Sound and violence, sound as violence
Aufbauseminar Sommersemester 2018
BA Medien- und Kulturwissenschaft
Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf

Wann: Donnerstags von 12:30 bis 14 Uhr
Wo: Raum 2332.00.52

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*Hinweis: diese Veranstaltung findet in Englischer Sprache statt! Aufgaben dürfen aber auf Deutsch geschrieben bzw. präsentiert werden.*

In this course we will investigate together different articulations of sound and violence, from historical to speculative perspectives. Starting from assessing the effects of sound in the body, to diverse definitions and discussions on forms of violence, we will together develop and engage with a body of knowledge — both in reading and listening — that articulates how sound can be either a direct vector of or an excuse for different forms of oppression. The readings encompass but are not limited to the use of sound as direct inflicted violence, but also inquires the use of rhythm, noise, pitch, and timbre in colonial/modern accounts of violence, historical and contemporary forms of sonic surveillance, and the possible articulations of sonic violence in representations of the future.

**By the end of the semester you should:**
- understand the effects of sound in the body both in physical as well as in affective terms;
- grasp the cultural implications of sound and its relation to political violences;
- be able to articulate the ethics of sound-as-power and their intersection with race, gender, class, and ability;
- have a basic understanding of a decolonizing analytical lenses for sound studies;
- apply this knowledge into future analysis and criticisms of the political power of sound and listening in society.

**Syllabus**
This course is designed to take 13 (thirteen) meetings, from April 12 to July 19. We meet every Thursday from 12:30 to 14 at room 2332.00.52. The following is a rough plan of subjects I would like to tackle together with you over the semester; these are subject to (minor) changes, according to your own pace and interests.

Every Thursday afternoon starting right after our first meeting on April 12, I will post on the Semesterapparat a short list of recommended readings and listening for the upcoming week. You are required to engage with that material over the week, and send in two questions pertaining them and their relationship with the theme of the upcoming class. Please send them in by **no later than Wednesday 15:00** to my e-mail* (see above). I will read them through and select a few; they will be the basis of our weekly meetings, in which we will be discussing the readings through sound material.
*Please use the subject line “SV2018” and your last name on the e-mail, so that I can easily sort it on my inbox.

**Week 1, April 12 2018**

*Class Introductions*

Brief discussion on pedagogical and analytical methods for this class, and an example of the possible articulations of sound and/as violence we will tackle throughout the semester.


**Week 2, April 19 2018**

*The affective physicality of sound*

What can be understood by “listening” and what is the effect of vibrations in one's body?

- A short documentary on artist Christine Sun Kim  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqlA0SZm9zl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqlA0SZm9zl)

*In-class discussion*


**Week 3, April 26 2018**

*Sound and power, part 1*

What defines “sound,” and what defines “noise”? How sound articulates power through its vibrational affects.

- Sounding Out! Podcast Episode #9: Listening to São Paulo, Brazil  
  [https://soundstudiesblog.com/2012/10/15/7858/](https://soundstudiesblog.com/2012/10/15/7858/)
- Ballard, J.G. The Sound Sweep (1960)
- Pan Daijing – Practice of Hygiene (from the album 'Lack', 2017)  
In-class discussion:
- Brazilian Military Police on the use of Sound Bombs to Disrupt Funk Parties (Fluxo/Pancadão) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0I-2NI7xhaQ

Week 4, May 3 2018
Sound and power, part 2
The power of sound in creating community, as well as in triggering listening anxieties towards violence.


In-class discussion:
- Brian Eno – Ambient 1:Music for Airports (1978) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNwYtllyt3Q
- An Interview with Chino Amobi http://www.okayafrica.com/non-chino-amobi-interview/
- Authoritarian hold music: How Donald Trump's banal playlist cultivates danger at his rallies https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/authoritarian-hold-music-how-donald-trumps-banal-playlist-cultivates-danger-at-his-rallies/2016/03/16/723159ac-eab1-11e5-bc08-3e03a5b41910_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.50bc4fd6628

Assignment: produce a maximum 2-minute long audio piece critically reflecting on your own “musical autobiography,” and connecting it with themes we have discussed in class (affect, subjectivity, power, community, etc.).
This assignment is loosely inspired by Wendy Hsu’s similar prompt.

**Week 5, May 17 2018**

*Sonic Weapons, from fact to fiction to speculation*

The use of soundwaves as weapons, its myths and half-truths, popular depictions of sonic weaponry.

- Performance on ‘Acoustic Weapons’ by Juan-Gil López and Chiu Longing
- Fatima Al-Qadiri – Brute (2016)
- Sonic Spirituality: Louise Erdrich on Postcommodity's Ceremonial Transformation of LRAD

**In-class discussion:**

- The Aztec Death Whistle
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjzqAInNlsI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjzqAInNlsI)
- Operation Wandering Soul
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THMAchwBwgs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THMAchwBwgs)
- Mosquito Device
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PjLRjxPLyU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PjLRjxPLyU)
- Why the ocean is getting louder
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrpkZkwTvU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrpkZkwTvU0)

**Week 6, May 24 2018**

*Sound and racial violence*

The instrumentalization of sound and listening in the construction of racism, and its direct and indirect use in sustaining the fictions of racial difference.

**Choose one of these two:**


- Common – Black America Again (2016)
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMNyCNdgayE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMNyCNdgayE)
  [https://blackquantumfuturism.bandcamp.com/track/time-distortion](https://blackquantumfuturism.bandcamp.com/track/time-distortion)

**Book recommendation (fiction):**
• Octavia E. Butler – Kindred (1979)

**In-class discussion:**

- "3 ways to speak English" by Jamila Lyiscott (2014)  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmI5xQ_mc
- Childish Gambino – This is America (2018)  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3eAMGXFw1o

**Week 7, June 7 2018**

*Sound and gender violence*

The instrumentalization of sound and listening in sustaining patriarchal structures of power.

  https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/03/09/gendered-voices-and-social-harmony/
- Billie Holiday, Strange Fruit (1939)  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Web007rzS0I

**In-class discussion:**

- Kanye West – Blood on the Leaves (from Yeezus, 2013)  
  (no link/available on your music streaming service of choice)
- Rachel Jeantel – ‘Yes, sir’  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oi-yPMV7p14
- Rachel Jeantel speaking on George Zimmerman's trial  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0WN28P6frk
- Learn the Alphabet with Cardi B.  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYMoLPYaNc

**Week 8, June 14 2018**

*Sound and power, part 3*

The conservative politics of silence, and its relation with sound and violence.


Octavia Butler – Speech Sounds (1983)


**Week 9, June 21 2018**

*Carceral Soundscapes*

Sound and listening within the prison-industrial complex, the violence towards incarcerated Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, and other forms of sonic control and surveillance in incarceration.

- Scanner, Mass Observation part 1 (1994) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gC4fJSm9vM

*For those who only need a Beteiligungsnachweis: produce a podcast on sound and violence, sound as violence, due August 10, 2018. You will divide yourselves in groups of maximum three people to do this, and produce a minimum 5 maximum 15-minute long podcast discussing one or more examples that were not presented in class (nor in the Semesterapparat). This has to be more in-depth than the "musical autobiography" assignment and employ concepts and ideas we discussed throughout the semester. However, you are free to articulate those with non-academic languages (storytelling, fiction, personal accounts, and so on).

Possible “broad themes” are to be taken from the themes of each class (featured here in the Syllabus), as suggestions for you to begin from. You will be also required to submit a bibliography/list of references as a separate document.*

*For those requiring a Modulabschlussprüfung: instead of the podcast, you will produce, also in groups of maximum three, either (due August 17, 2018):*

- a minimum 15-minute long Audio Paper — NOT a podcast;
- a minimum 10-minute short film;
- a 10-minute audio paper + a 1500-words position essay.*
The production should discuss the articulation of sound, violence, and culture using examples that were not presented in class nor added in the Semesterapparat. For this I expect a creative, yet academically cohesive contribution, which presents ideas, concepts, and propositions based on our discussions and materials of the class. These formats allow for non-academic languages (storytelling, fiction, personal accounts, and so on) and you are encouraged to make use of them.

Broad themes to begin from can be sourced from the overall themes of our classes (shown here in the Syllabus), but you are free to choose something of your own interest (provided it fits with the themes of the class). You will be also required to submit a bibliography/list of references as a separate document.


**Week 10, June 28 2018**

**Sonic Torture**
The use of sound as a State-sanctioned torture mechanism; historical and contemporary accounts, the power of loudness, repetition, and sensory deprivation.

- Tristan Chytroschek – Musik als Waffe (2010)
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7T0oH6PWLU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7T0oH6PWLU)

**In-class discussion:**
- Explore Saydnaya
  [https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/](https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/)

**Week 11, July 5 2018**

**Queer listenings and re-soundings as resistance**

Re-sounding the body othered and building radical communities with sound and music.

- Bradley, R. 2014. I Been On: BaddieBey and Beyoncé’s Sonic Masculinity. Sounding Out!
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTjQq5rMIEY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTjQq5rMIEY)
- FAKA – Uyang'khumbula (2017)
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHCN8bynfF0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHCN8bynfF0)

**In-class discussion:**
• Pabllo Vittar – Então Vai (2018)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVDyowAzBrU
• The Carters – Apes**t (2018)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbMqWXnpXcA

**Week 12, July 12 2018**

*Seminar Review*

Open class in which we will go a bit deeper in a theme or themes you wish to know more from (meaning it is to be decided with you in advance).

**Week 13, July 19 2018**

*Audio papers, methodologies, paths forward*

Short presentations from assignment themes for discussion on formats, methodologies, etc.

**Grading**

Assiduity on questions and delivering the podcast assignments for this class is what secures your *Beteiligungsnachweis*. Students that would like to have a *Modulabschlussprüfung* can skip the second podcast and instead develop the other assignment.

**Class policies**

This is a class in which we will potentially discuss sensitive political topics, and the consequences of certain forms of violence for the configuration of the (sonic) world we all live in. Therefore we want to create an environment in class that allows students to exchange ideas and discuss positions, all the while making sure that a respectful relationship is constructed amongst you, as well as with myself. Long story short: **racist, sexist, xenophobic, transphobic comments will not be tolerated.**

Certain topics and discussions might be triggering for some students; if so, please read the syllabus carefully and do let me know in advance — I will do my best to accommodate that in a respectful manner.

Students are responsible for handing in questions and assignments in due time. If you cannot come to class please let me know in advance per e-mail; same goes if you cannot deliver an assignment on time, and require a different due date — I will try to accommodate that depending on the urgency of your absence. Needless to say, academic integrity is expected from you in relation to plagiarism and originality, tone, and content of your participation both in-class and in assignments.

In case I am late to class, I will try to communicate that to you in due time. If that is not possible, please allow for up to thirty minutes before leaving and use this time to catch up with readings and questions. If it turns out that I may miss the class completely, I will notify you in advance.