

## Sexing Sound Art

Lucie Vágnerová / Lv2252@columbia.edu

Fall 2015: Wednesday, 10:10 – 12:00pm

Schermerhorn Extension, Room 754

### Course Description

This course explores sound-based creative practices as sites where gender, race, and sexuality are always, and sometimes explicitly negotiated. We will study contemporary sound art that variously speaks to inequalities in canon-formation, participates in human rights movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and suggests feminist and queer readings of everyday sonic praxis. Readings in feminist theory, critical theory, art history, musicology, and media studies will guide in-class discussion of artworks accessed through online archives and New York-based installations. We will also review artist statements, exhibition catalogues, conference programs, online media, and journalistic articles. The seminar will address the following questions: What role do sound-based creative practices play in re-/de-/forming raced, gendered, and sexual subjects? What is the place of activism in sound-based arts engaged with feminist and queer politics? Can sound be feminist, queer, anti-racist, Afrofuturist? How should theorists of race, gender, and sexuality address sound in and out of the arts? Open to all majors

### Course Objectives

Students will develop a vocabulary and a set of listening skills to assist in thinking, writing, and speaking about sound. By becoming sensitive to *sounding* as a textuality equal to (if different from) the written word, students will develop a critical acuity applicable across disciplines. Weekly discussions of the stylistic traits of scholarly and non-academic readings will help students refine a self-conscious writing style and tone. An in-class presentation will allow students to work with new media content. Empirical listening experience and field trips to several sound-art installations will also feed class discussions.

### Instructor Contact Information

Weekly office hours by appointment: [lv2252@columbia.edu](mailto:lv2252@columbia.edu) (I tend to respond within 24 hours during the work week)

### Materials for the Course

- 1) In lieu of a textbook, Courseworks will house a 'live' syllabus with embedded/linked web-based media, PDFs of readings, sound files, assignment guides as well as the online Discussion platform.
- 2) The class will visit the Computer Music Center/Sound Arts MFA students in Prentis Hall.
- 3) Students are asked to make time for out-of-class visits to several sound installations in New York

### Grading Criteria

#### 25% Participation

An "A" for participation will be earned by a student who...

- ... always arrives on time having done the assigned listening / reading
- ... asks questions, debates other students, enriches our collective understanding of material by making intersectional connections
- ... acts respectfully towards other students and the instructor

If you have trouble participating in class discussion, please show your commitment in other ways: you may volunteer to read your Discussion posting, send me an email with a relevant article or resource for the class, come to office hours *etc.* Unannounced, short in-class writing assignments will count towards the CP grade, so especially if you have trouble speaking up, make sure to show up!

**25% Presentation**

A formal presentation on a sound piece or practice of your choice, drawing on some of the theoretical literature we read for class. Presentation platform and structure of your choice!

**20% Weekly Responses**

Write a short paragraph, three to five sentences (they can even be questions!), responding to an aspect of that week's reading. Post on Courseworks' Discussion platform by 5pm the day before class.

**30% Final Paper**

A short paper (6 double-spaced pages) on sound-based artwork installed in/around New York City or a topic of your choice pending approval.

**Class and University Policies**Statement on academic integrity and the Columbia College Honor Code:

We, the undergraduate students of Columbia University, hereby pledge to value the integrity of our ideas and the ideas of others by honestly presenting our work, respecting authorship, and striving not simply for answers but for understanding in the pursuit of our common scholastic goals. In this way, we seek to build an academic community governed by our collective efforts, diligence, and Code of Honor.

I affirm that I will not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, or examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.

Disability Accommodation:

If you are a student with a disability and have an DS-certified 'Accommodation Letter' please come to my office hours to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 and [disability@columbia.edu](mailto:disability@columbia.edu).

Laptops, iPads, phones: I am open to discussing occasional and/or momentary use of laptops and iPads in class, but would generally prefer that you take notes by hand to facilitate face-to-face conversation.

Deadlines: Deadlines are strict and late papers will incur a grade-per-day penalty. If you need an extension because of extenuating circumstances, let me know as soon as possible.

Academic Support Services: You are welcome to address anything from reading comprehension to writing strategies in Office Hours with me. At the same time, I encourage every student to take advantage of the University Writing Center (Locations, Hours and Appointments: <http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center>).

## Weekly Schedule of Assignments and Activities

Come to class having reviewed the material under **READ/WATCH/LISTEN**.

### Sep 9 / Introduction to the Course: What is Sound Art?

**READ:**

Barbara Pollack, "Now Hear This: Sound Art Has Arrived," (2013).

### Sep 16 / Elements of Sound: the Limits

**READ:**

Jonathan Sterne, "Hearing," *Keywords in Sound* (2014).

Pauline Oliveros, "Some Sound Observations," *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (2004).

Marion Guck, "A Woman's (Theoretical) Work," (1994).

### Sep 23 / Gender, Canons, Institutions

**READ:**

Pauline Oliveros, "And Don't Call Them Lady Composers," (1969).

Pamela Z, "A Tool is a Tool," (2003).

Stacey Allan, "On Louise Lawler's Birdcalls," (2009).

**WATCH:**

Regine Basha, "Sound and inter-subjective space," *Sexing Sound* conference video (2014).

**LISTEN:**

Louise Lawler, *Birdcalls* (1972).

### Sep 30 / Intimacy, Affect, Touch

**READ:**

Suzanne Cusick, "On A Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not To Think Straight" (1994).

Daniel Larkin, "Sculpting Soundscapes," (2015).

**WATCH:**

Celeste Oram, *mirror #1* (2013). Video.

Jacqueline Kiyomi Gordon, *It Only Happens All the Time* (2014). Video.

### Oct 7 / Having a Voice

**READ:**

Ruth Salvaggio, "Preface: Hearing the O: Is the motion of words like sound?" in *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* (1999).

Katharine Norman, "Speak/Listen: Invisible voices in radio, radio art, and works for sound alone," *Sounding Art: Eight Literary Excursions through Electronic Music* (2004).

Nina Eidsheim, "Race and Aesthetics of Vocal Timbre," *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, Jeffrey Kallberg (2015), excerpt.

Alondra Nelson, "Spin the Painting: An Interview with Nadine Robinson," in *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Miller (2008).

**LISTEN:**

Nadine Robinson, *Tower Hollers* (2001).

## Oct 14 / Cyborg Sounds

### READ:

Judy Wajcman, "Combining Feminist and Technology Studies," *TechnoFeminism* (2004).

Annie Goh, "Sonic Cyberfeminism and its Discontents," *Discontinuities* publication to accompany CMT Festival for Adventurous Music and Art (2014), a brief introduction to cyberfeminism in sound.

Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (2009), two pages on Christina Kubisch.

### LISTEN:

Christina Kubisch, *Electrical Walks* (2003), sound walks with headphones allowing electromagnetic (non-acoustic) listening.

### WATCH:

Todd Selby x Christine Sun Kim, *Christine Sun Kim* (2011). Short film.

## Oct 21 / Sounding Afrofuturism

### Discussion posting on proposed presentation topic.

### READ:

Octavia E. Butler, "The Monophobic Response," *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction From the African Diaspora*.

Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura* 24 (2009).

Michelle-Lee White et al. "Afrotech and Outer Spaces," *Art Journal* (2001).

### WATCH:

Vik Franke, *Boom Box Bikers, Queens, New York* (2009), video.

## Oct 28 / Student Presentations

Email me about your a/v needs at least two days in advance, please.

## Nov 4 / Sounding Big Data

### READ:

N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (1999), excerpt.

Patricia T. Clough et al., "The Datalogical Turn," in *Nonrepresentational Methodologies: Re-envisioning Research*, ed. Phillip Vannini (2014), excerpt.

Wes Modes, "Listening Post Ten Years On," *The Journal of New Media and Culture* (2013-14). Watch the video within the article.

Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, *Movable Type* [proposal].

### VISIT:

Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, *Movable Type* (read here: [http://www.nytco.com/wp-content/uploads/Moveable\\_Type.pdf](http://www.nytco.com/wp-content/uploads/Moveable_Type.pdf) and visit)

### LISTEN:

Mendi and Keith Obadike, *American Cypher: Stereo Helix for Sally Hemings* (2012).

## Nov 11 / Queering Sound

### READ:

David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1997), 15-20.

Drew Daniel, "All Sound is Queer," *The WIRE* (2011).

Christina Nadler and Megan C. Turner, ““Between Meaning and Becoming: Some Introductory Notes on Queering the Noise,” *Lateral Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* (2014), a short essay on Carsten Nicolai.

**LISTEN:**

Carsten Nicolai, *wellenwanne lfo* (2012).

**Nov 18 / Rooms, Houses, and Soundscapes**

**Drafts of final papers due (no required Discussion posting this week)**

**READ:**

Brandon LaBelle, “Seeking Ursound: Hildegard Westerkamp, Steve Peters, and the Soundscape,” *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (2006), excerpt 201-207.

Salomé Voegelin, “Sitting in Rooms,” *Listening to Noise and Silence* (2010), excerpt 126-8.

Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear* (2009), excerpt on Lucier’s *I am Sitting in a Room* 185-193.

**LISTEN:**

Alvin Lucier, *I am Sitting in a Room* (1969).

**VISIT:**

LaMonte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Dream House: Sound and Light Environment* (1974).

Max Neuhaus, *Times Square* (1992).

**Nov 25 / Sounding Discipline: Muzak, Noise, Torture**

**READ:**

Jonathan Sterne, “Urban Media and the Politics of Sound Space,” (2011).

**LISTEN:**

Marie Thompson, “Feminizing Noise,” CTM 2014: Sound, Gender, Technology – ‘Where to’ with Cyberfeminism? panel.

Suzanne G. Cusick, conversation with Aaron Friedman (president of Make Music New York) on the use of music as torture in CIA black-sites (2015), podcast.

**Dec 2 / Silence and Feminism**

**READ:**

Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra, “Still the Silence: Feminist Reflections at the Edges of Sound,” in *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, ed. Sheena Malhotra (2013).

Salome Voegelin, “When there is nothing to hear you start hearing things,” from her book *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2010), 82-88.

Adrienne Rich, “Cartographies of Silence” poem (1978).

**Dec 9 / Sounding Protest**

**Papers due.**

**READ:**

Jonathan Sterne, “Quebec’s #Casseroles: on participation, percussion and protest,” (2012).

Bob Ostertag, “*Sooner or Later*” and “*All the Rage*,” in *Creative Life: Music, Politics, People, and Machines* (2009).

Nasser Hussain, “The Sound of Terror: Phenomenology of a Drone Strike” (2013).

**LISTEN:**

Bob Ostertag, *Sooner or Later* (1991), *All the Rage* (2013).