Western University  
Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

THEOCRIT 9501A 001 GF19  
Writing Aloud: Theories of Sound and Silence

Term/Session  
Fall 2019

Time  
Fridays 9:30-12:30pm

Location  
StvH 3165 (unless otherwise notified)

Professor  
Christof Migone, cmigone@uwo.ca

Office Hours  
VAC room 214, Thursdays 12-2pm, or by appointment

OWL  
https://owl.uwo.ca/portal/site/061cdc7a-740b-4d50-ae5a-f62d73780a2c

Course Description

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.

- Samuel Beckett (writing about James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*)

I write before my self by apprehension, with no comprehension, the night vibrates, I see with my ears, I advance into the bosom of the world, hands in front, capturing the music with my palms, until something breathes under the pen's beak. (I've just written these lines eyelids closed as usual, because the day and its huge light keeps us from seeing what is germinating.)

- Hélène Cixous

One by one.  
The sounds. The sounds that move at a time  
stops. Starts again. Exceptions  
stops and starts again  
all but exceptions.  
Stop. Start. Starts.  
Broken speech. One to one. At a time.  
Cracked tongue. Broken tongue.  
Pidgeon. Semblance of speech.  
About to. Then stops. Exhale swallowed to a sudden arrest.  
- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

There is no silence. Your mind makes noise.

- Bruce Nauman

A course tracking the sonic *in* and *through* writing as it is invoked and deployed by writers, artists, and theorists. The sonic functions as an amplification of the word in its role as a wager of presence. The word and its rhythmic materiality; its negotiations between the formal and the formless; its exponential xeno-embodiments; its lawfulness and its unruliness; its precision and its poetic slippages—all examined through the filter of the *sonic* word (including the unspoken, or as Beckett put it, the *unword*—its attendant specter) and in particular how it functions as a
paradigmatic manifestation of the pervasiveness, persistence and proliferation of the performative. Silence as experienced by John Cage, passivity as activated by Maurice Blanchot, nonperformance as articulated by Fred Moten will all come into play via the expanded notion of the *sonic* that will be explored in this course. Noise, voice, orality, glossolalia, listening, mutism, mistranslations, stutterance, soundfullessness, non-cochlear sound (Kim-Cohen), parasitology (Serres), syncope (Clément)—an incipient list of known terms and neologisms that exemplify the range of connected divagations the course will attempt to trace. Daniella Cascella in *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing* considers "writing as the other side of sound. Instead of looking for answers it echoes questions with questions, riddles with riddles, it adds complexity to complexity. Writing sound traces the shifting in the tuning of my words, of my questions, of sounds drifting." Questions will undoubtedly abound, and we will be posing them aloud: How does one approach a writing that includes sound within its core constituency? What does such a writing sound like? What are the social and sensorial stakes of such sonophiliac theories and practices?

**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Pages/Words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Response Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>October 7 (3-5 pages, 1200 words)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>November 29 in the Artlab</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>December 18 (15-20 pages, 5000 words)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance/Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**Short Response Paper**

- A brief analysis of one or more of the assigned readings.

**Presentation**

- Presentations will take place in the Artlab in the Visual Arts Building within the context of an exhibition primarily focused on sound art. A brief written synopsis (1-2 pages) and audiovisual documentation may be required in cases where the presentation takes place outside of class time, or is otherwise difficult to fully experience in person. Content of the presentation may include material that will end up in the final research paper but must be adapted for the exhibition context.

**Final Research Paper**

- The major component of the course must be a text containing original research that relates to the course content. Hybrids forms of writing are welcome. Topics do not need to be approved by the instructor but you are encouraged to discuss your ideas as they coalesce around a topic.

**Attendance/Participation**

- The class will primarily be held in a seminar style and as such, discussion by those in attendance is paramount. The level of discussion is expected to be thoughtful, timely, informed, focused, sensitive, and respectful.
Important Information Regarding Assignments:
- Late penalty is 2% per day, including weekends.
- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances.
- Written assignments must be submitted by email as a Microsoft Word file.
- All written assignments should be double-spaced, and in a 12-point font. The first page should include the following information: your name, essay title, and the date.
- All written assignments should follow the Chicago or MLA style guides. They should use footnotes (not endnotes) and contain a bibliography.

Academic Offences:
- Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.
- Students should be conscientious at all times (i.e. in both written and oral contexts) to explicitly note the borrowing of words and concepts from other sources.

Mental Health:
Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.
Schedule (subject to change)

All readings are to be found on the OWL site for the course

SEPT 6 - Week 1 - Introduction
- Intro

SEPT 13 - Week 2 - Noisily Eventful

SEPT 20 - Week 3 - Bodily Grain

SEPT 27 - Week 4 - Writing Sound

OCT 4 - Week 5 - Utter Passivity

OCT 11 - Week 6 - Somatic Speech

OCT 18 - Week 7 - Still Soundless
OCT 25 - Week 8 - Silencing Silence

NOV 1 - Week 9 - Operation Theoperatricks

READING WEEK

NOV 15 - Week 10 - [TUNING SPECULATION AT ARRAY in TORONTO, NOV 15-17]
https://www.theocculture.net/tuning-speculation-7-non/

NOV 22 - Week 11 - Hear Here
  - Annea Lockwood, *From the River Archive* (1973), 248-250
  - Max Neuhaus, *LISTEN* (1966), 284-287
  - Yoko Ono, RECORD OF 13 CONCERT PIECE PERFORMANCES, 295-303
  - Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, Event Scores (1963-1964), 341-343
  - La Monte Young, 1960 Works, 423-437

NOV 29 - Week 12 - ARTLAB Presentations [LAST CLASS]

[Alternate 1] - Breathing Words

[Alternate 2] – Lists of Listens

**[Alternate 3] – (Not) Seeing Sound**

Bibliography


