

Listening to Sound and/as Violence

Seminar Wintersemester 2019/20

Institut für Musikwiss. und Medienwissenschaft

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Wann: Dienstags von 12:00 bis 14 Uhr

Wo: Raum 501

E-mail: [pedro.oliveira \[at\] hu-berlin.de](mailto:pedro.oliveira@hu-berlin.de)

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 15 (thirteen) meetings, from October 22 to February 11. We meet every Tuesday from 12 to 14 at room 501. 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 Tuesday afternoon starting right after our first meeting, I will update the Moodle of our Seminar with required and (sometimes) recommended readings and listening for the upcoming week. **You are required to engage with that material over the week and send either a question for discussion** (if per email or posted on Moodle we will decide together) or a listening example related to the material and topic of the week.** If you choose the latter, we will listen together in class, and you will be asked to briefly contextualize and explain your choice for us to discuss.

** A question for discussion should be formulated so that it cannot have a simplistic answer. If you are unsure as to how to prepare a question that elicits discussion, [this guide by Dr. Robin James](#) is a fantastic resource and absolutely recommended.

Week 1, October 22 2019

Class Introductions

The primordial first class. We will get to know each other, and on top of that also: what we will learn, how we will learn, ideas, thoughts, evaluation methods.

Reading:

- Weheliye, A.G., 2005. "Outro: Thinking Sound/Sound Thinking". In: *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Duke Univ Pr, Durham.

In-class assignment:

Back-to-back YouTube DJing session

Week 2, October 29 2019

Listening and its others

What, in fact, is "listening"? How does the idea of "listening" is implicated in cultural assumptions about who listens? Is there a difference between "listening" and "hearing"? If so, who hears, who listens, to whom, and how?

Reading:

- Kassabian, A., 2013. Introduction. in: *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, 1st ed. University of California Press.
- Oliveros, P., 2005. Introduction. in: *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*. iUniverse, New York, NY.
- Sterne, J., 2015. hearing, in: Novak, D., Sakakeeny, M. (Eds.), *Keywords in Sound*. Duke Univ Pr, Durham ; London, pp. 65–77.

Week 3, November 5 2019

Sound and affective physicality

What does sound "do" to us? What are the effects of vibrations in one's body? What are the affective articulations caused by perceiving said vibrations not only with our ears and our bodies but also with our embodied perception of the world?

Reading:

- Henriques, Julian F.. 2003. Sonic dominance and reggae sound system sessions. In: Michael Bull and Les Back, eds. *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 451–480. ISBN ISBN 1–85973–613–0

Listening:

- <https://700bliss.bandcamp.com/track/ring-the-alarm>

- Hanna Hartman

[https://open.spotify.com/album/1XcUmgsbQnrq7VROhKk2qF?highlight=spotify:track:](https://open.spotify.com/album/1XcUmgsbQnrq7VROhKk2qF?highlight=spotify:track:1hWi1hXcqcb8IdCNjwXbs5)

[1hWi1hXcqcb8IdCNjwXbs5](https://open.spotify.com/album/1XcUmgsbQnrq7VROhKk2qF?highlight=spotify:track:1hWi1hXcqcb8IdCNjwXbs5)

- <https://touch333.bandcamp.com/album/labyrinthitis>

In-class discussion:

- [https://archive.ph/20130210231259/http://www.bistum-erfurt.de/front_content.php?](https://archive.ph/20130210231259/http://www.bistum-erfurt.de/front_content.php?idcat=1857#selection-45.0-45.53)

[idcat=1857#selection-45.0-45.53](https://archive.ph/20130210231259/http://www.bistum-erfurt.de/front_content.php?idcat=1857#selection-45.0-45.53)

- Gloriosa (Erfurt)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZXnSLR4wiI>

Week 4, November 12 2019

Violence, defined.

How can “violence” be defined and understood in society? What are the many possible articulations of violence and how they are distributed amongst entanglements of power, institutions, and actions/agencies? Is there a “one-size-fits-all” definition of violence?

Listening:

- Moor Mother — Time Distortion (from “The Motionless Present”, The Vinyl Factory, 2017)

Reading:

- Sayak Valencia — The (Philosophical) Concern With Violence. In: “Gore Capitalism”, MIT Press 2018.
- Judith Butler — Violence, Mourning, Politics. Published in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 4:1, 9–37, 2003.
- Frantz Fanon — Concerning Violence. from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) to read: pages 35–38, then 50–62 (see red arrows on PDF)

In-class discussion:

- Angela Davis on Violence

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HnDONDvJVE>

- Concerning Violence (trailer)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIQwKP3j1zc>

Week 5, November 19 2019

Sound and power, part 1

If we are able to define “sound,” then what defines “noise”? How sound articulates power through its vibrational affects.

Reading:

- Marie Thompson — “What Noise Has Been”. In: *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (2018, Bloomsbury), pp.17–40
- Pedro Oliveira — “Weaponizing Quietness: Sound Bombs and the Racialization of Noise”. *Design and Culture*, Volume 11, 2019 — Issue 2
- Karin Bijsterveld — “Listening to machines: industrial noise, hearing loss and the cultural meaning of sound.” *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 31, 323–337.

- Octavia Butler — Speech Sounds. Published at Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine (1983)

In-class discussion:

- Here One: <https://hereplus.me/products/here-one/#overview>

Week 8, December 10 2019

Sound and power, part 4

Soundscapes of Protest.

Reading/Listening:

- Jeremy Woodruff — The Audibility of Rebellion versus Nationalism. Seismograf, issue 19 (2017)
- Marcella Ernst and Nancy Mithlo — Standing Rock, Protest, Sound and Power (Part 1). Podcast #60, published at Sounding Out (2017)
- Pedro Oliveira — Against Consonance: The power of sound patterns in recent Brazilian uprisings. In: PROTEST. The Aesthetics of Resistance (2018). Zürich, Lars Müller Publishers. pp.287–289 (+ soundscape)

In-class discussion:

- Lastesis — Un Violador en su Camino
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5AAscy7qbl>
- Primavera Secundarista
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZesQ_p-n8Q
- BLM and Kendrick Lamar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUC_DOhfwQ

Week 9, December 17 2019

Sonic Weapons, from fact to fiction to speculation

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

Reading/Listening:

- Performance on “Acoustic Weapons” by Juan-Gil López and Chiu Longing
<https://archive.org/details/alg052>
- Fatima Al-Qadiri — Brute (2016)
<https://fatimaalqadiri.bandcamp.com/album/fatima-al-qadiri-brute-hdbcd031>
- Sonic Spirituality: Louise Erdrich on Postcommodity's Ceremonial Transformation of LRAD <https://walkerart.org/magazine/lrad-louise-erdrich-postcommodity-at-documenta-14-nodapl>

In-class discussion:

- The Aztec Death Whistle
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjzqAInNlsI>
- Operation Wandering Soul
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THMAchwBwgs>
- Mosquito Device
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PjLRJxPLyU>

- NYPD
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C--TEKAxOhg>
- G20 Pittsburgh
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSMYy3_dmrM
- LRAD interface Images

Week 10, January 7 2020

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.

In this class we will also discuss Audio Paper themes for those requiring a Modulabschlussprüfung.

Reading/Listening:

- Weheliye, A.G., 2005. I Am I Be. In: *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Duke Univ Pr, Durham. pp. 46–72
- Ep.5 “Ears Racing”, an interview with Jennifer Stoeber. In: *Phantom Pod: A Podcast on the Sonic Arts and Humanities* (2018) <http://phantompod.org/2018/05/10/ep-5-ears-racing-jennifer-stoeber/>
- Marie Thompson — Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies (2017). In *Parallax*, 23:3, 266–282, DOI:10.1080/13534645.2017.1339967
- Common — Black America Again (2016)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMNyCNdgayE>

In-class discussion:

- William Sidney Mount — The Power of Music
<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1991.110>
- Jamila Lyiscott — 3 Ways to Speak English
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmJ5xQ_mc
- Sorry to Bother You (trailer)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XthLQZWishQ>
- Childish Gambino — This is America (2018)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY>

Week 11, January 14 2020

Sound and gender violence

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

Reading:

- Anzaldúa, G., 1987. How to Tame a Wild Tongue. In: *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Third Edition. ed. Aunt Lute Books. pp.53–64
- Mala Muñoz and Diosa Femme. Sounding Out! Podcast #63: The Sonic Landscapes of Unwelcome: Women of Color, Sonic Harassment, and Public Space <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2017/10/05/sounding-out-podcast-63-the-sonic-landscapes-of-unwelcome-women-of-color-sonic-harassment-and-public-space/>

- Liana M. Silva — As Loud As I Want To Be: Gender, Loudness, and Respectability Politics. Published in Sounding Out!, February 2015.
- Davis, A. Y., 1998. Strange Fruit, Music and Social Consciousness. In: Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday. New York, NY: Pantheon Books. pp. [181]-[198]

Listening:

- Kanye West — Blood on the Leaves
<https://open.spotify.com/track/42GcjriRK6srwHkfbkBqVI?si=7wIvxtFhQdOk0bd3leEwiw>

In-class discussion:

- Rihanna — BBHMM
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3eAMGXFW1o>
- Learn the Alphabet with Cardi B
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgYMoLPYaNc>
- Rachel Jeantel — Yes Sir
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oi-yPMV7p14>
- <https://lithub.com/on-the-great-old-white-guy-vocal-fry-panic-of-2013/>

Week 12, January 21 2020

Carceral Soundscapes and Sonic Surveillance

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.

Reading/Listening:

- Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh — Shadows and Echoes in/of Displacement: Temporalities, spatialities and materialities of displacement. Published in “Refugee Hosts”, 2018
- Baddawi Soundscape. Listen to the two first recordings re: Baddawi Refugee Camp in Lebanon
- Angela Y. Davis — Introduction: Prison Reform or Prison Abolitionism? In: Are Prisons Obsolete? Seven Stories Press, New York, 2013.
- Sara Nović — The Right to Remain Silent. Published in The New Inquiry, 2017.
- Bill Kirkpatrick — Regulating the Carceral Soundscape: Media Policy in Prison. Published in Sounding Out!, 2013.

In-class discussion:

- Inmates dancing “Thriller” in the Phillipines
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMnk7lh9M3o>
- Calais Soundscape
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olmf1r-Y8cY>

Week 13, January 28 2020

Sonic Torture

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

Reading:

- Cusick, S.G., Joseph, B.W., 2011. Across an Invisible Line: A Conversation about Music and Torture. Grey Room -, 6–21.
- Cusick, S.G., 2008. “You are in a place that is out of the world”: Music in the Detention Camps of the “Global War on Terror.” Journal of the Society for American Music 2, 1–26.

Listening:

- CIA Torture Playlist
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLM5ZtgVSXcWB--M0ar80GaR-qaTqs7x-e>

In-class discussion:

- Explore Saydnaya
<https://saydnaya.amnesty.org/>
- Musik als Waffe
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7T0oH6PWLW>
- Noriega Playlist
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2VMInppPrUSgysdRTY02dC?si=00kxPKaVRn6dYdptKNB62w>
- Trump 2016 Rallies Playlist (as per WaPo)
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3gHkT7GaiH9jCtWHV33Geb?si=0ktIrG-ERcq2Nk7vnX6YzQ>

Week 14, February 4 2020

Decolonizing listening(?), or re-soundings as resistance

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

Reading:

- Lydia French — Chican@ Literature of Differential Listening. Published in Interference Journal, 2014.
- Annie Goh — Sounding Situated Knowledges: Echo in Archaeoacoustics. Published in Parallax 23, 283–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1339968>, 2017.
- Kodwo Eshun — Motion Capture (Interview). In: “More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction”, ed. Quartet Books, 1996. pp.175–193

Listening:

- Kuenta i Tambu — Santa Electra ft. Elia Isenia
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcfJTTftrao>
- Urias — Diaba
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r83_ualtPM
- Max Roach feat. Abbey Lincoln — Freedom now! Suite
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Zyw4TWbgtE>

Week 15, February 11 2020

Review, Methods, Paths forward

Open class in which we will go a bit deeper in a theme or themes you wish to know more from, plus a brief “tutorial” on Audio Papers.

Reading and Listening:

- Sanne Krogh Groth & Kristine Samson — Audio Papers, a Manifesto. Seismograf Journal, 2016.
- Macon Holt & Katrine Pram Nielsen: A Sound Factory On Amager From Odesk To ASMR. Seismograf Journal, 2016.
- Andrea Letzner — How to tell a shattered story.
- Joshua Ben Pesch — Afrofuturistic Landscapes.

Evaluation

Assiduity on questions and engagement in class discussion is what I require for the Lehrveranstaltungsnachweis.

(this is also required for students that would like to have a Modulabschlussprüfung.)

For those requiring a Modulabschlussprüfung: you will be asked to produce, individually or in two, either (due date TBD):

- a minimum 15-minute long Audio Paper ;*
- a minimum 10-minute short film;

The production should discuss the articulation of sound, violence, and culture using examples that were not presented in class nor added in the Moodle. 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 an academically concise bibliography/list of references as a separate document.

**What is an Audio Paper? Here's the "Manifesto": http://seismograf.org/en/fokus/fluid-sounds/audio_paper_manifesto*

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.** Please let me know should you want to be addressed by a pronoun that is different from the one you are registered with.

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 for you and everyone else.

Students are responsible for handing in questions and assignments in due time. If you cannot come to class please be kind and 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 do my best to notify you in advance.