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Department of Communication Arts
Graduate Program in Media and Cultural Studies

Sound Histories: Seminar in Media History and Historiography

This seminar will focus on “Sound Histories” in two senses. First, we will concentrate on the theory and practice of media historiography, through readings and an introduction to archival research, as a way to think about what history is and how it can be practiced in a “sound” manner – and what that implies. Second, we will center our historical readings on “sound histories:” historical work that focuses on the emerging field of “sound studies,” or the study of aural culture in the US. This includes aspects of music history, radio history, aural aesthetics, sound technologies, and the listening practices they produce. Questions to which we will address ourselves include: what challenges does aural culture present to historians? How might we define “sound studies” as a field, and what are its parameters? Can we discern the beginnings of “sound theory” emerging from the readings in this class, or if not, from what theoretical bases do these histories proceed? How can we position histories of sound culture within the visual emphasis predominant in media studies?

Required Readings

Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*
Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)
Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)
Barlow, William, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1999)
Kozloff, Sarah, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2000)
Lastra, James, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)
Morton, David, *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000)
Lewis Ehrenberg, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998)
Weiss, Allen S. *Phantasmic Radio* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1995)

Recommended: Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995)

Selections (available for copying) from:

Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000)
Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio, eds., *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio* (New York: Routledge 2001)
Emily Thomson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in American, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002)

Requirements

All students are expected to attend and participate fully in each seminar session. Grade will be based on:

Research paper (and proposal)	80%
In-class reading presentation/archive assignment	10%
Participation	10%

The research paper should be 25-30 pp. in length, including endnotes and bibliography. It should make an original contribution to the scholarship in the area covered by the seminar, drawing on and developing theories and concepts from the readings and discussion, and be based at least in part on archival research. A proposal, due March 22, should sketch out the basic research topic, locate its argument within course concerns, and identify key evidentiary sources, including a preliminary bibliography.

The in-class reading presentation should be 2-3 pp. long, drawn from the seminar bibliography, and consist of a summary and critique of the book selected; copies should be distributed to all members of the class.

The archive assignment will involve investigating archival collections and materials available on campus and writing up a brief description of one selected source.

I. Historiographical theory and method

Jan 26

Jenkins, Keith, *Re-Thinking History*
Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*, Part III, "Making a Claim and Supporting It"

Feb 2

Trouillot, Michel-Rolf, *Silencing the Past*, chaps. 1, 2, 3
Anderson & Curtin, "Writing Cultural History: The Challenge of Radio and Television"
Hilmes, "Rethinking Radio"

II. Histories of Sound Culture Audio Recording and Acoustics

Feb 9

Sterne, Jonathan *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*

Feb 16

Morton, David, *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America*

Thomson, Emily Ann, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*, chap 6: "Electroacoustics and Modern Sound, 1900-1933"

Radio Broadcasting**Feb 23**

Barlow, William, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1999)

Archive assignment due

Mar 1

Butsch, Richard, *The Making of American Audiences, From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*, chap. 12-15

Vaillant, Derek, "Sounds of Whiteness: Local Radio, Racial Formation, and Public Culture in Chicago;"

Loviglio, Jason, "Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People,"

Savage, "Radio and the Political Discourse of Racial Equality,"

Douglas, Susasn, "Letting the Boys Be Boys: Talk Radio, Male Hysteria, and Political Discourse in the 1980s"

Squier, Susan, "Wireless Possibilities, Posthuman Possibilities: Brain Radio, Community Radio, Radio Lazarus"

Film Sound**Mar 8**

Lastra, James, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

Mar 15

Spring Break

Mar 22

Kozloff, Sarah, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2000)

Proposals due**Popular Music****Mar 29**

Ehrenberg, Lewis, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998)

Experimental/Art Sound

Apr 5

Weiss, Allen S. *Phantasmic Radio* (Durham: Duke Univ Press 1995)

Apr 12 Presentations

Apr 19 No Class

Apr 26 Presentations

May 3 Presentations

Papers due May 10 by 5 pm.

As a guide for analyzing the readings throughout the seminar, think about these things as you read:

- 1) What overall argument is the author making? What are the major sub-points and which, to your mind, are the most important?
- 2) Within what critical framework does the author position him/herself?
- 3) How does “history” work within this critical framework? Is “history” being used primarily to support a theoretical project, or does theory emerge (even if implicitly) from the historiographical project?
- 4) What evidentiary sources does the author draw on? How well do these sources serve the thesis of the book, and how might we critique this aspect of the author’s work drawing on our post-structuralist examination of historiographical theory?
- 5) How does this author contribute to what might be defined as the area of “sound studies?”