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## **EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: SOUNDS**

### **“Contemplating Voice”**

Morse Academic Program

New York University

Fall 2007

Tuesday/Thursday, 2:00-3:15 p.m. + recitation session

Silver Center 320

**Professor:** Dr. J. Martin Daughtry (martin.daughtry@nyu.edu)

**Preceptors:** Ivan Goff (ivan.goff@nyu.edu)  
Nicol Hammond (nicolhammond@yahoo.co.uk)  
Ben Tausig (datageneral@gmail.com)

**Office hours:** Tuesday 4:00-5:00 or by appointment

**Office:** 24 Waverly Place, Room 268, Office 266J

## **Course Description**

We will spend this semester contemplating the sound and significance of the human voice. The very ubiquity of the voice makes it a somewhat elusive topic: as something that we all have, and as a sonic presence that permeates the urban soundscape, our voices are easily taken for granted. In the words of philosopher Mladen Dolar, “we constantly inhabit the universe of voices, we are continuously bombarded by voices, we have to make our daily way through a jungle of voices, and we have to use all kinds of machetes and compasses so as not to get lost.” Of course, our voices don’t just contribute noise to the sonic “jungle” in which we operate. The voice is more than sound, more even than the necessary sonic residue of communication. The character of your voice helps you and those around you understand something profound about your position in the world as a unique individual and as a member of the human species. Your ideas, your personality, your history, your tastes, your fears, your affinities, your sense of humor—all of these are brought into the world by your voice.

By concentrating on the voice—by allowing ourselves to “get lost” in the voice for a time—we will gain a new appreciation for its complexity and its power in our lives. We will give primary emphasis to a number of musical voices, including those of throat singers, beatbox artists, singers of experimental jazz, Colombian traditional and African-American gospel music. At the same time, we will also think about voice as the result of a complex physiological process; a vehicle for communication; a gendered, racialized and in other ways essentialized text; a technologically-mediated commodity; and a master trope for all manners of identity and agency. We will attend to voices that silence others and voices that have been silenced themselves, and in so doing learn something about the voice’s articulation with politics, ethics, and violence. Perhaps most importantly, though, throughout this course *we will use our own voices*, both to generate our own discourse and to experience the visceral and intellectual pleasure of making a chorus of sounds together.

### **Required texts:**

Karpf, Anne. 2006. *The Human Voice*. New York; London: Bloomsbury.

Dolar, Mladen. 2006. *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

### **Recommended texts:**

Averill, Gage. 2003. *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Levin, Theodore, with Valentina Süzükei. 2006. *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Cavarero, Adriana. 2005. *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

The recommended texts will be held in reserve in the Bobst library.

Additional texts will be made available in PDF format on the NYU blackboard system.  
To access the system:

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 (V55:0730.001-007.010-016.FA07). 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**

Attendance and participation (see detailed description below): **20%**

Short writing projects: **20%**

Multimedia project and compositions: **30%**

Final paper: **30% (Final draft due no later than December 11 at 4:00 p.m.)**

### **Grading Scale**

97-100 A+	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	59 and below: F
94-96 A	84-86 B	74-76 C	64-66 D	
90-93 A-	80-83 B-	70-73 C-	60-63 D-	

### **Due Date Policy**

There are no examinations in this course. Instead, you will produce a number of projects (see below). Due dates for these projects are not flexible. We will allow for late submissions only under the most extreme circumstances. (Computer problems do not constitute extreme circumstances. Double pneumonia does.) To request an extension for an assignment, a legitimate excuse must be submitted in writing no later than one class period after the assignment is due. The request must be accompanied by written evidence, such as a note from your doctor, along with his or her contact information. The preceptors and I will then decide if an extension is warranted. To avoid problems, please plan ahead and begin working on the projects as early as you can.

### **Projects:**

Your written projects will include a research paper, a paper proposal, and a number of short writing assignments. Before turning in the formal paper proposal, you will discuss possible paper topics with your preceptor. The research paper will be 9-12 pages long, and will display evidence of critical engagement with course readings and class discussions. It will be beautifully written, innovative, focused, and free from grammatical and typographical errors. It will be turned in on time, no later than 2:00 p.m. on December 11. (The preceptors and I will reduce the grade by one letter for each day the paper is late.)

In addition to these written works, you will also produce two other projects. The first is a multimedia mix tape (a.k.a., a CD) of the voices, both "musical" and "non-musical," that

prominently figure in your life. The tape (CD) will be accompanied by extensive and thoughtful liner notes that explain the significance of each track and any relevance the tracks have to the dominant themes of our readings and discussions. This project will be due on December 4, at 2:00 p.m.. The second project will consist of two experimental vocal “compositions”: each composition will take the form of a prose description of things that you want a group of people to do with their voices. This project will be due early in the semester. You will be given detailed instructions for all of these projects well in advance of their due dates.

### **Reading and Listening Assignments**

Before each class, you will need to digest a number of articles and/or listening examples. (All articles and listening examples will be either posted or (if the readings are in your required texts) listed in the “course materials” folder on the blackboard site. Clicking on the link for a given date will reveal the readings that you need to do for the next class meeting. For example, the articles listed on Tuesday, September 4 need to be read by Thursday, September 6.) Some of the readings are quite challenging; others are very light and straightforward. You will need to read these pieces critically, but also generously. The point of reading them is to walk away with some useful new insights, not to tear the author’s argument to shreds. I will touch on many of the readings in my lectures, and you will get to discuss them in depth during the recitation sessions with your preceptor. I strongly suggest that you take notes on all of the reading and listening assignments. For a primer on notetaking, see the following article, prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Attendance and Participation**

Full, wholehearted participation in this course is absolutely crucial. I expect you to attend all class and recitation sessions and to be an active participant in discussions. In addition to talking, I will also expect you to lend your voices to several minutes of vocal exercises that will be conducted in class each week. Let me be clear: you do not need to have any singing experience or musical experience of any kind to take this course. You must, however, be willing to put aside your inhibitions and participate fully in all vocal exercises and experiments. The sounds that we make may not be pretty, but they will teach us something about the voices that are making them. (If you are physically unable to make sounds with your voice, please see me after the first class session and I will give you additional written assignments to compensate.) Full, earnest participation in these exercises (some of which you will compose yourselves) is a crucial element of this course.

### **Integrity of Scholarship**

I take it on faith that you are all honest and industrious students. Of course, if my assumptions are proven false—if you engage in plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty—the repercussions will be serious. For details on the University’s policies in this regard, see the “Academic Integrity” section of the Morse Academic Program website: <http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/about/academicintegrity.html>.

### **Status of the Preceptors**

The preceptors for this course are brilliant graduate students who will soon be professors themselves. The recitation sessions that they lead are a central part of this

course. The preceptors' evaluations of your written work and classroom participation will constitute the bulk of your grade. More importantly, they are on hand to answer your questions, help you learn how to become better writers, and make sure that your experience this semester is rich and positive. I trust that you will work closely with them, learn from them, and treat them with respect.

### **Status of This Syllabus**

This syllabus is a working document. As the semester progresses, I may make changes to readings, assignments and due dates to reflect the needs of the group and the schedules of guest lecturers. Updated versions of the syllabus will be e-mailed to you and mentioned in class.

Week 1: Tuesday, September 4

**Introduction to the course, review of syllabus, experimenting with our voices**

Thursday, September 6

**The evolution of the voice; the physiology of the voice**

Week 2: September 11

**Voices of 9/11; sonic characteristics of the voice**

September 13

**Voice as identity and agency; voice as seduction**

Week 3: September 18

**Tuvan throat singing, part I: *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing***

September 20

**Tuvan throat singing, part II: *Genghis Blues***

Week 4: September 25

**The voices of rap, part I: the art of beatboxing**  
**Guests: Kid Lucky and Baba Israel**

September 27

**The voices of rap, part II: voice as political and aesthetic statement**  
[Composition projects due]

Week 5: October 2

**The linguistics and (meta)physics of voice**

October 4

**The virtuosic voice: a cross-cultural survey of melisma**

Week 6: October 9

**Voice as vehicle for communication; voice and nonsense**

October 11

**Voice and language**  
[Paper proposals due]

Week 7: October 16

**African American close harmony**  
**Guest: Cedric Dent**

October 18

**The complex racial history of American barbershop singing**

Week 8: October 23

**“Whose voice is in the drums?”: bata drumming, ritual, and the metaphoricity of voice**  
**Guest: David Font**

October 25

**Film day: *Farinelli***

Week 9: October 30

**Angel voices: castrati and the gendered/degendered voice**  
**Guest: Nicol Hammond**

November 1

**Untangling a singer’s many voices**  
**Guest: Lucia Pulido**

Week 10: November 6

**Commodification, schizophonia, acousmatics, and the appropriation of voice**

November 8

**The voice and technology**  
**Guest: Ivan Goff**

Week 11: November 13

**Voice, national identity, and the persistence of memory: the case of the Russian national anthem**

November 15

**Voice, race, and immigration politics: the case of Nuestro Himno**

Week 12: November 20

**The ethics and politics of voice**

November 22

**No class—Thanksgiving Holiday**

Week 13: November 27

**Karaoke: a Global Phenomenon  
Guest: Ben Tausig**

November 29

**Voice as intellectual property: the case of *Waits v. Frito-Lay***

Week 14: December 4

**Voices from Iraq**  
[Mix-tape multimedia project due]

December 6

**Silencing voices and silenced voices**

Week 15: December 11

**Reflection and review**  
[Final paper due]

December 13

**No class—reading day**