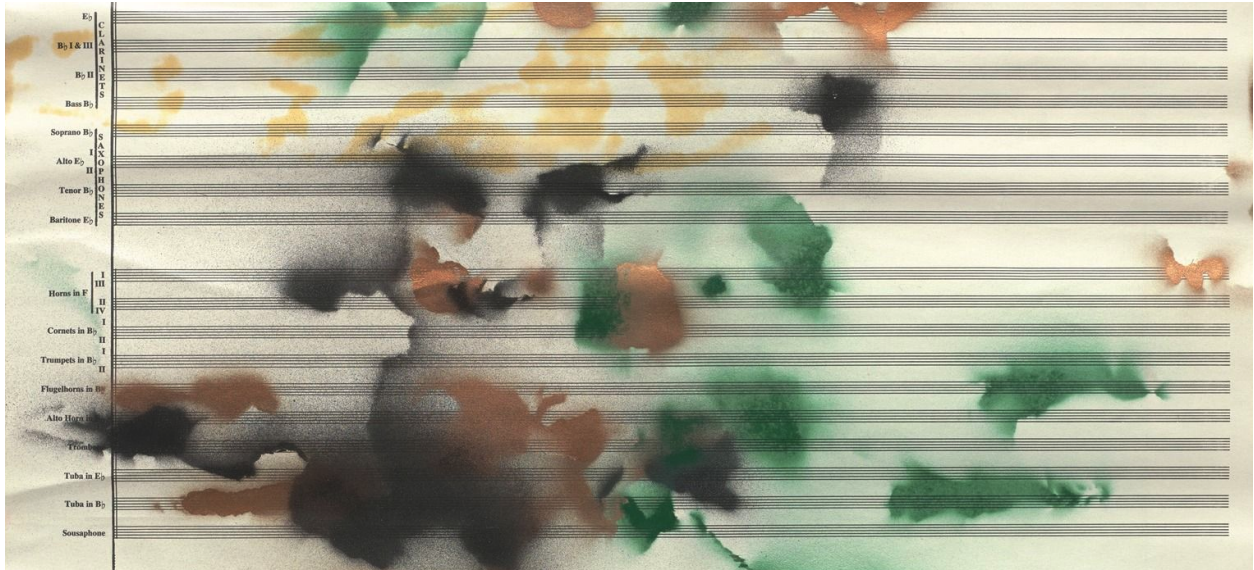


Sonic Art History: Listening to Modern & Postwar Art

ARTS 371 | Oberlin College | Spring 2020



[Dick Higgins. Symphony #249 \(1968\)](#)

Course Information

Instructor: Charles Eppley (they/he)

Email: ceppley@oberlin.edu

Class Meeting: Tue/Thr 3:00-4:15 PM

Location: Venturi 172 (seminar room)

Office Hours: Tue/Thrs 1:00-2:00pm (please email in advance)

Office Room: #126

Course Description

This interdisciplinary lecture course explores ‘sonic art’ across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emphasizing sonic art history via connections to sound studies and music history. We begin by examining depictions of music and sound in visual art at the rise of modernism, tracing representations of musical performance and instruments through sonic abstraction in silence and noise. We follow this development through twentieth century avant-gardes, overviewing how sonic methods and sound technologies suffused movements like Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, laying groundwork for shifts from sound-as-allegory to sound-as-material that defined ‘sound art’ as a distinct artistic practice in the postwar/contemporary periods. Field trips required.

Course Objectives

- Identify major sound-based or sonically-themed artworks, as well as general trends in artists working “with sound” as a medium or concept
- Define the basic characteristics (style, content, meaning, and goals) of various sonic art styles, techniques, and movements and their relationship to other art forms and movements
- Discuss the meaning of sonic art within formal, historical, cultural, and political contexts. Specifically, understand sonic art in broader contexts of listening culture and the politics of sound
- Develop the analytical and communication skills necessary to interpret and discuss sound critically verbally and in writing, culminating in a final research paper
- Develop an acute capacity for close and critical listening via sound-based recording and composition projects

- Understand how sound and sonic art require a shift of art historical methodology and theory, such as redefining concepts of medium, materiality, spectatorship, and meaning

Course Requirements

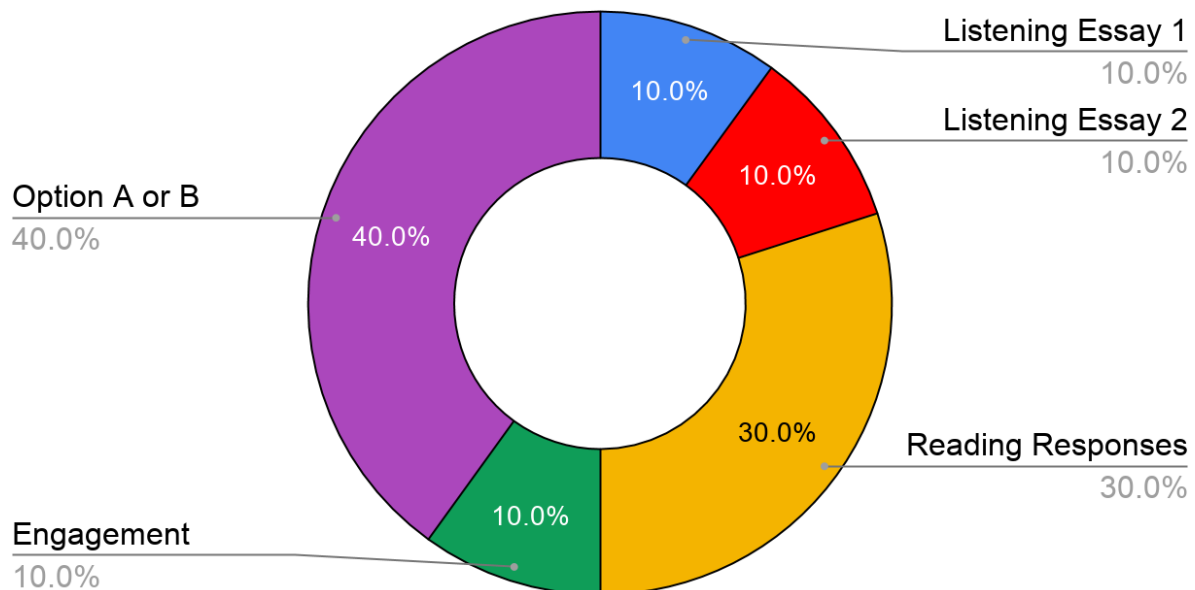
- There will be required readings for each class meeting. You are expected to complete these readings prior to class, and to come to class prepared for discussion. All readings are available on the Blackboard course site or linked.
- There will be recurring writing assignments throughout the semester. You will therefore need access to a computer, whether personal or shared in a computer lab. Please get in touch with me about access to a computer as needed or desired. Field trips may be required.
- There is at least one recording project that requires access to a sound recording device and sound editing software. These materials may be your own or also provided through the instructor and/or college.
- The course will use Caleb Kelly, [Sound](#) (MIT Press, 2011) as a recurring reading source. There is a single copy placed on reserve in the Library for student use. However, students may also want to purchase this book online (used or new, depending on your interest in the class topic) or at an in-real-life bookstore (they exist!)

Course Assessment & Grading

Your grade will be determined by multiple points of assessment, including course engagement and graded assignments. Course engagement means: attendance, completion of assignments, museum visits, office visits, discussion (in class and online), workshop attendance, and readings.

• Class Engagement	5%	
• Listening Essay 1	10%	Due: Feb. 18
• Listening Essay 2	10%	Due: Mar. 3
• Field Recording Project	10%	Due: Mar. 19
• Reading Responses	15%	
• Paper Presentation	15%	
• Final Paper	35%	Due: May 14

Grading Breakdown



Course Assignments

Below are descriptions of the graded course assignments.

- Listening Essays

In these assignments, you will write two brief essays (two pages each) on a listening experience. Working from R. Murray Schaefer's concept of the [soundscape](#), you will discuss, describe and analyze two sonic environments that you have experienced: one routinely and one rarely. The goal of this assignment is to "retune" a learned sense of sound its interpretation via close listening (inspired by, though not exactly the same as, [deep listening](#)).

- Field Recording Project

In this assignment, you will utilize a sound recording device (whether a cell phone, your computer, or a professional audio recording setup) to record a soundscape (i.e., sonic environment). The project has two stages. The first is an "objective" view of a single soundscape (i.e., like an aural photograph). The second will require you to edit the first recording into a new secondary artwork (e.g., musical composition) through audio processing techniques as discussed in class (see: [musique concrete](#)).

- Reading Responses

Throughout the semester you are required to respond to all weekly readings. You will upload your responses (one to two paragraphs) to the blog on our shared Blackboard course

website. In your responses, you should come up with two questions per class meeting. The responses should be completed/uploaded prior to class meeting.

- Paper Presentation

The course will culminate in a final paper. You will present a brief synopsis of your topic, findings and argument to the class near the end of the semester. Powerpoints with supplemental images/sounds are required.

- Final Paper

You will produce a final research paper for the course. The paper will be written in a conference style format: ten (10) pages, double-spaced. Your topic must be approved by the instructor prior to Spring Recess. Papers should discuss a single sonic artwork from a historical and aesthetic view, utilizing at least three (3) class readings as citations. The paper should include additional research conducted in Oberlin's Art Library & Conservatory Library.

Assignment Lateness Policy

All assignments should be turned in on time. However, if you feel and/or anticipate that you might not be able to meet the deadline, please do let me know in advance (i.e., before the assignment is due). I want you to succeed rather than receive a lowered grade, and deadline accommodations may be available depending on circumstances. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss potential options.

Honor Code & Classroom Community

Please carefully review the [Oberlin College Honor Code](#). Integrity of academic work is of utmost importance in this writing-intensive course: proper citation, footnoting, and presentation of your own ideas is required of every student. Courtesy and respect to each other is also expected: in the class, we will all be responsible for creating a hospitable, positive, and affirmative environment for learning and growth (this means, beyond generally being kind, using preferred names and pronouns of our class peers, and thinking carefully through our own privileges and biases in discussions).

In accordance with Oberlin College policy, I expect all students to abide by the Honor Code, meaning that each written assignment must include the statement: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

Class Accessibility & Inclusion

I am committed to every student's success and encourage you to contact me with any concerns that you may have regarding your academic work or barriers that you encounter in this course. If at any point in the semester you find that there are either structural or personal circumstances that are affecting your ability to learn - such as life stress, emotional distress, family situations, physical conditions, or how this course is setup/designed - please email me ASAP. I utilize the teaching method and theory of [engaged pedagogy](#), which means that I understand every student is an

individual with unique experiences, circumstances, and a life outside of class: I want everyone to succeed, and accordingly welcome any discussion about how I can help you achieve academic and personal goals. Let's talk!

Oberlin College's Center for Student Success also offers helpful resources to students with disabilities. If you feel that you want to work with the [Disability Resource](#) office (or are already working with them) and wish to receive formal course accommodations, please do so, and inform me after you have done so to ensure that these accommodations are in place. For information on DRCSS accommodation services, please send inquiries to: disability.resources@oberlin.edu.

Syllabus Information

This syllabus is provided to you as a cloud/online document which is downloadable/editable. Download and modify this document for legibility as needed. Each section uses meta-header tags for text readers and general document navigation.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please find the course schedule below. All dates and topics are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. All course readings will be available on Blackboard or hyperlinked in this document. (K) denotes Kelly source.

Week 1: Course Introduction

Tue 2/4 Course Overview & Introduction

- Max Neuhaus, "[Sound Art?](#)" (2001) (K)
- Caleb Kelly, "Introduction: Sound in Art," *Sound* (2011): 12-18

Thr 2/6 Art History & the Aural Paradigm: A New Paragone

Reading(s):

- Nina Sun Eidsheim, "[Introduction](#)," *Sensing Sound* (2015): 1-16 (excerpt)
- WJT Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media" (2005): 76-79 (K)
- Douglas Kahn, "Listening Through History," *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. Cambridge: MIT Press (2001): 2-19 (suggested)

Week 2: Listening to the 19th Century

Tue 2/11 Sonic Abstractions: Musical Allegory and Synaesthesia in the Context of Modernist Music

Reading(s):

- Wassily Kandinsky, "[Point](#)," *Point and Line to Plane* (1926): 25-31
- James McNeill Whistler, "[The Red Rag](#)" (1878) and "Messieurs les Ennemis!" (1892): 1-6 (Blackboard)
- Roberta Smith, "[Kandinsky and Schoenberg, Seen and Heard on Canvas](#)," *New York Times* (Oct. 24, 2003)
- William Robin, "[Formalizing a Purely Acoustic](#)

[Musical Objectivity: Another Look at a 1915 Interview with Stravinsky](#)," Right of Spring at 100 (2017): 138-45 (suggested)

Thr 2/13 No Class: College Art Association Conference

Reading(s): [CAA 2020 Conference Program](#)

Note: Please begin your initial Listening essay: identify your soundscape and listen for ten (10) minutes. Then go back and listen for twenty (20) minutes. Then listen for thirty (30) minutes. Give yourself time in between each session. Pencil or pen is recommended for notes. Digital notes are fine, however please avoid distractions by turning notifications/wifi/data off.

Week 3: Sounds of Modernism I

Tue 2/18 Words in Freedom: Modernist Sound Poetry and the Liberated Voice

Note: **Listening Essay 1 Due (Extension: Thursday)**

Reading(s):

- Dick Higgins, "Towards a Taxonomy of Sound Poetry," Horizons: Poetics & Politics of Intermedia (1984): 40-52 (Blackboard)
- F.T. Marinetti, "[Words in Freedom](#)" (1913)
- Charles Eppley, "[The Freedom of Futurist Poetry](#)," Hyperallergic (June 12, 2014)

- Debbie Lewer, "[Hugo Ball, Iconoclasm and the Origins of Dada in Zurich](#)," Oxford Art Journal 32(1): 19-35
- David Cundy, "[Marinetti and Italian Futurist Typography](#)," Art Journal 41(4): 349-352 (suggested)
- Tobias Wilke, "[Da-da: Articulatory Gestures and the Emergence of Sound Poetry](#)," MLN 128(3): 639-668 (suggested)
- Tristan Tzara, "[How to Make a Dadaist Poem](#)"
- Fortunato Depero, "[Bombs Against the Skyscrapers: Depero \[and\] New York, 1928-1949](#)," Center for Italian Modern Art (Jan 2019) (suggested)

Thr 2/19 Representing the New Industrial Soundscape: Aural and Audiovisual Strategies

Reading(s):

- Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises" (1913): 22 (K)
- Emily Thompson, "Sound, Modernity and History" (2002): 117-119 (K)
- Jacques Attali, "Noise" (1976): 90-92 (K)
- Arseni Avraamov, "The Symphony of Sirens" (1923): 245-243 (Blackboard)
- Rodney Payton, "The Music of Futurism: Concerts and Polemics," Musical Quarterly 62(1) (1976): 25-45 (suggested)

Week 4: Sounds of Modernism II

Tue 2/25 Body Sounds: Sonic Art, New Music & Performance

Reading(s):

- Naima Prevots, "[Zurich Dada & Dance: Formative Ferment](#)," Dance Research Journal 17(1) (2013): 3-8
- Nell Andrew, "[Dada Dance: Sophie Taeuber's Visceral Abstraction](#)," Art Journal 73(1) (2014): 12-29 (suggested)
- Lynn Garafola, "[The Making of Ballet Modernism \[Ballets Russes\]](#)," Dance Research Journal 20(2) (1988): 23-32 (suggested)
- Amy Zornitzer, "[Revolutionaries of the Theatrical Experience: Fuller and the Futurists](#)," Dance Chronicle 21(1) (1998): 93-105 (suggested)

Thr 2/27 Wireless Imaginations: Radio & the Avant-Garde

Reading(s):

- Velimir Khlebnikov, "[The Radio of the Future](#)" (1921)
- F.T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata, "[La Radia](#)" (1933)
- Anke Birkenmaier, "[From Surrealism to Popular Art: Paul Deharme's Radio](#)," Modernism & Modernity 16(2) (2009) (suggested)
- Judith Coffin, "[From Interiority to Intimacy: Psychoanalysis and Radio in Twentieth Century France](#)," Cultural Critique 91 (2015): 114-149 (suggested)

- Joe Militus, "[Radiophonic Ontologies of the Avantgarde](#)," TDR 40(3) (1996): 63-79 (suggested)

Week 5: Sound as Material & Medium

Tue 3/3 Audio Recording, Tape Collage & Electronic Music

Note: **Listening Essay 2 Due**

Reading(s):

- Glenn Gould, "[The Prospects of Recording](#)" (1966)
- Robin Lydenberg, "Sound Identity Fading Out: William Burroughs' Tape Experiments," *Wireless Imaginations* (1994): 409-433 (excerpt) (Blackboard)
- Theodor Adorno, "Form of the Phonograph Record" (1934) *October* 55 (1990): 56-61
- John Phillip Sousa, "[The Menace of Mechanical Music](#)," *Appleton Magazine* (1906): 278-284
- Lisa Gitelman, "[Making History, Spelling Things Out](#)," *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (1999): 21-24 (suggested)
- Tim Hecker, "[Glenn Gould, the Vanishing Performer and the Ambivalence of the Studio](#)," *Leonardo Music Journal* 18 (2008): 77-83 (suggested)

Thr 3/5 Silence, Noise, Music: John Cage & Indeterminacy

- John Cage, "Future of Music" (1937): 23-25 (K)

- John Cage, "[Lecture on Nothing](#)"
- Marcel Duchamp, "Musical Sculpture" (1912) (K)
- Frances Dyson, "The Ear the Would Hear Sounds in Themselves: John Cage, 1935-1965," Wireless Imaginations (1994): 373-408 (Blackboard) (need scan)
- Branden Joseph, "A Therapeutic Value for City Dwellers: John Cage's Early Avant-Garde Aesthetic," Experimentations (2016): 35-45 (excerpt) (Blackboard) (need scan)

Week 6: Sounding the Museum I: Some Early Encounters

Tue 3/10 Musical Instruments & Sound Objects

Reading(s):

- Harry Bertoia, "Why is Sound Left Outside" (1987): 181-184 (K)
- "[Musical Instruments by Francois and Bernard Baschet](#)," MoMA Press Release (1965)
- "[Baschet Instruments: Structures for Sound](#)," Music Educators Journal 52(4) (1966): 74-77
- Francois Baschet and Bernard Baschet, "[Sound Sculpture: Sounds, Shapes, Public Participation, Education](#)," Leonardo 20(2) (1987): 107-114

Thr 3/12 Sonic Machines & Kinetic Sculptures

Reading(s):

- Gryphon Rower-Upjohn, "[Calder & Sound](#)" (2013)

- Christine Kuan, "[Before John Cage: Calder's Experimentation in Music and Sound](#)," Artsy (Jul. 16, 2014)
- "[A Machine, 23 Feet Long and 27 Feet High](#)," MoMA Press Release, No. 27 (Mar. 18, 1960)
- Nina Siegel, "[Jean Tinguely's Clamor Still Echoes Today](#)," The New York Times (Oct. 13, 2016)

Week 7: Post-Cagean Art, Intermedia & Dematerialization

Tue 3/17 Performance After Cage: Fluxus, Judson, Intermedia

Reading(s):

- Dick Higgins, "Postmodern Performance: Some Criteria & Common Points," "Intermedia," and "A Child's History of Fluxus," Horizons: Poetics and Politics of Intermedia (1984): 71-82; 18-28; 87-92 (Blackboard) (need scans)
- Julia Robinson, "[The Sculpture of Indeterminacy: Alison Knowles's Beans and Variations](#)," Art Journal 63(4): 96-115
- Douglas Kahn, "Fluxus and Music" (1993): 28-42
- Alexandra Munroe, "Spirit of Yes: Yoko Ono" (2000) (K)
- Mieko Shiomi, "On Works 1961-68" (1973): 181-184 (K)

Thr 3/19 Minimalism, Conceptual Art & Beyond

Note: **Field Recording Project Due**

Note: Special Lecture by [Robin James](#) (Northeastern)
on resonance and neoliberalism. 4:45 PM in
classroom

Reading(s):

- Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture 1-4" (1966)
- Robert Morris, "Letter to John Cage" (1961):
177-180 (K)
- Branden Joseph, "The Tower & the Line: Towards
a Genealogy of Minimalism" (2007) (K)
- Pauline Oliveros, "[Sonic Meditations](#)" (1971)
- Kerry O'Brien, "[Listening as Activism: The Sonic
Meditations of Pauline Oliveros](#)," New Yorker
(Dec. 9, 2016)
- Yves Klein, "On Monotone Symphony" (K)
- Hiroko Ikegami, "[World Without Boundaries: EAT
and the Pepsi Pavilion at Expo 70, Osaka](#),"
Review of Japanese Culture & Society 23
(2011): 174-190
- Heidi Von Gunden, "[Theory of Sonic Awareness
by Pauline Oliveros](#)," Perspectives of New
Music 19(1/2) (1980): 409-416 (suggested)

Week 8: Spring Recess

Tue 3/24 No Class - Go Listen!

Thr 3/26 No Class ✨

Week 9: New Materialities: From Space to the Screen

Tue 3/31 Soundsites: Sound Installation & Environmental Music

Reading(s):

- R. Murray Schafer, "The Soundscape" (1977): 110-111 (K)
- Annea Lockwood, "A Sound Map of the Hudson River," Sound By Artists (1990): 220-221 (Blackboard)
- Annea Lockwood, "Piano Transplants," Sound By Artists (1990): 217-219 (Blackboard)
- Christina Kubisch, "About My Installations" (1986): 197-199 (K)
- Harry Bertoia, "Why is Sound Left Outside" (1987): 186 (K)
- Max Neuhaus, "Listen" (1990): 190-191 (K)
- Christoph Cox, "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism" (2011) (K)
- Rebecca Schneider and Charlie Morrow, "[Hefty Hefty Wimpy Wimpy Wimpy: An Interview with Charlie Morrow](#)," TDR 34(3): 159-161 (suggested)
- Alvin Lucier, "Careful Listening is More Important than Making Sounds Happen" (1979): 112-116 (K)

Thr 4/2 Audiovision: Video Art & the Moving Image

Reading(s):

- Paul Hegarty, "How Video Works and How it Sounds," Rumour & Radiation (2015)
- Michel Chion, "Video/Mouth: Gary Hill" (1994) (K)
- Laurie Anderson, "Writings" (1974): 194 (K)
- Rosalind Krauss, "[Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism](#)," October 1 (1976)
- Michael Nyman, "Nam June Paik: Composer" (1982): 171-176 (K)
- Paul Hegarty, "Ryan Trecartin: Videocore," Rumour and Radiation (2015): 168-177 (Blackboard) (need scan)

Week 10: Sounding the Museum II: Some Recent Encounters

Tue 4/7 Sound as Curatorial Model, 1980-2000

Reading(s):

- Brian O'Doherty, "Notes on the Gallery Space" (1976) (K)
- Suzanne Delehanty, "Soundings" (1981) (K) (short version)
- Suzanne Delehanty, "Soundings," Sound By Artists (1990): 20-38 (long version) (Blackboard)
- (short version) Chrissie Iles, "Cleaning the Mirror: Marina Abramovic" (1995): 187-189 (K)

Thr 4/9 Sound as Curatorial Model, 2000-2020

Reading(s):

- Charles Eppley, "[Sound is Here: Interview with Barbara London](#)," Rhizome (2013)
- Seth Kim-Cohen, "The Hole Truth: Doug Aitken's Sonic Pavilion" (2009): 219-221 (K)
- Seth Kim-Cohen, "Meditations in an Emergency," Against Ambience (2016): 1-6 (Blackboard) (need scan)

Week 11: Beyond the Gallery: Making Noise

Tue 4/14 Downtown Sound: Listening to the Pictures Generation

Reading(s):

- William Burroughs, "Invisible Generation" (1972)
- Jack Goldstein, "On Phonograph Records," Sound By Artists (1990): 259-261 (Blackboard)
- Christian Marclay & Kim Gordon, "In Conversation" (2003): 157-159
- Branden Joseph, "[Son of the Creature: An Interview with Cary Loren](#)," Grey Room 12 (2003): 116-125
- [Disband Performing at Franklin Furnace](#) (1979) (video) (30:00)
- Kyle Gann, "Harps from Heaven: Glenn Branca," Music Downtown (2006): 42-49 (Blackboard)

Thr 4/16 Noise Music & DIY

Guest Speaker: Aaron Dilloway ([Hanson Records](#))

Reading(s):

- Paul Hegarty, "Noise" and "Merzbow," *Noise/Music* (2009): 3-16; 155-164 (excerpt) (Blackboard)
- Thomas Imbach, "[Voice Crack](#)" (2005) (film screening)

Week 12: Contemporary Trajectories I

Tue 4/21 Recent Trends in Sound Installation & Sculpture

Reading(s):

- Svetlana Alpers, "Rebecca Horn: Chorus of the Locusts" (1996): 202-203 (K)
- Martin Herbert, "Infinity's Border: Ryoji Ikeda" (2009): 162-167 (K)
- Douglas Kahn, "Joyce Hinterding and Parasitic Possibility" (2008): 217-218 (K)
- Paul Hegarty, "Pierre Huyghe: Repurposing Sound," *Rumour and Radiation* (2015): 121-132 (Blackboard) (need scan)
- Charles Eppley, "[As Queer Listening: An Interview with Sergei Tcherepnin](#)," *Rhizome* (Sep. 17 2014)

Thr 4/23 Sound as Witness: Listening as a Model for Knowing

Reading(s):

- Emily Apter, "[Shibboleth: Policing by Ear and](#)

[Forensic Listening](#)," October 156 (2016):
100-115

- Anna Furman, "[An Artist \[Christine Sun Kim\] Who Channels Her Anger into Pie Charts](#)," New York Times (May 21, 2019)
- Ted Loos, "[Firing Up Weird Science at Whitney](#) [Kevin Beasley]," New York Times (Dec. 12, 2018)
- Charlotte Higgins, "[Silence or Death: Lawrence Abu Hamdan on Recreating a Horrific Syrian Jail](#)," The Guardian (Oct. 1, 2019)
- Matt Sussman, "[Postcommodity's Sound Installation Broadcasts a Luxury Apartment tower's Slow Collapse](#)," Art in America (Jan. 14, 2020)
- Chloe Bass, "[When Institutional Critique Doesn't Go Far Enough](#)," Hyperallergic (Mar. 8, 2016)

Week 13: Contemporary Trajectories II

Tue 4/28 Digital Systems: Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality to Simulation & Networked Sound

Reading(s):

- Christian Marclay and Yasunao Tone, "[Record, CD, Analog, Digital](#)," Audio Culture (2004): 341-347 (2008)
- Lina Dzuverovic, "[Holly Herndon: A Life Across Bits and Atoms](#)," Afterall 41 (2016)

Thr 4/30 'Sound Art' & Experimental Music: Current Fields and Institutional Boundaries

Reading(s):

- William Robin, "[Balance Problems: Neoliberalism and New Music in the American University and Ensemble](#)," American Musicological Society 71(3) (2018): 749-793
- Bradley Scott, "[Holly Herndon and Mat Dryhurst](#)," Mask Magazine (2017)
- DeForrest Brown Jr., "[Techno is Technocracy](#)," Fact (Dec. 17, 2019)
- "[Who Does Techno Belong To?](#)" Dweller NYC (Feb. 5, 2020) (video) (60:00)
- Drew Millard, "[Mat Dryhurst on Helping Artists with Blockchain](#)," Breaker Mag (Nov. 2018) (suggested)

Week 14: Paper Presentations

Tue 5/5 Paper Presentations I

Thr 5/7 Paper Presentations II

Week 15: Final Examination Period

Tue 5/12 No Class: Reading Day 

Thr 5/14 Due: Final Paper

Please email your final papers as a Word document (.doc or .docx) to: ceppley@oberlin.edu

Thank you for the wonderful semester!