

21A.360 / STS.065

Anthropology of Sound

Fall 2010 MIT

Tuesdays 1-4
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Course Description

Examines the ways humans experience the realm of sound and how perceptions and technologies of sound emerge from cultural, economic, and historical worlds. In addition to learning about how environmental, linguistic, and musical sounds are construed cross-culturally, students learn about the rise of telephony, architectural acoustics, and sound recording, as well as about the globalized travel of these technologies. Questions of ownership, property, authorship, and copyright in the age of digital file sharing are also addressed. A major concern will be with how the sound/noise boundary has been imagined, created, and modeled across diverse sociocultural and scientific contexts. Auditory examples — sound art, environmental recordings, music — will be provided and invited throughout the term.

Requirements

Students will write three 7-page papers. The final paper will be accompanied by a sound artifact (e.g., an audio montage, a piece of sound art) composed by the student. Themes/assignments described below, in paragraphs keyed to due dates. Each paper represents 25% of the subject grade. No emailed papers accepted. Papers docked by a letter grade for each day late. Students will be evaluated on class participation, including discussion and in-class exercises (25% of subject grade). Punctual attendance obligatory. No final.

Credit cannot be received for both CMS.407 and 21A.360.

Required Books

Bull, Michael and Les Back, eds. 2003. *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Berg.

Attali, Jacques. 1977. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.

Articles on Stellar:

<http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/21A/fa10/21A.360/>

1. September 14

2. September 21 Thinking about Sound

Bull, Michael and Les Back. 2003. Into Sound. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 1-18.

Schafer, Murray. 2003. Open Ears. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 21-39.

Ihde, Don. 2003. Auditory Imagination. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 61-66.

Schwartz, Hillel. 2003. The Indefensible Ear. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 487-501.

Erlmann, Veit. 2010. The String and the Mirror, excerpt. *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*. Zone, 9-12

Feld, Steven and Donald Brenneis. 2004. Doing Anthropology in Sound. *American Ethnologist* 31(4): 461-474.

99pp.

LISTENING IN CLASS

Voices Of The Rainforest: A Day In The Life Of The Kaluli People. 1991. Rykodisc.

Steven Vitiello. 2001. *Sounds Building in the Fading Light*. Creamgarden Records.

Jacob Kirkegaard. 2007. *Labyrinthitis*. Touch Records.

3. September 28 Acoustemologies, Soundscapes, Noise

Feld, Steven. 2003. A Rainforest Acoustemology. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 223-240.

Stoller, Paul. 1989. Sound in Songhay Possession, Sound in Songhay Sorcery. In *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 102-122.

Schafer, R. Murray. 1994. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books (First edition, Knopf, 1977), 3-12.

Thompson, Emily. 2002. The Origins of Modern Acoustics. In *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. MIT Press, 13-57.

Bijsterveld, Karin. 2008. Instruments of Torture: Traffic Noise and Uncivilized Behavior. In *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century*. MIT Press, 92-136.

139pp.

LISTENING IN CLASS

Voices Of The Rainforest: A Day In The Life Of The Kaluli People. 1991. Rykodisc.

Luigi Russolo, 1913. *Art of Noises*, examples.

4. October 5 Voices

Seremetakis, Nadia. 1991. The Screaming. *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*. Chicago, 64-81.

Brady, Erika. 1999. A Magic Speaking Object: Early Patterns of Response to the Phonograph. In *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography*. Mississippi, 27-51.

Samuels, David. 2005. Alien Tongues. In *E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces*, ed. Debbora Battaglia. Duke University Press, 94-129.

Homework listening: National Public Radio, 2010. The Vocoder: From Speech-Scrambling to Robot Rock. Interview with Dave Tompkins:
<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=126781688&m=126791977>; also <http://howtowreckanicebeach.com/?p=187>

80pp.

LISTENING IN CLASS

Mark Fay and Melinda Simon. various 20th century. *One of One: Snapshots in Sound*. Dish 002.

Antonin Artaud. 1947. *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*. Radio Play. Online: www.earlabs.org/label/LC/LC008.htm

Gregory Whitehead. 2006. The Problem with Bodies. On *Music Overheard*, edited by Damon Krukowski. Institute for Contemporary Art.

George Carlin. 1972. "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television."

FILM EXCERPTS IN CLASS

Pygmalion, Anthony Asquith, 1939

Klingon language documentary, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, Leonard Nimoy, 1984

3:30 GUEST LECTURE

David Wunsch, Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Massachusetts, Lowell

SOUND WORD PAPER DUE

For this paper, choose a word describing a particular kind of sound — e.g., ring, ping, zoom, whoosh, clang, buzz, bang, sigh, hush — and try to reconstruct a possible history of the word. You might begin by looking to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://dictionary.oed.com.libproxy.mit.edu/entrance.dtl>) for the word's etymology and for early usages. If the word has a scientific or technical meaning — as does, for example, reverberation — include and discuss in your history how that meaning arose and has or has not been modulated by popular meanings. Answer these questions along the way: how would you situate your word in an acoustemology? How and in what sorts of soundscapes does it figure? What is the relationship of your sound word to the category of noise? You must engage with class readings to aid your analysis. Provide a bibliography, formatted in the way you see sources cited here in the syllabus.

5. October 12 Telephones and Radio

Sterne, Jonathan. 2003. Machines to Hear for Them. In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Duke University Press, 31-85.

Schaeffer, Pierre. 1966. Acousmatics. In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner. Continuum, 76-81.

Sconce, Jeffrey. 2000. The Voice from the Void. *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Duke University Press, 59-91.

Kirkpatrick, Bill. 2010. Sounds Local: The Competition for Space and Place in Early U.S. Radio. In *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser. University of Pennsylvania Press, 199-220.

Kunreuther, Laura. 2006. Technologies of the Voice: FM Radio, Telephone, and the Nepali Diaspora in Kathmandu. *Cultural Anthropology* 21(3): 323-353.

137pp.

LISTENING IN CLASS

Orson Wells. 1938. *The War of the Worlds* Radio Play, *Mercury Theatre*, October 30.

Lucille Fletcher. 1943. *Sorry, Wrong Number* Radio Play, *Suspense*. May 25.

The Conet Project. 1997. *Recordings of Shortwave Numbers Stations*. Irdial-Discs.

Parapsychic Acoustic Research. 1999. *The Ghost Orchid: Introduction to EVP*.

6. October 19

Phonograph/Gramophone Records, Compact Discs, MP3s

GUEST LECTURE

Kieran Downes, Anthropology, MIT

Davis, Erik. 2002. Recording Angels: The Esoteric Origins of the Phonograph. In *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*. Continuum, 15-24.

Downes, Kieran. 2010. "Perfect Sound Forever": Innovation, Aesthetics, and the Re-making of Compact Disc Playback. *Technology and Culture* 15(2):305-331.

Evens, Aden. 2005. Sound and Noise. In *Sound Ideas: Music, Machines, and Experience*. University of Minnesota Press, 1-24.

Sterne, Jonathan. 2006. The MP3 as Cultural Artifact. *New Media and Society* 8(5): 825-842.

80pp.

LISTENING IN CLASS

Éduoard-Léon Scott de Martinville and David Giovannoni. 1860 "Au Claire de la Lune."

FILM IN CLASS

Scratch, Doug Pray, 2001

October 22: Event of Interest outside Class: The Elusive: Listening



Lectures: Steven Feld, "Acoustemologies," Hillel Schwartz, "Cross Polytopes & Octaphons More Agreeable: Toward A Taxonomy of Sounds All Around But Not Quite There," MIT Anthropology, "Sensing the Unseen" seminar, 2:30-5:00, Room 56-114. Look to <http://web.mit.edu/unseen/species/elusive.html>

7. October 26

Sound, Culture, Technology, Property

GUEST LECTURE 2:30-4

Wayne Marshall, Foreign Languages and Literatures, MIT

Taylor, Timothy. 2007. The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of "Mechanical Music." *Ethnomusicology* 51(2):281-305.

Pinch, Trevor and Frank Trocco. 2002. Introduction, Chapter 1: Subterranean Homesick Blues, Chapter 3: Shaping the Synthesizer. In *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer*. Harvard University Press, 1-31, 53-69.

Feld, Steven, 1996. Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28: 1-35.

Katz, Mark. 2004. Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling. In *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. University of California Press, 137-157.

Manuel, Peter and Wayne Marshall. 2006. The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall. *Popular Music* 25(3): 447-70.

Homework listening: http://www.afropop.org/radio/radio_program/ID/764/ 153pp.

8. November 2

The Sound of Music (and Noise)

GUEST LECTURE

Patricia Tang, Music, Harvard University/Music and Theatre Arts, MIT

Tang, Patricia. 2005. Negotiating Performance in Senegalese Popular Music: Sound, Image and the Ethnomusicologist as Exoticized 'Other.' *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17(3): 275-300.

Attali, Jacques. 1977. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press, 3-20.

44pp.

SOUND TECHNOLOGY PAPER DUE

This paper should deliver a discussion of a technology of sound relay or reproduction in connection with these two matters: the question of retrieving sound from other places and times and the question of how to imagine property in sound. Anchor your discussion by choosing a particular example of sound sent or reproduced — as do Feld and Katz — thinking through how your example's medium of relay or reproduction (telephone, recording) shapes or is shaped by its political economic context. This is a paper that demands that you grapple with the materiality of a technology and its effects. You must engage with class readings to aid your analysis. Provide a bibliography, formatted in the way you see sources cited here in the syllabus.

9. November 9
Sonic Publics

GUEST LECTURE
John Picker, Literature, MIT

Picker, John. 2003. The Soundproof Study: Victorian Professional Identity and Urban Noise. *Victorian Soundscapes*. Oxford, 41-81.

Gilroy, Paul. 2003. Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic. In *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back. Berg, 381-395.

Kun, Josh. 2005. Strangers among Sounds; Against Easy Listening. In *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. University of California Press, 1-47.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2001. The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt. *American Ethnologist* 28(3): 623-649.

130pp.

10. November 16
Styles of Silence

GUEST LECTURE
Wendy Jacob, Center for Advanced Visual Studies, MIT

Svenbro, Jesper. 1999. Archaic and Classical Greece: The Invention of Silent Reading. In *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier, tr. Lydia G. Cochrane. Polity, 37-63.

Bauman, Richard. 1983. Let Your Words Be Few: Speaking and Silence in Quaker Ideology. In *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers*. Cambridge University Press, 20-31.

Connor, Steven. 2004. Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing. In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann. Berg, 153-172.

Arehart, Kathryn H. 2005. The Nature of Hearing and Hearing Loss. *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 6(1): 9-14

Flournoy, J.J. Edmund Booth, et al. 1858. On Planning a Deaf-Mute Commonwealth. In *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Lois Bragg. NYU, 2001, 13-26.

Woodcock, Kathryn. 1992. Cochlear Implants vs. Deaf Culture? In *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, ed. Lois Bragg. NYU, 2001, 325-332.

Mills, Mara. 2010. Deaf Jam: From Inscription to Reproduction to Information. *Social Text* 102:35-58.

107pp.

FILMS IN CLASS
Into Great Silence, Philip Groening, 2005
Sound and Fury, Josh Aronson, 2000

November 23
Soundwalk?

11. November 30
The Sounds of Science

Mody, Cyrus C. M. 2005 The Sounds of Science: Listening to Laboratory Practice. *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 30(2): 175-198.

Roosth, Sophia. 2009. Screaming Yeast: Sonocytology, Cytoplasmic Milieus, and Cellular Subjectivities. *Critical Inquiry* 35(2): 332-350.

Johnson, Emma and Robert Lecusay. 2005. In Space, NASA Can Hear You Scream. Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Society for the Social Studies of Science, Pasadena, California, October 20-22.

Beer, Gillian. 1996. Wave Theory and the Rise of Literary Modernism. In *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter*. Oxford, 295-318.

Helmreich, Stefan. 2007. An Anthropologist Underwater: Immersive Soundscapes, Submarine Cyborgs, and Transductive Ethnography. *American Ethnologist* 34(4): 621-641.

Helmreich, Stefan. forthcoming. Underwater Music: Tuning Composition to the Sounds of Science. In *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and Trevor Pinch, eds. Oxford.

~115pp.

LISTENING

Ernst Karel. 2009. *Heard Laboratories*. and/OAR Records.

Anne Niemetz and Andrew Pelling. 2004. *The Dark Side of the Cell*.
<http://www.darksideofcell.info/about.html>

ESA/NASA/JPL/University of Arizona. 2005. Radar echoes from Titan's surface
http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/multimedia/videos/movies/alien_winds_descent_radar.mp3

David Dunn. 2006. *The Sound of Light in Trees: The Acoustic Ecology of Pinyon Pines*.
Earth Ear Records; <http://www.acousticecology.org/dunn/solit.html>

Historic Naval Sound and Video, <http://www.hnsa.org/sound/index.htm>
my own recordings, audio and visual, from *Alvin*

Hydrophonia Sound Art Contest - Turn Ocean Noise into Sound Art
<http://synth.me/music-gear/hydrophonia-sound-art-contest-turn-ocean-noise-sound-art>

Polli, Andrea. 2004. *Heat and the Heartbeat of the City*, <http://turbulence.org/Works/heat/>
Polli, Andrea. 2009. *Sonic Antarctica*. Gruenrekorder.

Christoph Campregher's *Molecular Code* Project, discussed and linked to in
Bohannon, John. 2008. Can Scientists Dance? *Science* 318: 905
<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/319/5865/905b#dancegallery>

FILM IN CLASS

Theremin, Steven M. Martin, 1993

12. December 7

Class presentations

SONIC COMMUNITIES PAPER DUE

Describe a sonic public we've not discussed in class. Present an example of how a community uses sound (speech or music or even silence) to express or enact its identity. As part of this assignment, deliver a sound-based artifact — a recording, an audio essay, a piece of sound art. You may use any mode of sound representation/reproduction you like — a wax cylinder, an audiotape, phonograph records, a digital file, sound notation. Be ready to present your work to the class. You must engage with class readings in your paper. Provide a bibliography/discography, formatted in the way you see sources cited here in the syllabus.