Syllabus version 1
(Tue Jan 23, 2018 08:00 AM - Wed Jan 31, 2018 08:00 AM)

Core UA-730 (8146)

**Expressive Culture: Sounds**

New York University

Spring 2018

Mo-We 11:00-12:15 + recitation session

Silver 320

Professor: David Samuels (dws2004@nyu.edu)

Office hours: Wednesday 2-4 or by appointment

Office: 24 Waverly Place, Room 268, Office 266L

Alexandra McIe (alm735@nyu.edu);

Section 2, F 9:30-10:45, Silver 218

Section 3, F 11:00-12:15, Silver 218

Preceptors: Joseph Pfender (jwp304@nyu.edu);

Section 4, F 9:30-10:45, Silver 220

Section 5, F 11:00-12:15, Silver 220

**Course Synopsis**

This class explores the role of sound in the social, perceptual, and cultural dimensions of human life. Over the course of the twentieth century thoughts, opinions, and observations about music were strongly involved in forming the ethical discourse about what it meant to be human in the modern world. Put another way, people involved in ethical discourse about the “good” and the “human” often drew on thoughts about musical sounds and musical practices in order to scaffold their arguments. The goal of this course is to begin to understand how and why music played this role in the production and circulation of ideas about human life and values. The discussion will center on four interrelated topics: (1) Cities, (2) Commerce, (3) Technology, and (4) Sound. These rubrics are clumsy but general cover terms for a series of interrelated discussions during the twentieth century: about the human values gained and lost in the process of urbanization; about the relative value of sales and art; about the technological advances of high fidelity; about Dylan “going electric” at the 1965
Newport Folk Festival; about the value of harpsichords vs. pianos in the performance of Baroque music; about the use of vibrato in singing classical music; about homage and appropriation.

Class Procedures

Class sessions will be devoted to discussing issues raised in the readings and listening selections. Part of our task will be to dive into a number of interwoven debates about the social life of sound. You should feel free to bring in materials and examples that will enhance our discussions by illustrating a point that you might want to make.

Readings are due on the day they are listed. It is very important that you complete reading assignments on time. This class cannot work unless everyone is coming to play.

There is one book for this class.


It’s available to you in several ways. Of course, copies have been ordered for purchase at the NYU Book Store (726 Broadway). You can also access it as an E-book through the Bobst Library website. And, of course, you can purchase it through any online resources you prefer.

Additional required readings, if they are not available electronically through Bobst, will be available as .pdf files through NYU Classes. For on-line resources we will provide links. We will provide clickable links, whenever possible, to the online version of the syllabus in NYU Classes.

Writing

There are five writing assignments during the semester. They all take the form of critical essays of moderate length.

a) Three critical essays of moderate (2-3 pgs.) length.

b) Writing assignment #3 takes the form of a take-home midterm. The questions to be answered for this assignment will be arrived at in consultation with the class.

c) The final writing assignment (#5) is a more substantial final project, meant to help you cap off the themes of the semester by finding a topic to explore that holds some personal interest for you. This final project can take a number of forms, but all must include a substantial and well-executed written component.
All written work must be word-processed, in 12-pt. Times or comparable font, with 1-inch margins all around. Your approach should display evidence of critical engagement with course readings, listening, and discussions. The essays will be beautifully written, innovative, focused, and free from grammatical and typographical errors. They will be turned in on time. (For all written projects, the preceptors and I will reduce the grade by one-half letter if we receive it late on the due date, and a further half-letter for each subsequent day the paper is late.) We will give you detailed instructions for these assignments in advance of their due dates.

Approximately once a week, you can expect to spend a few minutes of class time in free writing exercises. Our intention with these is to assist you in smoothing the connections between your thoughts and your written expression, to allow you to explore some ideas in an open-ended, non-threatening context, and to push yourselves in writing quickly and clearly. These will be passed in. They will count toward your grade. Responses will be graded on a simple √, √+, √- system.

Writing prompt #3 (“the midterm”) will offer a handful of questions arrived at in dialogue with the class.

Our goal with all the writing assignments is to help you hone your skills at saying what you want to say in the way you want to say it, so that uninitiated readers can follow your argument and be responsive to it. This is a skill that is portable and durable.

Grading distribution

Attendance and participation 20%
Free-writing exercises 10%
Short essays (writing prompts 1, 2, and 4) 25%
Midterm (writing prompt 3) 15%
Final project proposal 5%
Final project (writing prompt 5) 25%

DUE DATES FOR ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT FLEXIBLE. In order for discussion to flow, it’s necessary for you to submit your work on time. We will allow for late submissions only under the most extreme circumstances. (Note: computer problems do not constitute extreme circumstances. Be sure to back up your work regularly so that you always have a copy in the event of a computer meltdown.) To request an extension for an assignment, a legitimate excuse must be submitted in writing no later than one class period before the assignment is due. To avoid problems, please plan ahead and begin working on the projects as early as you can.

Writing quality, including spelling, grammar, and punctuation, counts in all written assignments. This includes Blackboard contributions. All assignments must be typed. Assignments should be submitted in hard copy, with an additional copy submitted electronically. We will not accept handwritten assignments.
Class Policies

1) I encourage you to discuss your work and assignments with your classmates, but ultimately you need to develop your projects and solutions independently. The general principle is simple: all of the work you turn in must be your own. If you have questions about academic dishonesty, please consult the “Academic Integrity” section of the NYU website:

https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

2) Attendance is important. I can’t stress this enough. First, you’re responsible for material presented in class but not found in reading assignments. Second, it is crucial for students to have time to discuss problems and question with each other. Absence hurts everyone’s success.

3) I encourage you to consult me during my office hours or email me if there is anything at all on your mind about the course, if there is anything you wish to discuss, or if there is something you need help with.

A Note About Your Preceptors

This class is lucky to have two outstanding and experienced graduate students as preceptors. Your preceptors will get to know you and your work very well, and their evaluations of your written work and classroom participation will constitute the bulk of your grade. More importantly, they are there to help you become more complete writers and critical thinkers, to help you sharpen your skills and help you productively respond to your questions about important issues. Recitation sessions are a central part of this course, a place where you can experiment with ideas, reduce your confusion, and share your experiences. I have complete trust in them, and I expect that you will work closely with them, learn from them, and treat them with respect.

A Note About The Syllabus

This syllabus is a working document and subject to change. As the semester progresses, we may decide to modify readings, assignments and due dates to reflect the needs and interests of the group, or to accommodate the schedules of potential guest lecturers. Updated versions of the syllabus will be posted on the NYU Classes site and mentioned in class.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 — Introduction and outline of the course; groundwork

Mon 22 January

No reading
Wed 24 January


Norman Cousins (1945) “Modern Man is Obsolete.” *Saturday Review of Literature*, August 18, pp. 5-9.


WEEK 2 — Modernity & Community

Mon 29 January

Note: Writing assignment #1 handed out today, due in class next Monday, February 5


Wed 31 January


WEEK 3 — Cities

Mon 5 February

Steven Johnson (2006) “That is to say, Jo has not yet died,” in *The Ghost Map* pgs. 81-109. [UPLOADED TO CLASSES]


Wed 7 February

Jean Gottmann (1957) “Megalopolis or the Urbanization of the Northeastern Seaboard.” *Economic Geography* 33(3):189-200. [AVAILABLE THROUGH BOBST WEBSITE EJOURNALS]


**WEEK 4—The Esthetics of Cities**

**Mon 12 February**


Ellen J. Stekert and Americo Paredes (1970) “Foreword” and “Introduction.” *Journal of American Folklore* 83(328):iii-iv, v-ix. (Special issue: “The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition”). (Also skim at least one of the pieces in this issue) [AVAILABLE THROUGH BOBST WEBSITE EJOURNALS]


**Wed 14 February**

Note: Writing assignment #2 handed out today, due in class next Wednesday, Feb. 21


**WEEK 5—Various counter-urban romances—rurality, antiquity**

**Mon 19 February**

No class—Presidents Day

**Wed 21 February**


WEEK 6 — Romances cont’d: Commerce

Mon 26 February


Wilfrid Mellers (1942) “Melody and Texture, Mediaeval and Modern.” Scrutiny, Summer, pp. 2-16.


Wed 28 February


WEEK 7 — Commerce

Mon 5 March

Note: Writing assignment #3 handed out today, due in section Friday


Wed 7 March


WEEK 8—Spring Break

Mon 12 March

No reading

Wed 14 March

No reading

WEEK 9—Commerce & the Scourge of Tin Pan Alley

Mon 19 March


Pete Seeger (19xx) “Why Do You Guys Publish So Much Rubbish?” *Sing Out!*

Pete Seeger (19xx) “Random Notes.” *Sing Out!*


Wed 21 March

Anonymous (1922) “Writer of ‘Home Sweet Home’ was wanderer; romance in songs is good selling point.” *The Music Trade*, October 14, p. 7.


---

**WEEK 10—The Culture of the Trade**

**Mon 26 March**

Note: Writing assignment #4 handed out today, due in section Friday

*Billboard Magazine* archives

**Wed 28 March**

Tom Paxton (1966) “Folk Rot.” *Sing Out!*

Ron Radosh (1962) “Commercialism & the Folk Song Revival.” *Sing Out!*

Abrahams et al (1966) “Folk Music and the Top 40” *Sing Out!*


---

**WEEK 11—One Possible Conclusion**

**Mon 2 April**

Jack Hamilton *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* 

**Wed 4 April**

Jack Hamilton *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*

---

**WEEK 12—One Possible Conclusion (cont’d)**

**Mon 9 April**

Jack Hamilton *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*
Wed 11 April

Jack Hamilton *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination*

**WEEK 15—Technology & its Discontents**

Mon 16 April

Note: Description of final project due in section on Friday


Edward Bellamy (1887) *Looking Backward* (selections)


Henry Ford (1922) “Machines and Men.” In *My Life and Work.* (selections)

Ralph Borsodi (1929) *This Ugly Civilization* (selections)


Wed 18 April


**WEEK 14—Technology cont’d; How Should Human Beings Sound?**

Mon 25 April

Smith, “The blues jumped a mechanical rabbit”

Irwin Kolodin (1957) “The vinyl decade”

Harold Lawrence (1956) “Back to pre-Bach”

Edward Tatnall Canby (1947) “Some highs and lows”

Bertrand Bronson (1956) “Folk song and live recordings”

Wed 25 April


Percy Grainger (1915) “The Impress of Personality in Unwritten Music”


**WEEK 15—How Should Human Beings Sound cont’d**

Mon 30 April

Joel Wapnick et al (2012) “Preferences for piano versus harpsichord performances in Renaissance and Baroque keyboard music”


Wed 2 May

Joachim-Ernst Berendt (1988) The Third Ear (selections)

New York City Department of Environmental Protection Noise Code, March 1998

[http://www.nonoise.org/lawlib/cities/newyork.htm](http://www.nonoise.org/lawlib/cities/newyork.htm)

New York City Department of Building Noise Code


**WEEK 16—Another Possible Conclusion**

Mon 7 May
