

SENSING AND MAKING SENSE OF CITIES AS WAVE FIELDS: A MULTIMODAL LABORATORY - SPECIAL FORMAT

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Abstract:

We tend to imagine cities in material terms: a space made of bodies and things - placed at specific locations or moving across space. Key contributions from post-humanist perspectives such as ANT, technofeminism, and multispecies ethnography have highlighted the roles played by nonhuman actors in urban politics: materials, technological artefacts, and nonhuman beings. In this special format, we will discuss, experience, and stage emerging matters of concerns in urban politics that challenge that ontology, as they bear upon an understanding of urban spaces as wave fields.

Take the field of urban climate adaptation: a major concern is how to control sun radiation and heat waves, thus leading to experimentation with urban materials, ecologies, and infrastructures. Similarly, digital urbanism relies upon wireless communication networks, reimagining the city as an antenna space concerned with the swift transmission of electromagnetic waves. Noise and light pollution have also emerged in the last years as key public health concerns, resulting in new urban design strategies for their abatement and regulation. These, and other current developments, thus entail various problematizations of how airborne waves propagate in cities and affect urban life.

Such problematizations of cities as wave fields challenge conventional text-centered modes of ethnographic accounting. Waves are felt, sensed, measured, visibilized, mapped, contested, and imagined in a sheer variety of modes by means of audiovisual and material/infrastructural productions. Accordingly, this special format will take the form of a multimodal laboratory, bringing together multiple modes of sensing and making sense of cities as wavefields.

Concretely, we propose curating a discursive and performative space for both discussing and engaging with the specificity of urban waves. In doing so, we will develop a discussion in the midst of urban waves. A mixed group of participants will be invited, including not only STS scholars, but also city officials, planners, architects, and affected and activist groups. The location of the event, which will last for 180 minutes (from 3pm-6pm), will be an open-air site near the center of the city. Madrid is in fact a noisy city and during the time of the conference, and especially during the afternoon hours, will certainly offer a very hot and dry environment to feel heat waves. This special format will combine different formats of knowledge exchange and knowledge production, such as paper presentations, roundtable discussions, artistic and activist interventions, and multisensory ethnographic explorations.

Key words:

urban climate politics, cities as wave fields, multimodal research