



Art/Sound: Practice, Theory, and History 1800-2010

Module Co-ordinator: John Harvey

Introduction

The boundary between visual art and aural modes of creative practice is porous. Today, sound art is a burgeoning area of creative discourse and intermedial practice. Its conceptual and historical roots can be traced back to aesthetic and philosophical theories of colour and music developed in the classical era, ideas that would be consolidated in the Enlightenment and late modern periods.

Sound art emerged at the confluence of new technologies for visualizing and recording audio material in the nineteenth century and the attempts by painters in the early-twentieth century to extend visual art practice beyond the boundaries of the strictly visual. Throughout the twentieth century, there was an endeavour, albeit fitful, to establish coalitions, correspondences, and connections between the two domains. Artists and musicians crossed over into one another's territories in order to extend their field of competence, to collaborate on audio-visual works, to establish theoretical and mutual methodological underpinnings, and to operate and cooperate in the interstice of their disciplines. During the period of late-Modernism, visual artists and musicians, either in collaboration or independently, explored syntheses and correspondences between image and sound, compositionally and performatively. The resultant works eluded categorization, and represented a variety of reciprocal inspirations between and across visual art, music, dance, theatre, and creative writing.

Since the late 1970s, postmodernism's emphasis on plurality, stylistic fusion, and the amalgamation of disparate material has further ruptured the membrane that separated mediums, styles, and art forms. Alliances have been encouraged, within the wider cultural discourse, by the growth of interdisciplinary, intermedial, and transmedial studies (whereby different art forms and media are made and observed to combine, fuse, or productively co-relate), a renewed interest in the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art), and 'transgressive' thinking (across the boundaries of subject fields).

New conceptualizations of knowledge acquisition, which emphasize interaction and simultaneity of form and perception, have also helped to foster a climate conducive to the visual-audio research and practice. The convergence and crossover has been further enabled by the rise of further new technology. Digitization has given visual artists, musicians and sound artists a common framework for creative development and the facility to seamlessly combine and manipulate different media as information, which can be preserved, and accessed and shared via the Internet. Recently, art historians too have

begun to engage with the acoustic aspect of objects, spaces, and architecture, visual codifications of sound, and sound as an accompaniment to visual experience and contexts.

The module provides a historical overview of this prolific, varied, and ground-breaking period in the coming together, exchange, and mutual influence of visual art and sound-based practices. While the curriculum surveys a broad span of time, its focus is upon the period from modernity to the present day. The module also examines, as a backdrop to the discussion of more recondite practices, correspondences between the development of art culture and music culture during the Modernist and Postmodernist periods. The intention is to explore, contextually, the visual artist's engagement with sound, noise, and music while at the same time recognizing the traffic of musicians and sound artists moving in the opposite direction, who aspire to cultivate visual analogues for their work. The module will discuss theoretical perspectives, historical trajectories, methodologies of thought and practice, key concepts, case studies, and exhibition contexts.

This is likely to be the first taught module in the nascent field of art history and sound to be offered in a UK university. (Ordinarily, sound studies are conducted in relation to creative practice and musicology.) It endeavours not only to draw together and extend current scholarship and emergent methodologies but also to prepare the ground for, and inform, the development of practice-based modules on art and sound in the future. The module is designed for students of art history and fine art principally, but will be of interest to students studying any creative art in ILLCA. It will also be mindful that some students will have a practice-based interest in sound and art, while others will have a commitment to museology. For the reason, the module deals also with the technologies and curatorial aspects of contemporary sound-art practices.

Aims

The module will:

- a) discuss, describe, exemplify, and present individual and collaborative contemporary practices in art and sound;
- b) examine the commonalities, distinctives, and relationship of image and sound in terms of their essence, methodologies, technologies, theories, aesthetics, historical trajectories, and modes of discourse;
- c) study curatorial methods and practices related to the historical study, presentation, installation, and preservation of sound-art presentation, installations, and preservation.

Outcomes

On completion, the students should be able to:

- i. understand the historical development of sound art from ancient times to the present day, including specific case studies and examples;

- ii. understand a broad range of interrelationships between image- and sound-based practices and methodologies, and of some of the fundamental theoretical and historical apparatus required to comprehend them;
- iii. comprehend and articulate, the issues and practicalities related to textual interpretation and curatorial management of sound-artworks.
- iv. possess practical skills in sound and image software such as to facilitate techniques in presenting art-sound historical study.

Curriculum

Lectures and seminars will be drawn from the following:

LECTURES:

1. Light > Colour > Sound > Light: From Newton to Goethe to Kandinsky to Scriabin
2. Print-making-waves: Photography, Phonography, and the Visualization of Sound
3. Imaging Sound: Music, Notation, and the Graphic Score
4. The Artist Sings: Chance and Indeterminacy from Duchamp to Cage
5. The Rise of the Machine: Futurism and the Industrial Soundscape
6. Still-life with Violin: Real-World Synthesis from Synthetic Cubism to *Music Concrète*
7. The Composer Draws: From Schoenberg to Cage
8. The Painter Dances: Abstraction and Jazz from Mondrian to Pollock
9. Make Something Up!: Improvisation in Art and Music
10. FluxOff: Intermediality and Protest since the 1960s
11. The Artist and the Talking Dead: Jürgenson and Electronic Voice Phenomenon
12. Image or Sound: The Written Word in Art; the Spoken Word in Music
13. Rock Art: Musicians in British Arts Schools since the 1960s
14. Album Art: Visualizing Popular Music from Rock n' Roll to Punk
15. Box with the Sound of its Own Making: From Minimalism to Neo-Conceptualism in Art and Music
16. Sound with the Box of its Own Making: Sculpture, Space, and Sonic Materialism
17. Sound in Space: The Acoustics of Architecture (Sacred and Secular)
18. Noisy Art Historians: The Sonorities of the Object, Place, and Time
19. Quiet Bell: Seeing Silence in Millet's *The Angelus* (1857-9)
20. 'Hearing is Another Form of Seeing': Theories of Aural and Visual Perception

SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS:

1. DIY 1: Art and Sound in the Digital Age

2. DIY 2: Sound Recording and Editing
3. Duchamp Sings: An Analysis of *Musical Erratum* (1913)
4. Silent Pictures: Signifying Sound through Visual Art
5. Electric Lady: Women Sound-Art Performers

Assessment:

Aural Essay: 5,000 words (100%)

Bibliography:

CORE TEXTS

Claudia Albert *et al.*, *Audiovisuology 1: See the Sound: An Interdisciplinary Survey of Audiovisual Culture* (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther Konig GmbH & Co. KG. Abt. Verlag, 2009).

Douglas Khan, *Noise, Meat, Water: A History of Voice, Sound, and Aurality in the Arts: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Boston: MIT Press, 2001).

Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York; London: Continuum, 2006).

INDICATIVE BOOKS

Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (eds), *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2013).

John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writing* (1939), 50th Anniversary Edition (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (eds), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York; London: Continuum, 2004).

Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (London; New York: Continuum, 2007).

David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books, 2013).

Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*. Athens, Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 1976).

Wassily Kandinsky, *Sounds*, trans. by Elizabeth R. Napier (Yale: Yale University Press, 1981).

Caleb Kelly, *Sound (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2010).

Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010).

Dan Lander, *Sound by Artists* (Mississauga, Toronto: Blackwood Gallery and Charivari Press, 2013).

Alan Licht, *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

- Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).
- Louis Neibur, *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010).
- Philippe F. Roux et al, *Hear & Now: Artists Interviews* (Paris: les presses du reel, 2011).
- Luigi Russolo and Balilia Pratella, *The Art of Noise: Destruction of Music by Futurist Machines* (1913), (London: Sun Vision Press, 2012).
- Pierre Shafer, *In Search of Concrete Music* (1959), *California Studies in 20th- Century Music*, trans. by John Dack and Christine North) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Experience and the tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1977).
- Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Eric Tamm, *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound* (1989), (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995).
- David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011).
- David Toop, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence, and Memory* (2004), (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005).
- Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010).
- Trevor Wishart, *On Sonic Art* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996).

INDICATIVE JOURNALS

Journal of Sonic Studies
<http://sonicstudies.org/>

Möbius Journal: Sound, Art and Environment
<https://www.moebiusjournal.org/pubs/22>

Leonardo
<http://www.leonardo.info/index.html>

Sensate: Journal for Experiments in Critical Media Practice
<http://sensatejournal.com/tag/sound-art/>

INDICATIVE WEB SOURCES

Phonography
<http://www.phonography.org/> (accessed: Jan. 2014).

Sonic Arts Research Archive
<http://www.sara.uea.ac.uk/> (accessed: Jan. 2014).

Sound in Art Practice: Archive and Research Collection

<http://www.onelonepixel.org/soundart.html> (accessed: Jan. 2014).

Sounding Visual

<http://www.soundingvisual.com/>

VISUALMUSICARCHIVE

<http://visualmusicarchive.org/> (accessed: Jan. 1014).

JH (Jan. 2014)