Course title:	**Berlin: Music and Sound in the Digital Age**
Instructor:	Kim Feser
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Track:	B-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.

Course description

Present developments in the Digital Age are not only shaped by technical innovations, but also by aesthetic and social transformations. The extent to which this has a particular impact on music and sound will be discussed on the basis of lectures, readings and excursions. The specific conditions in Berlin will be examined in relation to other cities around the world – especially those in which the course participants live – as well as to global networking.

Current texts from the fields of cultural studies, musicology, sound studies, and urbanism will be discussed. We will visit sites of music production and consumption in Berlin and examine local music cultural phenomena and the spectrum of urban sounds. The course thus covers the broad spectrum of music and sound, with a particular focus on: techno, house, experimental electronica, and hip hop-genres for which Berlin is especially known -, but also the acoustics of the built environment and urban noise, as well as sound art and interactive online sound/music environments (e.g., open-world games).

In many ways, Berlin is a center for contemporary electronic music. This is not least due to the strong connection between technological and aesthetic developments. Nightclubs, such as the Berghain, have dedicated sound systems, which allow a specific acoustic experience and encourage nightlong dancing and partying. Berlin-based companies such as Ableton, Native Instruments, and Bitwig distribute their music software worldwide. The dominance of digital 'virtual' technology is at the same time characterized by an increasing focus on the haptic dimension. Software companies have made great efforts to develop dedicated hardware controllers for their computer programs in order to be able to create musical processes more directly. Berlin is also a hub for the development and distribution of hardware synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines, particularly in the modular Eurorack format.

The course will explore the relationship between aesthetic trends and technological developments with the focus on the cultural and economic conditions in Berlin. 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? Berlin's creative scene is internationally networked, and its conditions can only be understood in a global context. But what kind of digital inequality exists, locally and globally? Furthermore, we discuss the extent to which

some popular myths, especially about the early Berlin techno days, neglect issues of diversity – for example, in relation to the partying crowd and influential personalities.

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 streaming services with their algorithmic recommendation systems influence listening to music? What is the impact of the dynamic development of artificial intelligence in the field of music? What is changing in music culture through new ways of sampling, remixing, and interactive sound in video games and online environments? What are opposing trends?

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

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 music and sound in the digital age, with a special focus on the conditions in Berlin in relation to other cities. It also examines current production methods of electronic music but does not teach the specific programming or composing of music.

Course requirements
1. **Course schedule and excursions**
    The course will take place on Tuesdays and Fridays and includes excursions within Berlin.

2. **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 an important requirement.

3. **Topic presentations with written summaries of discussions**
    Individual topics are prepared by the students in small groups. In the seminar, the core theses of the texts and any controversial aspects are then presented. Subsequently, a written summary of the joint discussion will be compiled.

4. **Final essay**
    At the end of the seminar, the students (alone or in groups) write individual essays on one of the seminar topics - related topics of their own choice are possible by arrangement.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Active participation: 40%
Topic presentations with written summaries of discussions: 30%
Final essay: 30%

Readings

A digital reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 21, 2026	An introduction into the main topic by the instructor and joint discussion of fundamental aspects, which will be addressed in detail throughout the course: Term 'digital age'. – Distinction between analog/digital. – Music and sound. Berlin as a 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.
Friday, July 24, 2026	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. — Exkursion: Hands on Hardware. Modular Sound Synthesis (joint experimental practice)*
Tuesday, July 28, 2026	Is there a 'sound of Berlin'? Is there a connection between the music and the city's environmental sounds and noise? What are urban conditions for musical creativity and technical development? What role do processes of gentrification play in Berlin? — Excursion to a small dynamic company (on the edge of a gentrified neighborhood of Berlin) developing special hardware for the production of electronic music* — Investigation: Spectrum of urban sounds

Friday, July 31, 2026	The history of 'analog' and 'digital' music devices and sound-recording media. – Significance for the music culture. Laptop music and the 'return' of hardware interface. On the importance of manual intervention in computer-based musical processes. — Excursion to a global manufacturer of software and dedicated hardware for the production of electronic music in Berlin*
Tuesday, August 4, 2026	Developments in the distribution and consumption of music: streaming services, blogs and self-promotion. On the relationship between technical developments and new musical trends: from sampling, remixing and mashup through to interactive music and sound in online open world games. The challenge of AI. — Excursion: Artist talk with a Berlin producer/musician about sound aesthetics and social conditions*
Friday, August 7, 2026	What is sound art? How blurred are the boundaries of media art? On the past and current trends in Berlin. — Excursion to a sound art gallery*
Tuesday, August 11, 2026	Final essays: Preparation, discussion and writing
Friday, August 14, 2026	Presentation of final essays. Final discussion FUBiS Farewell Ceremony

*The course schedule may be adjusted due to current developments in the realm of digital or the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.