Expressive Culture: Sounds
Morse Academic Program (V55.0730.015-019)
New York University
Spring 2006
Monday/Wednesday 2:00-3:15pm
Silver Center 302

Instructor: Dr. Jason Stanyek
Email: jstanyek@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:30-5:00 or by appointment
Office: Waverly Building, Room 268
Office Phone: 212-998-8314

Preceptor: Dr. Talia Jimenez-Ramirez
Email: tj201@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:00
Office: Silver Center, Room 219

Course Description
In a recent article entitled “Performing the (Sound)World” the sonic geographer Susan J. Smith provocatively asks: “What would happen if we thought about space in terms of its acoustical properties rather than in terms of its transparency or topography? What would happen to the way we think, to the things we know, to the relationships we enter, to our experience of time and space, if we fully took on board the idea that the world is for hearing rather than beholding, for listening to, rather than for looking at?” This semester we will make a valiant effort to take Smith’s questions seriously. We’ll think about how sound functions acoustically and we’ll consider the kinds of physiological work it does on human bodies. We’ll examine how sounds get embedded within legal structures, how they get realized as economic strategies, how they become forms of memory and belonging. We’ll try to unpack the role sounds play in the construction of geographies, spaces, borders, difference, power. We’ll ask questions about how sounds make us feel, how they act as stimuli to make us move, dance, act, perform, about how we use them to make sense of where we’re at. Our inquiries will also take us to the machines and technologies that produce, store, and disseminate sounds and the institutions and industries that market and sell various forms of aural culture. And we’ll be listening to a wide range of sounds: musics from all over the world, film soundtracks, podcasts, ringtones, environmental and ambient soundscapes, sounds that we run to, run away from, dream about, buy, sell, copy, create. In essence, we’ll be doing a critical acoustic politics, deeply engaging with the sonic contours of everyday life.

Required Texts

2. The bulk of the readings for this course are articles and book chapters drawn from a wide variety of sources. All of these will be turned into PDF files and made available through the New York University Blackboard system. To access these articles:
1. Go to: http://home.nyu.edu
2. Log in.
3. Click on the tab labeled “Academics.” There you’ll find a link to the course EXPRESSIVE CULT: SOUNDS (V55.0730.015-019.SP06). Click on this link.
4. Once you’re in the site for the course click on the tab labeled “Course Documents.”
5. Find the book excerpts or articles that you need (they are organized by dates of class meetings).

Grading
• Journal: **30%** (entries to be submitted electronically before each recitation meeting)
• Response Papers: **30%**
• Attendance and participation **15%**
• Quizzes and/or other assignments: **5%**
• Final examination: **20%** (Take-home essay due by Monday, May 8 at 3:50pm)

Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-96</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-76</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-63</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-below</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examination and Assignment Policy

There are no makeups for missed exams or assignments except under the most unusual circumstances. To request a makeup exam or an extension for an assignment a legitimate excuse must be submitted in writing no later than one class period after the exam is given or the assignment is due, and must be accompanied by written evidence. For example, if you were sick, you must provide a note from a doctor, with his/her name, address and phone number.

Integrity of Scholarship

Plagiarizing (or other forms of academic dishonesty) can result in an “F” for the course and can lead to further disciplinary action by the University. For more information please see the section entitled “Academic Integrity” in the College of Arts and Science Bulletin, available at:

http://cas.nyu.edu/object/bulletin0406.ug.academicpolicies.html

Methods of Evaluation

Grades will be based on response papers, journal entries, a final exam, and (possible) quizzes and/or other assignments. Attendance and participation in class discussions will also be crucially important and will figure heavily in your final grade.

Final Examination: The final examination for this course will ask you to write an essay that synthesizes the material we cover during the entire semester. You will be urged to use the written material you generate for your weekly journal assignments and response papers. More information on this assignment will be given in class. The paper will be due by Monday, May 8 at 3:50pm. Late papers will not be accepted.

Response Papers and Journal

As a participant in this course you are required to do fifteen weeks of critical thinking on sound. To this end you will be expected produce writings that will provide tangible evidence that you are indeed going through the process of thinking through some of the core issues that we will be dealing with in this course. These writings will be of two types: (1) formal response papers (2) informal journal entries.
There will be approximately three or four response papers, each in the range of 3-5 pages. Possible topics might revolve around (1) specific questions based on the assigned books or essays (2) fieldwork assignments (concert attendance, ethnographic interviews, etc.) (3) general questions on the politics of sound. These assignments must be typed with appropriate citations and must be submitted at the class meeting indicated on the assignment sheet. Late papers will not be accepted.

This course also requires that you keep a journal for which you will submit an entry electronically before each recitation meeting. Your writings should include responses to the reading and listening assignments and you should address questions that are broached in lecture. At times, we will give specific prompts for particular journal entries.

Your journal doesn’t need to be overly formal. The most important thing is that you write on a regular basis (see below for when and how to post entries). Grades will be based upon your level of engagement with the course materials and the critical acumen you bring to your interpretations of the readings and listening examples. In some cases we will accept “non-written” journal entries (photographic essays, soundpieces, videos, recordings of interviews, and so on). If you do plan to submit a non-written entry please let us know ahead of time.

Posting Journal Entries
All journal entries must be submitted electronically through New York University’s Blackboard system. Your entries are due before each recitation meeting. We will be extremely clear about the due dates for all assignments.

As mentioned above, we do not expect your journal entries to be formal. Providing personal (and, perhaps, experimental) interpretations of the course materials is what this assignment is all about. You do need to write on a consistent basis though. The pedagogical point of the journal assignment is to make sure that everyone in the class is moving through the same material at the same pace. Please be conscientious about doing these assignments in a timely fashion.

I would suggest writing your journal entries on your own computer and pasting or uploading them into Blackboard. Keep all of your submissions clearly labeled and organized in their own folder on your personal hard drive. This way, if there’s a problem you will have a backup copy. We will not accept hard copies of your journal entries.

A few important notes: (1) you can only submit these entries up until the time your recitation meets. After that, you lose not only the ability to access the assignment but also the credit for that assignment (2) you can only submit your assignment a single time. Once you hit “submit” it is sent to us and you cannot get it back in a form that can be edited.

To submit journal entries:

(1) Go to: http://home.nyu.edu
(2) Log in.
(3) Click on the tab labeled “Academics.” There you’ll find a link to the course EXPRESSIVE CULT: SOUNDS (V55.0730.015-019.SP06). Click on this link.
(4) Click on the “Assignments” button in the top left corner.
(5) Click on the appropriate assignment.
(6) Upload (as an attachment) or paste in your response.
(7) Log out.
Class Schedule

All reading assignments are to be completed before the lecture for which they are listed. All articles are available through the New York University Blackboard system (see page 1 of this syllabus for details on how to access these articles). Readings are subject to change (any modifications to this schedule will announced well ahead of time).

Wednesday January 18
Course Introduction

No Readings

Monday January 23
(Sound)Worlds/Soundscapes

Readings:
- Schafer, R. Murray. “Soundscapes and Earwitnesses.” and “Open Ears.”
- Smith, Susan J. “Performing the (Sound)World.”
- Feld, Steven. “A Rainforest Acoustemology.”

Wednesday January 25
On the Politics of Listening

Readings:
- Attali, Jacques. “Listening.”
- Tonkis, Fran. “Aural Postcards: Sound, Memory and the City.”
- Barthes, Roland. “Listening.”
- Carter, Paul. “Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space.”
- McCartney, Andra. “Soundscape Works, Listening and the Touch of Sound.”
- Conner, Steven. “Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing.”
- Sloboda, John A. “Everyday Uses of Music Listening: A Preliminary Study.”

Monday January 30
A Methodological Approach to the Study of Sonic Culture

Reading (required book):

Wednesday February 1
iPods, Headphones and Sonic Compression

Readings:
- Boyer, Bill. “A Curious Circumstance of the iPod Shuffle.” Available online at http://work.billtron.org/ipod/
- Thibaud, Jean Paul. “The Sonic Composition of the City.”
- Bull, Michael. “Thinking about Sound, Proximity, and Distance in Western Experience: The Case of Odysseus’s Walkman.”
Monday February 6  
Aural Geographies: Sound and Spatial Politics

Readings:  
- Connell, John and Chris Gibson. “Into the Music” and “Marketing Place: Music and Tourism.”  
- Lee, Tong Soon. “Technology and the Production of Islamic Space: The Call to Prayer in Singapore.”

Wednesday February 8  
Sites and Sounds/Acoustics and Architectures

Readings:  
- Sato, Minoru. “Place: Concerning Its Concept and Measurement.”  
- LaBelle, Brandon. “Site Specific Sound.”  
- Small, Christopher. “A Place for Hearing.”  
- Thompson, Emily. “Introduction: Sound, Modernity, and History.”

Monday February 13  
Noise

Readings:  
- Meszaros, Beth. “Infernal Sound Cues: Aural Geographies and the Politics of Noise.”  

Wednesday February 15  
The Corporatization of Sound: Ringtones, Muzak and the Noise of Commercial Space

Readings:  
- Basset, Caroline. “How Many Movements?”  
- Sterne, Jonathan. “Sounds Like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space.”

Monday February 20  
Sonic Economies and the Work of Genre

- Hull, Geoffrey P. “Understanding the Recording Industry.”  
- Toynbee, Jason. “Genre-Culture.”

Wednesday February 22  
(Il)legal: Copyright and the Regulation of Sonic Consumption

Readings:  
Monday February 27

*Technologies: Instruments, Actor Networks and the Production of Sounds*

**Readings:**
- Zak, Albin J. “Tracking and Mixing.”

Wednesday March 1

*Casting Sound: Radios and Pods*

**Readings:**
- Tacchi, Jo. “Nostalgia and Radio Sound.”

Monday March 6

*Hearing Film*

**Readings:**
- Kassabian, Anahid. “How Film Music Works.”
- Chion, Michel. “Audio-Vision and Sound.”

Wednesday March 8

*Seeing Music*

**Readings:**
- Vernalis, Carol. *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (excerpts)
- Jones, Steve and Martin Sorger. “Covering Music: A Brief History and Analysis of Album Cover Design.”

Monday March 13 (No Class, Spring Break)

Wednesday March 15 (No Class, Spring Break)

Monday March 20

*Sounding Time: Groove, Repetition and Microtiming*

**Readings:**
- Middleton, Richard. “In the Groove or Blowing Your Mind?: The Pleasures of Musical Repetition.”
- Filmer, Paul. “Songtime: Sound Culture, Rhythm and Sociality.”
Wednesday March 22  
_Aural Archives: Individual and Collective (Sonic) Memory_

**Readings:**  
- DeNora, Tia. “Music as a Technology of the Self.”

Monday March 27  
_Voices/Texts/Bodies_

**Readings:**  
- Tongeren, Mark C. van. “Singing Harmonics.”  
- Sundberg, Johan. “Where Does the Sound Come From?”  
- Kleege, Georgina. “Voices in My Head.”

Wednesday March 29  
_Corporealities: Trance, Emotion, Religious Experience_

**Readings:**  

Monday April 3  
_Feeling Sound: A Short History of Bass_

**Readings:**  

Wednesday April 5  
_Liveness_

**Readings:**  

Monday April 10  
_Another Kind of Liveness: Karaoke, Worldwide_

**Readings:**  

Wednesday April 12  
_On Sonic Creativity_

**Readings:**  
Monday April 17
Improvising Sounds and Sonic Spaces
Readings:
• Hebdige, Dick. “Even unto Death: Improvisation, Edging, and Enframement.”

Wednesday April 19
Performance and Power I: The Sonic Construction of Gender
Readings:

Monday April 24
Performance and Power II: The Sonic Construction of Race
Readings:
• Cornyetz, Nina. “Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan.”

Wednesday April 26
Conclusions
(No readings)