SOUND STUDIES
Martin Scherzinger

This course examines central themes in the emerging field of “Sound Studies”. We explore a range of histories, archeologies and ethnographies of sound and listening, as it intersects with topics in media studies, science and technology studies, political economy and musicology. How has our experience of sound changed as we move from the piano to the personal computer, from the phonoautograph to the mp3? How have political, commercial, and cultural forces shaped what we are able to listen to, and how we listen to it? Finally, how have performers, physiologists, acousticians, engineers and philosophers worked to understand this radical transformation of the senses?

Students should be able to describe and analyze technologies of sound production and reproduction over the last two centuries. They should also be able to describe, contrast and analyze (1) disciplinary, (2) metaphysical, (3) ideological, and (4) musical approaches to sound and listening over the last two centuries. Finally, students should be able to critically assess the way various communicative media have shaped how sound is made, used and heard in our times.

Readings
There are some books that are essential to this course. While it is not mandatory to purchase them, you may want them for your library. All are in print and available through major booksellers.


All the assigned book excerpts and articles listed on the course schedule will be made available through the New York University Blackboard system.

I will also try to upload as many audio examples as possible. These will also be found on the Blackboard site under “Course Documents” (in the folder named “Audio Examples”). Any CDs or videos that are placed on reserve will be in the Avery Fisher Center for Music and Media (on the second floor of the Bobst Library).

Assignments

Weekly Assignments
For most weeks you will be asked to post a short response paper or a fragment of your research to the Blackboard “Discussion Board.” Your submission will usually be due by 6.00 p.m. the Saturday or Sunday evening before our next class meeting. This deadline is not negotiable. Remember, this seminar is being conceived of as a collaborative endeavor—your participation, contributions, and insights are essential. Your five best submissions will constitute 50% of your grade. Please respect the other members of this seminar by posting your work by the Sunday evening deadline.

To post to the Discussion Board:
Click on the button labeled “Communication” on the left-hand side of the Blackboard homepage for this course.
Click on “Discussion Board.”
Click on the appropriate topic.
Click on “Add New Thread” button at the top left of the page.

Attach your response to the message (there is not enough space in the box for detailed responses or large files. Note: I believe that you do need to add a subject and at least a character in the box labeled “Message” in order for your thread to be uploaded). Further information on the weekly assignments will be given in class.
Sound/Video/Web Examples
You will frequently be expected to upload a sound, video or web example that illustrates some of the major themes covered in the reading for that particular week. There will be folders for this purpose on the Discussion Board. Also, insofar as it's possible, you should bring these examples with you to class.

Research Paper
In addition to the in-class assignments, a final research paper on an original topic that highlights aspects of modern aural culture is required for this course. We will discuss options for this paper throughout the semester (eg. an analysis of the advertising campaign for Apple’s iPod, an ethnography of the sonic environment of New York’s public spaces, a concert report on a musical event or concert, an account of the aesthetics of sound for the 2010 election campaigns, a diagnosis of recent music/sound/recording software and its cultural impact, a history of a musical genre, etc.) This paper should be in the range of ten to fifteen pages. Further information on this assignment will be given in class. The paper will be due by the last day of class.

Evaluation Standards and Policies

A=Excellent. Outstanding work in all respects. Demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of course material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well focussed and original insights, and well reasoned commentary and analysis. Includes skilful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and contains no grammatical or typographical errors.

B=Good. This work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of course material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials and examples are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Paper has been carefully proofread.

C=Adequate/fair. This work demonstrates understanding that hits in the ballpark but which remains superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing or articulation may appear vague, hard to follow, or loaded with typos and other technical errors.

D= Unsatisfactory. This work demonstrates a serious lack or error in understanding, and fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the course. Sources may be used entirely inappropriately or not at all, and writing is deficient.

F=Failed. Work not submitted or attempted.

Grading Rubric

five written assignments (10 % each)
one oral presentation (10 %)
final research paper (20%)
class participation (20%)
COURSE SCHEDULE
Current Themes in Historical Perspective

Week 1: Mass-Mediated Sound: Culture Industry after the Second World War


Additional Reading:

Listening:
“Adorno on Popular Music” on youtube.com

Week 2: Radio, Mass Culture, and the Age of Unending War


Additional Reading:

Listening:
Creed, “With Arms Wide Open” [Analyze]
Creed, “Higher” [Analyze]
Lady Gaga, Various
A current piece of popular (a.k.a.) successful recent radio music of your own choice

ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE

Week 3: Sonic Branding


Week 4: Censored Sound


Additional Reading:
Viewing/Listening:
Dixie Chicks, *Shut Up and Sing!*
Madonna, “American Life” on salon.com or youtube.com

**ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE**

**Week 5: Sound and Signal**

Technologies of Listening


**Week 6: A Short History of Sound Reproduction**


Additional Readings:
See website: “Earliest Sound Reconsidered” NPR – All things considered, 2009
See website: HYPERLINK "http://videointerchange.com/audio_history.htm"

Week 7: Audible Futures: From High Fidelity to Hyper Fidelity


Additional Readings:
Read, Olvier and Welch, Walter. From Tinfoil to Stereo: The Acoustic Years of the Recording Industry

Week 8: Mobile Sound, Cybersound, and Customization


Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies, Ch. 10, Sherry Turkle, “Always-On/Always-on-You: The Tethered Self”; Ch. 14, Naomi Baron, “Adjusting the Volume: Technology and Multitasking in Discourse Control”


Lanier, Jaron. You are Not a Gadget
ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE

Metaphysics of Listening

Week 9: Paradoxes of Reproducibility: Figures of Musical Sound in Continental Philosophy
(Another Short History)


Additional Reading:


Listening:
Selected examples from Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, Chopin, Mahler, and others

Week 10: Music and Critical Modernism: Negative Dialectics, Productive Rhizome, and Deconstructive Resonance


Derrida, Jacques. Various excerpts from Margins of Philosophy, Points, and Monolingualism of the Other

Listening:
Selected examples from Anton Webern, Arnold Schoenberg, Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Helmut Lachenmann, Mozart, and Beethoven

Ideologies of Listening

Week 11: Sonic Interpellation and Soundscapes of Public Space


Wee 12: Music, War and Peace


Jon Pieslak, Sound Targets, excerpts

Goodman, Steven. Sonic Warfare, excerpt


Additional Reading

**Listening:**
Selected examples from Metallica, ACDC, Bruce Springsteen, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, and others

**ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE**

**Week 13: Auricular Aspects of News and Propaganda**


Ellul, Jacques. *Propaganda* (excerpts)

**Viewing:**
Sut Jhally, Justin Lewis, Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky. The Myth of the Liberal Media: the Propaganda Model of News

**“Unmediated” Listening: Immediacy, Presence**

**Week 14: Performance, Sensation, Liveness**


ASSIGNMENT 5 DUE

Further Possibilities

**Iconographies of Sound: Race, Gender, Sexuality**
Readings will include Diamanda Galas (see also timbre), Mendi Obadike, Jacques Attali, Ralph Locke, Edward Said, Fanon, Bhabha, Gilman, Hall, Tricia Rose, Rob Walser, Susan McClary, Ellie Hisama, Gary Thomas, Wayne Koestenbaum, and Ruth Solie.

**Colonial Encounters: Representing Sound of Africa**
Readings include Veit Erlmann, Louise Meintjes, Philip Bohlman and Ronald Radano, Thomas Turino, Alex Pongweni, David Lan, Francis Nyamjo, Folu Ogundimu, Paulin Hountondji, Kofi Agawu, Akin Euba, Zabana Kongo, Willie Anku, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Chinua Achebe.

**Special Topics**
Timbre, Sirens, Silence, Noise, Echoes, Resonance, Repetition, Visual Aesthetics of Sound, Psychoanalysis of the Broadway Musical, Ethics of Listening