

Counter-Production: Noise as Critical Research in Sound Studies

ABSTRACT

Despite pockets of Sound Studies inquiry on particular UC campuses, there are no formalized or funded conversations across the UC system. To fill this void, we propose a UCHRI graduate student working group for the academic year 2017-18, with the hope that our model for interdisciplinary research continues as an enduring interest between the UC campuses, even beyond the year of the working group. This group will set out to critically engage the field of Sound Studies, questioning hierarchies of knowledge production and established patterns of cultural meaning. To do so, the group will take up the negative powers of *noise*, arguing that its disruptive, illegible and unintelligible attributes produce a critical lens for understanding sound's interaction with the material, the literary and the cultural. The working group will meet three times over the course of the year, with the third meeting culminating in a conference for the presentation of original research, as well as the launch of an online audio publication. After considering over thirty statements of interest in the working group, we have commitments from fifteen graduate students representing six UC campuses: UCLA, UCR, UCSB, UCD, UCB, and UCSC. These students hail from a variety of disciplines, including Cognitive Psychology, Comparative Literature, Cultural Studies, English Literature, Ethnomusicology, Film and Media, Music, Music Composition, Musicology, and the History of Consciousness.

Problem Statement:

Since the 1970s, Sound Studies has exploded as an interdisciplinary field of research across the humanities, arts, and social sciences. As John Jordan (UCSC) has noted, the field developed from the work of thinkers like R. Murray Schafer, who operated within more traditional research areas, including musicology, anthropology, urban planning and the history of sound recording technologies (2). Since that time, numerous scholars have engaged this emergent discipline through critical frameworks exploring race, class and gender. As Kara Keeling and Josh Kun (USC) suggest in their 2012 anthology "Sound Clash," this developing interest in the field

of Sound Studies exists alongside a larger project in the humanities “to dismantle hierarchies of knowledge production and critical thought,” especially among scholars working in cultural studies, feminism, queer studies, and critical race and ethnic studies (447). Our goal in the working group is to not only cultivate an interdisciplinary understanding of the field of Sound Studies, but to actively contribute to the development of critical research in sound through frameworks that unsettle dominant discourses inside it.

To that end we are taking up the ubiquitous sonic trope of *noise*, reclaiming its counter-productive character, and asking how its interference with normative reception can be a tactic for critique. We will look at how *noise* acts to “disrupt” material conditions, to make “illigible” literary attempts at audiation, and ultimately make “unintelligible” culture’s attempts to capture individuals and communities of resistance. The range of curiosities and interests expressed by the group members include such questions as:

- What is the role of sound and silence in torture?
- How does exposure to noise pollution correlate with race and class?
- Why talk about sound, music, and silence in literature?
- How do Indigenous musicking and sounding practices incorporate non-human animals and generate multiple acoustic ontologies?
- What qualities of speech produce affective connection, and what qualities incite conflict?
- How is music used to produce "authentic" film and televisual narrative about urban communities?
- What is the relationship between trauma and sonic memory?
- How do poets use sound to convey the lived experience of oppression?
- Why is group singing an effective tool of survival?
- How do sound-art installations challenge ocularcentric claims in philosophy?
- What are the relationships between listening, the materiality of sonic experience and notions of disabled ways of being?
- Why are some silences so awkward?

George Lipsitz (UCSB) reminds us that “theoretical expertise alone” is insufficient for our understanding of counter-hegemonic aurality - these sounds “are to be found within the concrete contests of everyday life” (114). These contests are the competing signals that produce the noise of politics, and as Roshanak Kheshti (UCSD) tells us, this noise is “not only a vehicle in the communication of difference...but also contributes to the production of difference by materializing bodies in the imaginary of the listener” (7). This study group will inevitably look at how subjects are produced by sound, how sound is an index of that process, and what culturally specific forms of aurality/orality find their voicing through media to produce counter-public spheres, what Dolores Ines Casillas (UCSB) calls in reference to radio “air communities” (8).

As graduate students within the UC system we are uniquely positioned to draw upon the invaluable scholarship already being produced across the UC campuses, as demonstrated by much of the cited work above. As of now, the UC campuses offer only a few isolated projects as a site for this interdisciplinary, cross-campus work (including the nascent *Sound Initiative* at UC Berkeley and isolated events at the *Center for Interdisciplinary Music* at UC Santa Barbara). In the short term, our working group seeks to connect these efforts by bringing students from across the UC campuses into conversation with each other, various campus communities and the general public. We hope that graduate students will make meaningful connections with other students and faculty across the UC campuses, establishing peer mentors and potential faculty dissertation readers. In the long term, we aim to provide a model for interdisciplinary research that continues beyond the year of the working group and thus provides a resource, through archived material or continual meetings, for Sound Studies research between the UC campuses.

Works Cited:

Dolores Ines Casillas, *Sounds of Belonging: US Spanish Language Radio and Public Advocacy* (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

John O. Jordan, "Dickens and Soundscape: The Old Curiosity Shop", *E-rea* [online], 13.2, 2016.

Kara Keeling and Josh Kun (eds), *Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

List of Participants:

	First	Last	School	Department	Funding Needs
1	Alex	Ullman	UCSC	Literature	1 trip (UCLA)
2	Stephen	Engel	UCSC	History of Consciousness	1 trip (UCLA)
3	Gabriel	Mindel	UCSC	History of Consciousness	1 trip (UCLA)
4	Alina	Larson	UCSC	Cognitive Psychology	1 trip (UCLA)
5	Pablo	Rubio	UCSC	Music Composition	not necessary
6	Sudhu	Tewari	UCSC	Music	1 trip (UCLA)
7	Wayne	Coffey	UCSC	History of Consciousness	1 trip (maybe)
8	Miranda	Butler	UCR	English	2 trips (UCB/UCSC)
9	Sean	Mathar o	UCR	Literature	2 trips (UCB/UCSC)
10	Chip	Badley	UCSB	English	3 trips
11	Harry	Burson	UCB	Film and Media	2 trips (UCSC and UCLA)
12	Max	Kaisler	UCB	Comparative Literature	not necessary
13	Amanda	Model	UCD	Cultural Studies	3 trips
14	Darci	Sprengel	UCLA	Ethnomusicology	2 trips (UCB/UCSC)
15	Monica	Chieffo	UCLA	Musicology	2 trips (UCB/UCSC)
*	John	Jordan	UCSC	Faculty Advisor	not necessary

Convener Biographies:

Gabriel Saloman Mindel is a PhD student in the History of Consciousness Department at UCSC and an interdisciplinary artist and scholar whose research considers ways that people produce and struggle for space using sound to extend beyond the limits of their bodies, particularly in formal and informal modes of protest. His long involvement with Sound and Culture as an area of study, and as a performer, composer and curator will contribute an interdisciplinary perspective on sonic production and affect.

Alex Ullman is a second year PhD student in Literature at UCSC studying global modernisms. He is primarily interested in how modernist literature is distributed through sound technology and how sound serves as literary device for representing ethnicity in modernity. Alex provides a perspective on the twentieth century for the second meeting on "Sound and the Literary," and he will also serve as an organizer

and facilitator for the three meetings. As a jazz musician, he also seeks to record a literary-musical piece for the final publication.

Faculty Advisor Biography:

John Jordan is Research Professor of Literature and Director of the Dickens Project at UC Santa Cruz. His recent essay on "Dickens and Soundscape: *The Old Curiosity Shop*" takes a Sound Studies approach to the study of this "noisy" novel, drawing connections between the sonic effects used by Dickens and the eccentric theory of sound recording and retrieval proposed by Dickens's contemporary, Charles Babbage.

Participant Biographies:

Chip Badley is a PhD student in English at UCSB where he is affiliated with the Literature and the Mind initiative and the SAGE Center for the Study of Mind. He is at work on a project concerning oral testimony, eloquence, and affect in antebellum antislavery writing and performance. Chip's research foci in literature and psychology will contribute to meetings on sound and the literary as well as the cultural.

Harry Burson is a PhD student in Film & Media at UCB interested in film sound technology and aesthetics. He is primarily interested in questions of immersion and the role that sound plays in the production and experience of real and virtual spaces.

Miranda Butler is a fourth-year PhD student in English at UCR, where she studies the relationship between Victorian media technologies and evolutionary biological discourse. Her work in science studies investigates the physical representation of sensory experience, especially sound, providing an interdisciplinary perspective to the group, especially as we discuss sound and the material.

Wayne Spencer Coffey is a sixth year student in History of Consciousness writing a dissertation on the relation between the production of visual and popular culture concerning African-American "inner cities" and the reproduction of poverty, violence, and underdevelopment in those communities. His primary site is Baltimore, Maryland, and his specific purpose for participation in the Sound Studies Cluster is to investigate how African-American music is used to produce "authentic" film and televisual narrative about urban communities.

Stephen David Engel is a second-year PhD student in History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz, where he is writing a theory of co-present dialogue that figures it as a form of poesis, on the one hand, and a ground for political uprising, on the other. For this project, Stephen will draw on western and non-western poetics, Sound Studies, critical pedagogy, philosophies of relation, and feminist and biological theories of the body.

Max Kaisler is a first-year doctoral student in Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley. She is trained in Latin, Ancient Greek, and German and is working on a designated emphasis in Film Studies. Though her work principally investigates questions of madness, medicine, grief, and romantic disappointment, at the moment she is particularly interested in Sound Studies as they relate to antiphonal elements in ancient elegy and modern avant-garde poetry, the sonic inheritance of trauma, and modern methods of musical/anti-musical punishment and surveillance.

Alina Larson is a PhD student in Cognitive Psychology at UC Santa Cruz, where she studies spontaneous communication and psycholinguistics with a focus on multimodal speech perception and social interactions. Her current research explores what qualities of speech help establish positive human-human interactions, and how these qualities may be implemented in human-computer interactions (HCI) to help them feel more natural. Alina's research on psycholinguistics and HCI will help inform discussions of Sound and Culture in particular.

Sean Matharoo is a Ph.D. student of Comparative Literature at UC Riverside, where he studies francophone and anglophone speculative media. He is researching noise as it manifests in sound-image relations and the poetics of space in the contexts of postcolonial theory and ecological philosophy. He has a forthcoming article in a special issue of *Horror Studies* devoted to sonic horror and is working on a multimodal performance involving chimeras, noise, drone, audiovisual diagrams, and the sampling of "dead" media technologies.

Amanda Modell is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at UC Davis, where her research focuses on several convergences between sound, music and the hereditary sciences. These convergences include Pandora's Music Genome Project, eugenic experiments on human musical ability, and the evolution of whale song. Amanda will contribute her knowledge of feminist science and technology studies throughout the group's tenure, but it will be particularly appropriate to the first meeting on Sound and the Material. She will also contribute to organizational tasks as needed.

Darci Sprengel is a PhD Candidate in ethnomusicology at UCLA. She is primarily interested in the non-discursive and affective potential of sound and music especially regarding issues of citizenship, belonging, and dissent under authoritarian conditions. Her dissertation examines how Egyptian DIY musicians use music/sound to engage public feelings of depression, schizophrenia, and paranoia in the aftermath of the "failed" 2011 Egyptian revolution to produce new modes of affective citizenship. She is also interested in looking at how race, gender, ethnicity, and class are sonically constructed. As such, her research will contribute to the third meeting on "Sound and Culture." She is also a violist.

Sudhu Tewari is a PhD candidate (ABD) in Cultural Musicology at UCSC. His research has tended toward investigations of technology's role in shaping modern musics and instrument builders and sound artists who challenge traditional

conceptions about music. Tewari is also an improvising musician, recording engineer, instrument builder and sound artist.

Pablo Rubio-Vargas is a multimedia artist/composer from Aguascalientes, Mexico. He is currently studying the DMA in Composition at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Monica Chieffo is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Musicology, Experimental Critical Theory, and Early Modern Studies graduate certificate programs at UCLA. Her primary research takes a material culture approach to sound in the early modern period, especially around the advent of purpose-built theaters for music on the Italian peninsula. Monica foresees her work intersecting in productive ways with the working group, especially for the meeting themed Sound and the Material.

Calendar of Proposed Dates and Locations:

Date	Location	Topic	Objective
October 2017	UCB	<i>Disruptive: Noise as/is Matter/ial</i> Sound and the Material	First meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss year long goals • Invited Speaker: Lunch Talk • Discuss readings and selected student writings
January 2018	UCLA	<i>Illegible: Literary Audiation</i> Sound and the Literary	Second Meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan <i>audio publication</i> • Discuss readings and selected student writings • Invited Speaker: Lunch Talk • Call for panelists for final conference
April 2018	UC Santa Cruz	<i>Unintelligible: Sound Studies Against Capture</i> Sound and Culture	Third meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student presentations: Conference • Invited Keynote Speaker: Lunch Talk • Recording session for <i>audio-publication</i>

The meetings throughout the year will be scaffolded to continually widen the aperture of the working group's focus. Each day will feature a short discussion of the group's goals and main lines of questioning, short presentations and discussion on group readings, a *public* lecture and discussion with an invited speaker, and a short planning discussion for the next meeting. Our first meeting, *Disruptive: Noise as/is Matter/ial*, will focus on the relationship between *Sound* and different conceptions of the *Material*, and may include discussion on such topics as: historical, feminist,

and new materialisms; architecture and the production of space; the history of sound technology; contemporary artistic production in relation to instrument making; multi-species sound and communication; sonic embodiment and its biological, neurological, affective and psychological effects. Our second meeting, *Illegible: Literary Audiation*, will put a particular focus on *Sound* and its relationship to *Literature*: sound as a method of representing racialized, classed or gendered identity and historical trauma; as a medium of literary distribution; and as a mode of representation and performance for poets. Our final meeting, *Unintelligible: Sound Studies Against Capture*, will manifest as a conference focusing on original research by members of the working group as well as an invited keynote speaker. Framing this gathering broadly as addressing *Sound* and *Culture*, we are inviting not only a consideration of the previous topics, but an expanded questioning of social, political and cultural life as expressed through the study of sound: the ways identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity) are heard, produced or contested by sound; how the aural challenges western ocularcentrism; composition and the sonic production of space; silence and the carceral. We will use this third meeting as an opportunity to record material for an *audio-publication*, which will appear online and possibly in physical form. This audio-publication will include recordings from the conference, audio research, archival material, poetry readings and original compositions.

These meetings will take place across three University of California campuses and will feature students from six different schools and ten different disciplines. Though students from UCSC are more highly represented, they offer invaluable diversity of discipline and life experience. Between meetings, graduate students will read 4-6 articles, as well as listen to audio materials, all relating to the upcoming topic. Students will also be asked to prepare summaries, position papers, or works of original content to pre-distribute and discuss during the day-long meeting. The meetings will serve as a means for students to engage with their peers, as well as invited faculty, from across the state, thus creating a network of researchers across the UC system. This work will also be a resource for the general public, with our first two lunchtime lectures and the entirety of our third gathering being open to the public, as well as through the online audio-publication that will result.

Funds provided by the UCHRI will be budgeted primarily towards graduate student travel expenses, a fee for our invited speakers, and food and beverages throughout the meeting days.

Proposed Budget: Based on 15 participants

Use	Logistics	Total
Graduate Student Travel	Funds to be disseminated based on need.	3000 dollars
Food	Local Catering	750 dollars
Publication	Audio-Publication	250 dollars
Invited Speaker Fees	Travel + Stipend	1000 dollars (max)

Total		5000 dollars
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BUDGET Narrative

- Out of the \$5000 potential award, we've decided to allocate \$3000 for student travel which averages to \$200 per student. Given the size of our group, even the total amount of \$5000 split evenly across 15 people would only total \$330 per person for travel to all three meetings. It is our understanding that not every member of the group has the same needs in terms of travel support. We understand that different students will have different levels of departmental support, access to other sources of funding, personal income and transportation. In addition we can arrange carpools and informal billeting to help offset these costs. Ideally we would like to reserve \$3000 as a need-based fund so that students most dependent upon financial support for travel can still participate fully. Should we be able to find additional funding for other aspects of our budget, those funds will be reallocated to student travel.
- We will allocate \$1000 as stipend and travel funding for our speakers. At our first two meetings we will be inviting speakers from adjacent UC campuses, mitigating travel and hospitality costs. Our keynote speaker on the occasion of our third meeting may be drawn from further afield and we will attempt to find additional funding sources through collaboration with various departments and organizations within our respective universities.
- \$750 will be put towards providing meals and refreshments during our three meetings. We will independently source affordable provisions so as to ensure attendees are properly resourced within the constraints of our budget.
- \$250 will be set aside to pay for the production of an audio-publication and the creation of an online platform for its distribution. We will seek additional funding in the hopes of being able to produce a physical artifact based on the same material that can be circulated inside and outside academic spaces.
- We recognize that fully funding the ambitions of this working group is not possible with the UCHRI grant alone. For that reason we will be reaching out to the home departments, schools and units of our constituent working group members, various centers and other institutional bodies within the UC community to support this work. We have already secured financial support from *the Dickens Universe* (UCSC), in-kind support from *the Institute of the Arts and Sciences* (UCSC), administrative support from *the Center for Cultural Studies* (UCSC), and we anticipate much more to come following the success of this application.

Proposed Objectives:

- The primary objective of this group is to create a network of peer researchers exploring the emerging field of Sound Studies. At present there does not exist a centralized space within the UC System for the interdisciplinary study of sound. Our hope is that this working group can act as a catalyst for the continued development of this area of study within the UC system as the members of this working group continue their work. For those students whose research has a particular focus on Sound Studies, this working group will provide their research with material, intellectual and social support.
- Our proposed conference will provide a public platform for working group members' research and will bring them into contact with students, faculty and community members from across the UC system and beyond who share an interest in Sound Studies. Our invited speakers will provide group members and the general public an opportunity to think alongside respected and established scholars within the field of Sound Studies.
- The production of an audio-publication will produce a lasting record of the research that will be developed by the group. It will also make public this research via its online platform as well as any physical platform that accompanies it.