



The Art of Listening #Keynote by Judith Beyer

written by Judith Beyer
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In her Keynote “On little and grand narratives in Central Asia” (28 March 2019), Allie Judith Beyer investigates the inter-linkages between orality, narratives, textual production and textual artefacts. In the context of a workshop on “Central Asian Studies Inside Out. Challenging Grand Narratives”, organised by the Centre National De La Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Judith focuses on oral history as both a method of



ethnographic inquiry and a theory of translation. She argues that the current overemphasis on data gathering and storing “has less to do with the way our informants remember or forget”, and much more with our own methodological insecurities: a focus on technicalities, prevalent in much oral history research, is simply too narrow. Drawing on her long-term research in Central Asia, particularly in rural Kyrgyzstan, she advocates for context-embedded analysis of narratives and for paying attention to how texts are put to use in terms of what they can stand for. Instead of devoting scholarly attention to the formulation of questions and the recording of speech, she advocates for the art of listening (McGregor and White 1986) as an active process. Listening is more than hearing and we would do well to re-cultivate it as a core ethnographic practice.