

**Sonic Environments**  
**MUA 3274**

Wednesday & Friday 3:00 p.m. – 4:50 p.m.  
4 MC  
Location: YSTCM Seminar 6

Instructor: Assoc. Prof. Steven M. Miller  
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**Course Abstract:**

The radical transformations of the acoustic environment over the last 50-75 years in many ways parallel that of the natural biological environment. Through the development and introduction of industrial and electronic media technology, humans have altered the natural balances of sonic elements in the environment. These balances that existed prior to the industrial and electronic revolutions are in various cases endangered or extinct, and the introduction of audio technology has radically altered the way we encounter, identify, and interact with our sonic surroundings.

We will examine some of the ways that we take these changes for granted, and how they are altering our very bodies, as well as our relationships to each other and our environment. We will seek to understand the principles of optimally functioning acoustic environments and the principles of good acoustic design. We will put this knowledge to work in support of creative and research initiatives that provide documentation of the changing soundscape and/or explore beneficial uses of electroacoustic technology for creative purposes.

**Course Description:**

This course—through listening, reading, discussion, lectures, and individual creative & research projects—will investigate the changing relationships between humans and their surrounding sonic environments.

The primary focus for the first part of the course will be to gain a clearer understanding of the effects of the sonic environment on the human species, as individuals and as larger societies, and to understand the ways in which humans are responsible for the drastic changes in the sonic environment, primarily since the advent of electronic and electroacoustic media technology. By understanding the processes of acoustic communication and the ecology of the acoustic environment, we will be in a better position to make optimum use of the remaining beneficial acoustic environments, and to possibly re-think the present course of audio technology and its uses.

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The second portion of the course will consist of readings and discussions regarding specific studies, projects, and initiatives within the larger field of Sound Studies, relating to history, anthropology, urban studies, etc. This will serve to contextualize and give concrete examples of creative and research activities relevant to Acoustic Ecology and Acoustic Communication.

Midterm and final semester papers and projects will consist of individual and group creative and research projects documenting the local sonic environment. The projects will be accompanied by a substantial essay that documents the project and relates it to the wider field of activity in Acoustic Ecology and Acoustic Communication.

**Required Texts:**

Michael Bull and Les Back (Eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader*. New York: Berg Publishers, 2003

R. Murray Schaffer, *The Soundscape*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994

Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication, 2nd Edition*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2001

Additional reading online, on reserve in library, or distributed in class

**Online resources:**

The following websites will be critical resources for course-related information:

World Forum for Acoustic Ecology: <http://www.wfae.net>

Acoustic Ecology Institute: <http://www.acousticecology.org>

**Expectations Concerning Student Work:**

Students will attend all classes, and arrive prior to the class time in order to begin class on time. It is the student's responsibility to sign in on the roll sheet provided at each class meeting.

Students will be responsible for completing readings, assignments, and projects on time. While acknowledging and allowing for special circumstances, students are expected to complete all assignments in a timely manner. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the due date. Late assignments will receive partial credit.

The attached semester schedule includes dates of reading assignments, course topics, and major assignments. The dates listed are when the assignment, reading, topic, etc., is due and/or will be discussed in class. Students are expected to keep current on all reading assignments in advance of associated in-class discussions, demos, etc.

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There will be 1 (one) mid-term written exam. The general content will be covered in a study sheet to be distributed approximately 1 (one) week before the exam date.

As this is an upper-level seminar rather than lecture course, significant weight will be placed on active and appropriate student participation in all facets of the course. Students will be expected to arrive at each class on time, well-prepared and able to make important and productive contributions to the discussions.

**Projects:**

There will be two major projects for the semester. Please consult the project descriptions and semester schedule for details and due dates.

- Midterm: Critical essay/Research paper
- Final: Project & Paper

**Grading:**

Participation in weekly discussions	15%
Weekly quizzes, assignments	10%
Midterm exam	15%
Midterm paper	15%
Final paper	15%
<u>Final project and presentation</u>	<u>30%</u>
Semester Grade	100%

**Note:**

All reasonable attempts will be made to adhere to the schedule & information in this document. However, the instructor reserves the right to make changes, accommodations, and adaptations based on a number of factors including class progress, special opportunities, etc., as well as occurrences outside the instructor's control.