

MUSIC [XXXX]: Sound Stories: Field Recording in Theory and Practice

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[Fall, 2023] [Tuesday, Thursday] | [11:40 - 12:55pm] | [Lincoln Hall B21]

Course Description:

Sound Stories: Field Recording in Theory and Practice explores the art of telling stories with recorded sound. During the semester, you will learn to apply a diverse range of recording and studio production techniques to foster your own personal creative storytelling practice. You will also explore an expansive, cross-disciplinary survey of artistic, philosophical, sociological, and scientific approaches to field recording in theory and practice. Workshops, field trips, listening exercises, and collaborative narrative design experiments will culminate in the development of three original sonic artworks and an accompanying sound journal. Students from any discipline are welcome, and no musical training is required.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

You will ...

- learn to approach listening as an active practice and will acquire listening techniques that empower you to interact both creatively and critically with the world in new ways.
- learn a wide variety of field recording techniques and strategies.
- foster a personal field recording practice and begin to develop an original sample library.
- learn how to sample, manipulate, and mix recordings using SoundTrap, an online Digital Audio Workstation (DAW).
- learn to both enhance your recordings and to produce otherworldly sonic effects using Filters, EQs, Delays, Reverbs, Compressors, and Time-and-Pitch Stretching tools.
- study principles of acoustics and psychoacoustics and apply these to the construction of sonic narratives.
- learn about the history of field recording—and phonography more broadly—as well as how field-recordists, sound designers, composers, artists, documentarians, journalists, advertisers, social scientists, natural scientists, and others use sounds to tell different kinds of stories about our world.
- creatively and critically respond to a capacious survey of recorded sonic art and related fields and so begin to develop a sense of the kinds of sonic stories that you might want to share with others.
- practice writing creatively, analytically, and discursively about sound.
- practice discussing recorded sound and narrative in the contexts of artistic, philosophical, sociological, and scientific disciplines, contributing your unique sets of skills and perspectives to class discussions and group exercises.

Required Course Materials:

- All text materials will be provided online through [Canvas](#), and no book purchases will be necessary.
- In lieu of books, you will be asked to sign up for a Sound Trap Music Makers Premium Subscription, which will cost [\[\\$21\]](#) for the semester (including a free trial month to start). Please let me know if this expense represents a significant financial burden for you.
- Due to its accessible cost and interface, I will work with SoundTrap as our primary in-class DAW. However, I will for the most part remain “software agnostic,” meaning that you are welcome to use any other DAW or sound-design software (Pro-Tools, Ableton, Logic, FL Studio, Cubase, Reaper, Max, PureData, SuperCollider) you choose. Doing so will not affect your grade positively or negatively. For our purposes, creative use of the software is all that counts.
- You will be expected to bring a laptop, tablet, or smart phone to *every* class session. Depending on your learning style, you are welcome to print the readings, but this is not required.
- You will make frequent use of the [\[Sidney Cox Music Library's Handheld Zoom H4n Recorders\]](#), which are available to check-out for free at the library desk. [Here](#) is a list of recommended recording devices should you wish to invest in one of your own.
- A pair of inexpensive, wired—not Bluetooth!—headphones or earphones is also required.

Course Structure:

Throughout the semester, you will participate in Production Workshops, Active Listening Exercises, and Field Trips. Weekly Reading & Repertoire assignments will be discussed every Thursday, *and you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss approximately 15-20 pages of readings and ~30-40 minutes of repertoire each week.*

The course includes three units, each of which concludes with a project presentation.

- *Unit 1: Imaginary Soundscape No. 1 (Listening I | History | Soundscape I | Soundscape II)* provides an overview of fundamental field recording concepts and practices, both historical and contemporary, with special focus on the rapid acquisition of hardware and software skills.
- *Unit 2: Signal Flows (Media and Memory | Listening II | Narrative | Voice)* investigates the different social, scientific, and artistic functions of field recordings, taking note of how each knowledge domain values and applies sound uniquely in its meaning-making practices, while emphasizing creative approaches to constructing sonic narratives with text and the recorded voice.
- *Unit 3: Signal Flows (TBD)* focuses on cultivating individual creative practices; its content will be determined by individual student interests and projects.

Grading Policy:

All due dates for all graded assignments are included in the syllabus at the beginning of the semester, and while these may shift during the course of the semester, please note they are designed so that assigned work can be used as material for activities *that same day*. Because of this, late work will result in knock-on-effects that will hinder your ability to effectively engage in class as well as in following assignment(s). If you do require extra time, or feel like you are falling behind, please let me know so that we can work together to find a solution.

20%	Attendance, Engagement, and Preparation
20%	Sound Journal Entries
30%	Mid-Semester Projects
30%	Final Project

Attendance, Engagement, and Preparation: (20%)

Attendance is mandatory, and more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. Assigned readings and repertoire will be discussed every Wednesday and preparing for class by reading, watching, and listening to the assigned materials is required. While active and enthusiastic participation in class discussions and group activities will help you and your colleagues benefit the most from the course, please always also be mindful of sharing space with others.

Sound Journal Entries: (20%)

During the semester, you will complete 6 Sound Journal Entries (3.3% of your total grade each), reflecting skills learned in class workshops. The format of these entries will vary widely, from short descriptions of sound to recordings to small sample libraries to project sketches. Journal Entries should be uploaded *before* class on the day that they are due to receive full credit; however, *you may resubmit work for a higher grade upon receiving feedback.*

Mid-Semester Projects: (30%)

- *Project 1 Presentation: Imaginary Soundscape No. 1 (15%)*

With samples cut from your own field recordings assemble an artificial soundscape of your own design using SoundTrap software. With careful consideration of recording techniques, studio effects and the relationships between your chosen sounds, your soundscape might evoke a city street, an alien moon, or ... Allow one-to-two minutes for the scene to unfold, and provide a program note (~100 words) describing your soundscape's ecological design.

- *Project 2 Presentation: Writing Sound (15%)*

Develop an original story—of any kind—and tell it through sound. You must incorporate text but may do so however you think best serves your narrative frame. While you are welcome to opt for a traditional short-story approach, you may frame your narrative within the context of any genre you choose, including poetry, spoken word, rap, creative non-fiction, theatre, podcast, documentary, news broadcast, etc. Aim for two-to-three minutes, focusing on quality over quantity.

Final Project: (30%)

Final Project Presentation: Signal Flows

The content, format, medium, equipment and presentation of your final project is entirely up to you, with a few important qualifications. You should aim to showcase your knowledge of field recording theory and practice, and recorded sound must form a central part of your project presentation. Aim also to be as practical as you are resourceful; if you are not sure about whether something will be possible, please ask me ahead of time! We will meet individually to discuss the direction you plan to take as well as to address any questions or additional help you may need. You will also submit a two-to-three-page program note in which you describe how at least three of the assigned readings and repertoire works have inspired or guided your project. More details to come.

Fair Assessment Policy:

Some of you may already be familiar with certain concepts and techniques covered in class, while others of you may not. In this regard, please note that each of you will contribute an invaluable perspective and unique mode of engagement with the course material, and you will never be penalized for not already knowing something! An important part of creative work means taking risks and being open to the possibility of “failure.” In my experience, we tend to learn as much from projects that “don’t work” as from those that do. Accordingly, projects that “don’t work” may end up receiving an excellent grade! The nature of creative work also means that evaluation can feel unfairly subjective. Always aim to make work that you enjoy making!—when you do so, the rest tends to work itself out. To account for each of the concerns raised above, projects will be assessed uniformly on the following rubric:

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| 25% | Demonstration of Effort |
| 25% | Application of Course Content |
| 25% | Originality (See <i>Academic Integrity</i>) |
| 25% | Risk-taking & Resourcefulness |

Academic Integrity:

Field recording and related practices (surveillance and sampling) are fraught with intellectual property and consent problematics from the start, frequently calling into question the very concepts of authorship and originality. As a result, your *personal integrity* is of the utmost importance in this class. You will always learn the most from and most enjoy presenting work that is authentically yours! Standard academic guidelines still *always* apply. Do not pass off work made by others as your own, and when incorporating the use of others’ work in your projects—which will in some cases be expected or even necessary—acknowledge those persons appropriately. Please note that plagiarizing creative work is—perhaps counter-intuitively—normally extremely obvious.

Student Resources:

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| [Writing Center: | http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/ |
| [Learning Strategies Center: | https://lsc.cornell.edu/ |
| [Student Disability Services: | http://sds.cornell.edu |
| [Student Support and Advocacy Services: | https://scl.cornell.edu/student-support |
| [Counselling and Psychiatric Services: | https://health.cornell.edu/services/counseling-psychiatry |

If you or someone that you know are feeling overwhelmed, and are struggling to find the support you need, know that you are not alone. If I cannot personally help you, I will work with you to find someone else who can. If needed, please register with [Student Disability Services] at the beginning of the semester so that you may receive your accommodation without delay. We will work together to maximize your learning however you require. If you think you may have a disability, please contact [Student Disability Services] for a confidential discussion. More information is available at the links above.

Assignment Schedule:

Unit 1: Imaginary Soundscape No. 1

Week	Date	Assignment	Description
1	08/22		
	08/24		
2	08/29	Sound Journal #1	Field Recording and Reflection (1' ; 100 words)
	08/31		
3	09/05	Sound Journal #2	Arts Quad Sample Library and Annotations
	09/07		
4	09/12	Sound Journal #3	Sound Collage (30" ; 100 words)
	09/14		
5	09/19	Project Presentation #1	<i>Imaginary Soundscape No. 1</i>
	09/21		

Unit 2: Writing Sound

Week	Date	Assignment	Description
6	09/26		
	09/28		
7	10/03	Sound Journal #4	Remix (30", 100 words)
	10/05		
8	10/10		
	10/12		
9	10/17	Sound Journal #5	Prose Poem (30", 100 words)
	10/19		
10	10/24	Project Presentation #2	<i>Writing Sound</i>
	10/26		

Unit 3: Signal Flows

Week	Date	Assignment	Description
11	10/31		
	11/02		
12	11/07	Sound Journal #6	Acousmatic Narrative (30"; 100 words)
	11/09		
13	11/14	Sound Journal #7	Final Project Draft Materials / Sketch
	11/16		
14	11/21		
	11/23		
15	11/28	Project Presentation #3	
	11/30		
16	12/05	Sound Journal #8	Program Note (2-3 pages)
	12/07		

Guest Speaker Schedule:

4	09/14	María Bulla	<i>The Hacemos Bulla Project</i>
6	09/28	Kevin Ernste	<i>Advanced Sound Design</i>
7	10/03	Emily Beran	<i>Sound in the Archive</i>
8	10/12	Ronald Hoy	<i>Bioacoustics & Cognition</i>
9	10/19	Annie Lewandowski	<i>The Cetus Project</i>
11	10/31	Mike Watson	<i>Macaulay Library, Bird Vocalizations</i>

Reading & Repertoire Schedule

UNIT 1: IMAGINARY SOUNDSCAPE No. 1

Week 1: Listening (08/24)
<p>Reading: (9 pages)</p> <p>Le Guin, 1986, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (2) Oliveros, 2000, "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory" (2) Chion, 2012, "The Three Listening Modes" (3) Pisaro-Liu, 2010, "Ten framing considerations of the field" (2)</p>
<p>Repertoire: (25 minutes)</p> <p>Ferrari, 1970, Presque Rien No. 1 (21') Cage, 1991, "John Cage about silence" [Interview] (5')</p>
Week 2: History (08/31)
<p>Reading: (14 pages)</p> <p>Sterne, 2003, "Hello!" (5) Schaeffer, 1952, "Chapter 1" (4) Chavez & Warren, 2022, "A Sound Artist's Breakdown of Field Recording over History" (2) Eno, 1983, "Studio as Compositional Tool" (2) Attali, 1977, "Noise and Politics" (1)</p>
<p>Repertoire: (30 minutes)</p> <p><i>Ask ChatGPT for a paragraph or two of context for each piece. Ask follow-up questions too!</i></p> <p>El-Dabh, 1944, "Wire Recorder Piece" from <i>The Expression of Zaar</i> (10'; starts at 9'22") Schaeffer, 1948, "Études aux chemins de fer" from <i>Études de Bruits</i> (3') Cage, 1951, Imaginary Soundscape No. 4 (5') Cage, 1952, Williams Mix (6') Chavez, 2018, "The Language of Chance #1" (4')</p>
Week 3: Soundscapes, Part I (09/07)
<p>Reading: (16 pages)</p> <p>Schafer, 1973, "The Music of the Environment" (4) Ouzounian, 2021, "Mapping the Acoustic City: Noise Mapping and Sound Mapping" (7) López, 2001, "Profound Listening and Environmental Sound Matter" (3) Ingold, 2011, "Four Objections to the Concept of Soundscape" (2)</p>
<p>Repertoire: (30 minutes)</p> <p><i>Play the four pieces below simultaneously in different tabs on your web browser. For (at least) ~15 minutes, continuously adjust the volumes of each video to (re)mix the soundscapes together. Also feel free to experiment with changing the speed and skipping back and forth in time however and whenever you like. What does an icy rainforest sound like?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Chris Watson, 2013 "Weather Report"- Francisco Lopez, 2015, "La Selva: Sound Environments from a Neotropical Rainforest"- Jana Winderen, 2016, "The Wanderer"- Francisco Lopez, 2017, "Wind Patagonia"

Week 4: Soundscapes, Part II (09/14)

Reading: (16 pages)

- Bruyninckx, 2018, “Conclusion” (3)
Westerkamp, 2002, “Linking Soundscape Composition and Acoustic Ecology” (5)
Martin, 2019, “[...] Soundwalking as Black Feminist Method” (3)
England, 2019, “[...]: (Re)mapping and Recording Space in Indigenous Sound Art” (5)

Repertoire: (1 hour)

More information about [Westerkamp](#), [the Obadikes](#), [Ogboh](#), and [Bulla](#).

- Westerkamp, 1981, “A Walk Through the City” from *Transformations* (15)
Obadike, 2012, “African Metropole: Sonic City Lagos” (2)
Ogboh, 2015, “The Song of the Germans” (1) [Excerpt]
Ogboh, 2017, “Lagos is a City That is Never Silent | Tate Shots” (5) [Interview]
Biggs, 2020, “Send_Silence” (5) [Use headphones]
Bulla, 2023, “To Be Noise and Dance” (45) [Listen to at least 30’ while reading]

Week 5: Presentations (09/19, 09/21)

No Reading & Repertoire Assignments

UNIT 2: WRITING SOUND

Week 6: Reproduction and Remix (09/28)

Reading: (11 pages)

- Berger, 1972, “1” in *Ways of Seeing* (1)
Miller, 1996, “Erasures and the Art of Memory” *Audio Cultures* (3)
Crawford, 2009, “Following You: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media” (5)
Chua & Rehding, 2021, “Alien Listening” (1)
Lely & Saunders, 2012, “Commentary on *Ear Piece*” (1)

Repertoire: (~40 minutes)

- Reich, 1966, “Come out” (13)
Humanity, 1977, “United Nations Greetings/Whale Songs” *Voyager Golden Record* (4)
Selby, 2011, “Christine Sun Kim” (10)
NatGeo, 2014, “DJ Spooky Mixes Media to Spark Thought” (2)

Week 7: Narrative (10/05)

Reading: (16 pages)

NB: Please read through all of the pages of the Online Exhibit before Tuesday’s class.

Cornell Library, 2019, [Mixed Media: The Interplay of Sound and Text](#) (~10) [Online Exhibit]

- Oliveros, 1998, “Sonic Images” (1)
Ono, 1964, “Music” in *Grapefruit* (2) [Excerpts]
Berlant & Stuart, 2019, Excerpts from *The Hundreds* (2)
Moten, 2015, Excerpts from *The Little Edges* (1)

Repertoire: (30 minutes)

- Cardiff, 1999, “I’m Standing in the Library”² (14’)
Fischli & Weiss, 1987, “The Way Things Go” (2’)
Sol Rezza, 2016, “La horda de escarabajos” (4’)
Kreidler, 2009, “Compression Sound Art” (4’)
Jones, 2004, “You Make Me Feel Like 100 Billie Holiday Songs” (4’) [*Excerpt*]

Week 8: Listening II (10/12)**Reading: (16 pages)**

- Clarke, 2005, “Perception, Ecology, and Music” (4)
Krueger, 2011, “Doing Things with Music” (5)
Hoy, 1992, “Evolution of Hearing in Insects” (4)
Hoy, 2022, “Outsourced hearing in an orb-weaving spider [...]” (3)

Repertoire: (22 minutes)

- Joyce & McQuay, “Good Vibrations: Key to Insect Communication” (7’) [*Interview*]
Elias Lab (UC Berkeley), “Jumping spider mating dance [...]”
Cornell University [Katy Payne], 2011, “Listening to Elephants” (13’) [*Interview*]

Week 9: Space and Movement (10/19)**Reading: (5 pages)**

- Lewandowski, 2021, “Program Notes” [*Cetus, watch video first, see Repertoire below*]
Lennox, 2017, “Music as artificial Environment” (3’)
LaBelle, 2020, “Listening to the Body” (2’) [*Transcribed from YouTube*]

Repertoire: (25 minutes)

- Lewandowski, 2018, “Cetus: Life after Life” (5’)
Kubisch, 2018, “Discovering New Sounds” (4’)
Kubisch, 2007, “Atocha” from *Five Electrical Walks* (6’)
Ash Fure, 2020, Interior Listening Protocol (10’)

Explore: (~15 minutes)

- [Camille Norment Studio](#) ; Norment, 2015, “[Rapture](#)” ; Norment, 2016, “[Prime](#)”

Week 10: Presentations (10/24, 10/26)

No Reading & Repertoire Assignments

UNIT 3: SIGNAL FLOWS

Week 11: The Voice (11/02)

Readings (18 pages):

- Rilke, 1919, "Primal Sound" (3)
Barthes, 1972, "The Grain of the Voice" (2)
Hamdan, 2014, "Aural Contract: Forensic Listening [...]" (3)
LaBelle, 2006 "Finding Oneself: Alvin Lucier and the Phenomenal Voice" (5)
Rogers & Z, 2010, "Pamela Z" (5)

Repertoire: (40 minutes)

- Lucier, 1981, "I Am Sitting in a Room" (10') [*If pressed for time, listen to first 5', then skip ahead to last 5'*]
Chacon, "Compass" (3')
Ultra-Red, 2017, "R.A.D.I.C.A.L." (7')
Z, 2009, "Voci Excerpts" (10')
Sterne, 2014, "... and this is my voice" (10')

Week 12: Interiority and Exteriority (11/09)

Readings: (17 pages)

- Bregman, "The Auditory Scene" (5')
Ouzounian, 2021, "The Rise of the Binaural Listener [...]" (10)
Grimshaw, 2018, "Presence through Sound" (3')

Repertoire: (35 minutes)

- Susan Philpsz, 2018, "Sound in Space" (7')
Papalexandri-Alexandri, 2014, "Speaking of Membranes" (2')
Morris, 1961, "Box with the Sound of Its Own Making" (7')
Lucier, 1990, "Nothing is Real (Strawberry Fields Forever)" (11')
Barrett, 2007, "Microclimate IV" (7')

Week 13: The Macauley Library (11/26)

Repertoire: (20 minutes)

Explore the [Macauley Library](#) sound archive for at least 15 minutes. Choose a specific species and listen to some field recordings of it. What is musical about the sound?

Week 14: Thanksgiving (11/23)

No Reading & Repertoire Assignments

Week 15: Presentations (11/28, 11/30)

No Reading & Repertoire Assignments