Listening

KHC MU 102

Spring 2015
Tues & Thurs 11:00am-12:30pm
KHC 114

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Course Description

This seminar offers an exploration of listening and its mediating practices and technologies, from the stethoscope to the earbud. Through the lens of recent theories of listening we begin by considering the way in which our own auditory habits are socially and culturally determined. We then take a step back to explore the emergence of the modern listener in the second half of the nineteenth century and in particular the role of the telephone, phonograph, and wireless telegraph in shaping a range of new listening practices. We then turn our attention to the spaces of performance—from the concert hall to the jazz club—and their associated musical repertories. Here we focus not only on issues of acoustics, architecture, and social behavior but also on specific musical compositions and performance traditions that were conceived for these spaces. Finally, we consider how the advent of recorded sound has changed our relationship to the way we listen to so-called “live” music. In this context we engage with current debates on the ethics and aesthetics of sound reproduction, transmission, and ownership. By exploring the public and private spaces in which listening occurs, we consider the diversity of contemporary and historical listening practices including the effect of recording technology on recent performance practice, the relationship between sound and vision, and the way in which industrial noise has transformed the way in which we hear.

Course Requirements

In addition to our regular discussions, you are required to submit three short writing assignments, a concert review, and a final research paper. The course also involves a “field” component in which you are challenged to reflect on the auditory practices of the 21st-century listener. During the course of the semester we will visit several performance spaces in the greater Boston area with the goal of exploring the intersection between the acts of listening and seeing. Excursions will include an orchestral concert (Symphony Hall), a chamber music performance (Calderwood Hall), a sound installation (Institute of Contemporary Art), and a jazz performance (The Lilypad, Cambridge or The Village Vanguard, New York).

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is required. Active participation is expected.
Academic Conduct

Students are expected to adhere both to the BU’s Academic Conduct Code and the Kilachand Honor Code

http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/

http://www.bu.edu/khc/current-students/policies/

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Papers (3)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concert Review</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Final Presentation</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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Course Outline

I. Contemporary Listening Practices

Week 1 - Ways of Listening


II. Historical Perspectives

Week 2 - Mediated Listening in the 19th Century: The Stethoscope


Week 3 - Professionalized Listening and the Wireless Telegraph


Week 4 - Acousmatic Sound: Phonograph and Radio

III. Spaces of Listening and their Repertories

Week 5 - The 19th-Century Concert Hall: Containing the Symphony


Listening:

- Charles Ives, *Central Park in the Dark* (1906); Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 2 (1894)
- Attend concert at Symphony Hall

Week 6 - The Modern Auditorium as Chamber Venue


Listening:

- Arnold Schoenberg, Second String Quartet (1908)
- Attend concert at Calderwood Hall (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

Week 7 - The Jazz Club: Discourses of Liveness


Listening:

- John Coltrane, Live at the Village Vanguard
- Concert at The Lilypad, Cambridge or The Village Vanguard, New York

Week 8 – Spring Recess

Week 9 - The Gallery

- Reading TBA

Listening:
• Sound Exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art

IV. Listening to Recorded Sound

Week 10 - Performance and Recording


Week 11 - Listening to Recordings

• Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2010), 109-123.

V. Portability, Mobility, and Loss

Week 12 - The Earbud


Week 13 - Sound and Vision


Week 14 – Noise and Compression