

FA289 Practice-Based Sound Studies

Seminar Leader: Jeremy Woodruff
Course Teaching Assistant: Chantal Michelle
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Course Time: Mondays, 15:45 – 19:00
Office Hours: Mondays 15:00 or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides a theoretical basis in sound studies for empirical and artistic research in sound. The course culminates in the development of sound works, theoretical writing and presentations. 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 impacted on 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, 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

Students are expected to:

- Inform their professors 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

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. 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 at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, one absence will not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

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 (more than 15 minutes) will constitute a loss of a half-credit for that day. If absent, a short notification via email, sent before the beginning of class, is expected.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

One formal written assignment will be due by the end of the course: a short contextualization of the final project (minimum 1000 words), with bibliography (if desired), (due 11/04). Aside from this, every week one student send an email in advance of the next class to the other students with short comments about the reading (see below). four practice-based assignments will be given including the final project.

The final project (Assignment 4) encompasses a sound work. This sound work can take the form of an installation, performance, or sound recording. The parameters of this work will be explained and developed over the course of the three preceding practical assignments. 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.

The written assignment should be 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]".

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+). The Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. 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. 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.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance, readings, and participation 25%
Emailed reading comments 10%
Assignments (1 - 3) 25%
Final Project (Assignment 4) 20%
Final Presentation 10%
Final Project Paper 10%

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 commenting on the reading to all other students (on the Friday) 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 comments 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 which this reading gave you for your own interests as well as inspirations, perspectives, or discussion of your own ideas as relating to those found in the reading; 3) discuss further resources, references and works (textual, sonic, and/or visual) which you link to the reading.

The last four classes are reserved for the development of the final sound work. They take the form of discussion and critique of the work presented by the students.

Some reading materials can be found on the reserve shelf at the college library. Otherwise all readings will be provided as a PDF through a Dropbox link.

Further Policies

- 1) **Technology.** In the case of necessary absences, no Zoom attendance will be allowed unless it is facilitated and run by another person aside from the Seminar Leader (this could be a fellow student in the class or an approved outside visitor). But this should really only be a last-ditch solution. The projector and audio in the classroom cannot be used for this Zoom call. Zoom needs to run, in this case, on a separate system handled by that designated person.
- 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 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 if 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 being vigilant about protecting our ideas (intellectual property, academic integrity) and privacy as we work with online tools.

10) **Reading Materials.** Although some reading materials can be found on the reserve shelf at the library and otherwise all readings will be provided as PDF through a Dropbox link, 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.

Schedule

Week 1, Jan 29: Audio culture, histories of listening, and listening in cultural context

Introduction

Week 2: Feb 5: In-class facility orientations / Readings from predecessors of contemporary artistic approaches

Readings done:

In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Cox and Warner, Bloomsbury 2017: Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto"

R Murray Schafer, *The Music of the Environment*, from *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*

Due the next following next 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, some are available from the college. A phone can be used if no other solution can be found but please use an app that allows headphone monitoring like ASR (Android)

3) Headphones

Week 3, Feb. 12: sonic research and aural environment: guest lecture, Gilles Aubry

Readings done:

Gilles Aubry, *Sawt, Bodies, Species: Sonic Pluralism in Morocco*, Introduction and Chapter 4

Preparatory assignment for the following week: Please come to class with a digital sound sample that you would like to work with in the DAW foundations workshop in the following class.

Suggested reading: Dennis Desantis, *Making Music, 74 Creative Strategies for Producers*

Week 4, Feb. 19: Philosophies of voice, phonemes, theories of voice and voicing. Race, identity and sound / DAW Workshop

DAW Foundations

In this hands-on workshop, students will be introduced to the world of Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs). Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of DAWs, powerful software tools used for producing music. I will guide students through the fundamentals of navigating DAW interfaces with a particular focus on Ableton Live, exploring essential features such as recording, audio editing, arranging, effects, and plugins. By the end of the workshop, students will have a solid foundation for their journey

into the realm of digital music production.

Readings done:

Nina Eidsheim *The Race of Sound*, Chapter 1

Assignment due:

Assignment 1: soundscape recording - discussion

Assignment due the following week:

Assignment 2 draft idea: Editing and mixing soundscape recordings with EQ-ing, compression, optionally effects, added overdubs etc.

Week 5, Feb. 26: Composing space - philosophical approaches to site-specific sound art and concepts of time. Space related art installations and acoustics as artistic element.

Readings done:

Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories*, Chapter 2: Home, excerpt

Alex Arteaga, "Aural Architecture" in the *Sound Studies and Sonic Arts Reader* (2021) - on reserve in the library

Assignment due:

Soundscape composition ideas critique- preparation for Assignment 2.

Assignments due the following week:

Final project/paper preparation: be ready to discuss a choice of final project ideas

Week 6, March 4: Vibrating Matter - Extended field recording techniques. Inaudible sound, outer space recordings, plants. Acoustic ecologies, Listening session.

Readings done:

Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal* Chapter 8, excerpt

Salomé Voeglin, "Technologies of Sound Art" in *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*

Assignments due:

Assignment 2 draft due: soundscape composition draft presentation and discussion

Discuss final project/paper topic ideas

Assignments due the following week:

Assignment 2: soundscape composition

Please decide a final project concept (optional: and have a bibliography ready)

Week 7, March 11: Deep Listening. Sound perception and cognition, embodied listening.
Guest Lecturer: Chantal Michelle

Students will engage in hands-on experiences, including sonic meditations and improvisational exercises, to deepen their understanding of Oliveros' groundbreaking concepts. The course aims to foster a heightened sensitivity to sound, encourage open-minded exploration of musical creativity, and cultivate a holistic approach to the sonic environment. Through a combination of theoretical discussions, practical exercises, and critical reflections, students will not only gain a profound appreciation for Oliveros' contributions to the field of experimental music but also develop valuable skills for navigating the complexities of contemporary sonic landscapes.

Talk about materials to bring for next week - introduction to mics, piezzos, analog sound

Readings done:

Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (1974)

Assignments due:

Assignment 2 soundscape composition due

Final project/paper concept draft due with optional bibliography

Assignments due following week:

Assignment 3 preparation: research analog sound work preparation - sound interventions: building microphones, basic electronics and/or sound synthesis techniques. Analog sound production workshop will follow

Week 8, March 18: Practical Session - electronics, mics, transducers and objects. Starting to conceptualize individual or group works. Analog sound. [Field trip: Berlin School of Sound]
Guest Lecturer Lisa Simpson (AKA Agente Costura)

Readings done:

Nicolas Collins, *Handmade Electronic Music: The Art of Hardware Hacking*

Assignment 3 draft due:

Some analog object to build or tinker with - bring materials for this day

Assignments due the following week:

Assignment 3: further research and revision for applying signal to objects through transduction, amplification methods, various speaker systems and applications for different acoustic spaces workshop

March 25 – April 1: Spring Break

Week 9, April 8: Media theory and film sound. More on signals transmissions and propagation.

Readings done:

Chion, Audio-Vision, Part 1, excerpt

Marshall McLuhan "The Medium is the Message"

Assignments due:

Assignment3: analog work or prototype – discussion and critique

Assignment due the following week:

Final sound work project (Assignment4) draft or mock-up

Week 10, April 15: Performative installations: roles of audience, publics, the listener. Continuing production of works.

Readings done:

Holger Schulze *Sonic Fiction*, Chapter 1 , excerpt

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

Assignment 4 due:

Final project/paper mockup / draft due

Assignments due the following week:

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

Week 11, April 22: Sound and activism; sound and organizing.

Readings done:

Ultra-red "Organizing the Silence" In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* David Goodman

"Propaganda and Sound" in *Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*

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, April 29: Unsound, hauntology and further project development.

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 revision and second critique

Project description/contextualization with bibliography revision (1000 words)

Assignment due following week:
Final project revision

Week 13, May 6: Graphic notation and sonification. Project presentation.

Project presentations, part 1 and installation / performance day

Readings done:
Julia Schröder, "Transfer into the Musical Arts" " in the Sound Studies and Sonic Arts Reader

Week 14, May 13: TBA

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 – 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. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this link: <https://avroom.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.