

# **INTRODUCTION TO SOUND STUDIES**

**ENGC 646A – FALL 2004**

Wednesdays 10:05am-12:55pm

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## **Prospectus:**

The past few years have seen an explosion of scholarly work on sound by writers in the human sciences. This course aims to introduce students to the broad range of sound studies across the disciplines. Contemporary approaches, subjects and themes vary widely. Scholars are rethinking longstanding pieties about the nature of sound and listening, the role of speech, hearing and music in modern life and modern thought, and the relations among the senses. We have histories and ethnographies of listening, studies of soundscapes built and natural, and a proliferation of books and articles on sound media, sound art and sound works. Our goal will be to step back, map and assess this work, and place it against writing about sound from earlier scholarly moments, such as the Western philosophical tradition, and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century writings on media. As we proceed, we will consider how scholars ask questions of sound, and what the important intellectual and political questions are emerging at this moment.

Class time will feature weekly lectures and discussions, and occasional creative or experimental in-class projects. Students will write three papers and help direct discussion one or more times.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Etiquette:**

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading. I expect the very best you can give.
2. Good faith and good humor toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstance. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

**Product:****I. Participation in Class Discussions**

I expect everyone to participate regularly in class discussion. You should come every week ready to discuss the readings.

Requirements for class discussion are as follows: good faith, attention to the readings, and relevance to the course. We want to avoid “seek and destroy” sessions. If you have something critical to say, be ready to explain how the piece could be improved. If you disagree with the premise of the piece, then read for what motivates the argument.

If necessary, I will keep a speakers list and call on people.

**II. Discussion Facilitation**

Each week, at least two students will help facilitate discussion. Both discussion leaders should spend extra time on the readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth. Depending on enrollment and other factors, you may perform one role more than the other. NOTE: some weeks I may have something in mind for discussion, in which case I will collaborate with the facilitators.

The *Inquisitor* will bring in discussion questions and topics, and lead the discussion. He or she should send an email to the class list (which I will set up) by midnight, Monday night, with a list of questions and topics to discuss. You should aim to get at the most important issues in the readings, which will also mean prioritizing them, since we will need get to every reading every week. Questions can be oriented around anything from really basic content questions (like “what does the passage on p. 25 mean?”) all the way up to “big picture” issues that connect the week’s readings with other discussions we’ve had in the course. Please avoid (as much as possible) more than passing references to materials from other courses or other things you’ve read.

The *Finder of Objects* will bring in an object for us to discuss in relation to the readings. Your object may be an image, a sound recording, a device, or anything else you see fit to bring in. I prefer that people bring in objects created by someone other than themselves, but if you made something particularly cool, please consult with me. If you need audiovisual equipment, please let me know as soon as possible (no later than Monday morning) so that I can make arrangements. Audiovisual material should be of short duration – no longer than approximately 5 minutes.

**III. Response Papers**

During the semester, students will write two 4-5 page (double-spaced) response papers and present one of them verbally.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October and the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, class will consist of presentations from students. The length of the presentations will depend on final enrollment (you will know well in advance how much time you have), and time limits will be *strictly* enforced in order to allow for discussion and responses. Half the class will present in October and the other half will present in November. The model for these presentations will be conference panels.

In preparation for these two dates, *everyone* (including the people who are not presenting) will write a 4-5-page paper that advances a thesis about two or more readings (selected from at least two different weeks) from the section of the course we just finished. Don't try to do too much: you should make one point, and make it well. That paper will be submitted to me at the beginning of class on presentation day. Please stick to the readings from the course for these papers. You will have an opportunity to advance your own work in the synthesis paper.

It is my preference that students who present do so in as fluid a fashion as possible – i.e., give a speech, don't just read a paper. However, recognizing that not everyone is comfortable doing that, students may elect to read from their papers. If you choose to read to us, please make enough copies of your paper that everyone can follow along. If time limits are short, you will need to read an excerpt.

#### IV. Synthesis Paper

Since this course is a field survey, the final writing assignment is designed to intensify your reading and to help hone your thinking on future research in the field. Rather than generating the so-called “publishable” 20-page essay, you will produce a medium-length 10-12 page essay (double-spaced, excluding bibliography) that does one of the following two things:

a. Offers an intensive literature review of a subsection of sound studies. Ideally, you will also stake out your own position as well.

OR

b. Advances a well-honed, significant and *defensible* argument about a theoretical position or an object. It is a short paper. You get to make *one point* with some support and nuance. Make it well. Focus on the thinking and not the research.

Please note the following due dates. You may submit materials early:

**17 November:** a short 1-2 page proposal for your synthesis paper. This may be submitted over email, but if I don't receive it, it's as if you didn't submit it.

Synthesis papers will be due in my mailbox at 4pm on **Wednesday, the 8<sup>th</sup> of December**. Hard copies are required; emails are not acceptable. Please also provide an address to which I can send your paper with my comments.

You are encouraged to meet with me throughout the semester as your work on your project, and you are encouraged to submit your proposal early.

### **Grading:**

You have the right to submit your written work in French. If you plan to do so, please contact me so I can make arrangements for evaluation, as I am not fluent in French. All verbal presentations must be in English.

If your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.

Late papers may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade. Activities for which you must be present (helping to lead discussion) cannot be made up. If you know you will be absent on a day for which you are obligated, trade with one of your colleagues.

Final grades may be reduced for unsatisfactory performance in any of the categories listed under “requirements” or “etiquette.”

I do not give incompletes except in truly extraordinary personal circumstances that can be documented.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

### **Auditors:**

Auditors are welcome to participate in the course on the following conditions:

- They request (and I grant) permission to audit the course.
- They follow the same rules of etiquette as enrolled students. That means attending all classes and arriving each week ready to discuss the readings.
- Depending on enrollment, they may be called upon to facilitate discussion during the semester.

### **About the Readings:**

No books are required for this course.

A packet of required course readings will be available.

Except for one week, readings are fewer than 150 pages per week. Most of them are not difficult. If you are having trouble with the readings, please let me know immediately.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings required unless otherwise noted.  
Any changes to the schedule will be announced in class.

## 8 Sep: **Introduction**

Histories of sound studies, habits of sound scholars and others, the place of sound in the humanities and social sciences. With an exercise.

### I. Sound Technologies and Sound Cultures

## 15 Sep: **Problematizing Sound** (or, playing the single first)

Sterne, Jonathan. 2003. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-85.

Schwartz, Hillel. 2003. "The Indefensible Ear: A History" in *The Auditory Culture Reader* (eds. Michael Bull and Les Back). New York: Berg, pp. 487-501.

Ihde, Don. 1976. "In Praise of Sound," in *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*. Athens: Ohio University Press, pp. 3-16.

Altman, Rick. 1992. "Four and a Half Film Fallacies," in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (ed. Rick Altman). New York: Routledge, pp. 35-45.

Attali, Jacques. 1985. "Listening," in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. (trans. Brian Massumi). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 3-20.

## 22 Sep: **Formations of Sound Media**

Gitelman, Lisa. 1999. "Imagining Language Machines," in *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 62-96.

Martin, Michèle. 1991. "The Culture of the Telephone" in *"Hello, Central?" Gender, Technology and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 140-166.

Hilmes, Michelle. 1997. "Radiating Culture," in *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 1-33.

Lastra, James. 2000. "Sound Theory," in *Sound Technology and American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 123-153.

Morton, David. 2000. "The Message and the Answering Machine: Recording and Interpersonal Communication," in *Off the Record: the Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 108-135.

### 29 Sep: **Logics of Sound Media**

Adorno, Theodor. 2002 (1927/1934). "The Curves of the Needle," and "The Form of the Phonograph Record," in *Essays on Music* (ed. Richard Leppert). Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 271-282.

Kittler, Friedrich. 1999. Excerpt from "Gramophone," in *Gramophone-Film-Typewriter* (trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz). Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 87-114.

Mowitt, John. 1987. "The Sound of Music in the Era of Its Electronic Reproducibility," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (eds. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary). New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 173-197.

Rothenbuhler, Eric W. and John Durham Peters. 1997 (summer). "Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 81(2), pp. 242-264.

Rafael, Vicente. 2003. "The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines," *Public Culture* 15:3, pp. 399-425.

### 6 Oct: **Constructs of Listening**

Leppert, Richard. 2004. "The Social Discipline of Listening," in *Aural Cultures* (ed. Jim Drobnick). Toronto: YYZ Books pp. 19-35.

Douglas, Susan. 1999. "Exploratory Listening in the 1920s" and "The Invention of the Audience," in *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination from Amos 'n Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern*. New York: Times Books/Random House, pp. 55-82 and 124-160.

Ihde, Don. 1976. "The Auditory Dimension" and "The Shapes of Sound" in *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*. Athens: Ohio University Press, pp. 49-71.

Berland, Jody. 1993. "Contradicting Media: Toward a Political Phenomenology of Listening," in *Radiotext(e)* (ed. Neil Strauss). New York: Semiotext(e) pp. 38-55.

13 Oct: **First round of responses**

**II. Sound World Making**

20 Oct: **Voice**

Silverman, Kaja. 1988. "Body Talk," in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 42-71.

Carter, Paul. 1992. "Introduction," and "Spirits of the Dead: A Sound History of 'Cooee'," in *The Sound In-Between: Voice, Space, Performance*. Kensington: New South Wales University Press, pp. 11-51.

Derrida, Jacques. 1973. "The Voice that Keeps Silence," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (trans. David B. Allison). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 70-87.

Simon, Sherry. 2003. "Accidental Voices: the Return of the Countertenor," in *Aural Cultures* (ed. Jim Drobnick). Toronto: YYZ Books pp. 110-119.

27 Oct: **Soundscapes**

Schafer, R. Murray. 1994 (1977). "Introduction," "Listening" and "The Acoustic Community," in *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester: Destiny Books, pp. 2-12, 205-225.

Rath, Richard Cullen. 2003. "'Those Thunders, Those Roarings': The Natural Soundscape," in *How Early America Sounded*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 10-42.

Corbain, Alain. 1998. "The Abductors of Bells," in *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century French Countryside* (trans. Martin Thom). New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 45-70.

Picker, John. 2003. "The Soundproof Study: Victorian Professional Identity and Urban Noise," in *Victorian Soundscapes*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 41-81.

Feld, Steven. 2003. "A Rainforest Acoustemology," in *The Auditory Culture Reader* (eds. Michael Bull and Les Back). New York: Berg, pp. 223-239.



### 3 Nov: **Shaping Sound**

- Rath, Richard Cullen. 2003. "No Corner for the Devil to Hide," in *How Early America Sounded*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 97-119.
- Thompson, Emily. 2002. "Acoustical Materials and Modern Architecture, 1900-1933," in *The Soundscape of Modernity*. Cambridge, MIT Press, pp. 169-228.
- Bijsterveld, Karin. 2003. "The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age: Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns, 1900-40," in *The Auditory Culture Reader* (eds. Michael Bull and Les Back). New York: Berg, pp. 165-189.
- Pinch, Trevor and Frank Trocco. 2002. "Introduction: Sculpting Sound," "Shaping the Synthesizer," and "Conclusion: Performance," in *Analogue Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-11, 53-69, and 302-324.
- Théberge, Paul. 1997. "The New 'Sound' of Music: Technology and Changing Concepts of Music," in *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 186-213.

### 10 Nov: **Some Sonic Arts**

- Connor, Steven. 2000. "At Home and Abroad: Monsieur Alexandre and Mr Mathews" and "Phenomena in the Philosophy of Sound: Mr Love," in *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 265-305.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. 1936. "In Praise of Blindness; Emancipation from the Body," in *Radio* (trans. Margaret Ludwig). London: Faber and Faber, pp. 133-203.
- Chion, Michel. 1994. "The Real and the Rendered" in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (trans. Claudia Gorbman). New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 95-122.
- Jones, Steve. 1993. "A Sense of Space: Virtual Reality, Authenticity and the Aural," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10:3 (September), pp. 238-252.

17 Nov: **“Sound Art”**

Kahn, Douglas. 2002. “The Impossible Inaudible” and “John Cage: Silence and Silencing,” in *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 158-199.

Cox, Christoph and various artists. 2004. “Sound Art Now: A Symposium,” *Artforum online*.  
<http://www.artforum.com/index.php?pn=symposium&id=6682&sid=f3caba9e1a68b2d1f9c2495a29ad5f1> (a link will be available on the course website so you don’t need to type all this in).

Fisher, Jennifer. 2004. “Speeches of Display: Museum Audioguides by Artists,” in *Aural Cultures* (ed. Jim Drobnick). Toronto: YYZ Books pp. 49-61.

McCartney, Andra. 2004. “Soundscape Works, Listening and the Touch of Sound,” in *Aural Cultures* (ed. Jim Drobnick). Toronto: YYZ Books pp. 179-185.

Drobnick, Jim. 2004. “*Aural Cultures* Artists’ Pages and CD,” *Aural Cultures* (ed. Jim Drobnick). Toronto: YYZ Books pp. 271-279.

24 Nov: **Second round of responses**1 Dec: **No class**