MUSIC 509 Special Topics in Contemporary Music: Electroacoustic and acousmatic music
RH003 Wednesdays 9:00 – 12:00
Spring 2014
Professor Ronald Kuivila

Part I: Hosting SEAMUS and opening it to a social understanding of spatiality
The first half of the semester will focus on the SEAMUS conference as a musical and social entity. We will
Georgina Born’s critique of the absence of social categories in the theorization of musical space and
examine the extent to which the planning and implementation of the SEAMUS conference responds to
that critique in a productive manner.

The focus of the first half of the semester will be the organization and implementation of the SEAMUS
conference that will run March 27 – 29. A central component of the conference is the introduction of the
“Open Window”, a set of projects to encourage collaborative interaction by fixed media composers and to
open some preliminary questions about the social properties of space. The class will be divided into teams
to supervise the implementation of the three main Open Window projects: Rainforest, Rock’s Role, and
the Non-Aggressive Music Deterrent.

1/29 Introduction:

2/5 The concerts, part 1
assignment 1: Each seminar member determines its program order and copy edits the program for a concert or
listening session (there are 17). In class, you will give a short introduction to the concert, playing excerpts from each
piece from a prepared compilation recording.
Reading:
Georgina Born, “Music, Sound, and space” pp. 1-24
SEAMUS call for proposals

2/12 The concerts, part 2
assignment 2: Each seminar member is assigned a concert or listening session, determines its program order, copy
edits its program notes and gives a short introduction, playing excerpts from each piece from a prepared compilation.
Reading:
Denis Smalley, “Space-form and the acousmatic image”
Patrick Valiquet, “The spatialization of stereophony, taking positions in post-war electroacoustic
music”

2/19 Rock’s Role
assignment 3: Compose 6 sound events for Rock’s Role
Reading:
Trevor Wishart, “Sound Symbols and Landscapes
Michael Fowler, “Finding Cage at Ryoan-ji”

2/26 Rainforest
assignment 4: compose an articulation of Rainforest (duo project)
Reading:
Laura Cameron and Matt Rogalsky, “Preserving Rainforest IV”
Georgina Born “Music, Sound, and space” pp 24 – 40

3/5 The non-aggressive music deterrent
assignment 5: Conceive or compose a segment of music for the non-aggressive music deterrent
Reading:
Georgina Born “Music, Sound, and space” pp 40 – 51
Jonathan Sterne: The Non-aggressive Music Deterrent
Vacation

3/26: SEAMUS preparations
   TBD
4/2: Conference reviews

Part II: Acousmatic Listening
The second part of the semester will focus on the understanding of acousmatic music presented in Brian Kane’s forthcoming book and contrast it with the more materialist experience of sound characteristic of experimental music. The final project for the course will be a composition that responds directly to the issues of the course.

4/8: What is acousmatic listening? Must it be phantasmagoric?
Reading
   Brian Kane, Sounds Unseen: Introduction and Interlude
   Pierre Schafer, Solfege de l’objet sonore

4/15 The original project of acousmatic music
   Brian Kane, Sounds Unseen: Chapters 2 and 3
FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE

4/22: Franz Kafka and Les Paul
discussion assignment: present an example in any musical style that can be understood as either creating the need to identify the physical origins of the music, relying on illusion to create a stable performance or resisting the category of the “phantasmagoric” altogether. (For example, it could be readily argued that the radically limited sound material of Steve Reich’s Come Out makes it “anti-phantasmagoric”. One is well aware of that limitation and is put in a relation of “testing” in relation to that material. But, nevertheless, the hallucinatory quality of the piece seems literally phantasmagoric as it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the original source recording.)
Reading
   Brian Kane, Sounds Unseen: Chapters 5 and 6
Reference
Walter Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction”

4/29: Experimentalist Alternatives
Reading:
   Tim Hodgkinson, Interview with Pierre Schafer
   Francisco Lopez, schizophrenia and l’objet sonore
   Doug Kahn, Excerpts from Earth Sound, Earth Ear
   Doug Copeland, Cruising for a Fixing in this art of Fixed Sounds

5/6: Final Project in progress presentations

5/12: Final Project performances and installations