

Sound Studies and Sonic Arts

Summer Term 2026

Phase Focus

Module Theory, Practice

Course Title **When Listening Fails — and Yet,** | Seminar

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

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Office Hours and Location upon request, LIE 312

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

Course Description

"To think without the world, is that possible? Is thinking more material than we know? There are affinities that escape our perception: the unknown is an immense reality"

Etel Adnan, Fog (2012)

"[...] political resistance often begins in a meanwhile"

John Berger, Ten Dispatches About Place (2005)

This is a theory seminar on gaps, absences, and on despair as a method. Its main driving force is to think possibilities for poetic and artistic practices to rehearse modes of living when life itself is devoid of ground. We start from an understanding that listening – as with any other form of restorative practice – has already failed. Rather than seeing this failure as an end of possibility, we instead pay close attention to what remains: the breaches and breaks between realities, and the pauses and intervals that structure subjectivity.

The goal of this Seminar is to outline and discuss emerging forms and practices from cracks and pauses, which are desperately mobilized in times of political, ecological, and epistemic collapse. Our journey will insist on steadfastness in face of collapse. Despair, here, is not lack of coherence but a method for endurance. Not resignation, but an attentiveness to zones of potential: a methodology of listening and attuning to what might emerge from the crevices at the end of the world. Re-organizing listening, then, becomes a way of engaging theory and praxis from these spaces of failure.

We will start by delineating this problem space, looking at how the world-ending logics of colonial modernity operates—*now*. Simultaneously we will look at authors from a range of fields within critical and cultural theory (including but not limited to Sound Studies), who are not describing these operations but enunciating new potentialities from where they break. We will ask: How do we mobilize artistic and sonic practices as generative forces, from the gaps and against premature futurities? The answer might lie on rescuing the affective, the aesthetic, and the poetic at the breaking point of language, at the limits of listening.

If all of this sounds too dense or abstract, fear not. The Seminar will offer a space for reading, discussing, and listening while holding space for not-knowing and unknowing. In other words: this is a Seminar largely based on a pro-active engagement with text. For every meeting one (or more) students will be asked to introduce the readings to the class. This is **not** meant to be a presentation, but instead a brief contextualization from our own, situated positions. The aim is not to test what we "get" from theory but to ignite a productive, open-ended discussion that is constantly building together. We will be focused on crafting responses that are contingent and vulnerable, and which engage with the task of re-organizing listening as a material and bodily engagement with sonic phenomena: a generative and generous practice in undefeated despair.

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Requirements for Attending

Anyone interested in radical thinking beyond the canon of Sound Studies, as well as students interested in working and experimenting with the limits of what theory can do at the intersection (and conflict) with artistic practices are more than welcome to join.

The Seminar is limited to a maximum of 15 Students with up to 3 extra guest listeners (non-graded).

Exam / Credit Points

2CP (not graded: Theory, Practice, Free Focus): attendance and active engagement with the in-class discussion; introducing one of the reading to the class.

2CP (graded: Theory): all requirements from not graded 2CP and a written position statement on one or more themes of the Seminar and their relation to your own work (ca. 1500 words).

2CP (graded: Practice): all requirements from not graded 2CP and a short sound piece based on one of the readings, no longer than 5 minutes.

4CP (optional, graded: Practice; grading: only the consecutive assignment is graded; not graded: Free Focus): all requirements for non-graded 2CP, plus a Performance or Lecture-Performance, + short abstract.

4CP (optional, graded: Theory; grading: only the consecutive assignment is graded; not graded: Free Focus): all requirements for non-graded 2CP, plus an Audio Paper + extended abstract OR Term Paper, between 5000–8000 words.

Schedule

- 1) April 15 : Ruins
El-Wardany, Haytham: The Labour of Listening.
Benjamin, Walter: Theses on the Philosophy of History
- 2) April 29: Insurgencies
Berger, John: Undefeated Despair.
Mombaça, Jota: For an Ontological Strike
- 3) May 13: Fractures
Butler, Judith: Precarious Life, Grievable Life.
Weheliye, Alexander and **McKittrick**, Katherine: 808s and Heartbreak.
- 4) May 20: Stutterings
Shibli, Adania and **Halabi**, Zeina: When Writing Stutters.
Ferreira da Silva, Denise: On Difference Without Separability
- 5) June 3: Dis/continuities
Cruz, Marcio and **Bispo dos Santos**, Antonio: The beginning, the middle, the beginning.
Ferreira da Silva, Denise: Unpayable Debt.

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6) June 17: Multitudes

Harney, Stefano and **Moten**, Fred: Al-Khwāridim.
Wark, McKenzie: Ketamine Femmunism.

7) June 24: Murmurations

Shibli, Adania: Touch.
Moten, Fred: come on, get it!

Supporting Media

- Adnan**, E. *Sea and Fog*. 1st ed. Nightboat Books. La Vergne. 2012
- Benjamin**, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Mariner Books, 2019.
- Berger**, J. *Hold everything dear: dispatches on survival and resistance*. London New York: Verso. 2016
- Bispo dos Santos**, A. *A terra dá, a terra quer*. São Paulo: Ubu Editora. SP. 2023
- Butler**, J. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso Books. 2016
- Ferreira da Silva**, D. *Unpayable debt, On the antipolitical*. London: Sternberg Press. 2022
- Harney**, S., Moten, F. *All Incomplete*. Autonomedia Colchester New York Port Watson. 2021
- McKittrick**, K. *Dear science and other stories*, Errantries. Durham: Duke University Press. 2021
- Mombaça**, J. *Não vão nos matar agora*. Encruzilhada. Cobogó, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil. 2021
- Rolnik**, S. *Spheres of Insurrection: Notes on Decolonizing the Unconscious*. Polity, Cambridge, UK: Hoboken, NJ. 2023.
- Shibli**, A. *Touch*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Clockroot Books. 2013.
- Wardany**, H. el-. *How to disappear, Kayfa ta*. Berlin: Sternberg Press Caroline Schneider. 2018.
- Wark**, M. *Raving*. Durham; London: MNG University Presses. 2023.
- Weheliye**, A.G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press Books. 2014.