

ENG 6939:001: The Sound of Texts and Technology (Acoustical T & T)

Thursday 7:30-10:15

Colbourn Hall 203

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Office hours: T/Th 1:00-2:30 (or by appointment)

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Despite the cultural pervasiveness of sound, contemporary critical theory by and large is glaringly silent on aurality and auditory phenomena; it seriously fails to consider sound as an object of study, instead focusing quite exclusively on visual culture (film, TV, video, computer screens — which are, of course, technologies of vision *and* sound). Addressing this roaring silence, this seminar will examine a number of historical accounts of aurality, along with several theoretical approaches to the study of sound, leading finally to current work in the technology and textuality of digital audio. We'll start by briefly considering the philosophical discourse underwriting what has been called the "hegemony of vision," the deeply-seated visual bias dominating Western thought and culture since the ancient Greeks. Turning toward the faculty of hearing, we'll begin to construct a critical theory of sound by foregrounding both the ways in which we hear (casual, concentrated, distracted) as well as the contexts in which listening takes place (i.e., the social and historical conditions of reception that give meaning to what is heard). We will also consider what could well be the most loaded (and coded) figure in aural culture, the voice, calling upon Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism in western metaphysics in order to historicize the voice, examining not only its textuality but its materiality through technology (especially in the digital age of voice-mail, voice print, and voice-activated machinery). Finally, our work will include analyzing sound in various media (film, TV, videogame, the Web), exploring such problematic concepts as noise and silence, and expanding our scope of sound to include audio art, global soundscapes, and the creation of a listening subject.

requirements and grading:

— 8 short response papers (1-2 pages): written pieces that engage creatively, critically and/or constructively with course material. These are due (one per week) within the first half of the semester [25%];

— Classroom participation will be crucial for this seminar and graded accordingly. Full attendance is necessary of course, as is your willingness to contribute to discussion. In addition, each student will be expected at least once this semester to lead class discussion with a series of questions raised by one of the readings [25%];

— Final project [50%]: I will begin meeting with everyone by mid-semester to discuss the process, but the following examples should give you some sense of what to expect:

— sound journal: either a written account describing the sounds of one's environment or a recording that documents same. As a final project you will also turn in a 10-page analysis of this text/recording;

— seminar paper (15-20 pages): this could be oriented around historical/theoretical issues raised by the readings or it could be based on your own research on current sound practices;

— your own work with sound: this would entail a new project occasioned by the seminar, and also requires a written component (approx. 10 pg.) that situates your work historically and theoretically.

Note: Everyone will be required to stage an informal presentation on their project (approx. 10-15 minutes); this could take the shape of a demonstration of one's work, in which case we might visit studios, a screening room, or whatever you need to illustrate your project. I welcome and encourage collaborative efforts.

- Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty

Academic policy: Students must follow University standards for personal and academic conduct as outlined in the Golden Rule. There is a zero tolerance policy in this class on academic dishonesty in any form.

All work that you submit for this class must be your own, and it must be written exclusively for this course. If such is not the case, it is the student's responsibility to notify and make arrangements with me prior to the due date of the assignment. Failure to do so will result in no credit for the assignment. Also, any sources consulted for your writing must be properly documented. "Rewriting," in which a student consults a source, changes a few words, and presents the ideas as his/her own, is plagiarism. Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and may also lead to an "F" for the entire course. Plagiarism and cheating subjects a student to referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule for further information: (<http://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>).

UCF Disability Policy: UCF is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Room 132, (407) 823-2371, TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

required texts:

— course articles available through Webcourses@UCF
The Auditory Culture Reader, eds., Michael Bull and Les Back (2003) [ACR]
Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003)
Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (2010)
{all books available at the campus bookstore}

recommended texts:

Plato, *Phaedrus*
Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*
Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*

seminar schedule:

Week 1 (Aug 25): *Introduction: thinking about sound*

Week 2 (Sept 1): *From sight to sound: deprivileging vision, considering sound*

Steven Connor, "The Modern Auditory I"

David Levin, "Introduction," *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*

Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine Grontkowski, "The Mind's Eye"

Douglas Kahn, "Introduction," *Noise, Water, Meat*

Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Hearing Loss" [ACR]

Week 3 (Sept 8): *Ways of listening*

Don Ihde, "The Auditory Field" and "Auditory Imagination" [ACR]

Roland Barthes, "Listening"

Ola Stockfelt, "Adequate Modes of Listening"

Michel Chion, "The Three Listening Modes"

Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening"

Week 4 (Sept 15): *Sites of listening*

R. Murray Schafer, "Listening"

Christopher Small, "A Place for Hearing"

Rick Altman, "The Sound of Sound"

Fran Tonkiss, "Aural Postcards: Sound, Memory and the City" [ACR]

Jean-Paul Thibaud, "The Sonic Composition of the City" [ACR]

Caroline Bassett, "How Many Movements?" [ACR]

Michael Bull, "Soundscapes of the Car" [ACR]

Week 5 (Sept 22): *Historicizing sound I*

Alain Corbin, "The Auditory Markers of the Village"

Bruce R. Smith, "Turning into London c.1600"

Mark Smith, "Listening to the Heard Worlds of Antebellum America"

Karin Bijsterveld, "The Diabolical Symphony of the Mechanical Age"

[all readings from ACR: Part II]

Week 6 (Sept 29): *Historicizing sound II*

Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, chapters 1, 2 & 3

Week 7 (Oct 6): *Historicizing sound II (cont.)*

Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, chapters 4, 5, 6 and conclusion

Week 8 (Oct 13): *The sound of cinema*

film screening: *Blue* (Derek Jarman, 1993)

readings: Peter Wollen, "Blue"

John Belton, "Technology and Aesthetics of Film Sound"

Mary Ann Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing"

Tom Levin, "The Acoustic Dimension"

Week 9 (Oct 20): *The sound of difference*

Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice,"
Michel Chion, "Prologue: Raising the Voice" and "The Acousmetre"
Steven Feld, "A Rainforest Acoustemology" [ACR]
Paul Gilroy, "Between the Blues and the Blues Dance" [ACR]
Julian Henriques, "Sonic Dominance and the Reggae Sound System Session" [ACR]
Sanjay Sharma, "The Sounds of Alterity" [ACR]

Week 10 (Oct 27): *Theorizing noise, Theorizing silence*

R. Murray Schafer, "The Industrial Revolution"
Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noise"
Douglas Kahn, "Significant Noises": "Immersed in Noise" & "Noises of the Avant-Garde"
Schafer, "Silence,"
John Cage, "Lecture on Nothing"
Frances Dyson, "The Ear that Would Hear Sounds in Themselves: John Cage, 1935-65"

Week 11 (Nov 3): No class (but a good week to meet to discuss final projects)

Week 12 (Nov 10): *The sound of power, politics, and resistance*

Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*

Week 13 (Nov 17): *The sound of postmodernity: digital audio, the virtual, and soundscapes of "new media"*

Lee Tsang, "Sound and Music in Website Design"
Dan Laughhey, "Music Media in Young People's Eveyday Lives"
Kieran Kelly, "Case Study: The Development of the Apple iPod"
Trace Reddell: "The Social Pulse of Telharmonics: Functions of Networked Sound and Interactive Webcasting"

Week 14 (Nov 24): Thanksgiving break (no class)

Week 15 (Dec 1): *Presentation of projects*

Week 16: *Coda*

exam session (check schedule): final projects due

Some valuable sound-related websites:

Edison National Archives: www.nps.gov/edis/edisonia.htm

Early recordings: www.tinfoil.com

Film sound/industry: <http://filmsound.org/>

Audio equipment/gear: www.audiorevolution.com

Sound art/theory: <http://autonomous.org/soundsite>

Acoustic ecology: <http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/wfae/home/index.html>

