

CFP

The Movement Movement: Histories of Microanalysis at the Intersection of Film, Science and Art

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany
June 4–6, 2020

The desire to study the motion of humans and other animals is deeply embedded in the technological, social and aesthetic histories of film. For a long time, the focus was on individual behavior and individual actors. This changed in the 1950s and 1960s when anthropologists, psychologists, linguists, sociologists and ethologists increasingly turned to film to analyze movement as an element in systems of social interaction. Informed by cybernetics, systems theory and structural linguistics, researchers such as Ray L. Birdwhistell, Gregory Bateson, Nikolaas Tinbergen and Adam Kendon looked for patterns in what they regarded as the continuous, multi-sensorial stream of interaction/communication behavior. Film and later video became important tools to tap into this stream, to stabilize it and facilitate close attention to minute details through repeated viewings of brief stretches of interaction. Bringing to consciousness “visible, yet unseen” phenomena that sometimes lasted for only fractions of a second, film promised to open a window onto the microtemporalities and processuality of social systems. But such analysis also reflected back on the (micro-)temporalities of film itself. This point was not lost on experimental filmmakers like Hollis Frampton, who drew on studies of movement interaction in his theoretical and aesthetic reflections on film. The field of interaction studies also overlapped with developments in contemporary dance and performance art, drawing choreographers like Irmgard Bartenieff and Forrestine Paulay into the circles of communication research, while also influencing aesthetic approaches to dance and performance.

This conference aims at exploring these often overlooked intersections of social science, ethology, experimental film and the performing arts in the 1960s and 1970s across the disciplines of film and media studies, history of science, visual anthropology and art history. It addresses questions of science policy during the Cold War in the East and West, epistemologies of the moving image, scales of observation, and interrelations between analytical and aesthetic procedures. It also addresses the question of how film was integrated, in various ways, into wider media assemblages/environments, including notational systems, viewing equipment, diagrams, and artistic performances. Considering the entanglements of cinematic movement, movement interaction research and artistic practices, the conference seeks to open an historical perspective on recent debates on media change and the relocation of film.

The conference is part of the DFG research project “Transdisciplinary Networks of Media Knowledge” at Philipps-Universität Marburg.

Possible topics might include:

- cinematic movement research and changing science policies in the 1960s and 1970s
- case studies/histories of filmic interaction research
- visual anthropologies of movement and gesture
- psychiatric and diagnostic uses of film and video
- media assemblages of movement studies
- microtemporalities in theories and philosophies of film
- intersections between microanalysis and experimental film
- the role of modern dance and dance notations for research on movement interaction
- research film archives and archives of experimental film

Proposals should be submitted to henning.engelke@uni-marburg.de by November 15, 2019. Please include a 250 - 500 word abstract and a current CV. Applicants will be notified of acceptance by November 30. The conference will take place at Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany, on June 4–6, 2020.

Conference organizers:

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