The ubiquity of digital, mobile media devices and technologies—cellphones, iPods, portable video game players, PDAs, MP3 files, flash drives—requires a rethinking of the sound studies and its unmarked, static assumptions of place, space, and the ambient, so that we might accurately understand and assess the real and apparent fluidity of “digital modernity.” Focusing on the auditory, this course will attempt to listen to that digital condition, diagnosing its peculiarities, replaying its felicities, tracking its faint murmurs and loud rumblings. The course will involve three broad sets of materials for consideration: 1) readings in various fields ranging from studies of mobile media industries, the study of mobile communication (Gerard Goggin, Vicente Rafael), research on user-generated content and YouTube (Strangelove, etc.), the portable stereo studies literature (Michael Bull, Shuhei Hosakawa, Paul du Gay, etc.), as well as more foundational texts in communications, political economy and economic sociology, and new media studies; 2) primary materials culled from various sources, including the critical analysis of multimedia installations, television shows, films, musical recordings, YouTube video clips, websites, etc., and 3) original student projects—case studies—on particular forms of mobile, digital expression, which will be brought into the course for collective examination. Certain theoretical concerns, including the problems of mobility, networks, and the fluidity of conceptualization, will also guide our work. The course content will both inform and be informed by work on two recent, ongoing projects of mine, a book titled Ringtones, or, The Auditory Logic of Globalization, and an edited volume titled The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies, co-edited with Jason Stanyek (ethnomusicologist at NYU).

Required course books, available and recommended for purchase:

- Giovanni Arrighi, Adam Smith in Beijing
- Luc Boltanski & Eve Chiapello, The New Spirit of Capitalism
- Michael Bull, Sounding Out the City
- Karen Collins, Game Sound: An Introduction
- Paul du Gay, et al., Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman
- Gerard Goggin, Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life
- Steve Kopper, Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record
- Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media
- Michael Strangelove, Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos By Ordinary People
- Industry in the Digital Age
- Raymond Williams, Television: Technology and Form

The rest of the readings will be accessible through online journals or made available as PDFs on the course website (at http://myu.umn.edu).
Class Assignments:

I. Each student will be required to write weekly commentaries on all readings, to be posted to the class blog before class begins. (The blog is called “Ringtone Culture II” and can be found online at http://blog.lib.umn.edu.) These comments comprise a significant percentage of your grade (see below), and must be completed every week. The general approach is for you to think of three substantial things you want to say about the readings. They can focus on a particular reading or can treat them generally; they can be questions as well as provisional answers; they may be dispassionate or polemical (though please be civil to one another!). Each weekly posting should ideally touch upon most or all of the readings, though sometimes this isn’t possible (if someone else has made your point, for example). Such realities should, however, be spurs for you to post as early as possible, and not wait until the very last minute. These posts should be thought of as your homework assignments. Keep in mind that your posts will be graded on their quality and need to be of a minimum size (150 words)—you are free, of course, to post more than once, and you should think of your posts as participating in a conversation with the entire class. And, late posts (without an approved excuse) will be docked one letter grade per day (starting with the beginning of class), so you want to be sure to get these done on time.

II. In addition, each class participant will serve as a discussion leader for one week—your task will be to come up with some questions for the rest of us to discuss (I’ll be co-facilitating all discussions, so you won’t be on your own in this); during the same week, another person will be designated as the finder of objects—it will be your task to find a concrete example of something for the class to connect its readings to, often by searching for materials online, such as on YouTube. (We will set up a schedule for discussion leading and object finding on the first class day.) General class participation will also be used to determine your final grade: in addition to contributing to discussion, each participant must come to class with at least one question about/in relation to the readings that he/she wants to ask the group as part of discussion.

III. The final course assignment, due on Sunday, May 8, by 8:00 PM in my inbox as an attached file or in an envelope by my office door, is a research project of substantial length (5000 words), investigating some aspect of mobile/digital auditory culture. The project may be ethnographic, drawing on interviews and observations (esp. online); it may be a cultural-critical reading of some object (say, a particular mobisode or smartphone app of interest); or, it may be a more theoretical investigation of mobile music practices and cultures. In relation to this, you will also have a formal class presentation (of about 45 min.) during the last three weeks of class, as well as select readings for us to discuss that week, and you will also be required to produce a project proposal (due February 24, in class), and a rough draft (due Friday, April 15, by 5:00 pm).
The breakdown of your course grade is as follows:

30% — blog postings  
*due weekly*

20% — attendance & in-class participation (includes discussion-leading, object-finding)  
*due weekly (and on your designated week)*

5% — project proposal  
*due Thursday, Feb. 24 in class*

10% — rough draft of final project  
*due Friday, April 15 at 5:00pm, in my e-mail inbox or at my office*

5% — final project presentation  
*due on your designated week, between April 21 and May 5*

30% — final project  
*DUE MONDAY, MAY 9, at 5:00 PM, in my e-mail inbox or at my office*

Readings:

Week 1 (Jan. 20): Introduction—Hearing Mobility Studies? Selections from Urry, Cresswell, Adey, Greenblatt, etc., excerpts handed out and discussed in class (and perhaps posted online).


Week 3 (Feb. 3): *Classic Essays in Communications and Media Theory*. Williams’s *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* and Smythe’s “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism”; and, selections from Ron Rodman, *Tuning In*. (Note Ron Rodman’s talk on February 7, 4:30pm, FergH)


**Project Proposal is due, in class.**


SPRING BREAK


Week 10 (Mar. 31): YouTube Studies: Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos By Ordinary People*; and, selections from Burgess, *YouTube*


Week 12 (Apr. 14): Ringtones, selections by Heikki Uimonen, Erkki Pekkilä, Sumanth Gopinath, Noriko Manabe, Christian Licoppe, Imar de Vries & Isabella van Elferen, and others. **Rough draft of project is due on Friday, April 15, at 5:00 pm, in my e-mail inbox or as hard copy in an envelope by my office door.**

Week 13 (Apr. 21): *Final Presentations*

Week 14 (Apr. 28): *Final Presentations*

Week 15 (May 5): *Final Presentations*

**FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 9, 2011, AT 5:00 PM, in my inbox or at my door.**

**Supplementary Readings on Music and Sound:**

Given that some students who take the class do not have backgrounds in writing on music and sound, I’ve put together a list of readings that would aid in this endeavor. They’re not required, but would provide useful background in getting a handle on writing about music and sound in relatively precise ways. Some of these include selections from:

R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape*  
Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film*  
Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*  
Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*