Mus 40b: Audio Culture and Digital Sound Production

T/Th, 3:30-4:50 PM
Spring 2020
Instructor: Jeremy Rapaport-Stein

About. This course covers a diverse range of topics related to the cultural history, politics, poetics, ethics, and science of how we listen to and create sound. Drawing from the emerging, interdisciplinary field of “sound studies,” the course will focus mostly on recorded sound and digital audio. Our work will lie at the intersection of the arts and the humanities, seeking to investigate the listening and sound-making experience from multiple angles. We’ll learn to use the tools of humanities scholarship (reading, research, and writing) while also acting as sound creators, producing original digital audio work. These two perspectives on sound, artistic and scholarly, will run parallel throughout the course. Alongside discussions and readings related to various critical concepts, we’ll also be having in-class workshops to develop the necessary technical skills to deal with digital audio production. In the final project, students will have the opportunity to bridge the gap, creating a multimodal, formally experimental research project on a topic of their choosing.

Learning Goals.
- Create clear audio recordings with handheld microphones
- Use a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) to edit and juxtapose recordings, producing a clean track without pops, clicks, unwanted artifacts, or awkwardly-timed transitions
- Apply the basic tenets of audio mixing to produce well-balanced, sonically rich finished products
- Explain the scientific phenomenon of sound, as well as how we hear and record it
- Develop strategies for critical, careful listening to complex sound works in various genres and styles
- Trace the history and identify major trends in experimental electroacoustic music and sound art
- Decode rich, scholarly writing in the humanities and arts, identifying thesis, motive, and examples of evidence to accurately summarize and critique the author’s main point
- Reflect on the cultural politics of sound and listening, including how one’s positionality and experiences filter the way sounds are heard and produced

Course Materials.

All other assigned readings and listenings will be available on the Latte page. You are responsible for printing out each week’s reading and bringing it to class.

If printing costs or the cost of purchasing *Ways of Hearing* pose any financial problems, please be in touch with me and we can work together to make sure you have access to everything you need.

**Course Schedule.** Our tentative course schedule is given below on this document. However, this schedule will change throughout the semester as our pace through the material quickens or slows. I’ll continually update a shared google doc of our “working course schedule,” linked to on our Latte page, which shows any changes and keeps the syllabus up-to-date.

**Pre-requisites.** There are no specific prerequisites. However, though this is an introductory course we will be dealing with a lot of material, some of which is quite complex. If you are a first-year student or have not yet taken a college-level course with a heavy reading/writing load, you may find the class overwhelming. If you have doubts, feel free to discuss this with me.

**Grading** breaks down as follows.

- Homework: **30%**
- Participation: **15%**
- Response Assignment 1: **15%**
- Response Assignment 2: **15%**
- Final Project: **25%**
  - Class Presentation: 5%
  - Project Submission: 20%

**Response Assignments.** The two response assignments will be your chance to consider the course material in more depth, choosing from a list of prompts. For the two assignments, focused on the first and second half of the semester respectively, you’ll do one 5-8 page paper and one 3-6 minute audio response (which can be a podcast-like narrative story, a creative work, or something in-between). You may choose which response assignment will be written and which will be aural, but you must do one of each.

**Final Project.** For your final project, you’ll have the freedom to go beyond the syllabus to take a deep dive into a question you find interesting. The form of your project (sonic, written, or a blend) as well as the mode of research (artistic, humanistic, scientific) will be up to you, guided by limits and goals that we’ll devise together. If desired, you may team up with classmates for a group final project (again, within reasonable limits which we’ll determine together on a case-by-case basis). In the last few class
meetings of the semester, as you’re in the research and brainstorming phase, you’ll present your work in progress to the class.

**Homework.** To supplement the assigned reading and listening, there will be discussion questions, a short response paragraph, and/or audio production assignments nearly every week. This “homework” counts for 30% of your total grade. Over the course of the semester, you’re allowed to skip or miss 1 homework assignment without a grading penalty (word to the wise: save your skip until you really need it!). The homework is graded “check plus,” “check,” “check-minus,” or “re-do.” If you don’t miss any homework, I’ll toss out one check-minus or re-do when I’m tallying your final homework grade.

**Participation.** Your participation grade, worth 15% of your total grade in the course, stems from your active presence in class. Examples of engaged, active presence include things like coming to class on time, offering insightful comments or questions related to the assigned work, and listening carefully to your classmates and myself.

**SIMS and BEAMS.** A handful of our class meetings will take place in the computer lab at SIMS (Sound and Image Studios), which is located in the bottom floor of the library. You are strongly encouraged to utilize the free and accessible resources at SIMS, which include borrowable microphone equipment, DAW software, and a recording studio. I also recommend getting to know Mark Dellelo, who manages SIMS, and his knowledgeable student staff. They offer in-person training and orientations for all the software and hardware equipment in the studios. You may also wish to work in the Brandeis Electroacoustic Music Studio (BEAMS), which offers a 5.1 channel audio workstation. If you’d like to use BEAMS, please be in touch with me and I’d be happy to give you a studio orientation.

**Late Work.** I offer extensions when given advance notice of legitimate reasons. **Barring emergencies, you must contact me at least 3 days in advance of a deadline in order to receive an extension.** Otherwise, late work will be penalized by a third of a grade per day (B+, B, B- and so on). I will not accept work submitted more than a week after the deadline.

**Office Hours Extension.** If you come talk to me in office hours (before the original due date) to discuss any assignment, you get an automatic one-day extension for that assignment!

**Revision.** If you wish, you may revise either or both of the response assignments for a higher grade. The maximum possible “re-write” grade is an A-. The last date by which I’ll accept revised work for the response assignments is Monday, May 4th.
If you get a “check-minus” or a “re-do” on a homework, you have one week to revise and resubmit (a revision is optional for a check-minus, but you must re-submit a “re-do” grade in order to get credit for that homework). The max possible grade for revised homework is a check.

**Attendance.** You are allowed up to three unexcused absences, no questions asked. You are responsible for reaching out to either me or a classmate to catch up on what you missed. After three unexcused absences, you will lose 4% of your total final grade for each additional unexcused absence. For example, if your final grade in the class is a 93, an A, and you’ve missed 5 classes, I’ll mark you down 8 points (-4 for each unexcused absence over the limit) to an 85, a B.

Excused absences are only granted in the case of serious illness or emergency. If you need an excused absence, contact both me and your academic advisor (see Brandeis’s policy here: [http://www.brandeis.edu/advising/policies/absence.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/advising/policies/absence.html)).

**Lateness.** Please be on time! Being 10 or more minutes late counts as half an absence. Being under 10 minutes late several times will lower your participation grade.

**Laptops/Tablets/Phones.** Unless you have received special permission from me, you may not use a laptop, phone, or tablet during class meetings.

**Academic Honesty.** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually in section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

**Content Warnings.** Though this seems like a course on sound, it’s often a course on how sound intersects with culture and humanity. As there are troubling aspects of culture and humanity, there will be course material that engages with potentially troubling matters. Please talk to me if you’re struggling with any material or foresee struggles. I will give content warnings in our working course schedule doc for any material which contains graphic depictions of violence and/or discussions of sexual assault.

**Accommodations.** If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodation letter, please speak with me and give me a copy of your letter as soon as you can. We’ll work together in order to create or establish the conditions which best support you. In order to provide test or presentation accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I can’t provide accommodations retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting
accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at 781-736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

Workload. Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.). If you find yourself either over- or underwhelmed by the workload in the course, please come talk to me.

COURSE SCHEDULE
(subject to tweaking)

Tues Jan 14 introductions
- In-class: syllabus dance party

Thurs Jan 16
- Oliveros, “Some Sound Observations”
- Sterne, The Audible Past (pp. 1-22)
- In-class: introduction to mics and DAWs

Tues Jan 21 analog and digital
- Krukowski, Ways of Hearing (episode 1/pp. -1-20)
- Clayton, Uproot (pp. 58-76)
- Cipriani and Giri, Electronic Music and Sound Design (pp. 7-24, but pp. 20-24 are optional)

Thurs Jan 23
- Cipriani and Giri, Electronic Music and Sound Design (pp. 1-6 and 37-38)
- Schaeffer, Cinq études de bruits
- Norman, Anything from the Minibar?
- Matmos, “Breaking Bad”
- Bonus Matmos video: Matmos interview/demo with EarthQuaker Devices (optional)
- In-class: musique concrete, collage, and editing
- HW 1: analog/digital reflection

Tues Jan 28 the aural environment, soundwalking, and public sound
- Westerkamp, Kits Beach Soundwalk and Talking Rain
- Westerkamp, “Soundwalking”
- Kubisch, *Electrical Walks* (watch the videos on latte)

- In-class: soundscapes and soundwalking
- HW 2: sound collage/musique concrète

**Thurs Jan 30**
- Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (pp. 3-15 and 88-103)
- 99% Invisible, “Sound and Health: Cities”

- In-class: sound collage listening session, mic and field recording techniques

**Tues Feb 4**
- Radovac, “Muting Dissent: New York City’s Sound Device Ordinance and the Liberalization of the Public Sphere”
- Peake, “Listening Like White Nationalists at a Civil Rights Rally” (optional)
- Schaeffer, “Acousmatics”
- Neuhaus, *Time Square* (watch videos on Latte)

- In-class: skimming and reading
- HW 3: public sound reflection and soundwalk (soundwalk due by Wednesday, Feb 5)

**Thurs Feb 6**
- **ambience**
  - Eno, “Ambient Music”
  - Eno, *Music for Airports*
  - Kim-Cohen, *Against Ambience*

- In-class: filters, delay, and reverb

**Tues Feb 11**
- **sound and power**
  - Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (excerpts posted on Latte)

- HW 4: ambience
- In-class: EQ and mixing

**Thurs Feb 13**
- Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line* (pp. 1-29)
- Giacona, “A Tribe Called Red Remixes Sonic Stereotypes”
- Bonus A Tribe Called Red video: SoundField Profile (optional)

- In-class: reminders about response assignment 1
- HW 5: politics and power reflection (due by Friday, Feb. 14)

**Tues Feb 18 - No Class, February break**

**Thurs Feb 20 - No Class, February Break**

**Tues Feb 25 health and healing**
- Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*
- 99% Invisible, Sound and Health: Hospitals

- In-class: Sonic Meditations, recording the voice

*** Response Assignment 1 due by 11:59PM ***

**Thurs Feb 27 voice**
- Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (pp. 13-33; pp. 2-11 are optional)
- Gee, *Mouthpiece I* and *Mouthpiece 28*
- Berio, *Sequenza III*
- Z, *Breathing* and ba da ga da

**Tues Mar 3**
- Griffin, “When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women’s Vocality”
- Blake, “Finding My Voice While Listening to John Cage”

- HW: voice reflection
- In-class: sound analysis and processing

**Thurs Mar 5 deafness**
- Friedner and Helmreich, “Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies”
- Glennie, “Hearing Deafness”
- In-class: sound synthesis

**Tues Mar 10**  
**sound art, sound sculpture, and sound installation**
- Cox, “A Brief Introduction to Sound Art”
- Lucier, *I am sitting in a room*
- Jones, various works
- HW: sound analysis

**Thurs Mar 12**  
**silence**
- Cage, 4’33
- Ross, “The Composers of Quiet”
- Frey, *String Quartet No. 3*

**Tues Mar 17**  
**noise**
- Cage, “Credo”
- Russolo, “The Art of Noises”
- Xenakis, *Concret PH*
- In-class: granular synthesis
- HW: silence, noise, and deafness reflection

**Thurs Mar 19**  
**DJ and DIY culture**
- Clayton, *Uproot* (pp. 3-25)
- DJ/rupture, *Gold Teeth Thief*
- In-class: live electronics

**Tues Mar 24**  
**broadcast and podcast**
- Fanon, “This is the Voice of Algeria”
- HW: mixtape/mash-up

**Thurs Mar 26**
- NPR, “The Ear Training Guide for Audio Producers”
- Ira Glass, “Manifesto”
- Kaitlin Prest/The Heart, “no: Inheritance” (CW: sexual assault)
- Radiolab, “Colors”
- Joe Frank, selections TBA

- In-class: audio documentary and podcast techniques

Tues Mar 31  syllabus overflow/wild card day

Thurs April 2  final project prep
- In-class: about the final project, research techniques
  *** Response Assignment 2 due by 11:59PM ***

Tues April 7  multimodality, artistic research, and digital humanities
- Eco, *How to Write a Thesis* (excerpts TBA)
- Hales, “The Digital Humanities”

- In-class: presentations, research, and final project FAQs
- HW: final project proposal

Thurs April 9 - No Class, Passover

Tues April 14 - No Class, Passover

Thurs April 16 - No Class, Passover

Tues April 21
- In-class: mixing and mastering, TBA

Thurs April 23  presentations
- In-class: final project presentations

Tues April 28 (final class)
- In-class: final project presentations

Mon May 4

  *** last possible submission day for revised response assignments ***
Sat May 9

*** final project due by 11:59PM *