

Julia Lange, Seminar II, SoSe 2022

Listen Up! Sonic Dissent in African American Literature and Art

This seminar addresses the intersection of African American studies and sound studies over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. Focusing on the sonic dimension in African American literature we will examine how black writers reflect on the relationship between race, gender, class and sound. How do black artists use sound (music, laughter, noise, etc.) or its absence (silences, erasures) to critique and protest existing political conditions? How do they mobilize specific sonic articulations to subvert dominant notions of citizenship or to affirm counter-hegemonic identity constructions? In other words, which aesthetic and political soundscapes of dissent do they (re-)create to overcome “the tyrannies of silence” (Audre Lorde)? Shifting our attention to active listening as a strategy of engaging with cultural, social and political differences, this course aims to open up new perspectives on both canonical and lesser known texts. Drawing from a multimedia archive, we will trace the numerous links between black cultural production (novels, poems, plays, protest songs) and sound art, technologies and theories in their historical evolution.

The following novels will be discussed in the course of the term, so please ensure that you get hold of the texts in time, preferably by the start of the semester. A full syllabus will be shared by the first session of the summer term.

- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Colson Whitehead, *Harlem Shuffle*