

Sound Studies and Sonic Arts

Summer Term 2026

Phase Focus

Module Theory, Listening

Course Title Decolonial Perspectives on Voice Technologies | Seminar

Course Times and Location Tuesdays | 10 am - 2 pm | LIE 316

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Office Hours and Location upon request

Possible Credit Points Theory 2CP/4CP (G), Practice 2CP/4CP (G), Free Focus 2CP/4CP (NG)

Course Description

In this seminar, we will aim to reframe the topic of voice technologies by examining critical, post-, anti-, and decolonial perspectives. The selected themes and readings shed light on various theoretical and artistic positions that challenge hegemonic views of voice and listening.

The seminar focus is twofold. On the one hand, we will examine essentialized and normative conceptions of voice, and how sound technologies reproduce racial, gendered, and other colonial hierarchies. In order to contest these technologies, we will also analyze the delimitation of "human" in technology and voice, considering the boundaries of human and nonhuman defined by Eurocentric modernity.

On the other hand, we will analyze artistic practices that use, rework, or subvert voice technologies, considering how these works unsettle established ways of listening.

The historical focus of the seminar is broad, ranging from indigenous vocal practices to artificial intelligence speech recognition, including voice technologies in wartime, forensic listening, radio, synthesis, machine listening, and more.

Course Format

Every week, the students will be required to read one or two texts at home. Seminar participants are expected to prepare their own critical ideas and questions about the readings. We will actively discuss the texts during each meeting. Moreover, the readings will be complemented with short in-class texts and audio-visual material. During the last class, the students will prepare an idea related to the general theme of the seminar or in dialogue with some of the topics discussed throughout the semester. It can either be an idea for a term paper or a sound piece. Each presentation will receive feedback in a class discussion. This presentation can then be further developed as consecutive assignments leading to 4 CP for the course.

Target and Goal

The seminar is aimed at those interested in the topic of the vocal apparatus as a medium, to critically examine the legacies of colonialism in modern technology and from sound studies, and to engage with an intersectional analytical lens from post-/anti-/decolonial studies. By the end of the seminar, students will have gained a general understanding of these perspectives and be able to use them as a theoretical framework to support their future academic writings and artistic practices.

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Requirements for Attending

Max. 15 students

Exam / Credit Points

2CP assignment (graded: Theory, Listening; not graded: Free Focus)

Attendance, preparation of texts, class participation, and a 15' presentation about a concept for a paper or a piece related to the seminar's topic.

Consecutive assignment leading to 4 CP for the course (optional, graded: Theory; grading: mean of both grades; not graded: Free Focus): Term paper (ca. 5-8,000 words) due November 1, 2026.

OR

Consecutive assignment leading to 4 CP (optional, graded: Listening, grading: mean of both grades; not graded: Free Focus): audio work + 2500 words documentation, due October 1, 2026.

Schedule

1 – What Voices? What Technologies?

Eidsheim, Nina. "Introduction. The Acousmatic Question: Who Is This?" In *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African-American Music*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. 1–37.

In class:

Wynter, Sylvia and Katherine McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?: Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations." In Sylvia Wynter: *On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick, 9–89. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

2 – Machine and Forensic Listening

Abu Hamdan, Lawrence. "Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject." In *Forensics: The Architecture of Public Truth*, 2014, 65-82.

Lawrence, Halcyon M. "Lessons In How (Not) To Be Heard." *Liquid Architecture x Unsound*. (Online Talk), 2020, min 15:20- 31:20.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/sP3Cn9mR9oA?si=sSDc0leJoBXYpEqs&t=910>

Crawford, Kate. "Introduction." *The Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. Yale University Press 2021, 1-21.

In class:

Crawford, Kate and Vladan Joler. *Anatomy of an AI System, The Amazon Echo as an anatomical map of human labor, data and planetary resources*. 2018.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240103124839/https://anatomyof.ai/>

Abu Hamdan, Lawrence. *Rubber Coated Steel*. 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFlvUV5vmMU>

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Further reading:

Lawrence, Halcyon M. "Siri Disciplines, Voice Technologies Are Not Revolutionary." In *Your Computer Is On Fire*. The MIT Press, 2021, 179-197.

Li, Xiao Chang and Mara Mills. "Vocal Features, From Voice Identification to Speech Recognition by Machine." *Technology and Culture*, 60(2), 2019, 129–160. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2019.0066>

3 – Anticolonial Radiophonic Voices

Fanon, Frantz. "This is the Voice of Algeria." In *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon. Chevalier. New York: Monthly Review, 1965 [1959], 69–97.

Fanon, Frantz. "The Fact of Blackness." In *Black skin, White masks*. New York: Grove, 1967.

Further reading:

Baucom, Ian. "Frantz Fanon's Radio: Solidarity, Diaspora, and The Tactics of Listening." *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1209083>.

4 – Aurality, Orality and Alterity

Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. "Introduction. The Ear and the Voice in the Lettered City's Geophysical History." In *Aurality*. Duke University Press, 2014, 1–13.

Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. "Chapter One," in *Aurality*. Duke University Press, 2014, 50-75.

5 – Gender, Body and Territory

Gago, Verónica. "Chapter 3 Body-Territory: The Body as Battlefield." *Feminist International, How to Change Everything*. London, New York: Verso, 2020.

Z, Pamela. "A Tool Is a Tool." *Women, Art, and Technology*. The MIT Press, 2003, 349–361.

Further reading:

Meintjes, Louise. "Ululation." In *Remapping Sound Studies*. Duke University Press, 2019, 61-76

6 – Knowledge Positionality and Indigenous Ontologies

De Castro, Eduardo Viveiros. *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Edited by Peter Skafish. University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 49-75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt17xr4vt>.

Genoud, Agustin. "Cannibalistic Vocalities. Post-Human Vocal Politics." In *Border-Listening/Escucha-Liminal*, Berlin, vol. 1. Contingent Sounds, 2020.

Further reading

Robinson, Dylan. "Introduction." In *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies. Indigenous Americas*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, 1–25.

7 – Presentations

Presentations + Discussion