

# **FA289 Practice-Based Sound Studies**

Instructor: Prof. Dr. Jeremy Woodruff

Course Time: Tuesdays 9:00 - 12:15

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:00 - 14:00 or by appointment

Email: [j.woodruff@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.woodruff@berlin.bard.edu)

## **Course Description**

This course provides a theoretical basis in sound studies as a jumping-off point for empirical and artistic research in sound. The course culminates in the development of sound works, theoretical writing and presentations. Sound studies has been called the anthropology of sound - we will consider the significance of sound in history, film, music, media, science and technology, cultural studies, psychology, politics and sociology, disability studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies and more; how have developments in all these fields affected contemporary modes of listening? We will explore concepts behind sound sculptures, sound installations, sound art for the white cube, for public space or in performances and socially engaged art, to discuss the implications of embodied listening both for individuals and for the public. On the applied level, sonic worlds of objects and their resonant qualities will be experienced using contact microphones and transducers, through the inaudible worlds of electromagnetic waves, or through the propagation of sound through water and other mediums. From field recordings we will extend beyond the concept of soundscape and the aural environment to generate abstract sound textures and sonic fictions; investigating noise, low-fi, feedback and resonance, while learning methods how to work with "errors", probability, and other intuitive approaches. This course is designed to introduce you to dealing at once both discursively and practically with sound to integrate theorization, new skills and knowledge into artistic practices through readings and hands-on experimentation.

## **Requirements:**

### **Attendance**

One absence is allowed for sickness, emergencies, conferences, performances, etc. Your grade will be lowered by at least a full letter if you miss three classes, and four absences result in automatic failure. If unavoidable circumstances necessitate your late arrival or early departure, please enter quietly. Late arrivals or early departures will constitute a loss of a half-credit for that particular day. If absent, a short notification via email, sent before the beginning of class, is expected.

### **Honesty and Academic Integrity**

We agree to abide by the intellectual honesty and integrity standards of the college. This includes avoiding plagiarism and properly attributing ideas to others in our work. 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.

## **Assessment**

One formal written assignments will be due by the end of the course: a short contextualization (minimum 1000 words), with bibliography (if desired), for the final project (due 11/04). Aside from this, every week one student will take the lead in course discussion by sending an email in advance of the next class to the other students with two or three short comments about the reading (see below). Five practice-based assignments will be given which include the final project (due 14/02, 28/02, 14/03, 28/03 and 25/04 respectively). The final project (Assignment 5) encompasses a sound work. This sound work can take the form of an installation, performance or sound recording. The exact parameters of this work will be explained and developed over the course of the four preceding practical assignments given. You will do a 15-20-minute in-class presentation (02/05 and 08/05) of this work in its final form in addition to presenting and discussing the project in its draft forms during the preparatory group discussions and critiques leading up to it. The written assignment should be completed by the specified deadline and uploaded to the provided Dropbox file request link. Practice-based assignments will be either brought in to demonstrate in class or uploaded in the appropriate format as assigned. Please use the following filename format for all assignments that are handed in digitally: “Lastname\_Firstname\_SoundStudies[Assignment Number]”.

## **Grade Breakdown**

Grading is derived as follows:

Attendance, readings, and participation 25%

Emailed reading comments 5%

Assignments (1 – 4) 25%

Final Project (Assignment 5) 20%

Final Presentation 10%

Final Paper 15%

## **Late Submission**

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). Thereafter the assignment will receive an additional loss of 20% to the grade. Assignments not completed after more than a week will receive a failing grade. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Please plan your work schedule accordingly.

Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours. Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

## Course Structure

Readings will be assigned for all students each week. For each reading one student is assigned to start the discussion. This student sends an email comment on the reading to all other students (on the Sunday) before the next class at the latest, which the other students can use to prepare their own thoughts and observations. Their comments form a starting point for the in-class discussions.

These thoughts could (but must not necessarily) contain the following: 1) areas in which the text could have followed up, explained, or detailed it's points better, or where you thought the concept or execution was unclear, or which you didn't understand 2) ideas, thoughts which this reading gave you in your own interests as well as Inspirations, perspectives, comparisons of your own to the ideas in the reading 3) further resources, references and works (textual, sonic, and/or visual) which you think link to the reading.

## Class Schedule

Note: this syllabus is subject to change over the course of the semester.

### Week 1

31/01, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Audio culture, histories of listening, and listening in cultural context**

### Week 2

07/02, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Contemporary artistic approaches - introduction to sound installations and sound sculptures, between music and art.**

Readings done:

From *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Cox and Warner, Bloomsbury 2017:  
Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto"  
and  
Marshall McLuhan, "Visual and Acoustic Space"

Assignments due the following week:

Assignment 1: Soundscape recording - what you need:

1) Laptop (Mac or PC) with music software. For example, free audio software: •

<https://www.audacityteam.org/download/>

2) Field Recorder (such as the Zoom Handy Recorders, Yamaha Recorder/Players etc.)

capable of headphone monitoring during recording. If you do not have such a device, please email me. Some are available from the college

3) Headphones

### **Week 3**

14/02, Tuesday 9 – 12:15

**Acoustemology, soundscape and the aural environment. Critical theory: sound phenomenology, space, and place.**

Readings done:

Steven Feld, "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style" pp. 79 – 102 *Aesthetics Journal* 1989

R Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape*, short selected readings

Assignments due:

Assignment 1: soundscape recording

### **Week 4**

21/02, Tuesday 9 – 12:15

**Composing space – philosophical approaches to site-specific sound art and concepts of time. Space related art installations and acoustics as artistic element.**

Readings done:

From *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne, Routledge 2012:

Brandon LaBelle "Auditory Relations"

From *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Cox and Warner, Bloomsbury 2017:

Ultra-red "Organizing the Silence"

Assignment due the following week:

Assignment 2: Mixing, editing and production with soundscape recordings. Sound engineering with DAWs workshop; EQ-ing, compression and processing; formatting and uploading

Be ready to discuss and present your soundscape composition

### **Week 5**

28/02, Tuesday 9 – 12:15

**Philosophies of voice, phonemes, theories of voice and voicing. Decolonising sound; racism, indentity and sound and "the sonic color-line".**

Readings done:

From *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne, Routledge 2012:

Mladen Dolar, "The Linguistics of the Voice"

Nina Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound* Chapter 1

Assignments due:

Assignment 2 due: soundscape composition

Present and discuss your soundscape composition

Assignments due the following week:

Final paper topic: be ready to discuss a choice of paper topic(s) for your final paper

### **Week 6**

07/03, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Vibrating Matter - Extended field recording techniques. Inaudible sound, outer space recordings, plants. Listening session.**

Readings done:

Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal* Chapter 8

Assignments due:

Discuss final paper topics

Assignments due the following week:

Assignment 3: sound interventions: building microphones, basic electronics and/or sound synthesis techniques. Analog sound production workshop

Please decide your final paper topic and have a bibliography ready

### **Week 7**

14/03, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Gender and sound; sound ethnography and urban geography. Sound perception and cognition, embodied listening and the senses.**

**Field Trip: Errant Sound Project Space**

Readings done:

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"

Michel Serres, "Potential" from *Variations on the Body*

Assignments due:

Assignment 3: analog sound work

Final paper topic due with bibliography

### **Week 8**

21/03, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Practical Session - Extended field recording explorations II, transducers and objects. Starting to conceptualise individual or group works.**

**Guest Lecturer Alex Arteaga / Georg Klein**

**Field Trip, Berlin School of Sound**

Readings done:

Alex Arteaga, *Klangumwelt Ernst-Reuter-Platz: a project of the Auditory Architecture Research Unit*, Errant Sound Press

Assignments due the following week:

Assignment 4: applying signal to objects through transduction, amplification methods, various speaker systems and applications for different acoustic spaces workshop

### **Week 9**

28/03, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Media theory and film sound. More on signals transmissions and propagation .**

Readings done:

Chion, *Audio-Vision*, Part 1

Mikio Tohyama Ed., *Sound and Signals*

Assignments due:

Assignment 4 : mounted work or prototype

Assignment due the following week:

Final sound work project (Assignment 5) draft or mock-up

### **Week 10**

AFTER SPRING BREAK 11/04, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Performative installations: roles of audience, publics, the listener. Continuing production of works.**

Readings done:

Holger Schulze *Sonic Fiction*, Chapter 1

Assignment due:

Final project mockup or draft due - installation and performance techniques workshop,

Assignments due the following week:

Final project and project description /contextualization [with bibliography] draft

### **Week 11**

18/04, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Materiality of sound, acoustic ecologies, the non-human and unsound. Noise, interference and further ontologies of listening.**

Readings done:

Stanyek and Piekut, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane" *TDR: The Drama Review*, Volume 54, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 14-38

Assignments due:

Final project and first critique

Final sound work project description /contextualization [with bibliography] draft (800 words)

Assignments due the following week:

Final project revision

Project description/contextualization with bibliography revision (1000 words)

### **Week 12**

25/04, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Documentation approaches and graphic notation. Sonification.**

Readings done:

Sebastian Scherer, *The Materiality of Media*, "Sonic Matter: The Material Cutups of Christian Marclay"

Assignments due:

Final project revision and second critique

Project description/contextualization with bibliography revision (1000 words)

### **Week 13**

02/05, Tuesday 9 - 12:15

**Sound and war, sound and protest, sound and trauma. Sound and consciousness, sound and theology.**

**Project presentations part 1 and installation / performance day**

**Guest presenter: Brandon LaBelle**

Readings done:

BradonLaBelle, *Acoustic Justice*, Chapter1

## **Class 14**

08/05, Tuesday 9 – 12:15

### **Project presentations 2 and installation / performance day**

#### **FURTHER COURSE POLICIES:**

- 1) **Technology.** In case of circumstances related to COVID our course may be held in part as face-to-face encounters with each other using Zoom video communications software. Please read the Zoom “Terms of Service” and “Privacy Policy” as well as any college policies about online education. This option however we will use only as a matter of last resort and it is not guaranteed.
- 2) **The Internet.** Outside of our Zoom class, we hereby agree not to record or place data about each other on the Internet without some form of explicit consent from others. This includes material that we gather as part of the fieldwork project.
- 3) **Respect.** We engage with each other first as people and agree to respect each other, each other’s ideas, and the integrity of each other’s opinions and values as aspects of what it means to be ethical researchers and citizens of the world. We also agree to be open to understanding the opinions and values of others, even when we disagree, and to engage in open and respectful discourse and debate about the most important questions and problems in music and sound studies and ways of approaching them using various theories and methods.
- 4) **Ethics and Responsibility.** Part of our respectful engagement as researchers involves taking responsibility for the knowledge that we learn and create during this seminar. To the extent of your abilities, I request that you take care with what you do with your ideas and those of your colleagues in this room, as well as how you gather, store, and manage data about these ideas. I also agree to be ethical in our engagement with our research collaborators as part of the fieldwork project in this course.
- 5) **Disputes.** We agree to attempt to resolve any disagreements or disputes that may arise among us firstly by communicating honestly and openly with each other in our seminar meetings and through written communication formats. If we cannot resolve an issue among us, only then will we engage with other faculty and/or administration.
- 6) **Language.** The official language of our seminar, as per the policy of the university, will be English. Any language may be used as a part of the research, analysis, and interpretation process, but the exchange of our ideas will be carried out primarily in oral and written forms of English. Given that English is not a native language of all participants, we will take care in how we use English words with each other, we will be reflective on how we are using English in order to translate and communicate ideas about music and sound, and we will be patient when misunderstandings inevitably arise.
- 7) **Knowledge Exchange.** We agree to make it the goal of our seminar to understand each other and learn from each other, despite our various differences in communication abilities, countries and places of origin, identities, and life experiences. In this sense, we would like to



think of this course as a collaborative knowledge exchange. I as the instructor appreciate your patience and support in the inevitable misunderstandings or problems that may arise in this course and being a foreign faculty member in Berlin.

8) **Mentoring.** I am available throughout the semester to meet you privately for counseling or for any other reason. Please email me to set up a meeting. I am also happy to provide feedback on your research projects, paper outlines, or assignment drafts provided that you contact me in advance of the deadlines and give me reasonable time to respond.

9) **Health and Safety.** Most importantly, we hope that we can remain safe and healthy during the semester! This includes taking care of our bodies (managing health, stress, being flexible, being patient) and also being vigilant about protecting our ideas (intellectual property, academic integrity) and privacy as we work with online tools.

10) **Reading Materials.** All readings will be provided as PDF through a Dropbox link, however it is highly recommended that you either obtain a hard copy of the material or print the readings out on paper where it is easier to read and easier to make small marks with pencil.

### **Additional, Optional Reading**

Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*

Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound*

Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories*

Brandon LaBelle, "Noise, Over-hearing and Cages 4'33'"

Augoyard and Torgue, *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*

Rick Altman, "Four and a Half Film Fallacies"

Schulze, Groth Eds., *Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art*

Blessner and Salter, *Spaces Speak, are you listening?*

Hermann et. al., Eds., *The Sonification Handbook*

Marina Peterson, *Atmospheric Noise: The Indefinite Urbanism of Los Angeles*

Cathy Lane, Ed. *On Listening*

Michael Bull, "The Audio-Visual iPod"

Jouili and Moors, "Introduction: Islamic sounds and the politics of listening"

Matt Sakakeeny, "Resounding Silence in the Streets of a Musical City"

Steven Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*

Douglas Barrett, *After Sound*

**"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](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

### **AV Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)**

- 1) BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support 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 and social distancing conditions. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this link: <https://janinaschabig.youcanbook.me/>  
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

**Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)**

**Computer Pool and Media Lab – Kuckhoffstrasse 24 (upstairs)**

\*\* Guidelines to be offered during orientations.