



**Universität  
Zürich** UZH

## **Aesthetics of Early Sound Film: Media Change around 1930**

University of Zurich, Switzerland, June 4–6, 2020

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

Cinema's transition to sound around 1930 required a profound renegotiation of film aesthetics, expanding the notion of film as a purely visual form to that of an audiovisual one. Filmmakers, audiences, exhibitors, technicians, critics, and theorists worldwide were faced with questions such as: how much dialogue should be in the movies? Should dialogue and music be combined? How does sound change the moviegoing experience? How does it alter the 'nature' of film and its status as an art form? The films of the period found a wide array of answers and went into many different directions, not all of which would be pursued further. What may seem like a watershed moment in the history of cinema can thus perhaps be better understood as an uncertain phase of reorientation, with heterogeneous, often contradictory developments and outcomes.

This conference aims at a deeper understanding of the various aesthetics emerging in the early sound film era, with a focus on the films' fundamentally experimental and inventive character (regardless of whether they were produced in mainstream or avantgarde contexts). The goal is to counter the still dominant view of the transitional period as a time of yet-to-be-perfected forerunners of 'proper' sound film, instead highlighting the sense of experimentation and 'fruitful uncertainty' in a period of media change and transformation that merits scholarly investigation in its own right.

Scholars are invited to send proposals for papers that discuss specific aspects of early sound film aesthetics in intriguing case studies. Possible topics include (but are not limited to) the specific uses of speech (including questions of language and translation), music (diegetic and non-diegetic, including songs and musical numbers), noise, and silence; the effects of the coming of sound on visual style in general and on specific genres or types of films (e.g. musicals, horror films, trial films, animation); the effects of sound on acting; the construction of acoustic space; the transformation of the cinematic experience through sound; connections to other electric sound media and their respective aesthetics (e.g. radio or the telephone). Papers may also focus on how aesthetic aspects were discussed in film theory, in the trade press, in technical discourse, and in the films themselves. Presentations on films produced outside Europe and North America and/or with a transnational perspective are especially welcome, as are presentations with a focus on hybrid/transitional forms between silent and sound film.

The conference is organized by the Department of Film Studies at the University of Zurich as part of the doctoral program "Film, Photography, and Other Visual Media," a joint program with the University of Lausanne (UNIL), funded by swissuniversities.

300-word proposals for individual presentations and a short biography should be sent by January 13, 2020 to

[earlysoundfilm@fiwi.uzh.ch](mailto:earlysoundfilm@fiwi.uzh.ch)

Letters of acceptance/rejection will be sent by the end of January.

The conference organizers:

Daniel Wiegand, Jessica Berry, Nadine Vafi