

The Audiovisual in Question: State of Research and Perspectives

International conference, 24-25 November 2022, University of Lausanne

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In 2025, the public broadcasting service Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) will move into new studios located on the Lausanne university campus. The media organization will thus reside in immediate vicinity of academic institutions. If this move offers multiple opportunities, the contours of which will be defined through renewed collaborations between academics and media makers, it invites us today to update our knowledge on Swiss media history and to draft new approaches to the topic.

As a first step, we would like to question a notion that is omnipresent in scientific and journalistic discourse but rarely discussed in a critical and historical perspective, namely that of the "audiovisual". Audiovisual, audio-visual, audio-vision, audiovision: analogue to the spelling vagueness, a definitional vagueness indeed accompanies the term. Designating technical equipment, teaching methods, "new media", or simply TV and radio: the audiovisual as a term seems as malleable as the multiple realities it covers.

Used regularly since the post-war period, especially in English and French, the term was particularly in vogue during the 1970s to 1990s (see for instance Martineau 1987). Today, it is used in debates concerning the economic regulation of media, in discussions on "media convergence" (Bourgeois, 2015), in narratological studies of cinema (Beylot 2005; Jullier 2018), or as an extension of the cinema (Albert et al. 2021). However, if audio-vision refers above all to the media landscape of the second half of the 20th century and its mass media, it potentially encompasses a much longer history. As an association of the eye and the ear, it indeed constitutes, according to some authors, an anthropological fact: "Audio-vision is, indeed, a fundamental constant for the majority of the living beings: it is thanks to audio-vision that they can reach knowledge, affirm their specificity and their personality, and communicate with the inanimate and the animated world" (Matras 1974).

However, although uses of the notion abound in specific literature, its critical and historiographical analysis remains limited. In addition to scholarship that explicitly take audiovision as an object of study (Bourdon 1988; Follonier 2020; Sorlin 1992; Chion 2013; Delavaud 2010; Zielinski 1999), two fields are of particular interest: that of pedagogical discourses and practices associating sound and image (fixed and/or animated) on the one hand (Acland 2017; Duccini 2013; Lefebvre et Raynal 2017), and that of exhibitions, on the other hand (Lugon 2014).

Without wishing to fix the meaning of "the audiovisual" once and for all, this conference seeks to take advantage of the notion's heuristic plasticity and opens a dialogue around the methods and history of the audiovisual. Rather than asking "what is audio-vision?" we would like to discuss how the audiovisual may become an analytical instrument to understand the complexity of media history and its multiple dimensions.

In particular, we would like to know more about the use(fulness) of "the audiovisual" as a *tool*: firstly, as a technological tool used in many media practices and professions, from adult education to political communication; secondly, as a descriptive tool that allows us to designate objects, practices, representations, etc. involving images and sounds; and thirdly, as an epistemological tool useful for rethinking media history. Indeed, if there is an overlap between the different understandings of the audiovisual, it is that the notion does not refer to a singular medium - the cinema, television, photography - but rather to an intermedial environment where various media forms, "old" and "new", are enmeshed, hybridized, and converging.

Thus, we invite proposals that problematize the history and notion of the audiovisual by addressing, among others, the following strands:

- Methods: To what extent does the notion help us to discover new corpora and new objects and, more broadly, to question historiographical categories or periodization? Is it possible to develop new approaches based on its use?
- Historiography: What place does this term occupy in the scholarship on media? Is it autonomous or is it entangled with other notions such as the digital, multimedia, transmedia, etc. and why?
- Archives: As audiovisual sources have now acquired the status of cultural heritage, their archiving is a central issue for the institutions concerned. What definitions of audiovisual are operative in this context? How is the relationship between sound and image defined?

We invite submissions from scholars in the humanities and social sciences who can enrich the reflection on these questions and on the history of the audiovisual more broadly. In particular, doctoral students are invited to discuss these theoretical and methodological issues from their specific field of research.

Calendar

Deadline for submission of abstracts: July 15, 2022

Response to authors: end of July 2022

Conference: 24-25 November at the University of Lausanne.

Travel and accommodation will be provided by the organizers.

Please send abstracts in English or French of 600 words maximum, together with a short bibliography and a biographical note, to annekatrin.weber@unibas.ch

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