Name: Kim Feser

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Course title: Berlin and the Digital Music Era

Language of instruction: English

Contact hours: 48 (6 per day)

ECTS-Credits: 4

Course description

In many ways, Berlin is a center for contemporary electronic music. This is primarily due to the strong connection between technological and aesthetic developments. Nightclubs, such as the Berghain, have a worldwide reputation for their sound systems, which allow a specific acoustic experience and encourage nightlong dancing and partying. Berlin-based companies such as Ableton and Native Instruments are global leaders in their music software, especially in the context of techno, electronica and electronic dance music. Many DJs and musicians´ market themselves or their tracks via blogs and streaming services. Particularly in the context of sound art, there are fairly strong parallels with media art.

Due to the key 'digital' aspects of such phenomena, we often speak of a 'Digital Age' in which Berlin plays a particular role in the field of music. However, the 'analog' phenomena are constantly growing. This corresponds with an increasing focus both on the virtual and haptic dimension. Among other things, software companies have made strong efforts over the past years to develop their own hardware controllers for their computer programs in order to be able to better design musical processes manually.

Based on such phenomena, the course will explore the relationship between aesthetic trends and technological developments with the focus on the cultural and economic conditions in Berlin. Particular emphasis will be made on the past and present of techno, (experimental) electronica and electronic dance music. What makes Berlin a magnet not only for thrill-seeking club-goers, but also for DJs, musicians, producers and developers? How does this relate to the recent past of Berlin since the fall of the Berlin Wall, especially given the gentrification processes? To what extent is Berlin's creative scene at the same time internationally networked and can its conditions only be understood in a global context?

Beyond the Berlin perspective, the course examines the current conditions of production and consumption as well as the performance and distribution of music. How do legal/illegal file sharing and streaming services affect listening to music? What is changing in music culture through sampling, remixing, mashup and approaches to interactive music in video games? What opposing trends are out there?

In addition to the joint discussion of texts and film excerpts, excursions also provide an opportunity for an exchange with proven experts in the course subject areas.

At the end of the course, the participants can elaborate on and present a topic (either alone or in a group) of their choice in the context of the general list of topics on the course.

Student profile

This course is intended for students of any disciplines. No prior music and technology background is required. The course aims to provide an insight into the relationship between aesthetic, social and technical developments regarding the topic 'Berlin and the Digital Music Age'. It also examines the conditions of the current production methods of electronic music and the specific functionality of hardware and software, but does not teach the specific programming or composing of music.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course requirements

1. Active participation
   The topics will be jointly developed within the course. Continuous involvement in the discussions is a prerequisite for successful participation in the course. Preparatory reading of texts between the course days is another important requirement.

2. Course schedule and excursions
   The course will take place on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and includes excursions within Berlin.

3. Presentation with handouts
   Each student will prepare a topic for a discussion by critically presenting the core content of a text in a presentation (with a handout) and working out specific aspects for the joint discussion.

4. Course presentation
   In the last week of the course, the students will present a topic of their choice in the context of the list of topics on the course (cooperation of several students presenting similar topics is possible, if individual parts are clear).

Grading

Active participation: 40%

Presentation of a text (lecture with handout): 25%

Presentation of a chosen topic with a written summary at the end of the course: 35%

List of References

The list of references will be made available in a Reader at the introductory lecture.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, January 7, 2020	An introduction into the main topic and the discussion of fundamental aspects, which will be addressed in detail throughout the course: Term 'digital age'. – Distinction between analog/digital. – An inquiry into the debate over 'post-digital' trends Berlin as the center of electronic music and as a magnet for tourists and artists from all over the globe. – Significance of the recent past of Berlin since the fall of the Wall.
Thursday, January 9, 2020	An inquiry into the variety of discourses about 'analog' and 'digital'. – Is there a 'digital beauty'? – Is there 'analog' aesthetics? – An inquiry into the correlation of ideas about 'analog' and 'digital' phenomena. – The technical distinction between 'analog' and 'digital' signal paths. The history of 'analog' and 'digital' music devices and sound-recording media. – Significance for the music culture. *Hands-on in class: Practical introduction to the handling of hybrid analog-digital hardware synthesizers, samplers and sequencers (to demonstrate the presented phenomena and to intensify the discussion).*
Monday, January 13, 2020	Is there a 'sound of Berlin'? What are urban conditions for musical creativity and technical development? What role do processes of gentrification play in Berlin? – An inquiry into the past and present of techno, (experimental) electronica and electronic dance music in Berlin. *– An excursion to a small dynamic company (on the edge of a gentrified neighborhood of Berlin) developing special hardware for the production of electronic music**
Tuesday, January 14, 2020	Laptop music and the 'return' of hardware interface. On the importance of manual intervention in computer-based musical processes. *— An excursion to a global manufacturer of software and dedicated hardware for the production of electronic music in Berlin **

Thursday, January 16, 2020	Developments in the distribution and consumption of music: legal/illegal file sharing, streaming services, blogs and self-promotion. Music listening between cellphone headphones and club sound systems. On the meaning of mastering. On the relationship between technical developments and new musical trends: From sampling, remixing and mashup through to interactive music in video games? *— An excursion to the computer game museum**
Monday, January 20, 2020	What is sound art? How blurred are the boundaries of media art? On the past and current trends in Berlin. *— An excursion to a sound art gallery **
Tuesday, January 21, 2020	Final papers of the participants: Presentation and discussion
Thursday, January 23, 2020	Final papers of the participants: Presentation and discussion

*Excursions may be subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On excursion days, adaption of class times is possible.