the planned Humboldt-Forum in Berlin-Mitte. The experiment began with the question of how objects accommodated in a museum can open up new perspectives on our globalized present. In its search for solutions, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem therefore collaborated with scholars, custodians, curators, and artists. The results were regularly presented in so-called “Probebühnen” during the opening hours of the museum. In this manner, the Humboldt Lab Dahlem provided stimuli for dealing with the current challenges of presentation and mediation that are also posed to other museums in Germany and Europe.

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Seeing Music / Teaser

The Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin houses the world’s largest and most unique collection of musical instruments along with historical audio and film documents. The “Seeing Music” project developed two formats to present and convey these audiovisual media, staging the music as spatial images. This was preceded by a multi-stage competition between diverse concepts, of which two were then realized: Melissa Cruz Garcia, Aleksander Kolkowski, Matteo Marangoni, and Anne Wellmer were inspired by the existing material from the era of wax cylinders to build new sound machines which they presented in the installation “lichtklangphonogramm – an exhibition of historical and invented, optical and mechanical sound machines from the era of the wax cylinder phonograph.” Daniel Kötter recomposed historical film material and in “participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music” showed eight new music clips in scenes designed by the architects’ team raumlaborberlin.

Seeing Music / Project Description

Bringing the Phonographic Collection to Life as an Art Installation

by Elke Moltrecht

The Ethnologisches Museum’s outstanding collection of historical audio documents prompted the exhibition titled “Seeing Music” within the framework of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem. With 150,000 recordings on various sound carriers, such as wax cylinders, tapes, cassettes, records, CDs, and also numerous film materials including video tapes and DVDs, as well as around 2,000 musical instruments from around the world, the collection is the largest and most important of its kind. This was one reason for the UNESCO to list the distinguished historical audio documents in its “Memory of the World” in 1999.

We raised the question of how the future Humboldt-Forum can succeed in exhibiting and visualizing music



and audiovisual material in a convincing way. This resulted in two exhibitions in adjacent and acoustically open rooms of 150 square meters each displaying what could be heard.

A Stock of Ideas

Our intention was to address a broad range of creatives who might be interested in approaching the collections with a view diverging from that of scientists or ethnologists. We organized a two-stage concept competition calling on international artists from the fields of visual art, design, architecture, music, sound and video installation, media art, performance, and exhibition design to conceive and produce scenographically convincing exhibition formats in individual teams. Music was to be made visible not as a carpet of sound, but in impressive and atmospherically challenging installations demonstrating how something immaterial can be exhibited. We received 80 concepts from Germany and abroad in three weeks. During the entire competition procedure, the candidates made intensive use of the consultation and viewing offer with scientists in the museum and the phonograph archive. This was accompanied by an exciting survey of the collection stocks.

In a selection meeting of the Humboldt Lab, 11 teams were commissioned to develop their projects in four further weeks. A jury then decided in favor of two exhibitions that stood in a complementary and yet meaningful relationship to each other:

“lichtklangphonogramm – an exhibition of historical and invented, optical and mechanical sound machines from the era of the wax cylinder phonograph” and “participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music.”

“lichtklangphonogramm – an exhibition of historical and invented, optical and mechanical sound machines from the era of the wax cylinder phonograph”

The team of artists, Melissa Cruz Garcia, Aleksander Kolkowski, Matteo Marangoni, and Anne Wellmer, selected wax cylinder recordings and experimental cylinders from the phonograph archive and focused on the materiality and mechanics of the devices. They developed an impressive cabinet of curiosities consisting of familiar and entirely invented apparatuses that, with a view to the present, simultaneously offered a look back to the past.

For example, a magic lantern brought the physical texture of the wax cylinders to bear. Visitors could use a crank to set images of cogs in motion. A newly invented “Gramoscope” used a gramophone funnel to light a historical, manually operated film projector. A self-designed “Mutoventilatoscope” made reference to the mutoscope, the Kinora, and the flip book. In the “Hornbostelheterophony” one could hear the voices of Carl Stumpf, who founded the phonograph archive in Berlin in 1900, and Erich von Hornbostel, its first director from 1905 to 1933. A “Waxcylinderphonograph” enabled up to 15 visitors to simultaneously listen to a sound collage of the archive material using stethoscopes. And visitors could individually choose from 50 sound recordings in the “Archivophone.” At the closing event, the audience and the four artists tested the objects, instruments and mechanisms—resulting in a live audiovisual installation and concert.

“participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music”

The team of artists, Daniel Kötter, Julian Klein, Juliane Beck, and raumlaborberlin, examined the following questions: How do ethnologists actually visualize past and present music with their recording devices? How can this visualization simultaneously alter the ethnological view of how music is played in different cultures? When does the camera change from an observing to a creative tool? And: How do visitors regard the filmic documentation of music? Daniel Kötter recomposed and staged found video material from the archive of the ethnomusicology collection and made eight short films out of it. The group of architects, raumlaborberlin, designed corresponding participatory situations for the viewers.

In the film sequence “Pre Roll,” Kötter focused on the before and after of the actual musical performance, for which raumlaborberlin chose the ambience of a living room. “Recording” concentrated on the mobile recording technology that enables field recordings in the first place. raumlaborberlin designed a classroom for this sequence. The captivating view through a camera on a tripod (“Set”) was situated in a kitchen. Panned motifs (“Panning”) could be viewed on a staged fairground. Visitors could watch “Zoom,” approaching an object without reducing the distance, in a waiting room, while the “Close up” could be experienced lying in bed, and “Flashback”—the gaze of the other into the camera—in a bar. For “Editing,” the view of the scientists’ uncut film material that could be selected by the visitors, the architects’ group built an archive room.



The artists' collective was interested in the gaze as an element of artistic design and reinterpreted the historical documentary material. The installation set the scientists' ethnographic cinematography in relation to the artistic treatment of original ethnographic material. This resulted in a field of tension between the (seemingly) neutral documentation through the camera lens and the (evidently) individual perception of the listening subject.

Potentials and the Possibility of Building on the Results

From an artistic perspective, both teams invented novel exhibition designs to be experienced with the senses that, in an exemplary manner, shed new and contemporary light on the museum's acoustic and visual collections of global cultures — beyond the usual expert circles and formats. They created methodical instruments to establish something new beyond speechlessness. Their dialog can give rise to deeper layers of interpretation, different levels of understanding, and participatory formats. A potential that both exhibitions revealed. The Humboldt-Forum can build on this — and on the idea of using exhibition spaces and objects for audiovisual installations and live performances.

Elke Moltrecht has been the CEO of the Academy of the Arts of the World in Cologne since March 2014, and was previously the managing director of the national Netzwerk Neue Musik "Musik 21 Niedersachsen" and of the "Hybride Musik" project. She studied musicology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and was the director of the music section of Podewil – Zentrum für aktuelle Künste as well as director of Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin. In 2013 she founded the Ensemble Extrakte für transtraditionelle musikalische Praxis und Forschung.

Melissa Cruz Garcia works with optical means to create new versions of historical projectors.

Aleksander Kolkowski uses Edison phonographs, gramophones and funnels to produce acoustic and sound objects.

Matteo Marangoni invents and develops devices to explore the qualities and perception of sound.

Anne Wellmer works with analog and digital media as an artist and composer of electronic and experimental music.

Julian Klein is a composer and film director, the artistic director of the group "a rose is" and the director of the Institute for Artistic Research.

Daniel Kötter works as a director, filmmaker and video artist with a special interest in multi-channel video installations and alternative concert formats.

Juliane Beck, Berlin, is a cultural scholar and dramaturge who has worked as assistant director and dramaturge in several (music theater) productions by Daniel Kötter/Hannes Seidl.

raumlaborberlin is a group engaged with architecture and urban planning working with cross-genre and interdisciplinary methods. In specific projects, the members collaborate with specialists from other professions.

Seeing Music / Positions

Artistic Strategies for Spatial Staging

The jury members Sandra Naumann, Sandeep Bhagwati, and Lars-Christian Koch as well as the curator Elke Moltrecht in a conversation on the evaluation of the two exhibitions, "lichtklangphonogramm – an exhibition of historical and invented, optical and mechanical sound machines from the era of the wax cylinder phonograph" and "participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music."

Moderation: Uli Aumüller. Editing: Barbara Schindler

What were your impressions of the exhibition "lichtklangphonogramm" by the team of Cruz, Kolkowski, Marangoni and Wellmer?



Sandra Naumann: I found the work very well-made as a spatial staging. It marvelously transported that magical character associated with old media devices—just remember that apparatus like the camera obscura were often used by magicians. Some members of the audience criticized that no original devices were used in the media-historical perspective. So we had to repeatedly emphasize that it was an artistic “reinvention” taking up elements of these originals (episcope, phonograph etc.) but employing them in a different way and recombining them. The piece mainly visualized the mechanical aspects of these devices by enlarging the cogs, grooves, or the tone writing on the cylinders. For an audience that has grown up in the digital age and therefore has almost nothing to do with haptic carrier media anymore, I found it quite charming to make all these things tangible in a playful way.

And what is your assessment of the project “participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music” by the team of Kötter, Klein, Beck, and raumlaborberlin?

Naumann: Their idea was based on the question: How do we actually take in foreign cultures? Because not only ethnologists, but we, too, assume an extremely voyeuristic position when looking at life in an African village on a flatscreen monitor in our centrally heated bedroom. The analysis of how ethnomusicological films function in terms of editing and camera techniques was also meant to make the gaze of the spectator at home evident. Unfortunately, the realization did not go far enough. Perhaps more condensed material and more precise editing would have been required—something not achievable in such a short period of time—to really convey the idea. As a result, many visitors regarded the work as an analysis of media techniques.

Which insights from the Humboldt Lab projects can and should be included in the plans for the Humboldt-Forum?

Sandeep Bhagwati: The Humboldt-Forum should be allowed to once more realize the same projects—both exhibitions of “Seeing Music”—with more time at hand. What we have now is a “demo version.” We looked into a possible form of presentation, and now things must proceed.

How do you picture scientific and artistic curating and further experimentation?

Bhagwati: I can imagine organizing a symposium with artists, curators, and scientists, who would view the original films of the ethnomusicologists as well as the edited films of the artists and then ask: Okay, how do the scientists and artists respond? As a composer, I would say that some of these edits work well, but that the sound material was cut in a rather brutal and not expedient way. A symposium would also be useful because, in the present artistic-aesthetic world, we can no longer assume that an individual artist creating an artwork is a genius, but that the processes are so complex that they can only be solved by a team. The teams were formed ad hoc in these projects—it was a really short-term call. But they would have been even better...

Naumann: ...if they had had more time.

Elke Moltrecht: It must also be mentioned that the ambitious timeline is one intention of the “Probebühnen.” They grasp themselves as a “free leg” and do not seek to present completed results, but instead to raise questions and visualize the process.

How do you evaluate the two installations in regard to contents, form, and innovation?

Lars-Christian Koch: The real question is: What do we do with the insights gained from this “Probebühne” in the actual exhibition later on? The preparations for the exhibitions of “Seeing Music” were very work-intensive and demanded a thematic debate. It is not enough to just visit the exhibitions and enjoy the nice atmosphere. As an ethnological museum, we have an educational mission. We are not an art museum. If we want to seriously convey what other music cultures are like, how they treat sound in their processes, how they shape sound, then the question is, how much art or artistic design we require to optimize this conveyance.

Bhagwati: What was lacking in the two “Seeing Music” projects from a museum-educational point of view was that the reference material was not made accessible to the audience at all. I compare that with the “Game of Thrones” exhibition of “Probebühne 2” where, in a room of the Humboldt Lab, four appropriations of a Chinese imperial throne were presented; one could view the original in the adjacent Museum für Asiatische Kunst. If one could have seen the original films, uncut, and then the meta-films, one would probably have seen “more.”

Naumann: So an environment should have been created in which the exhibits would have been presented not solitarily, detached from the context of the collection, but embedded, for example, in an exhibition of original cylinders? But we only had one room available in the Humboldt Lab and it was outside of the actual music



department.

Koch: The phonograph archive, the devices, the media archaeology, everything belonging to the collection will be given a 150-square-meter exhibition space of its own in the Humboldt-Forum. This needs to be designed in content-related terms as well. A certain mediation structure has to be created for the contents. We will have media stations in each exhibition area. But what should it all look like? Will there just be a screen or do we have other mediation concepts? In general, we are faced with very important questions, which in my view have been partially answered by these two shows. But they have also raised new questions, which is also quite positive.

Moltrecht: What succeeded in “8 takes” in your opinion?

Koch: In “8 takes” I always ask myself how much can be conveyed directly with videos. It is difficult to show a really long video, because in most cases people don’t linger more than two minutes or so. It would be more interesting to ask how I can use short clips to stimulate people to watch the complete original material. Under the aspect of mediation, that would be the interesting question for me.

Naumann: Does that mean that the Humboldt Lab Dahlem ultimately serves as a source of various mediation approaches?

Koch: Yes, but without neglecting the artistic aspects. Numerous discussions resulting from the ethnological exhibitions revealed that the contexts from which the exhibits stem cannot be constructed. And I can’t just simply display the objects. I therefore exhibit them — to say it in a short and exaggerated way — as art objects. However, I have a general problem with that, because there’s a lot more to the objects. But if I bring both aspects together, that’s where it gets interesting again. This means that I use art to focus a bit on this aspect of mediation. Why not? Why shouldn’t art serve this purpose?

Naumann: So this implies that the Humboldt Lab projects are not primarily concerned with interpretation, but with utilizing artistic strategies for the exhibition design. In this discussion, we are trying to assess whether the projects have been successful or not. But successful in regard to what? As an independent artwork or in view of new mediation strategies? Do they succeed as spatial mises-en-scène or as scientific strategies of explanation and cognitive aids?

Koch: Several things have already changed in the planning process for the Humboldt-Forum. In my view, this has quite a bit to do with the “Probebühnen.” For example, in the ethnomusicology section we will no longer have two rooms, which were planned as being separate, in this form. We will open the entire space to create room for action, in which productions in the field of mediation can be realized. That alone is already a positive result.

Moltrecht: And in my opinion, the fact that all these questions have been raised is also a very good outcome of this “Probebühne.”

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Prof. Dr. Lars-Christian Koch is the director of the Department of Ethnomusicology, Media Technology and the Berlin Phonograph Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. He is extracurricular Professor of Ethnomusicology at the Universität zu Köln and Honorary Professor at the Berlin University of the Arts. His research focuses on the theory and practice of Indian, especially northern Indian, raga music, organology, intercultural comparative music aesthetics, the interpretation of non-European music in the context of history, and music archaeology.

Elke Moltrecht has been the CEO of the Academy of the Arts of the World in Cologne since March 2014 and was previously the managing director of the national Netzwerk Neue Musik “Musik 21 Niedersachsen” and of the “Hybride Musik” project. She studied musicology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and was the director of the music section of Podewil – Zentrum für aktuelle Künste and the director of Ballhaus Naumynstraße in Berlin. In 2013 she founded the Ensemble Extrakte für transtraditionelle musikalische Praxis und Forschung.

Sandra Naumann is a curator and media historian living in Berlin. She has curated programs for the transmediale, CTM, Werkleitz, sound:frame, Shift, Elektra, and other festivals. As a scholar she has worked on projects such as “See



this Sound” and “aux écoutes des images.” She is the coeditor, with Dieter Daniels, of the two-volume publication “See this Sound – Audiovisuology.”

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The conversation took place on September 23, 2013; it was edited in September 2014 for the online publication by Barbara Schindler.

Seeing Music / Credits

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lichtklangphonogramm – an exhibition of historical and invented, optical and mechanical sound machines from the era of the wax cylinder phonograph

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participants and objectives – 8 takes on filming music

Artistic direction, videos: Daniel Kötter

Artistic direction, dramaturgy: Julian Klein

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“Seeing Music: lightsoundphonogram,” photo: Jens Ziehe



“Seeing Music: lightsoundphonogram,” photo: Jens Ziehe



“Seeing Music: participants and objectives - 8 takes on filming music,” photo: Jens Ziehe



“Seeing Music: participants and objectives - 8 takes on filming music,” visitors at the opening, photo: Sebastian Bolesch



“Seeing Music: participants and objectives - 8 takes on filming music,” visitors at the opening, photo: Sebastian Bolesch



“Seeing Music: lightsoundphonogram,” visitors at the opening, photo: Sebastian Bolesch