

ANT 324L: Sonic Ethnography

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Course description

Sonic ethnography starts with listening, and listening to how people listen. Listening is a practice that people do as a way of being in and knowing the world – it is something in which we are all expert, even if not always acknowledged. Thus sonic ethnography investigates ways in which people orient themselves via the aural, how expertise is enacted through listening, and how sociabilities emerge around attunement to sound. At the same time, sound is neither separable from other senses nor an object in and of itself. Instead, sound is, as anthropologist Steven Feld suggests, a way of being in and knowing the world.

Themes of acoustemology, hearing history, silence, noise, and technologies of listening will organize discussion of topics that include the history of recorded sound in anthropology, acoustics and environmental sound, nonhuman listening, and listening beyond the ear. Class meetings will be spent on discussion of readings, listening, fieldtrips, guest lectures, audio workshops, and writing. The course pays particular attention to concerns of writing sound, writing with sound, and writing about sound. Writing sound is approached as a practice, with modes of inscription that might include writing or audio recording. With an emphasis on developing ways of using written language to address sound as an ethnographic concern, we will also attend to the breadth of the meaning of “phonography” by listening to ethnographic recordings and creating short audio pieces at the end of the semester.

Course objectives

- Develop skills in ethnographic listening
- Become versant in topics in the anthropology of sound
- Learn research methods in sonic ethnography
- Explore diverse ways of writing sound
- Acquire basic field recording skills

Readings

The following book has been ordered at The Co-op:

Novak, David and Matt Sakakeeny, eds. 2015. *Keywords in Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Other assigned readings are available as PDFs or links on Canvas

Course requirements

Participation and attendance [10%]

This course will be run in a seminar format, with class sessions consisting of discussion of readings, listening material, and sonic investigations. As such, it depends on the participation of all. Be versant with the assigned readings and other material, and be prepared to engage in productive discussion. Bring the readings to class as you will need to be able to refer to them. We will maintain an ethos of respect in all interactions. The class will be a welcoming and safe place for all people regardless of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation.

If you must miss class please let me know in advance, or as soon as possible. It is especially important that you attend all fieldtrips. Absences will be considered excused for religious holidays, illness, or extenuating circumstances due to an emergency. More than 1 unexcused absence will affect your grade.

Reading responses [20%]

Readings are drawn from *Keywords in Sound*, *Theorizing Sound Writing*, and articles and chapters (on Canvas) that demonstrate modes of writing sound ethnographically and/or provide material that supports our sonic ethnographic investigations. Thorough engagement with the readings is crucial for the success of the course. In order to facilitate active discussion on days focusing on readings, students will write responses to the readings for that day. These should be posted to Canvas on 10 a.m. on Tuesday. The class will be divided in 2 groups that will alternate posting and commenting on the reading responses. Those commenting should be prepared to comment on reading responses in class.

Your 1-2 paragraph (200-400 word) reading response should include the following:

- Main point/s of the reading with a quote from the text that best captures this
- Key concept/s or terms used and their meaning, as you understand it
- Something that was particularly interesting, curious, or confusing to you
- The significance of the text for sonic ethnography (or a more specific prompt, to be provided)
- Questions raised by the readings, posed as discussion questions for the class

When there are multiple readings, aim to read across them, drawing out a shared theme and addressing commonalities and differences between the texts. Your responses should demonstrate that you have read all assigned readings, that you have a good understanding of the argument or focus of the text/s, and that you put thought into developing a discussion question.

“Writing sound” entries [30%]

There are **10** ethnographic listening events during the course of the semester. (12 are listed, but 2 – specified in the syllabus – are optional.) Following each fieldtrip, lecture, or listening session you will write up your notes as an entry that incorporates modes of “writing sound.” Specific prompts will be provided for the listening events. Each submitted entry should be a thoughtfully revised version of your notes from the listening event. The 500-word entry is due on Canvas 1 week after the listening event. These will be drawn on for peer response and review during class.

Midterm [10%]

A report on your project site, research question, and plan for research for your final project

DUE: MARCH 12 BY 12 P.M.

Final project [30%]

The final project is a sonic ethnography engaging with a setting of your choice. It consists of a written component (8-10 pp.) and an audio recording (3 min.). The two parts have equal weight [15% each]. You should select an ethnographic case in which there is socially meaningful sound and where you can focus on listening as a social process. You will apply techniques of sonic ethnography learned in class. Plan for a minimum of 4 visits for participant observation and/or interviews. You may also utilize archival sources and audio technologies as part of your ethnographic research. Your paper should engage with a minimum of 4 course readings, used to develop your conceptual framework and discussion. More specific guidelines will be provided.

The last weeks of class will shift from “writing sound” to “writing *with* sound.” Following a field recording and editing workshop, you will create a 3-minute sound piece, “writing sound” with a microphone and recording device or other mode of technological transduction. The audio recording should be guided by your ethnographic investigation, engaging and capturing socially meaningful sounds. Drafts will be presented for peer review during the last week of class. The final version should include notes on what revisions you made.

DUE: MAY 12 BY 5 P.M.

Grade scale used for this course:

Grade	Cutoff
A	94%
A-	90%
B+	87%
B	84%
B-	80%
C+	77%
C	74%
C-	70%
D	65%
F	<65%

Writing

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Using someone else's work in your own writing without giving proper credit is considered plagiarism, a serious form of academic dishonesty that can result in severe penalties. Copying someone else's work, buying a paper and submitting it as your own, copying and pasting text (even with changes), or borrowing images from an online source, are some examples of plagiarism. Even if you plagiarize accidentally, you can be held responsible and penalized.

Learning to cite sources appropriately is an important part of becoming a professional. When you are unsure about citation, you are encouraged to ask your instructor (who is already an expert in the discipline) what is appropriate in the context of your assignment. Consultants at The [University Writing Center](#) can also help you determine whether you are citing sources correctly—and they have helpful guides online for using [direct quotations](#) and [paraphrasing](#). Reviewing those skills will help you feel confident that you are handling sources professionally in your writing.

You can read the University's definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in Sec. 11–402 of the [Student Conduct Code](#). For more information, visit the [Dean of Students' site](#).

WEEK	DATE	READINGS	LISTENING	DUE
ACOUSTEMOLOGY				
1. Writing sound	1/21		FIELDTRIP: Soundwalk #1, Listening	
	1/23	“Listening” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Traffic Patterns” in <i>Theorizing Sound Writing</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading response: list ways of writing sound • Soundwalk #1 notes for workshoping
2. Acoustemology	1/28	“Acoustemology” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Waterfalls of Sound,” Feld “From Ethnomusicology to Echo-Muse-Ecology: Reading R. Murray Schafer in the Papua New Guinea Rainforest,” Feld “Doing Anthropology in Sound,” Feld and Brenneis		Reading response A
	1/30		LISTEN: “A Village Soundscape”	1. Soundwalk 1 revised entry
3. Listening with others	2/4	“On Alternating Sounds,” Franz Boas “Listening Acts,” in <i>Theorizing Sound Writing</i> “Sounding Bodies,” Tom Rice		Reading response B
	2/6		FIELDTRIP: Soundwalk #2, Listening <i>with</i>	2. “A Village Soundscape” entry
HEARING HISTORY				
4. Phonography	2/11	“Phonography” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “The Echoes of Hearts Long Silenced,” Cowen “The First Time, the Heart,” Dario Robleto		Reading response A
	2/13		IN CLASS PROJECT: Sonic memories	3. Soundwalk 2 entry
5. Echoes	2/18	“Echo,” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Acoustic Palimpsests” in <i>Theorizing Sound Writing</i> “Listening to Southern Slavery,” White and White		Reading response B
	2/20		GUEST LECTURE: Zachary James Watkins, “High Vibration Resonance” (RLP 0.112)	4. Sonic memories entry
6. Collecting sound	2/25	“Performers and the Phonograph,” Erica Brady “An Archival Dilemma: The Densmore Cylinder Recording Speeds,” Judith Gray “Epilogue,” in <i>Modernity’s Ear</i> , Roshanak Kheshti “Tribal Elder Hears Grandfather’s Voice in Archived Songs”		Reading response A
	2/27		FIELDTRIP: Harry Ransom Center	5. Resonance entry (optional)
SILENCE				
7. Composing silence	3/3	“Acoustics” and “Silence” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Let’s Listen to Nothing: Silence, Silencing, and the Anechoic Chamber,” Michael Heller		Reading response B

	3/5		FIELDTRIP: Anechoic Chamber	6. Sonic archive entry
8. Sensing silence	3/10	<i>Wild Sanctuary</i> “One Square Inch of Silence” “Rustications: Animals in the Urban Mix,” Connor “Silent City: Listening to Birds in Urban Nature,” Bruyninckx “Sonic Ecology: The Undetectable Sounds of the City,” Jones “Ungrid-able Ecologies,” Myers		Reading response A
	3/12		FIELDTRIP: More than human listening	•7. Anechoic Chamber entry •MIDTERM
SPRING BREAK				
NOISE				
9. Urban noise	3/24	“Noise” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Between Silence and Pain,” Heller “Why is Everything Getting Louder?” Bosker <i>Measuring Sound</i> , by Brüel & Kjaer		Reading response B
	3/26		GUEST LECTURE: Dr. Preston Wilson, Mechanical Engineering	8. More than human listening entry
10. Measuring Noise	3/31	“The Politics of Noise Control in São Paulo,” Cardoso City of Austin <i>Noise Ordinance</i>		Reading response A
	4/2		FIELDTRIP: Noise measurement	9. Measuring noise entry (optional)
LISTENING TECHNOLOGIES				
11. Listening beyond the ear	4/7	“Body” and “Deafness,” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “Do Signals Have Politics?” Mara Mills “Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies,” Friedner and Helmreich		Reading response B
	4/9		IN CLASS PROJECT: Listening beyond the ear	10. Noise measurement entry
12. Sound of/as energy	4/14	“Transduction,” in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> “The Aelectrosonic and Energetic Environments,” Kahn “Earthquakes and frack-waste: sounds of extraction-related disaster in Appalachian Ohio,” Harnetty		Reading response A
	4/16		FIELDTRIP: Electromagnetic listening	11. Listening beyond the ear entry
13-14. Writing with sound	4/21		Phonography workshop	Reading response B
	4/23		Field recording day	12. Electromagnetic listening entry
	4/28		Editing	
14.2-15. Final presentations	4/30			
	5/7-9			

FINAL PROJECT DUE 5/12

Resources

Services for Students with Disabilities

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>

Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin

- The University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning.
 - o Sanger Learning and Career Center: <http://lifelearning.utexas.edu/>
 - o Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>
 - o Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>
 - o Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/>
 - o Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

Important Safety Information

The following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.

Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.

In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency