

FA329 Playing with Perception

Seminar Leader: Nick Houde
Pronouns: he/him/they/their
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Course time: 9:00 - 12:15 Tuesdays
Location: SR6, Factory
Office Hours: After class or by appointment

Course Description

Rather than simply make music that is provided to a listener, experimental composers in the late 20th century such as Maryanne Amacher and R. Murray Schafer tinkered with how sounds are met by the ear and body through working with the material structure of the inner ear (cochlea), haptic (touch/vibration) sensations, and the subtleties of the sonic environment in which they were heard. Their work went beyond making “music” by pursuing the frontiers of human perception and experience using scientific understanding as a framework for composition and, subsequently, challenging how perception - rather than mere reception - could be moulded through sonic experiments.

Starting from these innovative ideas, this class will unpack the human perceptual apparatus for “hearing” from evolutionary, cognitive, cultural, and aesthetic perspectives to provide a more considered and curious way of approaching sonic experiences. The idea is to take hearing and sound out of the restrictions of the musical context so that it can be explored and played with as an innate part of the human experience.

The core of the class will be structured around understanding the anatomical and cognitive capacities for the human perception and experience of “sounds” as they have developed over the long course of human biological and cultural evolutions. This will also involve negotiating norms around what it means to “hear” within the context of technological augmentation and notions of disability. Experiments in hearing and sonic/haptic perception of later 20th century composers will then be explored in light of these evolutionary processes, affording a broad understanding of why this could underwrite a compelling aesthetic and philosophical project.

Requirements

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during class time, unless they are being used for class.
- Initiate appointments with Professor or Arts Staff outside of class time.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.
- Respond to emails from Professor in a timely manner.
- Inform Professor at the beginning of the semester if photos of student’s identity, artwork, works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.

- Remove all artworks, art materials, and / or any personal belongings before the end of the semester. Failure to remove works or return spaces clean and empty may result in final grade penalization. Donating unrequested artworks and / or art materials is not permitted and will still be considered student property, expected to be removed by your inspection deadline. Please contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park for more information: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

Technical Requirements

This class will require that students create sound recordings as part of their assignments. Some means to make these digital recordings will therefore be essential. This can simply be a voice memo app on a mobile phone or any other sort of freeware that comes stock on a laptop. Other more advanced recording devices are also welcome should someone already own and feel comfortable using one. We will also be using the program [Audacity](#) from time to time for audio editing and analysis. This software is already available on Bard College Berlin computers and is otherwise free to download online. Other free software such as [Pure Data](#) could also be helpful for the seminar projects but not required. If it is difficult for a student to procure such a device or have access to Audacity, please contact the Professor prior to the first class to find another solution.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

- Attendance of all classes is expected, even if class is virtual. If there are technical problems with virtual attendance please contact Professor as soon as possible.
- More than one absence (that is, absence from one three-hour session per week) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.
- Students are expected to attend all off-campus classes punctually, from start to finish. If there is a scheduling / travel conflict, Professor must be informed in advance.
- Tardiness after five minutes will be considered an absence.

Assessment

All assigned readings are required and will be discussed in class. Selections of text are noted in the syllabus but could shift slightly depending on in-class discussion and other unforeseen changes. All readings will be made accessible to students digitally for free. Physical copies of readings will be available as a reader. Additionally they can be accessed at the library (when available) or need to be purchased.

Assignments and written responses are due copied into the class folder or emailed to professor before the start of class.

Students will be assessed based on their engagement in five different components of the class:

1. In-class participation and discussions

A substantial part of the class time will consist of group discussion, collective listening, and collaborative experiments in dealing with sound. Curiosity, engagement into the reading, and engagement within discussions are perhaps the most important aspect of class participation.

2. Reading Responses

Every few weeks students will be asked to create a very short (350-500 word) response to the material that has been assigned. The aim of this is to find moments in the material that stand out to you and generate more engaged thoughts to be brought to class discussion. Responses may be written or recorded sonically.

Response 1 - Hearing and Listening materials, due September 15

Response 2 - Sound, perception and evolution materials, due September 22

Response 3 - Response to listening session, due November 24

3. Assignments

Small assignments will be due every few weeks that engage with the themes of the class through sound experiments. They will not be graded on technical proficiency but are rather seen as a medium for the investigation of sonic perception itself. Assignments will be evaluated based around the level of engagement and curiosity with the sounds themselves and the conceptual ideas that are being explored. These should be therefore more experimental and playful ways of negotiating the medium of sound in a manner that is suited to your working processes and disciplinary background. There will be some class time used to work on these assignments.

Assignment 1 - Bring a sound to class, due September 8

Assignment 2 - Materializing sound experiment, in-class September 15

Assignment 3 - Soundscapes, due November 3

4. Midterm projects

These will be collaborative projects with a sound component (3-5 minutes) as well as a written component (1500 word) that draws together aspects of the reading and the material from the assignments, due and presented on **October 13th**. The focus will be on tying together physiological / cognitive and social modes of hearing into a concern of the student's choice / field they feel most comfortable in. More info on this assignment will be provided during class.

5. Final Projects

The final project will operate similarly to the midterm projects but with the attempt of pursuing a more considered thesis and area of inquiry. Students will be asked to think through how this project can be framed throughout the class and developed in conversation with the professor. They will consist of a sonic component (up to 10 minutes) to be presented in class **December 8th** and a written component

(2000 - 3000 words) due at the end of completion week **December 18**.

Required Readings (in order of appearance) *all required reading is within reader*

“Arts/Sciences: Alloys” by Iannis Xenakis. From dissertation defense. 1985.

Shafer, R. Murray. *Ear Cleaning. Notes for an Experimental Music Course*. BMI Canada, 1967.

Eidsheim, Nina Sun. *Sensing Sound. Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice*. Duke, 2015. pp 169-184

Deutsch, Diana. “Speaking in Tones.” In *Scientific American Mind* July/August 2010: 36-43.

Schaeffer, Pierre. “Acousmatics.” *Audio Culture. Readings in Modern Music. Revised Edition*. Eds. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner. Bloomsbury, 2004: 76-81.

Weheliye, Alexander. *Phonographies. Grooves in Afro-Sonic Modernity*. Duke, 2005. pp 19-29, 36-40

Tomlinson, Gary. *A Million Years of Music. The Emergence of Human Modernity*. Zone, 2015. pp 11-50, 89-128.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. *The Sound of Culture. Diaspora and Black Technopoetics*. Wesleyan U Press, 2016. pp 163-173

Keller, Helen. *The World I live In*. NYRB (1908) 2003. chapters 1, 4, 5, 8.

Eckhardt, Julia. *Elaine Radigue. Intermediary Spaces*. Umland Editions, 2019. pp 41-50.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley, 2005. pp 39-54.

Khan, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal. Energies and Earth Magnitudes in the Arts*. UC Press, 2013. Introduction.-

Henriques, Julian. *Sonic Bodies. Reggae Soundsystems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*. Continuum, 2011. pp 19-62.

Lewis, George. “Rainbow Family”. *Technosphere Magazine*. 23 December 2018.[online]

Shafer, R. Murray. *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and The Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books (1977) 1994. pp 3-12, 112-119, 123-168, 214-225.

Bui, Quoc Trung and Emily Badger. “The Coronavirus Quieted City Noise. Listen to What’s Left.” *NYT* 22 May 2020. [online]

Sonic Experience. A Guide to Everyday Sounds. Eds. Jean-Francoise Augoyard and Henry Torgue. Translated by Andra McCartney and David Paquette. McGill-Queen’s U Press, 2005. pp 3-13, 54-57, 66- 88.

Amacher, Maryanne. “Psychoacoustic Phenomena in Musical Composition. Some Features of a Perceptual Geography“ with preface and update. (1977) ?.

Amacher, Maryanne. “Notes on Additional Tones.” In *Spectres II. Resonances*. Shelter Press, 2020.

Gottshalk, Jennie. *Experimental Music Since 1970*. Bloomsbury, 2016. sections 1, 1.1, 4.1.

Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where Professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

30% Class participation (attendance + quality of engagement with others)
 10% Written responses
 30% Assignments & Midterm project
 30% Final project

Schedule

Fall 2020 classes start on Monday, August 31 and run until Friday, December 11 with fall break planned from Monday, October 19 – Monday, October 25. Completion week is from December 14 - 18. Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

*****Given the current pandemic*****

there could be some shifts in the schedule as well as rearrangements of assignments depending on whether or not the class is held in a “blended” form. These changes will be discussed in class and negotiated collectively. IF you are unable to attend physically for any reason please let the professor know so that he can accommodate.

<p>Week 1 September 1</p>	<p>Introduction Aim of class, negotiate base consensus of terms and approaches, meeting each other, first thoughts on sound and perception.</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> “Arts/Sciences: Alloys” by Iannis Xenakis</p>
<p>Week 2 September 8</p>	<p>Listening & Hearing Basic anatomy, sound as wave / vibration, perceptual effects Discuss readings / do ear cleaning exercises *Facilities tour / AV equipment introduction*</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> <i>Ear Cleaning</i> by R. Murray Shafer; “The Difference between Listening and Hearing” by Pauline Oliveros (12 min); “Speaking in Tones” by Diana Deutsch also these videos related to her work 1, 2, 3 & this song by Lucky Dragons; This reference website “Journey into the World of Hearing”</p> <p><u>Assignment due:</u> “Bring a sound to class” exercise (see Shafer)</p>
<p>Week 3 September 15</p>	<p>Hearing & Listening Listening, acousmatics, materialities of sound Discuss readings and responses to it.</p>

	<p><u>In-class assignment:</u> Materializing sound experiments</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> excerpt from <i>Sensing Sound</i> by Nina Sun Eidsheim pp 169-184; “Analysis” excerpts from <i>The Soundscape</i> by R. Murray Shafer, pp 123-168; excerpt from <i>Phonographies</i> by Alexander Weheliye, pp 19-29, 36-40; “Acousmatics” by Pierre Schaeffer.</p> <p><u>Assignments due:</u> Response to readings, make field recordings for in-class experiment</p>
<p>Week 4 September 22</p>	<p>Sound, perception, and evolution Discuss <i>A Million Years of Music</i>, sonic archaeology, discuss <i>A Slightly Curving Place</i>, Evolution = culture + technology + organism + environment</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> excerpt from <i>A Million Years of Music</i> by Gary Tomlinson pp 11-50, 89-128; exhibition at HKW A Slightly Curving Place with the work of Umashankar Manthravadi (students should go to exhibition anytime prior to 20th Sept. closing or all together, more details in class) text; excerpt from <i>The Sound of Culture</i> by Louis Chude-Sokei, pp 163-173</p> <p><u>Assignment due:</u> Response to material</p>
<p>Week 5 September 29</p>	<p>Vibration Discuss readings, perception as manifold, perceptual worlds, media In-class experiments with contact mics and transduction, hydrophones, vibration</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> excerpt from <i>The World I live In</i> by Helen Keller, chapters 1, 4, 5, 8; excerpt from <i>The Eyes of the Skin</i> by Juhani Pallasmaa, pp 39-54; introduction from <i>Earth</i> Sound Earth Signal by Douglas Kahn alongside these sounds; The Earth Sound Project website; music video “Pacific Pacific” by Tomoko Sauvage (8 min); video piece “Soundings, 1979” by Gary Hill (17 min); field recordings Toyshida Tsunoda “Extract from Field Recording Archive”.</p> <p><u>Assignments due:</u> Response to material, make field recordings of things with interesting vibrations</p>
<p>Week 6 October 5</p>	<p>Listening Together Discuss the social construction and facilitation of listening, discuss readings</p> <p><u>Materials for session:</u> excerpt from <i>Sonic Bodies</i> by Julian Henriques pp 19-62; “Rainbow Family” by George Lewis.</p> <p><u>Assignment due:</u> Response to materials</p>
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Midterm project presentations</p>

October 13	
October 19-23	FALL BREAK
Week 8 October 27	<p>Soundscapes Discuss idea of sonic ecology / soundscapes, sound mapping, discuss assigned reading / listening. Begin soundscape assignment</p> <p><u>Material for session:</u> excerpt from <i>The Soundscape</i> by R. Murray Schafer pp 3-12, 112-119, 214-225; “Coronavirus Quiets City Noise” by Quoc Trung Bui and Emily Badger; video “Talking Field, trailer” by Budhaditya Chattopadhyay (4 min); videos/project “Sea of Sounds” by Karachi Radio; sound piece “A Sound Map of the Danube” by Annea Lockwood (2h30m).</p>
Week 9 November 3	<p>Guest Lecture with Kali Malone</p> <p><u>Assignment due:</u> Soundscape</p>
Week 10 November 10	<p>Sonic Effects Filters, masks, timbre, psychoacoustics, feedback etc.</p> <p><u>Materials for session:</u> excerpts from <i>Sonic Effects</i> edited by Jean-Francoise Augoyard and Henry Torgue pp 3-13, 54-57, 66- 88 alongside album “Vocoder” by die reihe; “Psychoacoustic Phenomena in Musical Composition“ & “Notes on Additional Tones” alongside “Synaptic Island” by Maryanne Amacher; excerpt from <i>Intermediary Spaces</i> by Eckhardt/Radigue, pp 41-50 alongside “I am sitting in a room” by Alvin Lucier.</p>
Week 11 November 17	<p>Experiments in Music Listening session and discussions of experimental music / sound art</p> <p><u>Materials for session:</u> excerpt from <i>Experimental Music Since 1970</i> by Jennie Gottshalk sections 1, 1.1, 4.1</p>
Week 12 November 24	<p>Guest Lecture with Max Eilbacher</p> <p><u>Assignments due:</u> Response to listening session</p>
Week 13 December 1	Project development and discussions
Week 14 December 8	Final projects
December 14-18	COMPLETION WEEK

Grades Submission

All grades are submitted digitally to the Registrar's Office in a template provided in advance. Please note the following submission deadlines when setting final project deadlines:

- Midterm grades are due end of week 8, i.e. 20 March 2020
- Final grades for senior students are due 14 May 2020 ***NB please set your submission dates accordingly so as to meet this deadline***
- Final grades for all students are due 25 May 2020

Reminders about the above deadlines will be communicated by registrar@berlin.bard.edu

Facility Guidelines:

“The Factory” – Eichenstrasse 43

The Factory Policy Agreement

- 1) “The Factory” at BCB (Eichenstrasse 43) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Mandatory in-class orientations are required to retain chip access to the Factory. Chip access to The Factory is from 7am to 10pm everyday during the semester. At 10pm students will be asked to leave the building by BCB security personnel.
- 2) Students agree to only use the common spaces that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits. For requesting to reserve the dance / theater space and / or Seminar Room 6, please fill out the online [Factory Reservation Form](#). The Factory Staff will get back to you within two weekdays. (Monday - Friday).
- 3) No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
- 4) Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
- 5) Spray painting and handling of any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not allowed inside the building. Contact the Studio Arts Manager concerning working with these materials. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be properly protected with a drop cloth or a packing paper provided by the workshop.
- 6) No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside the workshop and studio 6.
- 7) Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.

- 8) If BCB workshop tools must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, please contact The Studio Arts Manager (by appointment).
- 9) There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with the Studio Arts Manager.
- 10) During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. Final grades may be penalized and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
- 11) Contact Studio Arts Manager directly with any questions: j.park@berlin.bard.edu

AV Facilities – Eichenstrasse 43 (upstairs)

- 1) BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support Admin, Faculty as well as those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times. Once these times are established they will stay consistent throughout the semester, with possible exceptions. AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.
- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
- 5) The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
 - failed to return items in time
 - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
 - returned items with missing pieces
 - returned items damaged or in poor shape
- 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
- 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
- 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
- 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
- 10) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve (av@berlin.bard.edu). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.
- 11) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
- 12) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
- 13) Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: av@berlin.bard.edu

MacLab and Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

** Guidelines to be offered during orientations.