expressive culture: sounds, Spring 2004, v55.0703.008
lecture T/TH 11:00-12:15, Rm. 714 Main
Professor Gage Averill
Preceptors: Amy Valladares, Rachel Coupe, Rachel Ives

GOALS: EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: SOUNDS challenges conventional notions of
the importance, function, and meaning of sound (voice, silence, noise, music,
etc.) in human life. Our primary goal is to foster a new kind of musical “literacy”
with higher standards for hearing, experiencing, analyzing and discussing
music—equal to the task of navigating in a rapidly evolving soundscape of
mediated and multicultural musics. The course has a strong bias toward making
sense of the sound environments in which we find ourselves.

This course is intended to:

--Provide a foundation for understanding how sounds are made and perceived.
Thus we study the science of sounds (acoustics) and the mechanics of hearing
or auditory perception (psychoacoustics)

--Increase students' awareness of and sensitivity to sounds and sound
environments/soundscapes (acoustic ecology) as well as those over the course
of human history (sonic history)

--Teach basic concepts and terminology with which to discuss sound and music
and provide students with the tools to understand their own and others' enjoiyment of sound and music. This will take place primarily in the sections and
will dovetail with the themes of class.

--Underline the important role that sound and music play in human life, society
and culture. We will highlight the diversity of human uses and approaches to
sound and music and to the production of meaning in music.

--Foster a critical awareness of the use of sound in commercial media and
mediated environments, focusing on film and advertising.

The course comprises a series of modules, which are listed on the Course
Outline. Examples are selected from a wide range of historical periods and
different musical cultures to encourage you to think about sound and musical
expression across boundaries of time, space, culture, and academic disciplines.
This course crosses, but introduces students to, the various disciplines related to
sound and music such as Audiology, Acoustic Ecology, Acoustical Engineering
(acousticians), Bioacoustics, Composition, Historical Musicology, Cultural
Anthropology (anthropology of the senses), Music Theory, performance art,
Ethnomusicology, popular and film music studies, and the various sound-related
positions in film (sound designer, sound editor, foley artist, foley editor, ADR
engineer, and many more).
Building blocks
VIDEO. The Anneberg/CPB series “Exploring a World of Music” is central to the
content of the lectures and the preceptorial sessions. You will be responsible for
video content, especially the basic ideas and main examples in each, SO take
notes and keep an account of the videos you see. The video material is
reinforced in classroom lectures and preceptorial sessions. These videos are in
the possession of Bobst Library and can be viewed at any time in the Avery
Fisher Audiovisual Center, Floor 2.

SLIDES. Class lectures typically will be accompanied by multimedia e-slide
presentations and these will be available on the website generally within a week
after the lecture. I will load these as Powerpoint documents which can be viewed
with the free Powerpoint reader available on the Microsoft website.

AUDIO RECORDINGS. Most audio examples used in class will be burned onto
CD and available for listening either in the Avery Fisher Audiovisual Center on
the 2nd Floor of Bobst Library or as a streaming audio from the Library,
accessible through a link on this class blackboard site.

WEB PAGES. The course web pages contain the syllabus, course outline,
course information, contact information for the professor and preceptors,
announcements, student grades, assignments, links to the Bobst Library’s
streaming music examples for this course, study guides, and bulletin boards for
communications. A general course informational bulletin board will be set up for
general questions of interest to the entire class. Assignments will be posted for
the following class NO LATER than the preceding class period, so check the site
often.

READINGS. There are three reading sources required for the course. The first is
the book/CD package that accompanies the videos, called Exploring the World of
Music by Dorothea E. Hast, James R. Cowdery and Stan Scott (Annenberg/CPB
Multimedia Collection, New York: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1999). This is
available at the NYU Bookstore. The second is a course reading packet available
at Advanced Copy on Laguaydia Street. The third is a book available from
Amazon.com for $10.47 (can also be ordered through other web suppliers, such
as B&N.com or Half.com) called The Soundscape, by R. Murray Schafer, Inner

MUSICAL ENCOUNTERS. We will visit one or more concerts/performances and
also have musical visitors in class for anywhere from 15 minutes to the entire
session. Keep notes on these encounters (on the performer, the genre,
instruments, basic ideas expressed)
Policies

PRECEPTORIAL SESSIONS: Preceptorials will emphasize student participation and discussion, which are difficult to facilitate in the large lectures. The preceptorial section of class will be devoted to creating a common language and conceptual framework for elements of musical sound and to building listening skills that students can use throughout their lives. The lab sequence (as well as some lecture topics) will be linked to the video series "Exploring a World of Music" (Annenberg/CPB). In addition to the assignments given in class and on this syllabus, preceptors will assign short written assignments.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance at all lectures and preceptorial sections is mandatory. Students should check in with their preceptor before the start or after the end of lecture. More than three recorded absences at the lectures OR labs (without a note from a Dean or doctor) will result in a loss of a full grade step for the course. Each additional absence will do the same. Please plan to be in class on time and to spend the entire session. Late arrivals or early departures may be counted as absences. Also, TURN OFF ALL CELLULAR PHONES AND BEEPERS.

ASSIGNMENTS: Written assignments, listening assignments, and reading assignments must be completed by the class (or preceptorial session) on the date they appear as "due". Written assignments will be marked down by a full grade (for ex. A to A-) for each class session they are overdue. Check the dates and times of the midterm and final exams now. No early or make-up exams can be given.

GRADING: Papers will be graded with letter grades from A-F and the two non-cumulative exams will be graded on a 100-point basis. The exams utilize a variety of question types (e.g. short answer, multiple choice, and listening questions) and will test mastery of basic concepts, terms, and listening skills. Each accounts for 25% of your grade. Papers are intended to emphasize writing, descriptive, critical, analytic and rhetorical skills. Papers will be assigned by the preceptors in consultation with the professor. Preceptors will announce how these will be weighed, but the preceptorial section will account for 50% of your final grade. Credible evidence of plagiarism or cheating in examinations or papers will be reported to the Dean of the College and will result in a failing grade for the course. This is not subject to after-the-fact negotiation. No incompletes can be given for the course and there are no extra credit projects assigned.

Course Outline
MODULE I. SOUND FOUNDATIONS
What is sound, how do we perceive it, and how do we relate to sound, noise, and silence? This module explores fundamentals in our understanding of the natural history of sound (as well as silence and noise) and listening.

Class / Date / Topic
1. 1/20 Sound / Silence / Noise
2. 1/22 Waves & vibrations (acoustics & the science of sound)
3. 1/27 Resonance and spatial acoustics
4. 1/29 Hearing & audition
5. 2/3 The biophony & bioacoustics (Animal sound) 1
6. 2/5 The biophony & bioacoustics (Animal sound) 2

MODULE II. SOUNDLY ORGANIZED HUMANITY
Something like music plays a role in every human society—our relationship to sound helps to form us as human beings. It accompanies us in all of our momentous passages from childhood lullabies to wedding music to death laments. It structures our religious rituals and serves as a communicative medium with the spiritual realm. It helps to form our most important memories and to create our sense of individual and collective identity.

Class / Date / Topic
7. 2/10 Soundscape analysis, engineering, recording
8. 2/12 Soundscape 2: Case Studies (Tuva, Bells)
9. 2/17 The transformative power of sound 1: Movement, ritual, emotion & the sacred
10. 2/19 The transformative power of sound 2: Secular ritual and politics
11. 2/24 Music & memory 1: Case studies (Australian Aboriginal & Malian jaliya)
12. 2/26 Music and memory 2: Case study (Irish Traditional). Musical encounter: Washington Square Ceilidh Orchestra

Sunday February 29: Visit to the Balinese gamelan performance, Kimmel Center.

13. 3/2 Musical transmission and learning
14. 3/4 MIDTERM EXAMINATION

MODULE III: THE ART OF NOISE
The 20th century has unleashed an unprecedented assault on previous conceptions of music — an assault that has sought to expand our experience of sound and our tolerance and appreciation for dissonance and noise. This module charts the rise of noise over the last century, from futurism to ambient music, experimental instruments, sampling, and deejaying. We will also make a class visit to a performance of the hit musical “Stomp!”

Class / Date / Topic
15. 3/9 Noise, futurism, and the social history of distortion
16. 3/11 Ambient & ubiquitous music: “furniture music” to Muzak and Brian Eno
17. 3/23 John Cage’s all-sound music: silences, amplifications, & unintentionality.
   Film: “Sound?!"
18. 3/25 Musical encounter: Ronnie Nogetsu Reishin Seldin, shakuhachi
19. 3/30 Experimental instruments: Theremin to synthesizers & Stomp.
20. 4/1 Voice / word: Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Bobby McFerrin, Diamanda Galas, Pauline Oliveros
21. 4/6 Musique Concrète, Tape Loops, Sampling, Djs, & turntablism. Digital
dilemmas.

[Class visit to “Stomp”: Date & time TBA]

MODULE IV. TRACKS: SOUND IN FILM (& RELATED MEDIA)
Our soundscapes are increasingly supplied by commercial culture industries and
channeled through electronic media (radio, television, cinema, CDs, video
games, the World Wide Web) for profit. An average Westerner spends much of
his or her waking life consuming — intentionally or not — the sonic products of
commercial culture. It is thus more important than ever to be aware of the logic of
sound in the media, especially because sound is designed to be most effective
below the level of conscious perception. This module uses “Hollywood” film
soundtracks and scores as the means to investigate these processes and
relations, but we’ll also extend our analysis to advertising and to television.

Class / Date / Topic
22. 4/8 Radio, broadcast, nationalism, & radio art
23. 4/13 History of film sound from silents to the “golden era”
24. 4/15 The American Movie Score (film)
25. 4/20 The structure of soundtracks & filmsound
26. 4/22 Filmscore analysis
27. 4/27 Pop song soundtracks, compilation films & classical music tracks
28. 4/29 Advertising & the logic of commercial sound: Jingles & background
sound.

TBA Final Examination
READING ASSIGNMENTS
Assignments should be read prior to the date of the class on which they’re listed below.

MODULE I. SOUND FOUNDATIONS
1. 1/20 Sound / Silence / Noise
2. 1/22 Waves & vibrations (acoustics & the science of sound)
3. 1/27 Resonance
   Visit and experiment with relevant parts of the website “The Soundry
   Read short 20/20 excerpt on Alvin Lucier (reading packet)
4. 1/29 Hearing & audition
5. 2/3 The biophony & bioacoustics (Animal sound) 1
6. 2/5 The biophony & bioacoustics (Animal sound) 2
   Visit at least two of the websites listed under animal sound, and sample

MODULE II. SOUNDLY ORGANIZED HUMANITY
7. 2/10 Soundscales 1: Soundscape analysis, engineering, recording
   Read Schafer, R. Murray, The Soundscape.
8. 2/12 Soundscales 2: Case Studies (Tuva, Bells)
   Finish Schafer, read Chapter 1 of Exploring the World of Music: Sound,
   Music, and the Environment
9. 2/17 The transformative power of sound 1: Movement, ritual, emotion & the
   sacred
   Read Chapter 2, Exploring the World of Music: The Transformative Power
   of Music
10. 2/19 The transformative power of sound 2: Secular ritual and politics
11. 2/24 Music & memory 1: Case studies (Australian Aboriginal & Malian jaliya)
    Read Chapter 3 Exploring the World of Music: Music and Memory
12. 2/26 Music and memory 2: Case study (Irish Traditional).
13. 3/2 Musical transmission and learning
    Read Chapter 4, Exploring the World of Music: Transmission: Learning
    Music.

MODULE III: THE ART OF NOISE
15. 3/9 Noise, futurism, and the social history of distortion
    (reading packet) and additional 3-page reading on Russolo.
16. 3/11 Ambient & ubiquitous music: “furniture music” to Muzak and Brian Eno
    Read Lanza, Joseph, “The Sound of Cottage Cheese (Why Background
    Music is the Real World Beat!),” (reading packet)
17. 3/23 John Cage’s all-sound music: silences, amplifications, & unintentionality.
Film: “Sound?!”
Read John Cage: Sonatas and Interludes (1948), (reading packet)
18. 3/25 Musical encounter: Ronnie Nogetsu Reishin Seldin, shakuhachi
Read Chapter 12, Exploring a World of Music: Music Technology
19. 3/30 Experimental instruments: Theremin to synthesizers & Stomp.
Read all Ellipsis excerpts (reading packet)
20. 4/1 Voice / word: Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Bobby McFerrin,
Diamanda Galas, Pauline Olivieros
Read 20/20 excerpts on Anderson and Monk.
21. 4/6 Musique Concrète, Tape Loops, Sampling, DJs, & turntablism. Digital dilemmas.
Read Cutler, Chris, “Plunderphonics,” (reading packet)

MODULE IV. TRACKS: SOUND IN FILM (& RELATED MEDIA)
22. 4/8 Radio, broadcast, nationalism, & radio art
TBA
23. 4/13 History of film sound from silents to the “golden era”
The readings for this and other classes on film sound will be drawn from the website http://www.filmsound.org/ TBA.
24. 4/15 The American Movie Score (film)
25. 4/20 The structure of soundtracks & filmsound
26. 4/22 Filmscore analysis
27. 4/27 Pop song soundtracks, compilation films & classical music tracks
28. 4/29 Advertising & the logic of commercial sound: Jingles & background sound.

READING PACKET (with a couple additions to come)


Cutler, Chris, “Plunderphonics,” (get cites)

PLUS: Something from Radio Art and Meat.

Selections from 20/20:
Alvin Lucier: I Am Sitting in a Room (1969)
Laurie Anderson: O Superman (1983)
John Cage: Sonatas and Interludes (1948)
Selections from Orbitrons, etc.
Luigi Russolo: Intonarumori
Leon Theremin: The Theremin
Harry Partch: Instruments of the Harry Partch Ensemble
Bill Colvig and Lou Harrison: American Gamelan
John Cage: Prepared Piano
Stomp: Everything