

The Sounds of Progress: Acoustic Ecologies in American Literature

Panel Organizers

David John Cross (Universität Stuttgart)

Amanda Halter (FSU Jena)

Beginning with the primordial sounds of nature and evolving to the drone of industry and the chants, wails, and ringing church bells of revolution, American acoustic ecologies sound out the speed and cost of progress. This so-called notion of “advancement” elicits a spectrum of reactions in American society, from ambivalence to fervent conviction. Echoes of these debates reverberate through American literature and culture: Thoreau’s *Walden*, for example, exemplifies this where natural “soundmarks” are disrupted by the intrusive “sound signals” of the nearby railroad. Readers, viewers, and listeners of such texts have been and continue to be presented with a series of shifting sonic environments that prompt them to critically “listen” to the world crafted in the name of progress. This workshop will explore acoustic ecologies documented in American literature and culture. Selected papers cover a range of mediums, encompassing canonical and contemporary American literature, film, and even playlists, and traverse diverse settings, from rivers and cabins of the continental US to the remote icy expanses of Alaska and the frontiers of space. Together, we will consider how music, sound, noise, and voices, as well as the conspicuous absence thereof in American literature and culture, act as cultural constructions that may influence individualization, collectivity, and/or community identity and act as instruments of political and religious, or ideological resistance to reshape our relationship with nature and foster new notions of progress.

Presentations

'With All Those Places to Live, How Come Nobody's Anywhere?' – The Great Silence and Elegy for the Planet in Richard Powers' *Bewilderment* (2019) and Maya Lin's *What Is Missing* (2009)

Marina Pinger (Universität Tübingen)

Cabin Noise. Sounds of Progress and Resistance in James Benning's *Two Cabins* (2011) and *Stemple Pass* (2012)

Robert Winkler (Paris Lodron Universität, Salzburg)

'In Space, No One Can Hear You Stream': Acoustic Placemaking in North American Astroculture

Dr. Jens Temmen (Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf)

Cracking, Whizzing, Sighing, Whistling: The Sounds of North America's Icescapes

Svenja Engelmann-Kewitz (TU Dresden)