

Spring 2016

Asma Abbas

POLS 335 Contra Diction, or, The Politics of Listening

202 Liebowitz

Tuesdays, 9am-noon, LIW-106

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Office hours: T 12-2pm, W 12-1pm; and by appt

This course makes an attempt to turn our ears to listening and its politics, that get displaced by an emphasis on the act of speech and representation in certain strains of western political philosophy, and on visuality in late modernity. Alongside tracking some of the history and reconfiguration of the hierarchy of senses in various political, economic, and legal frameworks, the course engages in the centrality of listening in radical pedagogies, and in artworks that have historically and in the present sought to expose the (in)capacities and injustices of a range of, often unseen, juridical forms of discipline and control. From the centrality of the Aza'an in Islam to moments of silence, from wiretapping to bearing witness, from national propaganda to the blues, from the radio to headphones, from being unheard despite speaking to choosing silence in response to the burden of representation, we consider various soundscapes of quotidian and democratic politics proposed in a range of our actions, passions, and interactions.

To this end, we draw from the history of political and aesthetic thought and practice, from the history of technology, and from the abundant oeuvre of contemporary artists from around the world. For instance, the title of the course itself, in part, draws from a series of works by Lawrence Abu Hamdan who addresses the intersection of sound and politics through the production of documentaries, essays, audio-visual installations, video works, graphic design, sculpture, photography, workshops and performance. His work frequently deals with the relationship between listening and politics, borders, human rights, testimony, and truth. Students will engage in a range of activities of listening, and challenging the configurations of sensory experience that produce norms of political subjectivity and coexistence. The course hopes to make room for a plurality of talents, approaches, and literary and artistic forms that reside in the space between politics and aesthetics.

Course Requirements

Active Listening and collaboration (including contributing one weekly listening exercise to the class). (15%)

A *sound journal* to be submitted at midterm (15%) and final (15%), with accompanying notes (2-3 pages)

Conventional written work: (25%)

Two 3 to 4-page *papers* over the semester on any 2 of the following topics, on dates listed in the syllabus:

- On democratic theory and metaphors of listening
- On national sounds/national radio
- On sound/art activism

Bring in one other sense along with HEARING/LISTENING in a creative project, alone or with others, and then write about it in detail. (15%)

Design a podcast or other sound art/installation--you must design it yourself alone, but can execute it with the help of others (and credit them). Written or spoken statement to accompany it. (15%)

Every week someone presents a listening project.

Learning Outcomes

1. To attend to an often-overlooked area of human sensory experience, listening, as a way of valuing the often “passive” acts of reading, listening, and thinking that often go out of the door when a particular form of (or understanding of) discourse is forced to enter the classroom, as well as other spaces. To observe and articulate the connections between these various elements.
2. To appreciate the importance of listening in creating social and political change.
3. To use technology to access and produce materials for the course with confidence, and to help each other to do so. (This class will predominantly feature digital reading and listening materials, require projects that use contemporary technology, and turn to artists who do the same.)
4. To understand the connection between various sensory experiences, and their relation to political structures.
5. To evaluate various political philosophies on how they address and normalize what kinds of aesthetic and sensual experience.
6. To use this knowledge to understand one’s own preferences and modes of engagement in the world.
7. To interact with a range of artworks and scholarly works without a sense of hierarchy between them, in order to produce a robust collaborative and interdisciplinary experience for oneself and others, and to appreciate why that is important in our world.

Class Schedule *(readings marked with an * are accessible via the course google folder)*

Week 1: Tuesday, January 26

*BBC-*The Listeners*

*Session 2 of *What Now?* Symposium on the Politics of Listening

*James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”

Week 2: Tuesday, February 2

*Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 2014 (selection)

*Karl Marx, “Private Property and Communism”

*Matthew M. Heard, “Tonality and Ethos”

*Fred Moten, “Interpolation and Interpellation”

Listening Project 1:

Week 3: Tuesday, February 9

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*

Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship*, 1996(selection)

*Nancy Love, *Musical Democracy*, 2006 (selection)

Listening Project 2: Coco

Week 4: Tuesday, February 16

*Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* + other selections

Listening Project 3: Elizabeth, Jan

Week 5: Tuesday, February 23

*Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard*, 2015

Listening Project 4: Ligaya, Sara

Week 6: Tuesday, March 1

Shari Goldberg, *Quiet Testimony: A Theory of Witnessing from Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 2013

*Works of Iman Issa, <http://imanissa.com>

Session 3, *What Now?* Symposium

Listening Project 5: Cameron

Week 7: Tuesday, March 8

*Bender, Corpis, and Walkowitz, eds. Special Issue on *Sound Politics: Critically Listening to the Past, Radical History Review*, Volume 2015, Number 121, January 2015

*Works of Lawrence Abu Hamdan, <http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com> (along with talk at *What Now?* Symposium)

Listening Project 6: Lily, Nathaniel

SPRING BREAK

Week 8: Tuesday, March 29

*Session 1 of *What Now?* Symposium

Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, 2005

Listening Project 7: Keith

Week 9: Tuesday, April 5

*Jouili and Moors, eds. *Special Collection: Islamic Sounds and the Politics of Listening, Anthropological Quarterly*, Volume 87, Number 4, Fall 2014

*Teju Cole, *Mushtaq* (on Soundcloud)

Listening Project 8: Anna

Weeks 10 and 11: Tuesday, April 12 and April 19

*Walter Benjamin, *Radio Benjamin*, 2015

*Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Radio Family*

*Allen Weiss (ed). *Experimental Sound and Radio* (selections)

*Jeffrey Schnapp, "Radio Syntheses," *Modernism/modernity*, Volume 16, Number 2, April 2009, p. 415

*Sarah Wilson, "Gertrude Stein and the Radio," *Modernism/modernity* 11.2 (2004) 261-278

*Broadcasting Modernism, review

Listening Project 9: Kolya

Listening Project 10: Isabel, Mia

Week 12: Tuesday, April 26

**Cultural Critique* special issue on "Comparative Radios"

*David Hendy, "Radio's Cultural Turns"

*Jason Loviglio, "The Radio Conference," report, 2009

*Jason Loviglio, "Radio in Wartime: The Politics of Propaganda, Race, and the American Way in the Second World War"

Listening Project 11: AJ, Ethan

Week 13: Tuesday, May 3

Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 2013

*Dreher, T. (2008). 'Media, multiculturalism and the politics of listening', In E. Tilley (Eds.), *Power and Place: Refereed Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association Conference 2008* (pp. 1-14).

Palmerston North, New Zealand: Massey University.

*Session 4 of *What Now?*,

*Sarah J. Cervenak, Karina L. Cespedes, Caridad Souza, and Andrea Straub's "Imagining Differently: The Politics of Listening in the Feminist Classroom."

Listening Project 12: Avonlea

Week 14: Tuesday, May 10

Presentations and Public Things