

**SOUND STUDIES**  
**COMS 608 – FALL 2008**  
Tuesdays 10:00am-1:00pm, W-220 Arts

Jonathan Sterne

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Office hours: By appointment, please.

**Prospectus:**

This course aims to acculturate students to the broad field of “Sound Studies” and acquaint them with current debates and issues in the area. The past few years have seen an explosion of scholarly work on sound by writers in the human sciences. Contemporary approaches, subjects and themes vary widely. Compared with a relative paucity of studies just ten years ago, there are now a range of 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. 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. Our goal will be to map and assess this work. As we proceed, we will consider how scholars ask questions of sound, and what important intellectual and political questions might be emerging at this moment. We will also consider contemporary sound studies against approaches to sound, speech, listening and auditory media from other historical moments.

Class time will feature weekly lectures and discussions, and occasional creative or experimental in-class projects. Students will undertake a semester project and help direct discussion one or more times.

**Required Books** (for sale at *Paragraphe* and on reserve at the library):

Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

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

Thompson, Emily. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

There is also a packet of required and recommended course readings available at *Copie Nova*.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Etiquette:**

1. Full and complete attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading (of required texts). 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 (and % of Semester Grade):**

#### **I. Participation in Class Discussions (20%)**

I expect everyone to participate regularly in class discussion. You should come every week ready to discuss the readings. I notice (and appreciate it) when students make good contributions to the course on the listserv or in other ways besides speaking up in class. Please note that I distinguish between quantity and quality. I also notice when students are routinely late and/or absent.

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 (20%)**

Each week, at least three students will help facilitate discussion. Discussion leaders should be prepared to discuss the readings in depth. Depending on enrollment and other factors, you may perform one role more than the others. 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 noon, Monday, 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 won't be able to discuss every aspect of 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 materials you've read from outside the course.

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.

Inquisitors and Finders of Objects, **please note that class dynamics will vary from week to week and will follow people's particular interests and energies.** DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED if you prepared something wonderful and the class went in another direction. This happens to me all the time and is part of the teaching process. It is better to have a good class session than to stick to a plan.

The Cleaner will take notes of any readings, authors or texts mentioned in class but not on the syllabus. Within 24 hours of the end of class, he or she will then email the people who mentioned them and ask for a full reference. If the reference doesn't appear in a day or two, the cleaner should send a reminder email. Once he or she has collected all of the relevant citations, the Cleaner will make a single post to the course listserv with all of the information from the previous week's class neatly compiled. If a classmate doesn't respond, the cleaner should do his or her best to track down the errant source.

### III. Semester Project (60%)

All semester projects will result in

- **a 5-6 page proposal due on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November**
- **a short scholarly talk on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November**
- **a formal scholarly paper of at least 20 pages due by 4:00pm on 8 December in the mailbox on my door (W280 Arts).**
- **Please note that a proper scholarly apparatus (notes, cites, page numbers) is a requirement for your papers, though I am somewhat flexible on matters of tone.**

Though it is unreasonable of me to expect a paper of “publishable quality” at the end of a seminar, I do expect a polished paper that reflects sustained thought and careful revision. It should also use a recognized scholarly reference system. I recommend Chicago Style with footnotes, but will accept MLA, APA, Chicago parenthetical, Harvard, or any other style widely used in the humanities or social sciences.

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

### Option 1: Application Paper

For this paper, you will synthesize a methodological or theoretical approach from a few of the readings assigned for the course and do your own sound study of a phenomenon out in the world. This paper may include some original research, but it is not intended to be a massive research undertaking.

Proposals for this option should include a discussion of the proposed theoretical or methodological framework and your chosen object of study. If research is required, you should explain what it is and how you will finish it by the end of the term. Ideally, proposals will also discuss early hypotheses or “try out” an aspect of your approach.

### Option 2: Revision Paper

Revision is not a skill often taught in graduate school, but it should be. This is your chance to take a piece of writing (somehow relevant to the course) that you’ve already begun and revise it toward a concrete end (for instance, for publication in a journal), using materials from the course to refine your thinking about your project and develop your analysis. Keep in mind that the purpose of this option is to facilitate extended reflection upon research you have already undertaken; it is not to facilitate further research.

Proposals for this option should include a discussion of the project as it currently stands; why you want to rewrite it for this course; a substantive plan for further revision – especially in terms of how you want to make your argument, your vision of the paper’s intellectual or political task; and a discussion of other work that you need to do in order to be able to rewrite the paper (such as additional outside reading or revisiting source materials). You should also append a copy of the current version of the paper to the proposal.

### Option 3: Synthesis Paper

This option is modeled on the PhD comprehensive examination process for Communication Studies. The final paper will make use of the course bibliography and a few select additional readings to answer one or two questions in a 20-page paper. The exact wording of the questions will be arrived at in consultation with me.

Proposals for this option come in two parts: a single page will offer one or more sample versions of the question and any additional sources you think you will need to consult. The remaining 5 pages should begin discussing two or more (but not many more) texts from the course in light of the question (or set of questions) you posed on the first page.

### Option 4: The Research Paper

Given the constraints of a semester full of coursework and other events, this is the most difficult option. It is not for procrastinators or the faint of heart. For this paper, you will conduct substantial research on a phenomenon relevant to sound studies. The paper will be made up primarily of original research, as opposed to commentary on course materials,

though it must not be a paper you could have written before you took this course. The conclusions reached in the paper, likewise, should be conclusions you could not have reached before doing the research.

Your proposal will be a research proposal. It will define the question you hope to answer and your methodological approach, paying close attention to how your actual research will answer your intellectual question. The proposal should also point to a few methodological exemplars: people who have used a similar approach successfully.

### **How to Present on November 25<sup>th</sup>**

It is my preference that students present 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 a written text. If you choose to read to us, please make enough copies of your text so that everyone can follow along. If time limits are short, you will need to read an excerpt.

**More details on the proposal, the presentation and the paper will be offered during the term.**

### **How to Interpret Graduate-Level Grades:**

A:	Good work
A-:	Satisfactory
B+:	There is a problem with what you submitted
B:	There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
B-:	Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
C+ or lower:	Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

### **More on Grading:**

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

In rare cases, if your performance on any assignment is not satisfactory, I may ask you to do it again.

### **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.

### **Unpleasant Business:**

**Late papers** may not receive written comments and will earn a reduced grade.

**Activities for which you must be present** (e.g., inquisitor, finder of objects, cleaner) **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. Notify me of the trade if it happens. This is your responsibility, not mine.

**The K contract:** At McGill, grades of incomplete are called “K” grades and they are only supposed to be assigned after the student and professor have agreed upon a contract. I do not give incompletes (“K” grades) except in truly extraordinary personal circumstances that can be documented.

**The Coerced K:** Should a student fail to turn in a final paper and fail to contact me well before my deadline for submission of grades, I will issue a K grade without a contract. In these circumstances, should the paper be completed at a later date, it will receive a mark. However, students who receive a “K” in this fashion will not be eligible to receive an “A” or “A-” for the course. K grades revert to “F” grades at the end of the next term unless a contract extension is signed by both professor and student. Under no circumstances will I offer an extension to a K that was granted without a contract.

**It is your responsibility to make sure I receive any assignment you turn in.** If you email it to me or leave it for me at a time other than the due date, make sure you get a note from me saying I received your paper. Otherwise, assume I don’t have it.

**Required Academic Integrity Statement:** 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).

# COURSE SCHEDULE

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

## 2 Sep: Introduction

Apologia.

### Part I. Normalizing Media

## 9 Sep: Sound and Modernity, Verso (or, Playing the Single First)

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. (Highlighted sections will be announced in class on 2 September.)

## 16 Sep: Original and Copy, Analog and Digital, Tomato and Tomato

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

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

Altman, Rick. "Four and a Half Film Fallacies," *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, edited by Rick Altman, 35-45. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Rothenbuhler, Eric W. and John Durham Peters. "Defining Phonography: An Experiment in Theory," *Musical Quarterly* 81 no.2, (1997, summer): 242-264.

### Recommended:

Kittler, Friedrich. Excerpt from "Gramophone," *Gramophone-Film-Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, 87-114. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Keightley, Keir. "'Turn It Down!' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space and High Fidelity, 1948-59," *Popular Music* 15:2 (1996): 149-177.

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

Katz, Mark. "Listening in Cyberspace," *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, 158-187. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

### 23 Sep: Artifice and Effect

Chion, Michel. "The Three Listening Modes," "The Real and the Rendered," and "Television, Video Art, Music Video," *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, Translated by Claudia Gorbman, 25-34, 95-122, 157-169. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Théberge, Paul. "The New 'Sound' of Music: Technology and Changing Concepts of Music," *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/Consuming Technology*, 186-213. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.

Fales, Cornelia. "Short Circuiting Perceptual Systems: Timbre in Ambient and Techno Music," *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, 156-180. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.

Collins, Karen. "Introduction," "Press Reset: Video Game Music Comes of Age," and "Gameplay, Genre and the Functions of Game Audio," *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design*, 1-6, 63-84, 123-137. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008 (forthcoming—packet version is uncorrected proof).

#### Recommended:

Arnheim, Rudolf. "In Praise of Blindness," *Radiotext(e)*, edited by Neil Strauss, 20-26. New York: Semiotext(e), 1993 (1936).

Jones, Steve. "A Sense of Space: Virtual Reality, Authenticity and the Aural," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10, no. 3 (1993, September): 238-252.

Kahn, Douglas. "Part I: Significant Noises," *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, 20-67. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

Pinch, Trevor and Frank Trocco. "Introduction: Sculpting Sound," "Shaping the Synthesizer," and "Conclusion: Performance," *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*, 1-11, 53-69, 302-324. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.



## Part II: Voice and Audition

### 30 Sep: The Voice

Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

#### Recommended:

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

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

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

Simon, Sherry. "Accidental Voices: the Return of the Countertenor," in *Aural Cultures*, edited by Jim Drobnick, 110-119. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004.

### 7 Oct: Listening: Phenomenology, Interiority and Beyond

Ihde, Don. "In Praise of Sound," "The Auditory Dimension" and "The Shapes of Sound," *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound*, 3-16, 49-71. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976.

Attali, Jacques. "Listening," *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, translated by Brian Massumi, 3-20. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

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

Schwartz, Hillel. "The Indefensible Ear: A History," *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, 487-501. New York: Berg, 2003.

#### Recommended:

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "Of the Refrain," *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Volume 2*, translated by Brian Massumi, 310-350. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Leppert, Richard. "The Social Discipline of Listening," *Aural Cultures*, edited by Jim Drobnick, 19-35. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004.

Currid, Brian. "Radio, Mass Publicity and National Fantasy," *A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany, 19-64*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Goodman, David. "Distracted Listening: On Not Making Sound Choices in the 1930s," *Sound in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction*, edited by David Suisman and Susan Strasser. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009 (forthcoming).

#### **14 Oct: Measurement, Sound and Hearing**

Edwards, Paul. "Noise, Communication and Cognition," *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America*, 209-237. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Born, Georgina. "Science, Technology, the Music Research Vanguard," *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*, 180-222. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Pearlman, Marc. "Golden Ears and Meter Readers: The Contest for Epistemic Authority in Audiophilia." *Social Studies of Science* 34:5 (2004): 783-807.

Bijsterveld, Karin. "A Booming Business: The Search for a Practical Aircraft Noise Index," *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century*, 193-232.

#### Recommended:

Stevens, Stanley Smith, and Fred Warshofsky. "The Machinery of Hearing," "The Route to the Brain," and "The Mind's Influence," *Sound and Hearing*, 30-84. New York: Time Incorporated, 1965.

Pinch, Trevor. "'Testing – One, Two Three... Testing!': Toward a Sociology of Testing." *Science, Technology and Human Values* 18:1 (Winter 1993): 25-41.

Mindell, David. "Opening Black's Box: The Bell System and the Transmission of Signals," *Between Human and Machine: Feedback, Control and Computing Before Cybernetics*, 105-137. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

### Part III: Sound and Space

#### **21 Oct: Soundscape**

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

Cockayne, Emily. "Noisy," *Hubbub: Filth, Noise & Stench in England*, 106-130. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

LaBelle, Brandon. "Seeking Ursound: Hildegard Westerkamp, Steve Peters, and the Soundscape," *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, 201-217. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Bijsterveld, Karin. "A Sound History of Technological Culture," *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century*, 233-261. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

#### Recommended

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

Weheliye, Alexander. "Consuming Sonic Technologies," *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, 106-144. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Cowan, Michael. "Imagining Modernity through the Ear: Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* and the Noise of Modern Life." *Arcadia* 46:1 (2006): 124-46.

Yablon, Nick. "Echoes of the City: Spacing Sound, Sounding Space, 1888-1916." *New Literary History* 19:3 (2007): 629-660.

Bijsterveld, Karin. "Infernal Din, Heavenly Tunes: Repertoires of Dramatizing Sound," and *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century*, 27-51. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

#### **28 Oct: Sound and Modernity, Recto**

Thompson, Emily. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

28 Oct, 6pm: Emily Thompson public lecture, Schulich Music Building.

**3 November: Project proposals due in my mailbox by 4pm (you are encouraged to submit them early).**

**5 Nov: What's New is Old Again (note: for this week only, class meets W 10-1 in Ferrier Seminar Room)**

Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

6 Nov: Lisa Gitelman speaks at Concordia University (exact time and location TBA)

**11 November: Mobility and Customized Sound**

Hosokawa, Shuhei. "The Walkman Effect." *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 165-80.

Gopinath, Sumanth. "Ringtones, Or the Auditory Logic of Globalization," *First Monday* 10 no. 12 (December 2005):

[http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10\\_12/gopinath/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/gopinath/index.html) .

Castells, Manuel, Mireia Fernández, Jack Linchuan Qiu and Araba Sey.

"Communication and Mobility in Everyday Life," *Mobile Communication and Society: A Global Perspective*, 77-126. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007.

Bull, Michael. "Sound Moves: iPod culture and urban experience: An introduction," "Mobilising of the social: mobile phones and iPods," "Sound timings and iPod culture," and "Endnote: sound mediations," *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 1-11, 66-86, 146-60. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Recommended

Bassett, Caroline. "How Many Movements?" *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, 343-355. New York: Berg, 2003.

Horst, Heather A. and Daniel Miller, "Link-Up," *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*, 81-101. New York: Berg, 2006.

Packer, Jeremy. "Communications Convoy: The CB and Truckers," *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars and Citizenship*, 161-188. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

**18 Nov: Discussion Day on Method**

Readings TBA, based on student interest and projects.

**25 November: Students Present and Discuss Works in Progress**

**8 Dec: Final Paper Due** in the mailbox on my door (by 4pm).