

Professor Pavlos Kavouras
Department of Music Studies
The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Introductory speech about the work of the honoree

Excellencies and esteemed guests

Colleagues and students

Dear friends

It is a great honor and privilege to present you, Prof Feld, who is going to be awarded tonight the highest degree of our University: the honorary Doctoral Degree of the Music Studies Department.

Steven Feld is a distinguished Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, University of New Mexico. A man of many honors and international recognition for his pioneering work, primarily but not exclusively, in the anthropology of sound.

Multimedia ethnography, sensory ethnography, participatory ethnography, sound, photography, dialogic editing – these are some of the most salient words reflecting the essence of Professor Feld's work. An anthropologist, linguist, as well as practicing musician, Feld became widely known for his explorations in contemporary sonic, sensory and visual ethnography, including dialogic editing and collaborative projects between anthropology and art. One of his main contributions to the field is how multimedia ethnography has enabled listening to multiple sounds and voices through field sound recording and dialogic photographic imaging, writing and editing.

It is difficult to capture and render in a few words the scope, goals and objectives of the work of our honored guest. I shall restrict myself to three caveats about him –his work and personality.

(1) He comes from a strong background in both musical performance and visual arts (especially photography and film). He has tried, from his earliest

publications in the 1980s to present equally his anthropology research in collaborative text, audio (radio, LP, cassette, CD, installation) and image (photography, film, exhibit, inter/multimedia books).

(2) Since the mid 1970s he had the opportunity, twice, to do more than 5 years field research in two very different places: Bosavi, a remote tropical rainforest community in one of the most isolated places in Papua New Guinea; and Accra, a cosmopolitan mega-city in Ghana, West Africa. To stimulate the questions and issues that connect the two, he has, since 2000, made multiple recording collaboration visits to Europe (Greece, Italy, France, Denmark, Norway, Finland), and to Japan.

(3) In addition to lecturing in many countries, he has had opportunities to teach in the US, France, Italy, Norway, Australia, and Ghana, in academic programs in anthropology, music, communications, film, cultural studies, and art practice. His research has always been strongly based in collaboration, and he has also tried to engage and learn from scholars and students around the world as much as possible.

But why is Prof Feld important to the Music Studies Department of NKUA and to Greek anthropology and ethnomusicology in general?

We, at the NKUA, are the only University Department in Greece –the Music Studies Department– to have a separate Sector of Ethnomusicology and Cultural Anthropology and a Laboratory bearing the same name. Combining cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology based on an inventive, systematic and pioneering approach to sound and image, Prof. Feld stands out as an iconic figure in this field; a person who has realized in his own work a trans-disciplinary dialogue between perception and expression, sensory experience and communicative competence across and within musical borders around the world. Prof Feld embodies and manifests the main principles and primary orientations of the Department of Music Studies of NKUA and the Ethnomusicology and Cultural Anthropology Sector in particular. Therefore, it is quite logical to wish to honor him today by awarding him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of our Department.

Let me elaborate on Prof Feld's academic uniqueness and, eventually, his significance for our Department and for the anthropology of sound in

general

Prof Feld has paved the way towards transcending the “ethno” element in ethnomusicology which has dominated the field since its inception with positivist classifications of and speculative theories about the musics of the Other – the non-Western Other. Through his two seminal works on the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea and on Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra of Ghana, Feld has demonstrated convincingly that the arbitrary intellectual bifurcation between “us and them” is an illusion when it comes to the actually lived experiences of the so-called “Other”. Whether cohabiting in the same physical environment as in the case of Kaluli people and the birds of the Bosavi rainforest or dealing with the Western hybrid tradition of a popular music genre like Jazz from the perspective of the Ghanaian musicians, the “Other” of the western classificatory habitus evaporates as a useless and, eventually, misleading analytical category. Feld’s anthropology of sound blends creatively music globalization, cosmopolitanism, sound and voice in ritual, and interspecies history. I would say that his multi-level anthropology project aims at realizing a trans-disciplinary approach which purports to cross the borders of subjective conceptualization induced and maintained by the epistemological divide between the Natural Sciences and the Humanities paradigms. He achieved this formidable transcendence by choosing to avoid the pitfall of phenomenological structuralism, as well as “ethno”-centric and neo-colonial hermeneutics.

Feld and Greece

Prof Feld is closely connected to Greece through his more recent research projects. He will later speak about his experiences in Greece. The title of his talk is “Listening to *his-stories* of listening in Greece.” Right from the outset I call your attention to the reflexive dimension of his title: “listening ... to listening” mediated by story-telling! What a wonderful way to engage us all with the Other in a perpetual becoming of “I-they-I” *ad infinitum* as a trans-subjective experience and equanimous expression of realities. Listening to listening is a juxtaposition of communicative competences and at the same time a token of respect for the othering process of reflexive consciousness.

On a more practical note, in his talk Prof Feld will reflect on how the first part of his career in anthropology of sound and *acoustemology* 1975–2000, principally with research in rainforest Papua New Guinea, transformed into a second phase, 2000–present, ignited by his first listening and recording work in Greece in 2000. He will recount in words, images, and sounds, some of his most memorable listening experiences in Greece. The first concerns the sound worlds of Greek Romani instrumentalists in Iraklia/Zumaya, in Northern Greece near to the Bulgarian border. The second concerns the sound world of everyday village life and winter festivals north and east of Thessaloniki, in Assiros, Dorkas, Sohoh, Kali Vrissi, and Nikissiani. The third concerns the belled carnival of Skyros. And the fourth concerns the sonic history of cicadas reaching from the antiquity of Plato and edge of the ancient city of Athens, to the modernist music of Iannis Xenakis, chaos theory, and climate change. He relates these experiences to critical issues in the anthropology of music globalization, of cosmopolitanism, of sound and voice in ritual, and of interspecies history.

I wish to close my introduction to Prof Feld's contribution to the field of anthropology by making a further reflection on what has been already mentioned about him. Allow me to be a bit personal about what I see as significant and path-breaking endowment in his work. This is integrity and clear vision, two prerequisites for a transformative perception and self-awareness of humanity.

It is true that Prof Feld has integrated body and mind in a coherent whole in his works and established the idea that experience, expression and communication is a totality which is informed by and manifested as habitual consciousness. His focus on perception as a means of making sense of the sensory world of other people and other species, and of reflexivity as a multi-faceted faculty of the intellect, stand out as unique achievements. Yet, what I find to be especially promising about his work is his conscious re-turn to the sensorial interface between the Ego –however defined and addressed– and his or her worldly experience. In Feld's approach, I see sincerity and humility towards knowing, engineered by a Trickster-like archetypal motivation for discovery of the Other. Through such conscious trickster-ing, he employs the order-less and un-conscious modality of human intelligence as one of his magical tools enabling him to avoid the traps of intellectualism and its polarizations. Such a physical coupled with psychological interplay of intelligence is a deliberate choice

on his behalf, which ultimately helps to liberate perception from any generalizing and imperialistic habitus of knowledge making and knowledge management. "Listening to the histories of listening" is **a conscious return to the sensorial** beyond the intellectualist boundaries of abstract conceptualization and a path heading towards re-integrating individualized consciousness which is the result of differentiated identification.

Feld's work in the anthropology of sound perceived in its totality is revolutionary as it crosses the boundary of identification (intellect serving ideology) and abstract intellectual differentiation. His emphasis on direct perception that is cleared of any intellectual reflexive biases in the form of subjectivism and objectivism has brought his acoustemology and multi-media works to the point of enabling the listener to listen anew to the Other – the embodied and the imaginary Other – thus overarching sensations, images and associations of thought as products of intellectual intelligence.

Such **a conscious return to the trickster** paves the way for listening to emerge as an intelligent feeling of the Other – a fundamental experience of humanity, namely, the intuitive awareness of the inner Self.