

IS 289-2: History of Modern Sound Technology

Fridays, 9 am – 12 pm

GSE&IS Building 111

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11-1 or by appointment

Course Description: Welcome to the History of Modern Sound Technology! In this course we will explore the social and cultural influence of many twentieth and twenty-first century inventions that we often take for granted. Within the span of a century we have gone from communicating long distances through the electric pulses of the telegraph to contacting anyone in the world with a portable device via satellite. The advancement in communication, acoustic manipulation, sound production and preservation is nothing less than staggering. How does technology influence the way an individual or society listens? How are sounds (and silences) interpreted as a source of information, and how have these methods changed over the course of the last century? What effects do sound technologies have on communication, the arts, politics, speech, and performance?

This course will address the emerging area of auditory information from both an historical and contemporary perspective. In recent years, scholars have identified visual literacy as critical in analyzing evidence from a variety of fields and disciplines, while its counterpart – aural or auditory literacy – has received little attention in comparison. We will begin by briefly introducing theories in sound, audio reproduction, and listening. Readings in sound history will illuminate the social and cultural impact of revolutionary advances in sound technology during the twentieth century from radio, the telephone, and phonograph, to less “standard” developments in urban noise, architecture, oral history, music sampling, and digital mixing.

Course Requirements

This is a discussion-based seminar, and as such, participation is critical for its success. Each week you will have a set of assigned readings as well as a listening assignment. Please come to class having done both the readings and listening exercise.

Class Participation: 15%. This will be evaluated by your in-class discussion performance, including your level of engagement with the reading and listening assignments. Many of the weeks are comprised of a series of shorter articles or chapters, and therefore, I strongly recommend that you organize your thoughts for each reading through your own system of note taking.

Blogging: 15%. Listening is both an individual and social activity, and like any other skill it involves practice. There is no better way to hone your listening (and reading/writing) skills than by sharing one another’s experiences. Each week you will be required to post a blog of no less than one and a half pages to our course site that engages the upcoming assignments. I will provide a set of questions to consider with your readings and listening assignment, although if you would like, you may share a relevant experience or discovery beyond the guided questions. This may include, for example, a review of an interesting article that you have found or a

recording that addresses the issues that have been raised in class. I encourage all of you to also comment on one another's postings and begin a dialogue that may continue beyond a single weekly post.

Course Assignments

The course will culminate in a final project worth 50% of your grade. You may select from one of two options:

Option #1: Research Paper, at least 20 full pages. You will select one sound technology, either historical or contemporary, and research its social and cultural function or impact. Your research must be based upon a primary source which is ideally a recording (or collection of recordings), or some other primary material(s) associated with using or experiencing a sound technology (letters, advertisements, government documents, court cases, etc). **Your paper must communicate an original scholarly argument that is based upon original research.** Please see the guidelines at the end of the syllabus for further details.

Option #2: Aural Exploration of a Sound Technology. For those who are familiar with sound technologies (mixers, software, editing equipment, etc.) you may create a final aural product that addresses the themes and issues discussed in class. Like the research paper, it must communicate a scholarly argument and it must incorporate at least one historical or original primary recording. You are free to decide upon the shape and format of the project although it should be at least 5 minutes in length, depending on the nature of the project. A paper at least 5-7 full pages in length must accompany your project explaining your thesis argument, the decisions you made along the creative process, any obstacles you encountered, and the equipment used in the production.

Additional Assignments

Assignment #1 (10%): Written proposal for final paper/project (at least 5 full pages plus a working annotated bibliography of at least 10 sources), due Week 5 in class; you must come see me in person prior to handing in your assignment for my approval. In this paper, you will introduce your topic and its associated primary sources. If it is a recording, you should describe its unique qualities and why you selected it. Your paper must also include a **working thesis argument** based upon your preliminary research beyond analyzing the primary source itself. You must provide a research plan that includes sources you plan to use, questions you will address, and problems that you anticipate or have already encountered. If you have selected Option #2, you must include a plan of action on how you will produce your final product, including what equipment you will use, the methodology you will use and why you have selected it, and how long you anticipate each step of the process will take. **It is unacceptable, particularly for those doing Option #1, to not have acquired and completed a preliminary analysis of your primary source(s) prior to handing in this assignment.** Your assignment must also include a working bibliography comprised of legitimate scholarly works (monographs, articles, and other appropriate digital sources). If you have chosen Option #2, you should include a list of prior works of art or prose that have influenced your own project along with scholarly works that you will take into consideration. All sources must be properly cited both within the text using footnotes and in the final bibliography.

Assignment #2 (10%): Final Presentation, Week 10. This presentation should be **no more** than 10 minutes in length. The presentation should include a summary of your final paper's thesis argument. You may want plan a brief clip or portion of your representation to illustrate your points to the class.

Final Paper/Project: 50%. See Guidelines below on the expectations for the written paper. The final project for Option #2 must be saved onto a CD/DVD and playable according to a common playback format.

Course Materials

Required Books (Available at the Luvalle book store)

Katz, Mark. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Miller, Paul D., ed. *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008.

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

All other readings are available for download and printing at our course website.

Class Schedule¹

Week 1: Introduction: "The Medium is the Massage"

Week 2: Theory in Sound History and Acoustic Technology

Bailey, Peter. "Breaking the Sound Barrier." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 23-35.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. 217-51.

Connor, Steven. "Sound and the Self." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 54-66.

Gitelman, Lisa. "Recording Sound, Recording Race, Recording Property." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 279-94.

Greene, Paul D. "Introduction: Wired Sound and Sonic Cultures." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. 1-22.

Schafer, R. Murray. "Soundscapes and Earwitnesses." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by

¹ Readings are listed in alphabetical order and do not convey any order of reading priority.

Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 3-9.

Schwartz, Hillel. "On Noise." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 51-53.

Sterne, Jonathan. "Preserving Sound in Modern America." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 295-318.

Smilor, Raymond W. "American Noise, 1900-1930." In *Hearing History: A Reader*, edited by Mark M. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. 319-30.

Truax, Barry. *Acoustic Communication*. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1984. 108-142.

LISTENING: Visit the Free Sound Project at www.freesound.org. Read "Richard Humphries: The Adventures of a Freesound Member", listen to the "Earth, Wind, Fire, Water" competition entries, peruse the archive and select a few notable entries for discussion.

Week 3: The Radio Soundscape

Adorno, Theodor. "The Radio Symphony (1941)." In *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, edited by Richard Leppert. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 251-70.

Douglas, Susan J. *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'N' Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern*. New York: Times Books, 1999. 3-55, 100-123.

Grandin, Ingemar. "The Soundscape of the Radio: Engineering *Modern Songs* and Superculture in Nepal." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. 222-44.

Larkin, Brian. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 48-72.

Taylor, Timothy D. "Music and the Rise of Radio in Twenties America: Technological Imperialism, Socialization, and the Transformation of Intimacy." In *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. 245-68.

LISTENING: Burns and Allen radio broadcast TBD.

Week 4: From Phonograph to mp3

Katz, Mark. *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

LISTENING: Selections from Accompanying CD.

Week 5: Can you hear me now? The Social History of the Telephone

Fischer, Claude S. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. 21-85, 154-272.

Killen, Andreas. *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. 162-211.

Smith, Jacob. *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 200-242.

LISTENING: The Jerky Boys, selections.

Week 6: Urban Noise

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

LISTENING: Select one story from the "Sound Clips" series at NPR's *All Things Considered*.

Week 7: The Electrified Voice and Vocal Performance

Connor, Steven. "Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing." In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, edited by Veit Erlmann. Oxford: Berg, 2004. 153-72.

Davidson, Michael. "Technologies of Presence: Orality and the Tapevoice of Contemporary Poetics." In *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, edited by Adalaide Morris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. 97-128.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Voices out of Bodies, Bodies out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity." In *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, edited by Adalaide Morris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. 74-96.

Morris, Rosalind C. "A Room with a Voice: Mediation and Mediumship in Thailand's Information Age." In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 383-98.

McCaffery, Steve. "From Phonic to Sonic: The Emergence of the Audio-Poem." In *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, edited by Adalaide Morris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. 149-68.

Smith, Jacob. *Vocal Tracks: Performance and Sound Media*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 1-14, 81-114.

LISTENING: Selections from Accompanying CD for *Sound States*

Week 8: Oral History and the Sound Documentary

Benmayor, Rina. "Cyber-Teaching in the Oral History Classroom." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 434-45.

Butler, Toby, and Graeme Miller. "Linked: A Landmark in Sound, a Public Walk of Art." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 425-33.

Hardy, III, Charles. "Authoring in Sound: Aural History, Radio and the Digital Revolution." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 393-405.

- and Pamela Dean. "Oral History in Sound and Moving Image Documentaries." In *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006. 510-61.
- Frisch, Michael. "Oral History and the Digital Revolution: Toward a Post-Documentary Sensibility." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 102-14.
- Good, Francis. "Voice, Ear and Text: Words, Meaning, and Transcription." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 364-74.
- Green, Anna. "The Exhibition That Speaks for Itself." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 416-24.
- Grele, Ronald J. "Oral History as Evidence." In *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006. 43-101.
- Kerr, Daniel. "'We Know What the Problem Is': Using Video and Radio Oral History to Develop Collaborative Analysis of Homelessness." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 485-94.
- Sharpless, Rebecca. "The History of Oral History." In *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006. 19-42.
- Sipe, Dan. "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 406-15.
- Swain, Ellen D. "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-First Century." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006. 343-61.

Week 9: Mixing Culture and Culture Mixed

Miller, Paul D., ed. *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008.

LISTENING: Selections from Accompanying CD.

Week 10: Presentations

Final Paper Guidelines

The following is a series of guidelines for composing your final paper. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to talk to me.

- You must include a title page that is separate from the final page count of your paper. The title should reflect your paper's thesis argument and it should grab the reader's attention. "Final Paper: IS 289" is unacceptable!
- Your paper should be at least 20 full pages (5-7 pages for Option #2), double-spaced, 1" margins all-around, Times Roman, 12 pt font.
- You should include page numbers in the header.
- Your introduction should grab the reader's attention. There are a number of techniques to do this: you may begin with an anecdote or description of your recording, or even a single quote. The introductory paragraph(s) should not conclude with a thesis statement.
- You must conclude the introductory section with a **thesis paragraph**. This paragraph will contain the argument you will prove in the rest of the paper. A thesis argument is not a statement of fact or your opinion. A thesis argument is provable with evidence that you acquired from your original thesis.
- Your paper should be clearly marked with sections. Each section should in some way support your thesis argument. Section headings should be clearly marked in bold and should introduce the topic of the section.
- Section breaks should not be pre/proceeded by unnecessary blank space.
- ****Your paper should not spend a copious amount of space summarizing or describing your recording. This is not a satisfactory analysis. You should only summarize/describe those elements or aspects that go towards proving your larger argument.**
- Your conclusion section should do more than simply restate your argument, it should also offer something new in terms of future analysis of the historical topic, representation, media form, or some combination of the three.
- All references should be cited as footnotes. You may use either MLA or Chicago style. All resources used must also be included in a bibliography (also not part of the final page count). Internal references are unacceptable.

The more specific and focused you choose to make your argument, the better your paper will be. For example, the final paper should not be a history of the radio, but rather might address a very specific development in radio history, such as a particular program or event. Whether you decide to cover an historical or contemporary topic, your argument should address a single significant social or cultural question or issue. If you have problems selecting your topic and forming your argument, you should come see me during office hours.

**Assortment of Possible Paper Topics
(In no particular order)**

- Theodor Adorno
- John Cage
- Karlheinz Stockhausen
- Thomas Edison
- Muzak
- Various developments in stereo equipment
- Pro Tools and other software programs
- Steve Reich
- Hearing Aids
- iPod/iPhone/iPhone App/iTunes
- The Walkman
- Speech recognition tools
- Napster
- Digital music and intellectual property rights
- Italian futurism
- Theater for the blind
- Pierre Henri
- Surround sound
- Multitracking/Tape delay
- Nick Brooke (Tone Tests)
- Wax cylinders
- Piano players
- Noise pollution
- Soundproofing materials
- Silent film + transition to sound film
- Cellular phones
- Answering machines
- Dictation machines
- Bluetooth earpieces
- Wiretapping and other spy devices
- The Science of sound [sound recording] / produced by Bell Telephone Laboratories. (SRLF, 1959)