

ANT 324L: Sonic Ethnography

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OH: M 1-3 and by appt. (SAC 5.148)

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 listening, silence, noise, sound worlds, and technology will organize discussion of topics that include the history of recorded sound in anthropology, acoustics and environmental sound, the global circulation of media, and the politics of song. 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

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 [15%]

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 1 hour before class begins. The class will be divided in 2 groups that will alternate posting and responding to the reading responses.

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. Following each fieldtrip, workshop, 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. Class time will be provided for workshopping preliminary drafts. The 500-word entry is due on Canvas 1 week after the listening event.

Midterm [10%]

Your midterm consists of the first five “writing sound” entries, revised following their workshopping in class. These should be accompanied by a 3-4 page reflection piece, in which you can expand on your listening experience, discuss the process of writing sound, and address challenges or questions that the investigations raised; it explain how you revised your entries and substantively engage with at least 2 class readings.

1. Soundwalk #1
2. Soundwalk #2
3. “A Village Soundscape”
4. Sonic archive
5. Anechoic chamber

Final project [10%]

The final is the full portfolio of all 10 “writing sound” essays, reworked incorporating feedback. The final reflection should include discussion of your revision process, along with substantive engagement with relevant class readings. 7-10 are responses to and engagements with material from guest lectures, drawing out themes from readings and elaborating on what they offer for sonic ethnography.

- 1-5.
6. Noise measurement
7. Language, voice, and signification (Shipley)
8. Politics of song (Thompson)
9. Arab experimentalism (Kalash)
10. Electromagnetic detector walk

Phonography project [15%]

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. These will be presented during the last week of class, and submitted along with a written reflection that explains and theorizes the audio work you are doing.

Peer reviews [10%]

Peer reviews are a crucial component of writing and editing. Class time will be dedicated to workshopping “writing sound” entries, with peer review instructions provided. These will be turned in and evaluated on the basis of their depth and thoughtfulness.

Extra credit [5%]: attend a lecture or workshop in the *Listen: A Sound Studies Lecture Series* and submit a review that draws out resonances with class readings.

Readings

The following books have been ordered at The Co-op:

Novak, David and Matt Sakakeeny, eds. 2015. *Keywords in Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Kapchan, Deborah, ed. 2017. *Theorizing Sound Writing*. Middlebury, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Other assigned readings are available as PDFs or links on Canvas

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%

Academic Integrity

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: “As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.” Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT’s Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

WEEK	DATE	READINGS	LISTENING	DUE
LISTENING				
1. Writing sound	1/22		FIELDTRIP: Soundwalk #1, Listening	
	1/24	"Listening" and "Phonography," 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 from the readings • Soundwalk #1 notes for workshoping
2. Acoustemology	1/29	"Acoustemology" in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "Waterfalls of Sound," by Steven Feld "Sounding Bodies," by Tom Rice		Reading response A
	1/31	"From Ethnomusicology to Echo-Muse-Ecology: Reading R. Murray Schafer in the Papua New Guinea Rainforest," by Steven Feld "Doing Anthropology in Sound," by Feld and Brenneis	LISTEN: "A Village Soundscape"	Soundwalk 1 revised entry
3. On listening to how others listen	2/5	"On Alternating Sounds," by Franz Boas "Listening Acts," in <i>Theorizing Sound Writing</i> "The Recording Studio as Fetish," by Louise Meintjes		Reading response B
	2/7		FIELDTRIP: Soundwalk #2, Listening to how people listen	"A Village Soundscape" entry
4. Collecting sounds	2/12	"Echo," in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "An Archival Dilemma: The Densmore Cylinder Recording Speeds"	FIELDTRIP: Harry Ransom Center	Reading response A
	2/14	"Performers and the Phonograph," by Erica Brady "Modernity's Ear, Epilogue," by Roshanak Kheshti		Soundwalk 2 entry
SILENCE				
5. Composing silence	2/19	"Acoustics" and "Silence" in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "Sounds of Modernity," by Emily Thompson		Reading response B
	2/21		FIELDTRIP: Anechoic chamber fieldtrip	Sonic archive entry
6. Sensing silence	2/26	"Let Your Words Be Few," by Richard Bauman "The Echo," by Macario Garcia "One Square Inch of Silence"		Midterm listening portfolio to workshop (include anechoic chamber entry)
	2/28		SCREENING: <i>Silence</i>	
NOISE				
7. Urban noise	3/5	"Noise" and "Music" in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> <i>Japanoise</i> , Ch. 1, by David Novak		Reading response A

	3/7	"Sounding Austin: Live Music, Race, and the Selling of a City," O'Meara and Tretter City of Austin Noise Ordinance	Guest lecture TBD	Midterm listening portfolio
8. Measuring noise	3/12	"A Booming Business," by Karin Bijsterveld		Reading response B
	3/14		FIELDTRIP: noise measurement	
SPRING BREAK				
SOUND WORLDS				
9	3/26	"Acoustic Palimpsests" in <i>Theorizing Sound Writing</i>		Reading response A
Language, voice, and signification	3/28		SCREENING: <i>Make It Sweet</i>	Noise measurement entry
10	4/2	"Language" in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "Parody After Identity" and "Transnational Circulation and Digital Fatigue in Ghana's Azonto Dance Craze," by Jesse Shipley	GUEST LECTURE: Jesse Shipley	
Politics of song	4/4	"Voice" in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "Underground Rock Music and Democratization in Indonesia," by Jeremy Wallach "Living the Punk Lifestyle in Jakarta," by Jeremy Wallach		Reading response B
11	4/9	"Sexual Slander and the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia," by Saskia Wieringa "When a history seminar becomes toxic," by Saskia Wieringa	GUEST LECTURE: Rachel Thompson	Language, voice, and signification entry
Arab experimentalism	4/11	"A Look at Lightning" and "Sonic Cosmopolitanisms" in <i>The Arab Avant-Garde</i>		Reading response A
12	4/16	"5 questions for Dirar Kalash"	GUEST LECTURE: Dirar Kalash	Politics of song entry
TECHNOLOGIES OF LISTENING				
	4/18	"Techniques of Inattention," by Brian Larkin "Ubiquitous Listening," by Anahib Kassabian		Reading response B
13. Transducing sound	4/23	"Transduction" and "Deafness," in <i>Keywords in Sound</i> "Do Signals Have Politics?" by Mara Mills	INTERVIEW: Day of music	Arab experimentalism entry
	4/25		FIELDTRIP: Electromagnetism listening	
14. Writing with sound	4/30		Phonography workshop	
	5/2		Field recording day	Electromagnetic listening entry
15. Final presentations, wrapping up	5/7-9			Phonography project, final portfolio

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