

**SEMINAR IN SOUND STUDIES**  
**COMS/ARTH 646A – FALL 2006**  
Mondays 2:30-5:30pm, W-220 Arts

Jonathan Sterne

Office: Arts W280

Office Phone: 398-5852 (I check voicemail at least once a day MW)

Email: jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca (I check at least once daily M-F when I'm in town)

Office hours: M 12-1 and by appointment

**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):

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. ISBN: 0231078994

Meintjes, Louise. *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. ISBN: 0822330148

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. ISBN: 082233013X

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

Additional recommended readings will be listed in a bibliography at the end of this syllabus, and where possible, they will be placed on reserve at the McClennan Reserve Desk.

## **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 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 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 midnight, Sunday 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 to 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.

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 12<sup>th</sup> of October**
- **a short scholarly talk on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December**
- **a formal scholarly paper of at least 20 pages due by 3:00pm on 12 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 (if necessary) 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 December 4<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 their papers. If you choose to read to us, please make enough copies of your paper 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.

**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 complete 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.

## 11 Sep: Introduction

Apologia.

## 18 Sep: 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 11 September.)

22-23 September: “Invisible Cities” Colloquium at Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec

Featuring several panels of sound scholars and artists including yours truly.  
<http://www.champlibre.com/citeinvisible/uk/index.htm>

## 25 Sep: Sound Aesthetics in Audiovisual Media

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

## 2 Oct: The Studio: Site, Technology, Context

Meintjes, Louise. *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. (Highlighted sections will be announced in class on 25 September.)

5-7 October: Future of Music Policy Summit, Schulich School of Music, McGill University

If I hadn't already promised to be in Berlin at a conference on the history of acoustics that very weekend, I'd be in attendance. <http://www.futureofmusic.org/events/summit06/>.

Note that Pop Montreal is concurrent (4-8 October): <http://www.popmontreal.com/>

9/10 Oct: No class, prof out of town

12 October: **Project Proposal Due** in the mailbox on my door (by 4pm).

### 16 Oct: A Little History (never hurt anyone)

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

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

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

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

#### Recommended:

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

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

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

Gallo, Rubén. "Radio," *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution*, 117-167. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005.

### 23 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:

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.

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: YYY Books, 2004.

**30 Oct: Sound Spaces: Contest and Control**

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).

Thompson, Emily. "Acoustical Materials and Modern Architecture, 1900-1933," *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 169-228. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002.

Rath, Richard Cullen. "No Corner for the Devil to Hide," *How Early America Sounded*, 97-119. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

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

Recommended:

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

Bijsterveld, Karin. "The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age: Technology and Symbolism of Sound in European and North American Noise Abatement Campaigns, 1900-40," *The Auditory Culture Reader*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, 165-189. New York: Berg, 2003.

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

Bull, Michael. "No Dead Air! The iPod and the Culture of Mobile Listening." *Leisure Studies* 24, no. 4 (2005): 343-55.

## 6 November: Analog and Digital, Original and Copy, Tomato and Tomato

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.

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

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.

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

Gopinath, Sumanth. "Ringtones, Or the Auditory Logic of Globalization," *First Monday* 10 no. 12 (December): Available online at [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10\\_12/gopinath/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/gopinath/index.html).

### Recommended:

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).

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

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

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

9 November: Trevor Pinch HPS talk, 5:30pm, Don Bates Seminar Room, Social Studies of Medicine Building, McGill University, 3647 Peel Street

## 13 Nov: S&TS, Musical Instruments and Sound Studies: Trevor Pinch, Special Guest Star

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.

Horning, Susan Schmidt. "Engineering the Performance: Recording Engineers, Tacit Knowledge and the Art of Controlling Sound." *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 703-31.

Pinch, Trevor, and Karin Bijsterveld. "Sound Studies: New Technologies and Music." *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 635-48.

Waksman, Steve. "California Noise: Tinkering with Hardcore and Heavy Metal in Southern California." *Social Studies of Science* 34, no. 5 (2004): 675-702.

Recommended:

The rest of Pinch, Trevor, and Frank Trocco. *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

The rest of the October 2004 issue of *Social Studies of Science*, available online at <http://sss.sagepub.com/content/vol34/issue5/> (note that you will need to log in from a campus computer or run your VPN if reading from home).

Pinch, Trevor, and Wiebe Bijker. "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other." *Social Studies of Science* 14, no. 3 (1984): 399-441.

**20 Nov: Voice and Subject Formation**

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.

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

Fox, Aaron. Excerpt from "Voicing Working-Class Culture" and "The Art of Singing: Speech and Song in Performance," *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, 37-45, 272-299. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Recommended:

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.

Gaines, Jane. "'These Boots are Made for Walkin': Nancy Sinatra and the Goodyear Tire Sound-Alike," *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law*, 105-142. London: BFI, 1992.

Best, Stephen M. "The Human Phonograph," *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession*, 54-65. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

### **27 November: Silence, Audism and the Limits of Sound Studies**

Burke, Peter. "Notes for a Social History of Silence in Early Modern Europe," *The Art of Conversation*, 123-141. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Davis, Lennard. "Universalizing Marginality: How Europe Became Deaf in the Eighteenth Century," *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*, 50-72. New York: Verso, 1995.

Rée, Jonathan. "Introduction: The Magic of the Voice" and "The Making of the Deaf: The Reproduction of Sign-Language Communities 1880-1980," *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language and the Senses, a Philosophical History*, 1-11, 230-243. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000.

Corker, Mairian. "Sensing Disability." *Hypatia* 16, no. 4 (2001): 34-52.

#### Recommended:

Lane, Harlan. "Constructions of Deafness." *Disability and Society* 10, no. 2 (1995): 171-89.

Baynton, Douglas. "Introduction," *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language*, 1-14. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Edwards, Martha L. "Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece." *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 29-51. New York: Routledge, 1997.

### **4 Dec: Presentations of Student Projects**

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