



Call for Papers:

## **Soundscapes and Sonic Cultures in America, 6-8 Nov. 2015, Graz, Austria**

Conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies

Organizers: Nassim W. Balestrini and Klaus Rieser, University of Graz

With this conference theme, the Austrian Association for American Studies tunes into the growing bandwidth that the study of sound has been acquiring within the field of American Studies and beyond. Special issues on sound studies have appeared in journals ranging from the American Studies Association's *American Quarterly* to *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*. Since 2009, the open access weekly *Sounding Out! The Sound Studies Blog* has been featuring peer-reviewed articles and scholarly conversations in myriad formats. It is also notable that the aforementioned special issue of *American Quarterly* appeared simultaneously with a complementary website that provides many of the sounds and soundscapes discussed in the featured articles. These examples from a burgeoning field have contributed to firmly situating soundscapes and sonic cultures as essential to the American experience and to American cultural practices.

In his seminal work *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977), Canadian composer and environmentalist Raymond Murray Schafer conceptualized the "soundscape" as a central feature of how sound mediates between living organisms and their environments. In his *World Soundscape Project* (launched in 1971), which was later continued as the *World Forum for Acoustic Ecology*, Schafer and his team at Simon Fraser University recorded and studied a variety of soundscapes across the globe. Since then, the concept has journeyed from its ethno-ecological foundation into diverse fields from music via sound design to film and literature.

While we invite conference participants to contribute papers on a diversity of topics relating to the transdisciplinary field of Sound Studies, we are particularly interested in two major areas of inquiry:

First, we would like to explore American Studies approaches that focus on how **soundscapes**, which may comprise sounds of any kind (voices, music, noise, and their alternation with silence), relate to a particular space or place and its inhabitants, and how this relation can be interpreted. Second, we would like to explore the poetics of **sonic cultures** in order to address the particular role of sounds in culture formation and cultural practice (which may be defined by region, ethnicity, gender, age, or musical taste).

As a result, we envision our conference to provide fertile ground for lively scholarly exchange about reception- or listener-oriented soundscapes and production- or producer-oriented sonic cultures. Listening from within and from outside, conference contributors will assess and debate the cultural, social, and historical implications and connotations of what they hear.

Possible areas of inquiry include, but are not limited to:

- The reciprocity of **space** and sound: sounds of the city, sounds of nature, noise pollution, sounds of work and leisure, music as representing spaces
- The cultural implications of sound **technology**: surround-sound cinema and home entertainment, Walkman and mp3-player usage, mobile phone ringtones, music streaming, digital composing
- The creation and development of sound **imaginaries**: local, regional, national, and transnational aspects of North American culture, perceived from within and without; cultural stereotyping through sound styles and specific sounds
- **Ethnic** sonic cultures and their trans/national aspects: Jewish fiddles, Native Drums, Jazz, Blues, or Hip Hop; sound diplomacy, (inter)national reception, appropriation, feedback loops
- **Economics** and sound: industrial noise vs. the quietude of bourgeois arcadia, the clamor of the street vs. pastoral sounds, the sound of progress, the sound of capitalism
- **Inter-/Transmedial Representations** of sound (in non-sonic or multi-media): sound in literature, visual arts, performance, and film
- **Gender** and sound: gendering of voice production and reception, “feminine” and “masculine” sounds (e.g. in horror, pornography, comedy), sound evocative language in feminist discourse
- **Silence** as the “other” of sound: silence as signifier, silent vigils vs. speaking up, silence as creative, healing, meditative, generative, or resistant.

Please submit abstracts (250 words) and short bios (5-6 sentences) by June 1, 2015, to [soundscapes@uni-graz.at](mailto:soundscapes@uni-graz.at)

