SOUND STUDIES: LISTENING & CREATING BETWEEN THE MATERIAL, MEDIUM AND METAPHOR

2 credits, Autumn Semester 2017

Course Code: UWC5000

This university wide course (UCW) is open to students of all departments. It is also cross-listed as an elective course by the School of Public Policy and Department of Sociology and Anthropology. It is open to MA and PhD students for both grade and audit as is part of the Intellectual Themes Initiative project Sound Relations: Transgressions, Disruptions, Transformations.

Note: This class’s credits can be used towards the ‘Visual Theory and Practice Certificate’.

Overview

*Sound studies* is a name for the interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival. By analyzing both sonic practices and the discourses and institutions that describe them, it redescribes what sound does in the human world, and what humans do in the sonic world. (Sterne, 2012 p.2)

Sound is vibration that is perceived and becomes known through its materiality. Metaphors for sound construct perceptual conditions of hearing and shape the territories and boundaries of sound in social life. Sound resides in this feedback loop of materiality and metaphor, infusing words with a diverse spectrum of meanings and interpretations. (Novak and Sakakeeny, 2015 p. 1)

In recent years there has been an explosion of work on, with or through sound by researchers in the social sciences and humanities. Highly interdisciplinary and often undertaken in cooperation with those outside academia, from musicians to professionals, the field of sound studies is increasingly diverse, daring and exciting.

Using sonic frames to think through how technology mediates relations, how cultures of perception are learnt and changed, and how the growth and diversity of mass media informs communication can help us develop fresh approaches to longstanding questions, whatever our disciplinary home.

This interdisciplinary and experimental course into the cultural, social, political and material dimensions of sound and listening will challenge students to both rethink their existing ideas and develop new interests.
We will explore questions such as: What is ‘noise’ and why do states seek to regulate it? How does culture shape sound? How does architectural practice change as cities become nosier? What role does sound play in film? What is the relationship between music and social structure? How does technology mediate listening? What can listening more and reading less do to academic practice? How do people listen to religion? How can sound be seen? What else do we listen with apart from our ears? Taking sonic mediums seriously, the course includes practical sessions in which students will learn how to create audio materials relating to the topics and theories explored in class.

Structure & Aim

The aim of this course is two-fold: firstly to interrogate some of the key debates in sound studies, secondly to acquaint students with some of the different skills needed to undertake research through a sonic lens. Touching on some of the most important moments in the development of the field, as well as contemporary debates, 9 of the 12 sessions will be used to help students situate their thinking within a body of scholarship that is seemingly in a constant state of emergence. The remaining 3 sessions (taking place once every 4 weeks) will involve practical learning and hands on engagement within and outside the university. It will push students to experiment with different ways of listening and researching – from soundwalks to podcasting to transduction. Students will develop public facing materials in these sessions, which may be published if of sufficient quality.

Learning Goals

Students will:

- have an understanding of the possibilities sound studies offers for research within and across disciplines
- become acquainted with some of the key debates in the field
- learn how to do field recordings
- learn how to make a podcast
- learn how to transduce images into sounds
- experiment with applying theoretical and analytical insights in work across different sonic mediums
Instructors

Internal

- Ian M. Cook ([CookI@spp.ceu.edu](mailto:CookI@spp.ceu.edu))
  Research Fellow at the Centre for Media Data and Society
  Lead for 6 sessions along with course design & management
  Please contact Ian for all questions or concerns regarding the course and the other instructors for questions regarding their sessions.

- Cameran Ashraf ([ashrafc@spp.ceu.edu](mailto:ashrafc@spp.ceu.edu))
  Assistant Professor at the School of Public Policy
  Teaching Class 10 ‘Orality, Literacy and Technology’

- Jeremy Braverman ([bravermani@ceu.edu](mailto:bravermani@ceu.edu))
  Media and Visual Education Specialist & Visiting Professor
  Department of History
  Teaching Class 6 ‘Sound Design for Film’ and co-teaching Class 1 ‘Introductions’

- Dumitrita Holdis ([HoldisD@spp.ceu.edu](mailto:HoldisD@spp.ceu.edu))
  Centre for Media, Data and Society
  Co-teaching Class 8 ‘Podcasting for Academics’

- Sara Svensson ([svenssons@ceu.edu](mailto:svenssons@ceu.edu))
  Research Fellow at the Center for Policy Studies & Visiting Professor at the School of Public Policy
  Teaching Class 3 ‘The Policies of Regulating Sound’
External

- Judit Emese Konopás ([juditemesekonopas@gmail.com](mailto:juditemesekonopas@gmail.com))
  Independent Sound Researcher
  Co-teaching Class 5 ‘Soundwalks / Phenomenological Music Listening’

- Zoltán Kovács ([zoltandotkovacs@gmail.com](mailto:zoltandotkovacs@gmail.com))
  Interaction Designer, musician – Budapest Metropolitan University & [Elefant](http://www.elefant.hu)
  Teaching Class 12 ‘Transduction and Sonification’

- Lucia Udvardyová ([ludvardyova@gmail.com](mailto:ludvardyova@gmail.com))
  Journalist, Musician, Organizer/curator, DJ – Easterndaze/Baba Vanga/SHAPE
  Co-teaching Class 5 ‘Soundwalks / Phenomenological Music Listening’
Outcomes and Assessment

1. **Read, listen and come to class with critical questions or comments:** The classes will include lectures, but there will also be lots of input from students. You will be required to discuss, debate and interrogate the readings and listenings during the class. Some weeks are a little heavier on readings, but on some weeks there is not much to read at all – it evens out over the semester. Most weeks there are podcasts, radio shows or videos included – listening is as important as reading, so please treat them as you would a text.

   (10 % of final grade along with attendance)

2. **Presentations (classes 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10 & 11):** You must present once on a case linked to (at least) one of the readings on the syllabus. The presenting students should contact the instructor at least three days in advance to discuss the content of the presentation. Please copy in Ian to the correspondence even when he is not the instructor. Please note, there may be more than one of you presenting per week and, if so, you must coordinate amongst each other to ensure there is no repetition of cases.

   (25% of final grade – students will be graded on how well their case relates to the topic(s) of the week, the clarity of their presentation and originality of application or argument)

3. **Class Podcast (classes 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 & 11 – and possibly 5, 8 and 12 depending on student numbers):** You must produce one class podcast. In groups or as an individual you must interview the lecturer directly following the class, asking her/him firstly for the most important lessons from the session, before asking up to three questions relating to the topic and/or readings. **Before the start of next weeks’ class** you must edit and upload the 10-15 minute podcast to the e-learning site as an MP3. These will be for all of us to listen throughout (and after) the course.

   (25% of final grade pass/fail)
4. Final assignment: In classes 5, 8 and 12 we will produce audio works (field recordings, podcasts, transductions). Students can choose which one of the three audio production works they wish to develop for their final assignment.

- Option One: Using the collaboratively produced pool of field recordings made in class 5, along with any independently collected recordings, produce a 30 minute audio piece. High quality pieces will be eligible for airing on the London based radio station Resonance FM or Resonance Extra. The piece must be accompanied by a theoretically informed circa 1200 word essay.

- Option Two: Building on the interview made for class 8, develop a full podcast. This must include one or more sound clips relating to the topic (of varying lengths); context – circa 800-1000 words of scripted narration that introduces the case study and/or the theoretical or other debate you are addressing (7-10 min); the already recorded interview (10-15 minutes); analysis – circa 500-800 words of scripted argumentation (5 minutes). High quality podcasts will be published within CEU’s podcast library.

- Option Three: Inspired by the transduction online exhibition made for class 12, produce an essay on ‘technology and sound’ using the theories, debates and concepts covered in the course. The circa 2500 word essay should include integrated audio and visual material. Instructions on how to do this will be communicated in class. High quality essays will be made public through a specially created blog.

**DEADLINE: JANUARY 5th MIDNIGHT**

(40% of final grade - work will be assessed on understanding of key concepts and theories, the application of theories to a case study, originality of approach and clarity of presentation, including production quality)
Classes

1. What is Sound Studies? Some Introductions (September 29th)

Instructors: Ian Cook & Jeremy Braverman

In this class, we’ll get acquainted with ways in which sound studies as an interdisciplinary concern has been conceptualised. This broad overview will allow us to position our own ideas as we move forward throughout the semester. As during this course we’ll be doing a fair amount of recording, we’ll also be introduced to the essentials of using microphones by Jeremy. Finally we’ll do a lot of housekeeping, with each student deciding which week s/he’ll give a presentation and which week s/he’ll work on the class podcast.

Readings and listenings:

Mandatory:


Recommended:


2. Soundscapes – An Enduring Concept? & Some Basic Tenants of Sound Editing (October 6th)

Instructor: Ian Cook

When most people think of sound studies they think of soundscapes. In this class we’ll critically interrogate the concept, looking at its inception, how
it’s been used effectively and the problems and limitations of ‘scapes’. In the final 30 minutes of the class we’ll have a crash course in audio editing. Please download and install Audacity before the class, follow the video tutorial we send & bring your computers, a mouse and some headphones to the session.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:


Ingold, Tim. 2011. ‘Four objections to the concept of soundscape’ in Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description. p. 136 – 139

How to Edit Sound – a Video Guide for Academics – online resource (this will be posted a week before the class, it’s still under preparation)

Recommended:


3. The Policies of Regulating Sound (October 13th)

Instructor: Sara Svensson

The aim of the class is to discuss various ways in which sound is the subject of policy, and how sounds are regulated in different contexts with different aims. The class will first discuss two different areas and compare the regulatory approaches towards these, and will then brainstorm around other regulatory areas - Sound pollution: the regulation of ‘noise’ & From radio to web podcast: edited audio media content.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:


Recommended:


4. Listening & the Body (October 20th)

Instructor: Ian Cook

Not only do we hear sound, but we follow and are surrounded by it - the rhythmic presence of moving sounds is lively and animating. We listen not only with our ears, but our entire bodies as active agentful creators of the sounds around us. And sometimes, when the city’s sounds get a bit too much, we aesthetically colonise our surroundings with headphones and our favourite tunes.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:


Recommended:


5. Soundwalks / Phenomenological Music Listening (date TBC)

Instructors: Lucia Udvardyova & Judit Emese Konopás

How do you usually listen? What captures your interest? How does your ear guide you through the environment? In this class we’ll learn how to better understand and relate to listening. Taking cues from psychogeography, situationism and sound studies we will use soundwalking as a means to find new ways of listening to our environments.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:
Schaeffer, Pierre. 1948. Étude Aux Chemins de Fer. Concert de Bruits. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9pOq8u6-bA


Recommended:
Lane, Cathy, and Angus Carlyle. 2013. In the Field: The Art of Field Recording. Uniformbooks.

IN-CLASS WORK: With the help of Lucia and Judit we’ll make some field recordings during a soundwalk close to CEU. You must select a 2-3 minute clip from the recordings made during the class that relates to the theme of the soundwalk (to be communicated in session). The recordings should be both uploaded to shared folder and uploaded to the specially created section of the sound archive Favourite Sounds DEADLINE October 29th

6. Sound Design in Documentary Film (October 27th)

Instructor: Jeremy Braverman

What are the guiding principles behind sound design and mixing techniques? How are sound tracks organized? How can sound establish/enhance the reality of the world of the film? Where does the sound design fit into the overall post production workflow? In this class we’ll get a basic understanding of the process of sound design for film, and the principles behind it. For the class discussion think about how much manipulation is acceptable when dealing with sound in documentary film.
Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:

(This can only be read online - https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/centraleurope-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4470164)


Recommended:


7. Sound Shaping Cultures (November 3rd)

Instructor: Ian Cook

How does knowing through sound help us understand culture? How does the medium through which culture is disseminated help mold the human senses so as to align practices with tradition?

Readings & Listenings:


Recommended:


8. Podcasting for Academics  (November 10th)

Instructors: Ian Cook and Dumi Holdis

In this class, we’ll explore what makes a podcast ‘academic’ and what the implications are for open access to knowledge. We’ll then learn how to interview for radio, how to write for the ear and the possibilities for structuring a podcast.

Readings and Listenings:

Pick an academic podcast and listen to it whilst filling in the ‘structured listening’ assignment. Choose from the list posted in the e-learning site.


Recommended:


POST-CLASS WORK: You must record and edit a 10-15 minute interview about a sonic phenomenon that relates to the readings and debates from class. Recordings can be made in the studio, in the ‘field’ or via skype/VOIP. They can be either with a ‘real person’ or an academic or other expert. The recordings should be sent to Ian. If of required quality, and if you are not planning to extend the interview for the final assignment, the interviews may be uploaded to CEU’s podcast library. DEADLINE November 19th

9. The Rhythmic City  (November 17th)

Instructor: Ian Cook

The city is not only mapped in space, but also lived through diverse collections of rhythmic patterns. There is no mandatory reading, use the time to prepare for, arrange and record your podcast interviews on time.

Recommended reading:
10. Orality, Literacy and Technology (November 24th)

Instructor: Cameran Ashraf

In this class we’ll explore the historical material contextuality of the human encounter with sound, including humans’ evolution of psyche/awareness in relation to sound and the impacts of sound-relating human technology.

Readings & Listenings

Poems: Neruda, P. “Keeping Quiet” & Merton, T. “In Silence”


Recommended:


11. Musical Transformations / Transformative Music (December 1st)

Instructor: Ian Cook

In this class we’ll explore how technology has mediated music production and listening, along with the relationship between music and other forms of production. We’ll also explore the power of listening to music under certain conditions.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:


Recommended:


(at the time of making the syllabus this series has just started. It’ll be in six parts, the other episodes might be worth checking out as well)

12. Transduction and Sonification (December 8)

Instructor: Zoltan Kovacs

Can we transform images into sounds? What can we learn from this transformation? What are the potential uses? You will be introduced to different software that explores the boundaries of image and sound making. The class will demonstrate an example of sound/image transformation in which you will participate in a hands on in-class activity before brainstorming about the practical applications of such transformation in everyday life.

Readings & Listenings:

Mandatory:


Recommended:


IN-CLASS WORK: Before the class you must take a photo relating to a theme (to be communicated beforehand). You must then transduce the photo into a sound file using the application sent to you by Zoltán. In the class we will record and transduce the sound back to an image. After the class you must upload i) the original image ii) the transduced sound iii) your recording of the sound and iv) the newly transduced image. You must give your creation a title. The collected works will form part of an online exhibition. DEADLINE December 12th