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

Current developments in the field of the digital are not only characterized by technical innovations, but also by aesthetic and social transformations. The extent to which this affects music and sound in a particular way will be discussed on the basis of text 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 will thus cover the broad spectrum of music and sound, with a particular focus on electronic music (from techno and house to experimental electronica) for which Berlin is especially known, but also on sound art (in galleries or online), on interactive sounds (computer games), and on the acoustics of the built environment and urban noise.

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 and Native Instruments are global leaders in their music software. The dominance of digital 'virtual' technology is at the same time characterized by an increasing focus on the haptic dimension. Software companies have made strong efforts over the past years to develop their own hardware controllers for their computer programs to better control 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. 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 chat rooms? What are opposing trends?

A special focus of the course is on the borderlands and intersections of music, sound art and environmental sounds.

In addition to the joint discussion of 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 texts
     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 using self-prepared slides to introduce a joint discussion.

  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

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

Readings
A digital reader will be provided.

Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 29, 2025	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, August 1, 2025	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. Hands on Hardware: Modular Sound Synthesis (joint experimental practice)
Tuesday, August 5, 2025	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? — 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* — Investigation: Spectrum of urban sounds
Friday, August 8, 2025	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.

	— An excursion to a global manufacturer of software and dedicated hardware for the production of electronic music in Berlin*
Tuesday, August 12, 2025	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 video games. The challenge of AI. — Excursion: Artist talk with a Berlin producer/musician about sound aesthetics and social conditions
Friday, August 15, 2025	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, August 19, 2025	Final essays: Preparation, discussion and writing
Friday, August 22, 2025	Final essays: Preparation, discussion and writing 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.