SONIC ECOLOGY (MUSIC 5950) SPRING 2011
Mondays 3:30 - 6:00

Instructor: Matt Rahaim
Email: rahaimclass@gmail.com
Office: Ferguson Hall 170

Phone: (612) 465-9248
Office Hours: 2:00-4:00 Tuesdays

Bells mark out community boundaries in the French countryside. The sound of chainsaws drives songbirds from their nests. A nagaswaram player projects the sonic boundaries of temple ritual space far beyond its walls. A freshly gentrified neighborhood puts a loud nightclub out of business with noise complaints. Elephants align their journeys with each other by singing at very low frequencies.

This seminar deals with sonic relationships between living creatures. In particular, we are interested in webs of these relationships that form sonic environments: sonic contexts for sound practices. There will be weekly readings and frequent recording and analysis assignments. The heart of the seminar, however, will be our own ongoing projects, which we will present to each other at the end of the course.

Required books

Fundamentals of Musical Acoustics
by Arthur Benade

The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World
by R. Murray Schaefcr

Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound
by Don Ihde

Suggested (but not required) Books

The Auditory Culture Reader
Bull and Back, eds.

Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life
Brandon LaBelle

Suggested Software

Sound recording and editing (e.g. Audacity, GarageBand)
Sound analysis software (Praat)

Suggested Hardware

Zoom audio recorders
Mike Duffy (duffy110@umn.edu) can help you with these.
Auxiliary Readings

If there are readings that you are particularly interested in, please write to me about substituting them for the canonical readings I assign. We may decide to rearrange the syllabus to accommodate student interest.

Weekly Writings

Part of the discussion in this class will go on by email. Everybody will write at least one long and one short email to the whole-class email list every week, including spring break.

The long contribution should comment on the readings. It is due on Friday.
The short contribution should comment either on observations you've made about sounds in the world or the writings of other students. It is due on Monday.

For grad students, the long writings should be ~750 words; for undergrad students, ~500.

You will likely find yourself writing much more than this; more writing is always welcome.

Recording Presentations

Over the course of the semester, you will make and present several recordings: Interior Sounds, Room Sounds, Mall of America Sounds, Forest Sounds.

Final Projects

Your major work in this class will be a final project, worked out in consultation with the rest of the seminar. This project may take any form (notation, mapping, essay, video or audio documentary, experiment, etc.) but it must fulfill these requirements:

1) it should take 15-20 hours of work (25-30 for grad students)
2) it should be presentable
3) you should be able to make a case that it bears on our collective interests in this seminar
Absence Policy

If you are well, come to class. If you are ill, stay home and rest. Let me know by email that you are not coming to class because of illness, and you will be excused. You are still responsible to do the readings and listenings that are due on that day. You may also be excused for a death in the family or other unusual situations.

Course Goals

Develop theoretical methods for engaging with texts about sonic environments; Discuss readings from a wide range of disciplines; Become conversant with scientific, social scientific, and humanistic methods for studying human nature relations; Write critically about discourses of music and nature; Produce recordings and basic sound analyses.

Course Expectations

You will complete every assignment, attend every class, and lend your voice to discussion.

Special Accomodations

If you have a disability that may affect your class participation and/or writing, please let me know right away so that we can arrange for accommodations. I also encourage you to be in touch with a Disability Services specialist.

http://ds.umn.edu/
PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS

Jan 24
Introduction to the course
Listening, silence, phenomenology, acoustics, ecology

Jan 31
Preliminary Interior Sound Recording Presentations
Phenomenology of Room Sounds
Sound, Silence and Power

Feb 7
Check-in about room acoustics and recordings
Music and Sound Studies Colloquium 4:30
Ron Rodman
"Dallas Redux: The Death and Re-birth of the Auteur in American Narrative Television Music"

Feb 14
Room Sound Presentations
The Countryside, Sonic Boundaries

Feb 21
Baseball Soundscapes, The Mall of America
Visit from Matt Mihalka, PhD Candidate, UMN

Feb 28
Mall of America Sound Presentations
Urban Soundscapes: Cairo, New York

Mar 7
Tuva Soundscapes
Music and Sound Studies Colloquium 4:30
Mark Katz: "The Amateur in the Age of Mechanical Music"

[Spring Break]
Mar 21

[Project Outline]
Visit to frogsong lab, UMN

Mar 28

Tawa Soundscapes
Music and Sound Studies Colloquium 4:30
Kiri Miller: "How Musical Is Guitar Hero?"

April 4

Forest Sound Presentations
Rainforest Soundscapes: Kaluli and the Senoi Temiar

April 11

Modern in nature, Romanticism

April 18

[Preliminary Project Presentations]
Animal song, Non-Human soundscapes

April 25

Beetles in trees
The sounds of deforestation

May 2

3:30 - 8:30
Listening trip followed by dinner and final presentations